
Learning from Parents:

A Research Brief Presenting Common Threads Across Systems Engaging Families

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Introduction

The Child Development Division knows parents are important partners in accomplishing its mission to improve the well-being of Vermont's children. In efforts to strengthen the Child Development Division's systemic-level efforts to engage the CDD seeks to learn from others who are experienced from both a research and practice perspective in involving parents in communications, programs and policies development activities. This research brief is the beginning of a formal effort to understand critical aspects of successful partnerships with parents.

To further the Division's relationship with parents, CDD sought to research lessons learned from the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies about their communication and engagement efforts with parents. NACCRRA is an experienced national organization committed to involving parents in child care issues, existing since 1987 to provide training and resources that support the development of high quality local and state resource and referral services, and promote national policies and partnerships that facilitate universal access to child care.¹

During 2007-2008, conversations, conference calls and email communications occurred among NACCRRA staff, VACCRRRA staff and the CDD. These communications focused around efforts to communicate with, inform and engage parents. The lessons learned from NACCRRA that are reflected in this brief are largely based upon these conversations. Lessons learned from NACCRRA were then examined in a context that extended beyond the national child care service delivery system, reviewing systems involved in implementing parent engagement practices and strategies inclusive of education, mental health, and health care systems.

A key resource in studying research and implications on parent involvement strategies and emerging practices is the Harvard Family Resource Project. The Harvard Family Resource Project (HFRP) distills information learned through their own research and evaluation projects, and by synthesizing the work of others to help stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies that promote the well being of children, youth, families, and their communities. Although early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education are the primary areas of focus, the Harvard Family Resource Project provides practical information that stimulates innovation and continuous improvement in policy, practice, and evaluation of family involvement practices that extends beyond their primary focus of supporting children's learning and development.² In addition to this work, HFRP serves as the National Parent Information Resource Center's (PIRC) Coordinating Center, providing technical assistance and guidance to build the PIRC's capacity for program planning, implementation, and evaluation.³

The backbone of all Harvard Family Resource Project's work is the HFRP's basic framework that identifies 3 components essential to incorporating family involvement: Family involvement matters across ages but changes over time; Family involvement occurs in many different settings; and Family involvement should be co-constructed by families and professionals.⁴ The basic components of the Harvard Family Resource Project framework underlie the best practices of organizations from a variety of disciplines that are embarking on developing and incorporating systems, building family engagement strategies to improve services.

Purpose

The intent of this brief is to provide a narrative synthesis of research-based findings that identify and support key themes and common elements existing in organizations that have successfully developed and implemented an effective family centered approach to delivering services. The goal of this research brief is twofold:

- To share a sampling of research based findings, strategies and emerging practices related to parent communication and engagement efforts;
- To serve as a springboard in future discussions so that stakeholders, including consumers of services, have the opportunity to build upon existing parent engagement efforts and develop practices that encourage and support working together to improve services.

Using this Reference Tool

This brief synthesizes common threads and parallels among standards of practice that emerged during the process of reviewing effective strategies for communicating with, involving and engaging families receiving client, patient, customer and/or consumer services. This brief will set forth common standards that have been identified in research arenas such as the Harvard Family Resource Project and Frameworks Institute and put forth strategies that have been implemented in the social service, education and health care fields, such as the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), Parent Information Resource Center's (PIRC's), Head Start and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

Based upon discussions with NACCRRA, information and research reviewed regarding effective parent communication and engagement strategies and the information gathered from the Harvard Family Resource Project, we have elected to develop an organizational framework that centers around four basic themes; This research brief is an interpretation of lessons learned in relationship to the following 4 general themes that have emerged during the process of reviewing research and practices existing across systems:

1. Organization values parents
2. Understanding and meeting the needs of parents
3. Sound research and evaluative mechanisms
4. Collaborations and partnerships

Within each theme, 3 categories exist: Principle/concept, common elements and strategy/practice.

Utilizing these four themes as an organizational framework allows for the opportunity to present the information in a meaningful way and encourage the discussion of existing Vermont parent engagement efforts, assisting in the development of meaningful parent involvement activities and strategies that can be implemented to engage and sustain parent voices at the table.

Organizational Framework Theme 1: Organization Values Parents

A common theme that emerges among organizations implementing effective family engagement strategies is the value organizations place on involving families. Strong leadership and coordination efforts to involve parents exist within a multitude of diverse organizations seeking to improve services through engaging families. Two commonly held principles of organizations demonstrating value of parents are: consumers of services drive effective practices and contribute to the delivery of meaningful services; and staff and resources are instrumental in supporting parent engagement efforts. Findings from the Lessons Learned from the Family Preservation and Family Support (FP/FS) Services Implementation Study, a national study examining how 15 states and communities chose to implement the Family Preservation and Family Support (FP/FS) services program, indicate better success with engaging parents was found among organizations who demonstrated valuing consumer input.⁵

Harvard Family Resource Project Finding: Committed leadership is fundamental to building family involvement. Leaders establish the expectations, opportunities, and incentives for family involvement; leaders are also largely responsible for using evaluation for continuous improvement.

Harvard Family Resource Project Recommendation: Prepare future leaders to value and build family involvement.⁶

Organization Values Parents (Principle 1)

Principle/concept	Common Elements	Strategies/practice
Consumers of services drive effective practices and contribute to the delivery of meaningful services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear philosophy, purpose, goals and strategies support the value of parents. • Established expectations, opportunities and incentives for involvement • Strength based • Family-centered focus • Federal mandates articulate expectations 	<p><u>Strategic Plan identified “Engaging families” Imperative</u> NACCRRRA’s 2006-2011 Strategic plan includes 4 imperatives; one of these is “Engaging Families”. 2 goals of the “Engaging Families” imperative are to raise public awareness of child care issues (advocacy) and to actively engage parents as advocates for their children through effectively supporting parenting. Within this umbrella, NACCRRRA identifies objectives related to communicating with families- developing accessible, easy to understand information for parents, gathering parents’ perspectives and developing strong consistent messages that appeal to and engage parents.⁷</p> <p>Specific findings: NACCRRRA conducted parent focus groups and a National Parent Poll to gather parent’s perspectives. NACCRRRA also launched Parent Central, aiming to motivate parents to action. NACCRRRA’s Parent Central established an expectation- to engage 1 million parents as a means to support policy initiatives. Current parent feedback from parent central and research on demographics of people who take action found women, ages 30-39, married, and well-educated want more on advocacy. NACCRRRA is currently in the process of redesigning parent central and reevaluating incentives for Child Care Resource and Referral agencies that sign on.</p>

Organization Values Parents (Principle 2)

Principle/concept	Common Elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Staff and resources are instrumental in supporting parent engagement efforts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse, knowledgeable staff • Training / professional development opportunities • Interagency coordination • Reflective supervision 	<p>Staff NACCRRRA believes a diverse knowledgeable staff contributes to understanding the complexity of issues; perspectives through a variety of “lenses” are essential to making informed decisions. In addition to diverse, knowledgeable staff, including staff dedicated to parent engagement efforts, NACCRRRA’s interagency coordination efforts ensure plans and ideas get reviewed, board members are consulted and the final proposal is comprehensive.</p> <p>Specific findings: In addition to programs and services staff, NACCRRRA staff is knowledgeable in diverse areas such as in public policy, data and research, marketing and communications and public engagement. The draft proposal for redesigning parent Central and making it part of a larger network with more opportunity to participate in advocacy includes input from all these disciplines and will be presented to the board members.</p> <p>Training Organizations committed to engaging parents support staff in this endeavor through providing training. Participants receive preparation/training on how to engage and develop positive partnerships with parents to support active parent participation. In addition, many have developed parent partnership resources.⁸</p> <p>Specific Findings: FS/PS Sites provided professionals with training in identifying and eliminating cultural barriers and negative stereotypes, facilitation skills and orientation in asset-based approaches.⁹</p>

Organizational Framework Theme 2: Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents

Education approaches that reflect an understanding of the consumer and meet the informational needs have been shown to affect behavior outcomes. Preliminary findings (in health and mental health care) indicate that resources designed with and for the intended audience and consistent with the audience's values, beliefs, and preferred ways of getting information demonstrated significantly increased behavior changes.¹⁰ Additionally, current research indicates that creating appropriate new materials in the target language of the intended audience may be a preferable alternative to translating a document that already exists in English, ensuring that the content, message and style of the document have cultural meaning for the target audience.¹¹ Research from Frameworks Institute further supports the role language plays, stating that, “choices in language can have a dramatic influence on how the public understands and engages...”¹²

Cultural and linguistic competent practices are widely recognized as fundamental aspects of quality in care, particularly for diverse populations, and as essential strategies for reducing disparities by improving access, utilization, and quality of care.¹³ The Center for Cultural Competency identifies 6 valid reasons to incorporate cultural competent practices:

to respond to current and projected demographic changes in the United States; to eliminate long-standing disparities in the health status of people of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds; to improve the quality of services and health outcomes; to meet legislative, regulatory and accreditation mandates; to gain a competitive edge in the market place; and to decrease the likelihood of liability/malpractice claims.¹⁴

The importance of establishing cultural competent communications and practices is also a practice in social marketing, a successful approach to social change that relies on 8 essential components, including research based knowledge regarding behaviors and needs derived from the audience. Behaviors, perceptions and needs are culturally sensitive. The use of formative research based on audience analysis strategies contributes to message design and ability of the message to resonate.¹⁵

Research suggests that the role cultural and linguistic competent practices play in understanding and meeting the needs of families is essential in delivering effective services. Three commonly held principles among organizations demonstrating a desire to understand and meet the needs of families include: understanding and learning about parents' beliefs, perceptions, wants, needs, and issues will improve service delivery, build knowledge and empower families; information and services that are available, understandable, accurate and designed to meet identified needs assist consumers in making informed choices; and moving from informing to activating consumers requires an ability to identify and address barriers to becoming engaged.

Harvard Family Resource Project finding: In research, policy, and practice, an understanding of family involvement across cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds is emerging. The development and use of knowledge about the predictors, patterns, and processes of family involvement in traditionally understudied populations, including developing and validating measures that are culturally relevant and appropriate, assists systems in better understanding and meeting the needs of families.

Harvard Family Resource Project recommendation: Develop and use knowledge about culturally relevant and appropriate predictors, patterns, and processes of family involvement to better engage, understand and meet the needs of families.¹⁶

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 1)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Understanding and learning about parents' beliefs, perceptions, wants, needs, and issues will improve service delivery, build knowledge and empower families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural competence practices • Seek knowledge for a purpose – why do I want to know this and how will the information be used? • Apply understanding of parents to influence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Services provided ○ Policy recommendations • Access parents/consumers through trusted sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Build trust from the community level up ○ Build relationships, strength based approach • Apply audience analysis needs assessment techniques: Research based, survey methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sample reflective of population (entire/target) ○ Results appropriately interpreted ○ Use scientific probability sampling methods 	<p><u>Parent Focus Groups</u> <u>What Do Parents Think About Child Care? Findings from a Series of Focus Groups</u>¹⁷ examine, What do parents look for, what are the difficulties and compromises they make, and what is quality care? NACCRRA developed the survey and recruited state agencies across the country to access 165 parents.</p> <p>Result: NACCRRA reviews results to identify what are the policy implications of the findings. Analyzed findings from the focus groups are incorporated into publication, <u>Breaking the Piggy Bank: Parents and the High Price of Child Care</u>, a report intended to inform and make recommendations to increase federal investment in quality child care, (Child Care and Development Block grant). Findings are also utilized in the development of NACCRRA's National Poll.</p> <p>Specific findings: Working families want “quality child care”, best defined as “professional” and “loving” caregivers able to provide a “clean”, “safe” and “learning” environment. Financial struggles mean compromising on quality care. Focus group findings indicate a desire to have access to quality care. Quality child care should be a reality. NACCRRA recommends improving access to quality care for all families through increasing CCDBG funds. Many families assume programs receive regular health and safety inspections and providers are trained. Unanimous support and belief that caregivers need training. NACCRRA tests the caregiver training and program monitoring assumptions on parents in national poll and establishes that parents support policies that require inspection of programs and training of caregivers.</p> <p><u>Commissioned National Poll</u> <u>Parents' Perceptions of Child Care in the United States: NACCRRA's National Parent Poll</u>¹⁸ 600 parents polled on their usage, perception and thoughts on child care. Professional interviewers (English and Spanish speaking) conducted survey that was designed with NACCRRA staff and contracted research firm. Valid sampling distribution and reflect actual population .</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 1 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Understanding and learning about parents' beliefs, perceptions, wants, needs, and issues will improve service delivery, build knowledge and empower families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural competence practices • Seek knowledge for a purpose – why do I want to know this and how will the information be used? • Apply understanding of parents to influence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Services provided ○ Policy recommendations • Access parents/consumers through trusted sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Build trust from the community level up ○ Build relationships, strength based approach • Apply audience analysis needs assessment techniques: Research based, survey methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sample reflective of population (entire/target) ○ Results appropriately interpreted ○ Use scientific probability sampling methods 	<p>Result of National Poll: Findings and policy implications incorporated into NACCRRRA's Vision Bill, seeking to reauthorize the Child Care Development Block Grant and protect and expand the Dependent Care Tax Credit so that states could: improve availability of child care assistance, increase and support caregiver training, background checks, increase development of quality programs and increase monitoring and safety mechanisms (unannounced inspections).</p> <p>Specific Findings- Poll supported misconception identified in the focus group-common existing mindset that programs are regularly inspected and providers receive training. Parents polled supported child care quality improvement strategies such as requiring programs to meet basic standards, requiring inspections, caregiver training, improving existing health and safety standards. NACCRRRA's vision bill makes health and safety recommendations that include background checks, fingerprints, 40 hours pre-service training and 24 hours annual ongoing training.</p> <p><u>Family Partnership Agreement Process</u> National program performance standards of Head Start reflect a commitment to effectively communicating with parents. Building trusted relationships, creating opportunities for parents to be involved and identifying goals, timetables and strategies for achieving goals is developed through a family driven process, unique to Head Start, known as Family Partnership Agreements.¹⁹</p> <p>Result: Family Partnership Agreement process is a continuous on-going relationship between the program and family that successfully helps families attain goals and staff meet key components of performance standards.</p> <p>Specific Finding: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families provides a variety of resources to assist Head Start staff thorough this process.²⁰</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 1 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Understanding and learning about parents' beliefs, perceptions, wants, needs, and issues will improve service delivery, build knowledge and empower families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural competence practices • Seek knowledge for a purpose – why do I want to know this and how will the information be used? • Apply understanding of parents to influence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Services provided ○ Policy recommendations • Access parents/consumers through trusted sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Build trust from the community level up ○ Build relationships, strength based approach • Apply audience analysis needs assessment techniques: Research based, survey methodology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sample reflective of population (entire/target) ○ Results appropriately interpreted ○ Use scientific probability sampling methods 	<p><u>Family Liaisons</u> Family liaisons are an essential piece to learning about the target population. Trained liaisons, aware of and prepared to address cultural differences, language barriers, socioeconomic issues, and social factors that affect parents' ability to be involved in their children's education, offer home visits to assess the needs of families and then to tailor communications and services to meet their needs.</p> <p><i>Result-</i> Liaisons build relationships with parents and are able to provide culturally relevant information to targeted populations, meeting specific needs.</p> <p><i>Specific Finding:</i> Utah Family Center recruited a medicine man on a reservation to be a liaison. In addition to being highly respected within the communities in that area, he is savvy about what types of communications will be most effective for a community where few families have a phone. When the school in which he was based was on verge of not making AYP, this liaison conducted over 100 home visits to talk with parents about the value of student attendance and testing, explaining that parents needed to make sure their children came to school so the children would learn well and test well, for both the children's sake and the school's sake.²¹</p> <p><u>Seek Parent feedback</u> Information can be gathered from participation of parents in formal and informal discussions and or surveys. Growing trend of web surveys, targeting users of service.</p> <p><i>Result:</i> Parent perspectives and feedback encourages more informed discussions.</p> <p><i>Specific finding:</i> The draft proposal for redesigning NACCRRRA's Parent Central and making it part of a larger network with more opportunity to participate in advocacy is a response to online feedback received from a large target population.</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 2)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Information and services that are available, understandable, accurate and designed to meet identified needs will assist consumers in making informed choices.</p>	<p>Information is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research based- use valid resources, • Incorporates findings from valid needs assessment • Incorporates parent and stakeholder input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Website feedback, ○ Parent review committee • Match appropriate message in appropriate format and language to appropriate audience. (Cultural and linguistic competent resource), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ i.e.: brain message for parents, for policy makers • Continuous feedback component <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Survey (parent feedback) ○ Web • Marketing strategy for distribution- communicate findings 	<p><u>Information Communicated Directly to Parents</u> America’s most trusted child care resource is a program of the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA). The Child Care Aware website, developed specifically for parents, provides child care related information and resources for parents. It is designed to primarily serve as an information and resource warehouse for parents looking for care.</p> <p>Result: Parent friendly, trusted resources.</p> <p>Specific Finding: Don’t reinvent the wheel, ie, “Matching your infant or toddler’s style to the right child care setting” is a Child Care Aware/Zero to 3 publication, adapted from two Zero to three publications.</p> <p><u>Information Delivered from Trusted Community Source</u> All organizations and systems reviewed strategically disseminate resources, (to some extent), from sources familiar to the target audience. NACCRRA recognized their communication and engagement efforts rely heavily upon state networks, member agencies and other stakeholders who are “on the front lines” with parents. Parent Central is a program of NACCRRA that connects parents with information and resources, and has an advocacy component, allowing parents to become part of a growing network of concerned parents knowledgeable and able to respond to policy affecting child care issues.</p> <p>3 core components of Parent Central include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valid information- Information on Parent Central is research based, either independent research or utilizing applicable founded research in the field. • Parent driven- Website topics and themes are guided by parent feedback. In addition to ongoing feedback collected on the site, NACCRRA pulled information from parents identified in <u>“Is This the Right Place for my Child?: 38 research based indicators and information from NACCRRA’s Public Policy Agenda to identify topics that center around quality child care.</u> • Personalized to meet the needs of parents- A subscription process allows parents to personalize their involvement by choosing the topics they are interested in receiving information.

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 2 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Information and services that are available, understandable, accurate and designed to meet identified needs will assist consumers in making informed choices.</p>	<p>Information is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research based- use valid resources, • Incorporates findings from valid needs assessment • Incorporates parent and stakeholder input: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ website feedback, ○ parent review committee • Match appropriate message in appropriate format and language to appropriate audience. (Cultural and linguistic competent resource), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ i.e.: brain message for parents, for policy makers • Continuous feedback component <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Survey (parent feedback) ○ Web • Marketing strategy for distribution- communicate findings 	<p>Results: Sharing accurate information, news and resources and online action campaigns through established community sources allows NACCRRRA to share information, establish familiarity of NACCRRRA among readers and become a trusted national source at a community level. Similarly, by working with or through a community or faith-based organization, PIRC’s exponentially increase parents reached.²²</p> <p>Specific Findings- Illinois Resource and Referral Network receives the monthly Parent Central Express from NACCRRRA, tailors the content to add statewide news for parents, then passes this version to member agencies who have the opportunity to add local information for readers in their community. Relevant, coordinated information that pertains to the readers is provided.²³ South Carolina add local awards, events, public hearings and resources for parents.²⁴ The Indiana Partnerships Center has developed partnerships with homeless shelters in the state to distribute <i>NCLB</i> information, and it places informational spots on Spanish-language radio and television to reach Spanish-speaking parents.²⁵</p> <p><u>Communicate the Message to Policy Makers</u> Policy initiatives are tested and supported by parents. NACCRRRA researcher and staff developed questions, gathered research through parent focus groups (messaging, audience analysis) and conducted a national parent poll, then interpreted and shared the results and implications of findings.</p> <p>Result: Information from parent focus groups contributed to the development of the national parent poll questions, conducted in 2006 to better understand parents’ perceptions of child care in the United States. Findings from poll supported key issues that are reflected in NACCRRRA’s <u>Vision bill</u>²⁶; the bill aims to increase the quality of child care as well impact policy recommendations regarding affordable child care.</p> <p>Specifics: Parents believe making child care more available is essential to working families; policy recommendations address making child care more available through increasing funding for child care assistance, adjust eligibility guidelines and improve federal and state tax codes.²⁷</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 3)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Moving from informing to activating consumers requires an ability to identify and address barriers to becoming engaged.</p>	<p>Access obstacles common among organizations that benefit families but not directly delivering the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address access barriers- Build visibility; work with community agencies. <p>Logistical obstacles include time of meeting, arranging for child care, transportation, and reimbursement for expenses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Logistic barriers- Select convenient meeting times and accessible locations. Provide stipends child care, +/- transportation. <p>Structural obstacles include lack of pre-meeting orientation, group size, number of parents and decision-making process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address structural barriers- clear, meaningful roles and tasks outlined. <p>Climate obstacles include feeling intimidated, not knowing others, vocabulary used and not feeling useful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Climate barriers- Build skills among parents and professionals; establish a welcoming atmosphere; purposeful activities. 	<p><u>Establish Familiarity with Parents</u> NACCRRRA believes that before they can effectively engage parents in advocacy, NACCRRRA need to become a familiar resource to them. “We must have some kind of relationship; go to where the parents are, don’t expect parents to just come to you.” NACCRRRA recognized their communication and engagement efforts rely heavily upon state networks and their member agencies and other stakeholders who are “on the front lines” with parents. Parent Central connects national issues to local issues by sending messages through networks, which in turn, send them through member agencies.</p> <p>Result: Parents receive info from a more familiar and trusted entity. Consistent logo helps to establish familiarity of national organization with parents.</p> <p>Specific Finding: Over 78,000 parents have signed on to parent central, the majority through their local network.</p> <p><u>Assign a mentor or facilitator to be the group/parent contact</u> Consumers may benefit from encouragement and support provided by professional members within the group or from a trusted, familiar source.</p> <p>Specific findings: Consumers in Kentucky noted that the support received from a service provider helped them to participate in the planning process. In Broward County, Florida, the community facilitator developed a relationship with consumers and maintained ongoing contact with them.²⁸ PIRC’s commonly utilize parent liaisons to form relationships with parents. Parent liaisons and mentors have been commonly used to increase parent participation by recruiting staff.²⁹</p> <p><u>Adopt Flexible ways to Engage Families</u> Lessons Learned from the Family Preservation and Family Support (FP/FS) Services Implementation Study indicate that successful states and localities did not try to simply fit consumers into a planning or oversight body designed for professionals. Instead, they rethought the ways consumers could be involved, and the supports that were needed to sustain participation.</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 3 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Moving from informing to activating consumers requires an ability to identify and address barriers to becoming engaged.</p>	<p>Access obstacles common among organizations that benefit families but not directly delivering the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address access barriers- Build visibility; work with community agencies. <p>Logistical obstacles include time of meeting, arranging for child care, transportation, and reimbursement for expenses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Logistic barriers- Select convenient meeting times and accessible locations. Provide stipends child care, +/- transportation. <p>Structural obstacles include lack of pre-meeting orientation, group size, number of parents and decision-making process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address structural barriers- clear, meaningful roles and tasks outlined. <p>Climate obstacles include feeling intimidated, not knowing others, vocabulary used and not feeling useful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Climate barriers- Build skills among parents and professionals; Establish a Welcoming atmosphere; purposeful activities. 	<p>Result: Addressing barriers improved participation. Sites more successful at engaging consumers were more creative and persevering in addressing barriers to seek meaningful consumer input.</p> <p>Specific Finding: While community centers were the service delivery settings that most frequently engaged consumers in service delivery, some jurisdictions encouraged consumer involvement by awarding mini-grants for small projects of benefit to the community. For example, in Broward County, Florida, the community mini-grant program was designed to encourage non-traditional providers to become involved in family support. The program, administered internally by the child welfare agency, provides grants of up to \$500 to reimburse providers for such expenses as parenting education supplies, transportation, child care, respite care, conferences, workshops and food or clothing banks.³⁰</p> <p><u>Establish inviting time and place</u> In order to accommodate consumers, meetings can be held during evenings and weekends, or working lunches can be arranged.</p> <p>Result: Locations familiar to consumers, non-stigmatizing and generally accessible by public transportation, i.e.: community centers, schools and public libraries increase access for parent participation.</p> <p>Specific findings: Moving off of agency turf, seeking a centrally located space +/- alternating meeting sites.</p> <p><u>Provide Compensation/Stipends/Incentives</u> Recognize and value that parents invest their time and money (travel, child care, time off for work) to be an active participant.</p> <p>Result: Recognition of parent participation and reimbursements increase ability of parent participation.</p> <p>Specific Finding: The PS/FS study found some localities developed an approach that provided both “support and encouragement” in addition to participation; service provider staff or community-based organizations provided rides for consumers.³¹</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 3 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Moving from informing to activating consumers requires an ability to identify and address barriers to becoming engaged.</p>	<p>Access obstacles common among organizations that benefit families but not directly delivering the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address access barriers- Build visibility; work with community agencies. <p>Logistical obstacles include time of meeting, arranging for child care, transportation, and reimbursement for expenses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Logistic barriers- Select convenient meeting times and accessible locations. Provide stipends child care, +/- transportation. <p>Structural obstacles include lack of pre-meeting orientation, group size, number of parents and decision-making process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address structural barriers- clear, meaningful roles and tasks outlined. <p>Climate obstacles include feeling intimidated, not knowing others, vocabulary used and not feeling useful.</p> <p>Address Climate barriers- Build skills among parents and professionals; Establish a Welcoming atmosphere; purposeful activities.</p>	<p>Other localities arranged to have a person responsible for contacting consumer participants in advance of each meeting to make concrete assistance available to them should they need it.³² Another common method of recognizing contributions of parents was in the form of offering “freebies” and gift certificates.</p> <p>Clear communication of purpose and role Organizations that seek consumer participation on boards and clearly define why and how consumer participation impact the development of better services truly value and process consumer input. These organizations tend to be more successful at involving and retaining consumer participation.</p> <p>Result: Meaningful participation, increased empowerment and understanding of expectations and process.</p> <p>Specific finding-In order to emphasize the active and meaningful role consumers are to play in a group, tasks such as collecting information from their community, networking with other community members or reviewing proposals from service providers should be assigned to them early in the group’s formation.</p> <p>Address Board composition/Create balanced representation: The number of consumers with equal standing on committees translates into genuine decision-making authority. Methods include forming a consumer group that elects its own representatives to a planning or governing body; and/or including several consumers in a group rather than just one or two.</p> <p>Result: Increased non-professional participation reduces participants feeling of “being an outsider” or token contributor” and increases a feeling of solidarity, value and respect for outsider input.</p> <p>Specific finding: Organizations are adapting policies to change composition of the board membership; increasing membership of consumers.</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 3 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Moving from informing to activating consumers requires an ability to identify and address barriers to becoming engaged.</p>	<p>Access obstacles common among organizations that benefit families but not directly delivering the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address access barriers- Build visibility; work with community agencies. <p>Logistical obstacles include time of meeting, arranging for child care, transportation, and reimbursement for expenses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Logistic barriers- Select convenient meeting times and accessible locations. Provide stipends child care, +/- transportation. <p>Structural obstacles include lack of pre-meeting orientation, group size, number of parents and decision-making process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address structural barriers- clear, meaningful roles and tasks outlined. <p>Climate obstacles include feeling intimidated, not knowing others, vocabulary used and not feeling useful.</p> <p>Address Climate barriers- Build skills among parents and professionals; Establish a Welcoming atmosphere; purposeful activities.</p>	<p><u>Provide ongoing feedback on the impact of participation</u> Feedback and participation that is recognized provides an opportunity to demonstrate the value of feedback received and its contributing role and impact on services.</p> <p>Result: Participation feels warranted, needed.</p> <p>Specific finding: After conducting an online survey regarding Parent Central, NACCRRR reviewed findings and decided to implement suggestions for increasing advocacy opportunities. Although the suggestions have not yet been implemented, the intent to revamp Parent Central based on feedback received was communicated.</p> <p><u>Address Hard to Reach Populations</u> A Research Project commissioned by the ‘Specialist Schools and Academies Trust’ & funded by the ‘Department for Education and Skills’ found that Parental engagement is heavily linked to socio-economic status, as well as parental experience of education. Parents of certain ethnic and social groups are less likely to engage.³³</p> <p>Result: Schools that offered support to these parents (i.e. literacy classes, parenting skill support) are more likely to engage them in their children’s learning.</p> <p>Specific findings: Many activities successful in bringing new viewpoints into the process, are activities that required consumers to come to a public location in order to participate, attracting those who were already active in community affairs and were comfortable speaking in public forums. Frustrated with the lack of effective outreach efforts to seek consumer input, a member of one state’s interagency planning group addressed the problem by simply visiting local public welfare and unemployment offices. “People there are waiting in line,” she noted. “They have time, and are willing to talk with someone who is interested in their needs.”³⁴</p>

Understand and Meet the Needs of Parents (Principle 3 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Moving from informing to activating consumers requires an ability to identify and address barriers to becoming engaged.</p>	<p>Access obstacles common among organizations that benefit families but not directly delivering the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address access barriers- Build visibility; work with community agencies. <p>Logistical obstacles include time of meeting, arranging for child care, transportation, and reimbursement for expenses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address Logistic barriers- Select convenient meeting times and accessible locations. Provide stipends child care, +/- transportation. <p>Structural obstacles include lack of pre-meeting orientation, group size, number of parents and decision-making process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address structural barriers- clear, meaningful roles and tasks outlined. <p>Climate obstacles include feeling intimidated, not knowing others, vocabulary used and not feeling useful.</p> <p>Address Climate barriers- Build skills among parents and professionals; Establish a Welcoming atmosphere; purposeful activities.</p>	<p><u>Address Target Populations</u> Information and research gathered from NACCRRRA identify the core group of parents seeking advocacy activity is a select population; professional white women between the ages of 30-39. NACCRRRA’s established goals and focus on moving parents to action, coupled with knowledge of parents most likely to participate in advocacy campaigns resulted in NACCRRRA focusing on target population to meet their needs.</p> <p><u>Provide Skills-Building Training</u> Train professionals and parent participants</p> <p>Specific Findings: Sites surveyed in the FS/PS study that provided professionals with training in identifying and eliminating cultural barriers and negative stereotypes, facilitation skills and orientation in asset-based approaches were found to be more successful in engaging consumers and providing a welcoming environment. Additionally, providing parents training in leadership, public speaking and advocacy skills built confidence and empowered parents.³⁵ A common strategy among PIRC’s is to jointly build “functioning in teams” skills among parents and professionals.³⁶</p>

Organizational Framework Theme 3: SOUND RESEARCH AND EVALUATIVE MECHANISMS

A number of organizations are investing significant resources to collect and disseminate quality of care information to consumers, often without understanding whether and how consumers use this information. How does an organization determine the effectiveness of services? Are the efforts to gather feedback from families truly impacting the design of services? How can you tell if the parent involvement efforts have actually made a difference?

To effectively meet the needs of parents, evaluating the impact of such endeavors is important for demonstrating the value of such investments and learning how to better communicate with and involve to consumers.³⁷ Gathering and utilizing data is an effective tool for understanding the impact services and resources have on parents, contributing to and guiding program development and revision. Assessment and evaluation are also important in all partnerships, not only to measure impact but also to help ensure that partnerships are both sustainable and strategic in reaching their program goals.³⁸

Organizations demonstrating sound research and evaluative mechanisms share two commonly held principles: Efforts to monitor, evaluate and assess parent engagement efforts and practices will inform program development and revisions. Increased knowledge about effective methods for evaluating parent engagement efforts will inform best practices.

Harvard Family Resource Project finding: Evaluations are only as useful as the strategies for applying them. Information about monitoring and assessing standards help states select most effective methods.

Harvard Family Resource Project Recommendation: There is a need to develop more rigorous evaluations of specific interventions and policies to understand what works, for whom, and why. The field needs to leverage and create new forums and opportunities for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, parents, and others to share and utilize this knowledge.³⁹

Sound Research and Evaluative Mechanisms (Principle 1)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Efforts to monitor, evaluate and assess parent engagement efforts and practices will inform program development and revisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong mindset in favor of evaluation for program improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be intentional ○ Set expectations • Collection + interpretation of data managed with experienced staff and or external expertise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scientific probability sampling methods • Variety of Evaluation techniques and methodology to gauge parent satisfaction built into program design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Qualitative data collection: Explorative consultations provide a better understanding from a select group, i.e.: Focus groups, meetings, public hearings, and community needs assessments. ○ Quantitative data collection: Statistical surveys, Phone questionnaires, Surveys (mail, web, face to face), comprehensive information systems, proven national sources 	<p><u>Set Expectations, review and address unmet goals:</u> Parent Central is NACCRRRA’s primary effort to involve parents on child care policy issues. NACCRRRA’s established goal for Parent Central is to obtain a membership of one million parents; currently, 78,000 parents have signed on with parent central and the number of new parents has “hit a plateau.” NACCRRRA assessed progress of quality indicators and identified the plateau as significant. NACCRRRA’s Parent Central task force, including internal evaluator and newly full time staff person dedicated to this project, surveyed parents and networks to further understand the status of Parent Central.</p> <p>Result: Monitoring the progress by assessing involvement through measuring participation and attendance, gathering baseline data and conducting well-framed satisfaction surveys among target population allowed NACCRRRA gather valid information that was used to evaluate Parent Central.</p> <p>Specific finding: Parent Central task force reviewed and evaluated feedback from surveys in relationship to established goals, determined a need to keep the goal of engaging one million parents and is creating a proposal to redesign Parent Central.</p> <p><u>Consult with Researcher to Evaluate participant satisfaction results and progress of activities:</u> NACCRRRA employs a researcher to assist in the design of the well-framed questions, assure proper sampling techniques and to evaluate results. For large projects, NACCRRRA contracts with a research organization. Similarly, PIRC’s emphasize the importance of evaluating services, employing external evaluators to work with program directors.⁴⁰</p> <p>Result: Researcher/evaluator services ensure ability to seek and interpret valid results.</p> <p>Specific findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program director identifies goals, research questions / set of benchmarks 2. Evaluator identifies data sources and controls 3. Problem solving- evaluator and program director review data

Sound Research and Evaluative Mechanisms (Principle 1 continued)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Efforts to monitor, evaluate and assess parent engagement efforts and practices will inform program development and revisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong mindset in favor of evaluation for program improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be intentional ○ Set expectations • Collection + interpretation of data managed with experienced staff and or external expertise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scientific probability sampling methods • Variety of Evaluation techniques and methodology to gauge parent satisfaction built into program design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Qualitative data collection: Explorative consultations provide a better understanding from a select group, i.e.: Focus groups, meetings, public hearings, and community needs assessments. ○ Quantitative data collection: Statistical surveys, Phone questionnaires, Surveys (mail, web, face to face), comprehensive information systems, proven national sources 	<p><u>Cost allocation, cost benefit/cost analysis evaluations</u>⁴¹</p> <p>Cost allocation is an accounting system that allows program managers to determine a unit cost or cost per unit of service. If the units measured are also outcomes of interest to evaluators, cost allocation provides some of the basic information needed to conduct more ambitious cost analyses such as cost-benefit analysis or cost-effectiveness analysis. The basic question asked is, "Which of these alternatives is the cheapest or most efficient way to get this benefit?" By definition, cost-effectiveness analysis is comparative, while cost-benefit analysis usually considers only one program at a time. Another important difference is that while cost-benefit analysis always compares the monetary costs and benefits of a program, cost-effectiveness studies often compare programs on the basis of some other common scale for measuring outcomes (eg., number of students who graduate from high school, infant mortality rate, test scores that meet a certain level, reports of child abuse). They address whether the unit cost is greater for one program or approach than another, which is often much easier to do, and more informative, than assigning a dollar value to the outcome.</p> <p>Result: Because well-publicized cost-benefit studies have been widely cited and credited with convincing legislators to increase their support for early childhood programs, some practitioners advocate making more use of cost-benefit analysis in evaluating social programs. These studies are often used by policy analysts and legislators to make broad policy decisions, so they might look at a large federal program, or compare several smaller pilot programs that take different approaches to solving the same social problem.</p> <p>Specific finding: Well-publicized cost-benefit studies of early intervention programs, such as the High Scope Perry preschool study, have claimed to show substantial long-term social gains for participants and cost savings for the public.</p>

Sound Research and Evaluative Mechanisms (Principle 2)

Principle/concept	Common elements	Strategies/practice
<p>Increased knowledge about effective methods for evaluating parent engagement efforts will inform best practices.</p>	<p>Opportunities exist to share information and build collective knowledge.</p> <p>Exploration of evidence-based practices.</p> <p>Development / use of effective tools to evaluate parent engagement efforts</p> <p>Participation in evaluation focused training opportunities.</p>	<p><u>Share, discuss and report progress of parent engagement efforts</u> Communicating with peers and stakeholders, (Including parents) the results of parent feedback status and discussing how efforts were evaluated will help inform future development of parent engagement activities. Specific Finding- Emerging communities of practice</p> <p><u>Research promising practices and apply effective methods of evaluating parent engagement efforts</u> Surveys to participants that evaluate specific activity, awareness, use of materials, attendance at trainings, what was learned, and what changes were made are commonly used to gauge parent satisfaction. <u>A Catalog of Family Process Measures- Evaluating Family Involvement Programs - Experimental evaluations demonstrate value added of practices.</u>⁴²</p> <p><u>Utilize / adapt existing evaluation tools:</u> The emergence of toolkits, evaluation designed for schools and districts to address parent involvement, incorporating Joyce Epstein’s 6 levels of Parent Involvement. <u>Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire- Lessons From Family-Strengthening Interventions: Learning From Evidence-Based Practice.</u>⁴³ <u>Strengthening parent Involvement Toolkit:</u>⁴⁴. The Parent Involvement Evaluation Toolkit, designed by Arroyo Research Services for the Colorado Dept of Ed, assists schools and districts in conducting evaluations of the parent involvement policies under Section 1118 of No Child Left Behind, contains guidance, policy details, and evaluation instruments including a parent survey, teacher survey and focus group protocols.⁴⁵ <u>Parent Engagement Information and Tools- Moving beyond Parent Involvement to Parent Engagement-</u> Michigan Dept of Ed compilation of resources to assist districts in parent engagement Efforts-includes Coordination and evaluation tool, Inclusion tool, Professional Development and Training tool and checklist developed by Outreach Partnerships of Michigan State University, specific for differing levels of parent Involvement.⁴⁶ <u>Out of School Time Evaluation Snapshot- Measurement Tools for Evaluating Out of School Time Programs: An Evaluation Resource-</u> Compilation of Evaluation Instruments that match their program and evaluation goals and characteristics and assist practitioners design future evaluations.⁴⁷</p>

Organizational Framework Theme 4: COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Harvard Family Research Project finds that stakeholders embarking on new and existing initiatives are able to think more broadly and creatively and make a more systemic and sustained commitment to family involvement when actively considering the roles of all individuals and institutions who influence families' capacity for involvement. Across the country, a growing chorus of voices is calling for more holistic approaches to education and youth development—approaches that intentionally connect the many settings in which children and youth live and learn and encourage the building of deep and meaningful connections between early childhood education, schools, families, out-of-school time, cultural and community institutions, and health and wellness services.⁴⁸ At Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP), this vision of connected supports is termed complementary learning. Recognizing that all children need multiple opportunities to learn and grow—at home, in school, and in the community, Complementary Learning is a comprehensive strategy for addressing all of these needs and ensuring success for all children and youth. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach—which intentionally integrates both school and nonschool supports—can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed.⁴⁹ Although complementary learning is a formal approach with a strong educational emphasis, the core imbedded concept of establishing connections, collaborations and partnerships within and among multi-systems and stakeholders is widely applied across settings of care.

Perhaps more pervasive and widely recognized, the concept of community of practice has also found a number of practical applications in various arenas including business, organizational design, government, education, professional associations, development projects, and civic life.⁵⁰ Communities of Practice is the process of social learning that occurs and shared sociocultural practices that emerge and evolve when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals. Communities of practice are fundamentally self-organizing systems, (informal or formal) that produce a shared practice as members engage in a collective process of learning. Both informal and formal communities of practice allow for the leveraging of knowledge that already exists, encouraging the development of a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice, among individuals with a common interest.⁵¹

Two principles that emerge among organizations seeking to develop collaborations and partnerships as a means to impact the capacity for family involvement: sharing information and emerging knowledge of parent engagement practices and strategies builds knowledge base and ideas and promotes the development of systemic efforts; and the development of strong collaborations and partnerships will inform and guide effective development and the implementation of co-constructed, systemic parent engagement efforts.

Harvard Family Resource Project finding: Individuals and organizations are increasing embarking on developing strong collaborations and partnerships, often forming communities of practice and or pursuing complementary learning opportunities. Collaborations and partnerships allow organizations the capacity to develop and deliver quality services; systemic approaches to designing, implementing and evaluating family involvement practices and policies more effectively incorporate family involvement.

Harvard Family Resource Project recommendations: Regular opportunities to engage in open and ongoing communication, sharing, of knowledge and learning about family involvement practices and policies are essential; these opportunities need to move beyond individual programs to more systemic efforts, inclusive of multi-disciplinary stakeholders.⁵²

Collaborations and Partnerships (Principle 1)

Principle/concept	Common Elements	Strategy/practice
<p>Sharing information and emerging knowledge of parent engagement practices and strategies builds knowledge base and ideas and promotes the development of systemic efforts.</p>	<p>Established “Leader” who initiates bringing people together and facilitating deeper understanding.</p> <p>Broad, meaningful and intentional participation among stakeholders.</p> <p>Ability for stakeholder organizations to contribute in the effort to improve data on family and children outcomes</p> <p>Ability for each group to contribute in unique ways</p>	<p><u>Internal Reflective Practice Discussions</u> Thoughtful look at how organization does work and identify efforts to learn together through interdepartmental communications.</p> <p>Result- Solidify mission, make strategic decisions, convey consistent messages and create a culture of relationships and communication.</p> <p>Specific finding: Breaking down silos interdepartmentally through “Leadership Labs”/ “professional thought forums”. Regular meetings among managers from all departments that provide opportunity to discuss relevant readings, new research and best practices in order to find common ground.⁵³</p> <p><u>External “inventory” of stakeholders:</u> Gather understanding of the roles and activities stakeholders outside of the organization may participate in that could contribute to efforts.</p> <p>Result: Development and distribution of the inventory provided information and encouraged discussions and sharing of ideas.</p> <p>Specific finding: Identify the “players”, develop a directory- The State of Rhode Island developed a “Directory of Parent engagement activities” as a means to understand who, within state government has the capacity to influence families’ capacity for involvement. The inventory collected information that included the name of the organization, purpose, number of parents involved, highlights, details, commitment, contact info, stipend institutions.⁵⁴</p> <p><u>Research and Learn from successful approaches</u> A compilation of key strategies for building communities of practice to accomplish state goals specific to special education is provided in <u>Common Strategies for implementing communities of practice as identified in New eyes: Meeting Challenges through Communities of practice</u>⁵⁵</p>

Collaborations and Partnerships (Principle 1 continued)

Principle/concept	Common Elements	Strategy/practice
<p>Sharing information and emerging knowledge of parent engagement practices and strategies builds knowledge base and ideas and promotes the development of systemic efforts.</p>	<p>Established “Leader” who initiates bringing people together and facilitating deeper understanding.</p> <p>Broad, meaningful and intentional participation among stakeholders.</p> <p>Ability for stakeholder organizations to contribute in the effort to improve data on family and children outcomes</p> <p>Ability for each group to contribute in unique ways</p>	<p><u>Actively seek out model program:</u> Vermont Resource and Referral Agencies sought to learn from California Parents Voices and affiliates how to develop successful parent engagement efforts that impact policy. Through conversations with California Parents Rising representatives, Vermont’s new initiative, Parents Rising, is learning more about the role of child care referral agencies in developing parent engagement efforts.</p> <p>Result: Improving knowledge of possible strategies and roles for Resource and referral specialists.</p> <p>Specific finding: Staff at Resource and Referral Agencies are critical in movement.</p> <p><u>Leveraging</u> Using authority, influence and or resources to create new attention, action or change. Successful leveraging requires an understanding of the content of the issue, the systems that influence the issue, and the context for implementing desired changes.</p> <p>Result: Well organized effort that increase parent participation and impact Legislation</p> <p>Specific Finding: Parent Voices, California’s parent-led grassroots organization fighting to make quality child care affordable and accessible to all families receives leadership guidance and support from resource and referral staff. Resource and referral staff recruit parents with subsidy related issues to impact legislative change and actively develop parent leaders.</p>

Collaborations and Partnerships (Principle 2)

Principle/concept	Common Elements	Strategy/practice
<p>Development of strong collaborations and partnerships will inform and guide effective development and the implementation of co-constructed, systemic parent engagement efforts.</p>	<p>Link multiple institutions, such as: schools, after school programs, families, early childhood programs, health and social services, and community-based resources such as libraries and museums</p> <p>Occur at any scale and scope, including city-wide, neighborhood-wide, and statewide.⁵⁶</p> <p>Common Mission, Goals and strategies among stakeholders that all focus on research based best practices⁵⁷</p>	<p><u>Seek support and form collaborative initiatives with “experts”</u> Use the resources and skill strengths that exist.</p> <p>Result: Using staff already well trained in family involvement and engagement strategies allowed Jacksonville Florida the ability to successfully raise awareness of, benefits of and strategies for engaging families in the school setting.</p> <p>Specific Finding: Building on the success of Family Involvement initiatives, Jacksonville Children’s Commission in Florida collaborated with successful family involvement staff to work with school programs.⁵⁸</p> <p><u>Investing in developing partnerships with target population community connections</u> Identify the resources the target population utilizes and seek to develop partnerships with those organizations to gain access to and understanding of those families of interest.</p> <p><u>Nationwide action through established community connections</u> Parent Central is NACCRRA’s an online hub for information about child care, parenting, and policy issues affecting children and families. Parent central aims to create a national network of informed parents that can be a source for social and political change and engage those parents in federal, state and local advocacy.</p> <p>NACCRRA’s Parent Central success relied heavily on their ability to collaborate with their member agencies (state resource and referral networks). State networks then relied heavily on their relationships with community agencies o increase parent recruitment efforts. This flow through process allowed NACCRRA access to parents. In addition, NACCRRA had an incentive for participating networks- the ability to maintain complete control of content and distribution of information at the community level. Information and Messages are created nationally then distributed to the state networks to filter. Recognizing the value of community driven communications, a flow through process allows parents to be part of a growing national network and receive national and local information from a community source. This flow through process allows parents to understand the big picture within a community context.</p>

Collaborations and Partnerships, (Principle 2 continued)

Principle/concept	Common Elements	Strategy/practice
<p>Development of strong collaborations and partnerships will inform and guide effective development and the implementation of co-constructed, systemic parent engagement efforts.</p>	<p>Link multiple institutions, such as: schools, after school programs, families, early childhood programs, health and social services, and community-based resources such as libraries and museums</p> <p>Occur at any scale and scope, including city-wide, neighborhood-wide, and statewide.</p> <p>Common Mission, Goals and strategies among stakeholders that all focus on research based best practices⁵⁹</p>	<p><u>Provide Incentives</u> Partnerships and collaborations are often a “give and take” relationship. NACCRRA has termed this, “What’s in it for me”. Each organization needs to know not just what you want from them but also what you are “bringing to the table”.</p> <p>Result: Creating “win-win” relationships</p> <p>Specific finding: NACCRRA provides tools and technical assistance to networks that have signed on to customize Parent Central and allows State Networks maintained complete community control, customizing Parent Central to meet the needs within their state/community.</p> <p><u>Embark in “Cross Pollination” efforts</u> Create interdisciplinary learning opportunities that examine policy trends that are not one dimensional, but impact more than one discipline.</p> <p>Result: information and advocacy efforts more sustained.</p> <p>Specific Finding- NACCRRA’s Vision Bill is supported by organizations that extend beyond child care. With a goal of moving quality child care forward, NACCRRA sought out multi-disciplinary partners who had a stake in the well of children. These stakeholders were provided research based information that supported the issues being addressed, participated in discussions and then endorsements were sought to adopt the Vision bill as a means to move quality care forward.</p> <p><u>Embark on Collaborative Reform Initiatives</u> One of the most successful, common reform initiative is the collaboration that forms between parents and schools. Typically, a group of local institutions, sometimes with the aid of foundation funds, hires an organizer--possibly from an organization like the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)--to initiate and facilitate the reform process. Through conversations with many individuals and groups, the organizer helps to identify a core organizing team of 8-15 parents and educators that usually coordinates the work of the others involved.⁶⁰</p>

Summary

Nationally, there is a growing trend to deliver “family friendly” services and services that “meet the needs of the consumer” through establishing and incorporating practices that are “family-centered”. While there are varying levels of successful parent involvement initiatives, efforts to improve policy, practice, and the evaluation of these family involvement practices are gaining momentum.

In researching the parent engagement practices of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, effective strategies to engage parents have emerged and have been found prevalent within a multitude of systems. These strategies can be associated with one of the four general themes that consistently appear among organizations engaging in sincere efforts to learn from and involve parents in the design and implementation of services: Organization values parents; Understanding and meeting the needs of parents; Sound research and evaluative mechanisms; and Collaborations and partnerships.

Theme 1: Organization values parents

Organizations value parents and believe that consumers of services drive effective practices and contribute to the delivery of meaningful services and that dedicated staff and resources are instrumental in supporting parent engagement efforts.

NACCRRRA’s lesson learned: Organization structure needs to develop and communicate a clear purpose, goals and strategies for why you want to engage parents, how you intend on involving parents and what you intend to do with it.

Theme 2: Understand and meet the needs of parents

Research suggests that the role cultural and linguistic competent practices play in understanding and meeting the needs of families is essential in delivering effective services that understand and meet the needs of families. Organizations want to understand and meet the needs of parents and believe that understanding and learning about parents’ beliefs, perceptions, wants, needs, and issues will improve service delivery, build knowledge and empower families; Information and services that are: available, understandable, accurate and designed to meet identified needs assist consumers in making informed choices; and moving from informing to activating consumers requires an ability to identify and address barriers to becoming engaged.

NACCRRRA’s lesson learned: Building a relationship with parents requires an ability to understand the issues and clearly communicate the issues through establishing linguistic and cultural competent practices.

Theme 3: Sound research and evaluative mechanisms

Organizations seek to apply sound research and evaluative mechanisms and believe that efforts to monitor, evaluate and assess parent engagement efforts and practices will inform program development and revisions and that increased knowledge about effective methods for evaluating parent engagement efforts will inform best practices.

NACCRRA lesson learned: You are only as good as your data- Use and provide valid research based knowledge and information. Demonstrate and share how the involvement of parents has made a difference.

Theme 4: Collaborations and partnerships.

The fourth theme common among organizations striving to involve parents is the development of Collaborations and partnerships. Organizations hold two common principles: Sharing information and emerging knowledge of parent engagement practices and strategies builds knowledge base and ideas and promotes the development of systemic efforts. Development of strong collaborations and partnerships will inform and guide effective development and the implementation of co-constructed, systemic parent engagement efforts.

NACCRRA lessons learned: NACCRRA values and develops partnerships and collaborations, recognizing that their communication and engagement efforts rely heavily upon state networks, their member agencies and other stakeholders who are “on the front lines” with parents. They also recognize a need to incorporate a multitude of stakeholders to impact national policy.

Next Steps

This brief hopes to provide insights into the lessons learned and practice trends implemented to engage consumers in planning services. It is meant to be used as a steppingstone in priming parent engagement discussions that lead to the development of strategies for effectively learning from Vermont parents and improving the delivery of services to effectively meet needs.

Appendix A. Seven Takeaways About the Future of Family Involvement

HFRP summarizes key observations -what the field needs to know and do to move family involvement forward in policy and practice.

1. *Families are an essential component of complementary learning**. To succeed in school and in life, children and youth need access to multiple supports for learning. These supports can be more effective when connected in an intentional and systemic way. HFRP calls these networks of supports complementary learning. Families are central to complementary learning as contributors, collaborators, and consumers.
2. *Recent research warrants a reconceptualization of family involvement, which includes three primary components*: Family involvement matters from birth through adolescence but changes as children mature. Family involvement occurs in all the contexts where children and youth live and learn, not only in homes and schools but in out-of-school time programs and many other settings. Family involvement must be a shared and meaningful responsibility among families, schools, communities, and society.
3. *Family involvement practices and policies need to move beyond individual programs to more systemic efforts*. Family involvement efforts and investments should build on programs in individual schools and communities to implement and study more systemic approaches. Growing initiatives at the district and state levels, including family involvement reforms, policies, and standards, represent potential models.
4. *More rigorous evaluation of family involvement policies and initiatives is needed to build knowledge about effective approaches*. Although correlational research has made a strong case about the benefits of family involvement, there is a need for more rigorous evaluations of specific interventions and policies to understand what works, for whom, and why. Promising strategies include cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses, large-scale evaluation of federal programs, and family involvement assessments within educational accountability systems.
5. *Evaluations are only as useful as the strategies for applying them*. To ensure that emerging knowledge does not end up in “digital graveyards,” the field needs to leverage and create new forums and opportunities for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, parents, and others to share and utilize this knowledge. One promising strategy is to create communities of practice—informal networks of stakeholders who regularly share information and build collective knowledge.
6. *In research, policy, and practice, a more nuanced understanding of family involvement across cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds is emerging but incomplete*. Several researchers featured in this issue are part of a growing movement to develop and use knowledge about the predictors, patterns, and processes of family involvement in traditionally understudied populations. This includes developing and validating measures that are culturally relevant and appropriate.
7. *Committed leadership is fundamental to building family involvement, and leadership development is a priority for the field*. In schools and other organizations, leaders establish the expectations, opportunities, and incentives for family involvement. They are also largely responsible for using evaluation for continuous improvement. Preparing future leaders to value family involvement and invest in evaluation continues to be a critical issue, from teacher and administrator education programs to state standards to mentoring future family involvement researchers.

Appendix B. Self-Assessment / Self Reflection Tool: Parents as Consultants: What does our Parent Data Mean?

Organizations Reviewed	Purpose for obtaining data					Data collection method				Methodology for identifying data needs & evaluating			Data use+value- what have you done with the data?			
	Grant Requirements	Accountability	Evaluation	Self-assessment	Improve services	Observation	1:1 Interview	Questionnaire/survey	Focus Groups	Internal expertise	Stakeholder input	Researcher	Submit for grant requirements	Share with stakeholders	Impact outcomes	Value of data-local / state wide
Organizations with a parent focus																
Building Bright Futures																
Child Development Division																
Frameworks Institute																
Harvard Family Research Project																
Headstart																
KAP1																
NACCRRA																
Parent Child Center Network																
PIRC Parent Information Resource Center																
Parent to Parent																
Parents Rising																
United Way																
Vermont Association of Child Care Resource and Referral																

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