

## Family Engagement Framework for the Early Learning Council

### Overview

The Family Engagement Subcommittee began in January 2016 with a goal of creating recommendations for an intentional system of family engagement that supports authentic parent voice, input and feedback to improve early childhood policies and systems at the statewide and community level. Through research and review of 10 program-level family engagement models and three national family engagement frameworks, the following recommendations were identified as the best practices by the families, providers, and early learning professionals who made up the subcommittee.

Using the ABLLe Change Framework from Michigan State University, the subcommittee defined authentic family engagement as: Families are empowered to not only engage in discussions and decision-making, but also actively take part in implementing decisions that are made. For example, families who are in the change agent role design ways to learn about local problems, collect information about the community, and engage in analyzing the information to identify targets for change. Families are also engaged in implementing strategies, collecting data for ongoing learning, and helping to make decisions.<sup>1</sup>

Research indicates that family engagement is positively correlated with student achievement and that it is an essential strategy for student success.<sup>2</sup> By implementing the following recommendations, families will be more empowered in the early childhood system at the state level and the Early Learning Council (ELC) will have a framework for systematic input and engagement from families.

Throughout this document the term family or families is used instead of parent to be inclusive of biological, adoptive, foster parents; grandparents; and legal and informal guardians.

The recommendations below are in three phases of implementation:

1. Phase I (next three months)
2. Phase II (FY18, would require some changes to the ELC)
3. Phase III (FY19, would take planning and resources during FY18, in order to put in place by July 1, 2018)

#### Committee Key:

- Early Learning Council – Throughout this document families who participate at this level are referred to as: family council members.
- Early Learning Council Executive Committee- Throughout this document families who participate at this level are referred to as: family exec committee members.
- Family Advisory Committee- Proposed new committee made up of families to raise up concerns to the state and ELC level. Throughout this document families who participate in this committee are referred to as: family committee members.

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<sup>1</sup> Michigan State University, “Family Engagement Continuum” *Promoting Systems Change Using the ABLLe Change Framework*: 52

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, *Policy Statement of Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades* (May 5, 2016)

## Recommendations

### 1. Phase I (next three months)

- a. **Include language in the mission and values of the Early Learning Council** to indicate families as partners in meeting the needs of young children.

Proposed addition to the ELC Mission: Our **mission** is to collaborate with child-serving systems and families to meet the needs of young children, prioritizing those with the highest need. We do this via comprehensive early learning services for children and families prenatally to age five.<sup>3</sup>

Proposed addition to the ELC Values: We **value** doing so in a way that is culturally and linguistically responsive, values the whole child, forwards community partnerships, relies upon collaboration across systems, increases equitable access, engages families, increases family self-sufficiency, and demonstrates high quality.

- b. **Include a standing item on every Early Learning Council agenda** for families to share their perspective and raise concerns or issues. Before the Family Advisory Committee is established (as described on page 3), this agenda space will be for current family council members. Once the Family Advisory Committee is established, this agenda space will be utilized by the committee to share and provide updates on their work.

### 2. Phase II (FY18, would require some changes)

- a. **Create a statewide vision of family engagement** to create continuity and consistency for children and that can be used by all early learning systems and programs. Utilize the Principles & Practices Committee knowledge and expertise on family engagement to help establish the vision.

Currently, many local and state early learning programs have family engagement visions for their specific programs. It would benefit the early childhood system to have one statewide vision that highlights the importance and benefits of systematic and authentic family engagement in state policy conversations.

- b. **Provide an annual orientation to all current and new Early Learning Council members** on the importance and principles of authentic and meaningful family engagement, including the statewide vision (described in item 2a above).
- c. **Include parent perspective at each ELC meeting** when there is a relevant agenda item. This could be the parent perspective of a guest or a current council member, to help ensure that those who are utilizing the program or system being discussed will have a voice at the table.

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<sup>3</sup> Governor's Office of early Childhood Development, "Early Learning Council"  
<https://www.illinois.gov/gov/OECD/EarlyLearningCouncil/Pages/default.aspx>

**d. Include families as members of the Early Learning Council and Early Learning Executive Committee**

The ELC was created with a vision that a continuous and strong, high-quality early learning system enables children to enter kindergarten and grow up safe, healthy, happy, and eager to learn. Bringing additional family voice to the table to share their expertise would be beneficial in advancing the vision and lead to stronger partnerships between families and the early childhood system. Through research and review of family engagement models across the country we recommend the following best practices:

- The Executive Committee of the Early Learning Council should designate two seats for families
- Early Learning Council membership should comprise of at least 20% families, through representatives from a Family Advisory Committee (described in item 2 below)

Expectations and qualifications for families on the ELC and ELC Executive Committee:

- Racially, linguistically, and geographically diverse (consider gender and parents with children with disabilities)
- Have a child birth to 12 years or be the parental voice for a child birth to 12 years
- Have firsthand experience with an early learning program
- Motivated and passionate about early childhood
- Agree to provide two-way feedback between the ELC and the Family Advisory Committee

**e. Create a Family Advisory Committee as a standing committee of the Early Learning Council.**

The Family Advisory Committee will serve as a systematic vehicle for the voices of families in communities and programs to be raised up to the state level. The Committee also will serve as resource and sounding board for state agencies who are making policy and program decisions. The members of the Family Advisory Committee are expected to provide two-way feedback between the Committee and their local program or collaboration.

The Family Advisory Committee will:

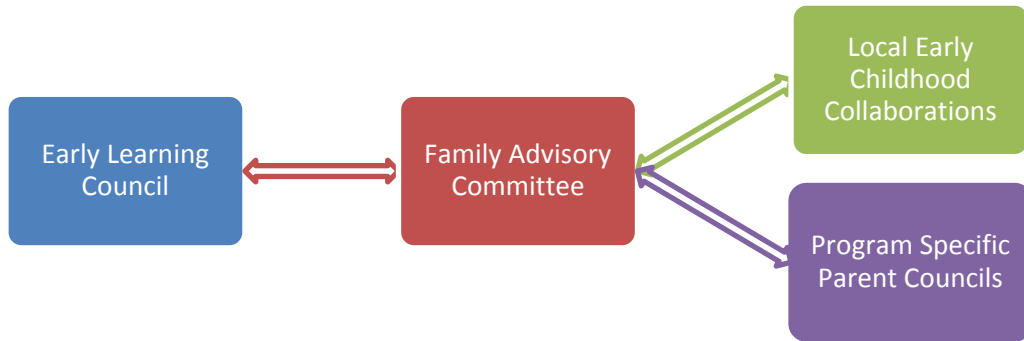
- Provide family voice to guide early childhood policy development and issues
- Advise on issues that impact the early childhood system
- Promote state-level family engagement and inclusivity of parents in decision making processes
- Recruit new family leaders to engage in the Committee
- Collaborate as needed with the Access, Integration and Alignment, Quality, and Home Visiting Task Force committees on cross-committee work

Expectations and qualifications for families on the Family Advisory Committee:

- Racially, linguistically, and geographically diverse (consider gender and parents with children with disabilities)
- Have a child birth to 12 years or be the parental voice for a child birth to 12 years

- Have firsthand experience with an early learning program
- Motivated and passionate about early childhood
- Agree to provide two-way feedback between the ELC and the Family Advisory Committee

Proposed Family Advisory Committee structure and composition:



The composition of the Family Advisory Committee should be inclusive of, but not limited to, families who participate in:

- All Our Kids (AOK) Networks
- Child Care Programs
- Early Intervention/Local Interagency Councils
- Head Start Policy Councils (including Migrant Head Start)
- Home Visiting
- Local Early Childhood Collaborations
- Local School Councils (Chicago)
- Parent Teacher Organizations
- Parent Training and Information Centers (to ensure inclusion of children with disabilities)
- Preschool Expansion/Preschool for All
- Prevention Initiative

Each Family Advisory Committee agenda will include a standing agenda item for providers or early childhood professionals to share their perspective or raise concerns and issues.

During FY18, pilot the Family Advisory Committee with a small number of communities to identify best practices and learnings on how to successfully operate, sustain, and connect the committee to the ELC. For the pilot year:

- Identify a volunteer backbone agency to staff and coordinate logistics for the committee
- Utilize training resources that we already have in Illinois for trainings to empower and prepare families to participate in the Committee, the ELC, and Executive Committee.

- f. **Provide an orientation and training to new family members** of the ELC and Family Advisory Committee

Topics to include in orientation for families: Advocacy, Leadership, Public Speaking, Overview of the Early Childhood System, Overview of the Early Learning Council, Current Early Learning Council Work, Facilitation, Agenda Creation

Existing Training Resources for families:

- Parent Leadership Training Institute
- Illinois State Board of Education
- Head Start
- Parent Empowerment Resources/Models: COFI, Serving on Groups That Make Decisions: A Guide for Families (developed by the WI Office of Special Education Programs), Logan Square Neighborhood Association

g. **In consultation with family members of the ELC, have at least two ELC meetings at different times and locations** to make them more accessible to families

h. **Begin to explore funding sources** for Phase III in FY19

**3. Phase III (FY19, would take planning and resources during FY18, in order to put in place by July 1, 2018)**

In order to be successful and empowered, families need to be supported. It is best practice to offer the following supports for families who partner with programs, communities, and systems.

- Child care
- Stipends
- Transportation or Transportation Reimbursement
- Refreshments
- Evening meeting or Weekend Meetings to accommodate work schedules
- Interpreters to accommodate families whose primary language is not English

At a minimum, the following supports for the Family Advisory Committee will be needed:

a. **Funds to cover the above support expenses** for the Family Advisory Committee meetings

b. **A designated staff person who is also a parent** to serve as the backbone support for the Family Advisory Committee and to be the liaison between the Family Advisory Committee and the ELC/ Executive Committee. This staff person must have the demonstrated ability to work with diverse families, including supporting, mentoring, and coaching skills.

Appendix A: Authentic Family Engagement Definition

## Family Engagement Subcommittee

Co-chairs:

Gloria Harris, Community Organizing for Family Issues (COFI)

Trish Rooney, SPARK Aurora Early Childhood Collaboration

Penny Smith, IL State Board of Education (ISBE)

### Definition of Authentic Family Engagement

The goal of this subcommittee is to submit recommendations to the Early Learning Council on how to create an intentional system that supports **authentic** parent voice, input and feedback to improve policies and systems at the statewide and community level.

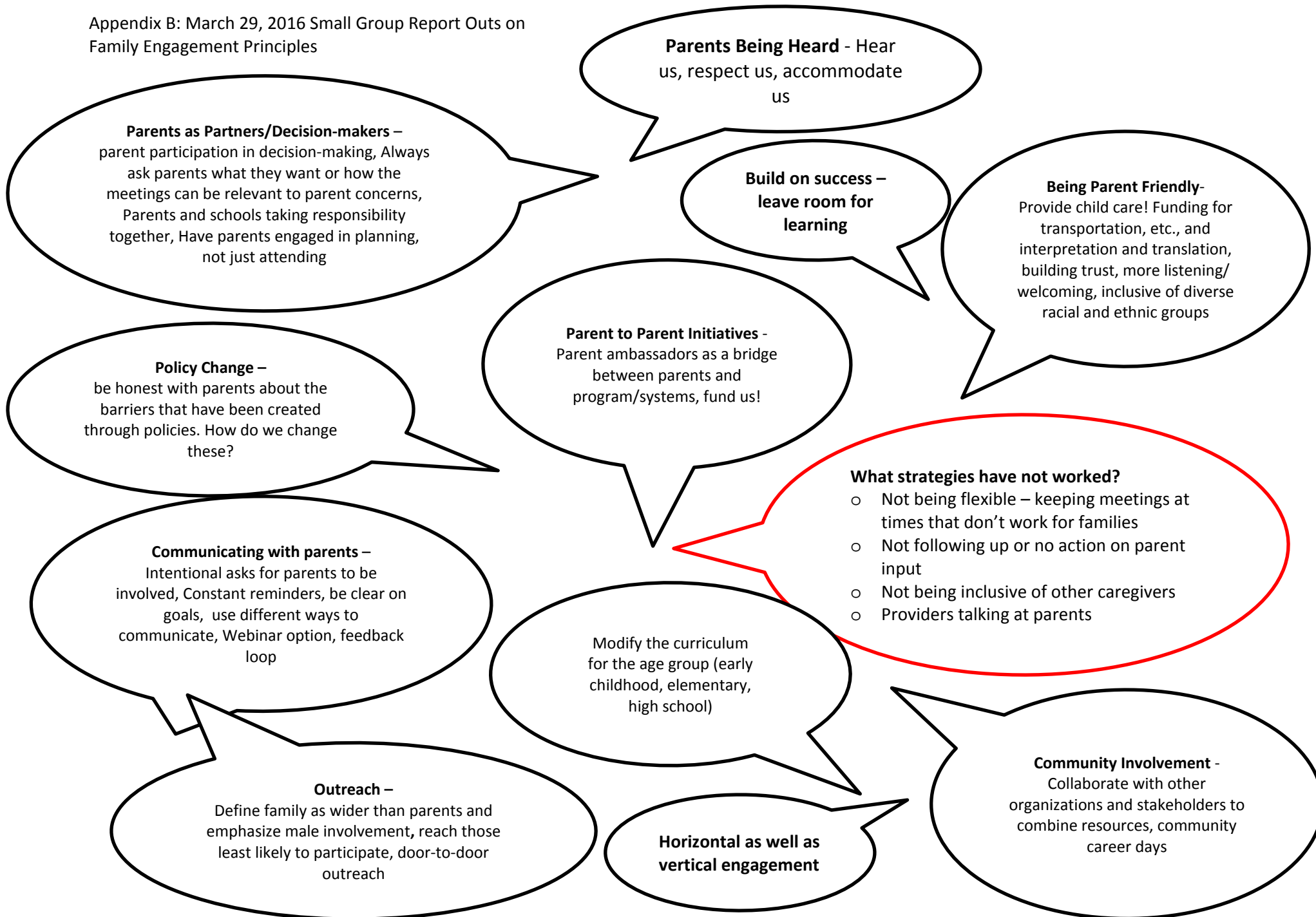
Using the ABLe Change Framework from Michigan State University this subcommittee will define authentic family engagement as:

#### **Change Agent:**

Families are empowered to not only engage in discussions and decision-making, but also actively take part in implementing actions. For example, families who are in the change agent role design ways to learn about local problems, collect information about the community, and engage in analyzing the information to identify targets for change. Families are also engaged in implementing strategies, collecting data for ongoing learning, and helping to make decisions.

Keeping this definition in mind, the committee will investigate and identify different strategies and practices in being used to engage families to help form the recommendations.

Appendix B: March 29, 2016 Small Group Report Outs on  
Family Engagement Principles



Appendix C: Family Engagement Subcommittee, ELC Access Committee: Summary of Reviewed Family Engagement Models (March 22, 2017)

Model/Organization	Strategies for Engaging Parents	Feedback Loop (between families and providers or government)	Parent Training	Supports for Parents
Boston Thrive in 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift from serving families to partnering with families</li> <li>• Monthly learning community meetings with parents and providers</li> <li>• City-wide quarterly meetings for parents</li> <li>• School Readiness Roundtables and other community meetings,</li> <li>• Support families with completing the ASQ (developmental screening)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pathway for parents: Boston Children Thrive Families → Parents on School Readiness Roundtable → Parent Partners → Parent-Led Projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained as ASQ screeners to provide screening to children in family, friend and neighbor care</li> <li>• Peer to peer trainings on ASQ</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Parent stipends (up to \$700/year)</li> <li>• Staffing support for projects</li> </ul>
Community Organizing on Family Issues (COFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with early childhood collabs</li> <li>• Develop relationships and trust</li> <li>• Include parents in planning from beginning and incorporate input</li> <li>• Parents leading/teaching other parents</li> <li>• Provide supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent delegates from regions and issue campaigns share updates and make decisions through a governing council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self, family, team (3-6 month process)</li> <li>• Community outreach and action (6-9 month process)</li> <li>• Policy and systems change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare</li> <li>• Convenient times</li> <li>• Full translation</li> <li>• Refreshments</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Welcoming atmosphere</li> </ul>
Head Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent Committee on a program level</li> <li>• Policy Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey parents twice per year.</li> <li>• Evaluation at parent trainings.</li> <li>• Ask parents to participate in annual program self-assessment.</li> <li>• Parents on the Policy Council take information back to their parent group and vice versa.</li> <li>• Parents (especially Policy Council parents) participate in grant planning meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation at first parent meeting.</li> <li>• Parents are invited to attend staff trainings and other local, regional or national Head Start or other trainings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child care</li> <li>• Registration, hotel and meal costs as approved</li> <li>• Translation</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Staffing (Family Engagement Specialist)</li> </ul>
Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Maternal and Child Health Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 Regional Family Councils (families participating in an IDPH maternal and child health program)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each regional council submits recommendations to IDPH</li> </ul>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child care</li> <li>• Food at meetings</li> <li>• Meeting stipend</li> <li>• Transportation</li> </ul>



Councils				reimbursement
Model/Organization	Strategies for Engaging Parents	Feedback Loop	Parent Training	Supports for Parents
Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Family Engagement Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing a family engagement system</li> <li>Building a welcoming and supportive environment</li> <li>Enhancing communication and</li> <li>Including parents in decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ISBE Info Hotline</li> <li>Bilingual Advisory Committee</li> <li>ISBE website for families: <a href="http://www.il-fss.org">www.il-fss.org</a></li> <li>Social media</li> <li>This feedback is used to inform the ISBE supports for families, school, districts and community-based providers.</li> </ul>	Trainings for families and providers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family Engagement</li> <li>Cultural Competency</li> <li>Collaborative Approach</li> <li>Assessment and Action Planning Tool</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
Michigan Great Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60 coalitions across the state               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coalitions need to look like the demographics of the community</li> <li>Parents/caregivers need to have at least one child under 12</li> </ul> </li> <li>State collaboratives are made of 20% parents. Collaborative director and parent liaison work together on the strategic plan. Parent coalitions support the work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surveys</li> <li>Providers come to parent coalitions to discuss information about the system.</li> <li>Parent liaisons provide input on strategic plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Orientation (4 month process: Developing Strong &amp; Effective Groups, Parents Partnering for Change)</li> <li>2 trainings/year, plus technical assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hospitality and childcare</li> <li>Meeting Stipend</li> <li>Part-time paid Parent Liaisons</li> <li>Staffing (including to separate family-level issues from system issues)</li> </ul>
Minnesota Department of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent education classes</li> <li>Parent advisory council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent councils advise on policy, fees, programming, how money is spent, and what events are important to families.</li> </ul>		
Parent Leadership Training Institute		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate parents' capacity to offer input at the school, neighborhood, regional and state level;</li> <li>Facilitate systems change, with increased utilization of parents in policy and process decisions.</li> </ul>	Many topics including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents as change agents</li> <li>The power of media</li> <li>Using your voice</li> <li>How the state works</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child care</li> <li>Meals</li> <li>Transportation</li> </ul>
Results of 2016 Early Childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surveys, interviews, focus groups</li> <li>Parent cafes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents share information with local collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tiny habits coaching/ training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>

Family Engagement Subcommittee

June 2017

Collaboration Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kindergarten parent interviews</li><li>• Door-to-door</li><li>• Outreach at community events</li><li>• Peer-to-peer/ parent ambassadors</li><li>• Participate in advocacy at state level</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advocacy 101 training</li></ul>	
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