

**Illinois Early Learning Council**  
**Family and Community Engagement**  
**Principles & Practices Subcommittee**

**September 23, 2014 • 9:30am – 11am**

**Minutes**

- Attendees: Choua Vue, Granada Williams, Leticia Parker, Donna Emmons, Sergio Hernandez, Toni Porter, Nick Wechler, Adrienne Stewart, Veronica Mercado, Gloria Harris, Juliet Bromer, Becky McBroom, Scott Kibler
- No previous minutes to be approved
- Presentation: “Governor’s Award of Excellence” Parent/Provider Focus Groups (Juliet Bromer, Erikson Institute)
  - Background: During Spring 2014, Erikson led a series of 10 focus groups statewide with staff (Head Start, PFA, for-profit and non-profit childcare) and parents.
  - Purpose:
    - Gather information about promising practices from the field;
    - Gather specific examples from already high(est) performing programs (in previous Quality Counts System)
    - Use this feedback to supplement the FCE (Award of Excellence) Standards
    - See if the Standards align with what’s currently happening in the field (eventually the Standards will be revised, can use this to guide process)
    - See the types of training and supervision that programs need in order to quality FCE
    - See how programs document these aspects of quality
  - Findings (grouped in 11 categories):
    1. Program philosophy and policies
    2. Relationship building with families
    3. How programs engage children in learning
    4. Goal setting
    5. Connected to resources
    6. Helping families with transitions
    7. Parent capacity and leadership
    8. Barriers to family engagement
    9. Community engagement
    10. Documentation
    11. Support, training, and supervision

- Highlights by category (Full Report and Executive Summary forthcoming)
  - Program philosophy and policies
    - Programs emphasized “open door policies”
    - Formal events and activities also part of policies
    - Parent-to-parent networking was encouraged
    - Examples of programs facilitating connections beyond parents’ normal social circles
  - Relationship building with families
    - Key attitudes include: caring, commitment, importance of staff being non-judgmental
    - Center directors discussed “openness to change”, idea that programs/staff must have attitude and receptiveness to change, (interesting given unspoken expectation that families and parents should be prepared to change)
    - Parents spoke of importance of being recognized; examples included staff knowing their names, greeting them, knowing who they are as an individual
    - Communication best when utilizing multiple modes; individualizing communication with families
  - Engaging children/families
    - Engaging fathers: hosting special activities for dads, including fathers in policies/structure, one program example of adding a “father” signature line on intake forms
    - Engaging extended families: staff needing support learning how to engage grandparents
    - Engaging isolated families: importance of understanding family’s circumstances; most effective programs are persistent in engaging isolated families; one parent gave example of appreciating the almost relentless persistence staff maintained to get her involved
  - Goal setting
    - This mostly happened in programs with dedicated staff/resources to do actual two-generation goal setting
  - Connected to resources
    - Programs had wide range of abilities to do connect parents and families to resources
    - Harder for small centers, but many still manage to do it; staff use creative ways, draw on personal connections (ex: getting their personal dentist to donate supplies)
    - Key areas identified: helping families in crisis, providing emotional support, connections to legal advocacy, helping families navigate child care subsidy system (many providers noted this took away time from working with children, but see it as part of necessary engagement work)
  - Transitions
    - Mostly helping parents understand kindergarten enrollment process, identifying eligible schools; though some staff help parents transition into other early childhood programs
    - Staff also help families with the *initial* transition (from home to first early childhood program); participants identified numerous different approaches to this (ex: no parents allowed in center first 3 weeks of program, parents allowed to shadow and stay in classroom, parents required to help); this points to an area where the Standards could help
  - Parent capacity and leadership
    - These mostly were identified in Head Start programs and centers with dedicated engagement staff; various examples of parent policy councils, etc.
  - Barriers to family engagement
    - Teacher barriers: lack of training, knowledge, skills in knowing how to work with adults; highly qualified and trained in working with children, but not necessarily with parents; program staff (especially younger employees, those without children) not comfortable educating parents, even when part of their job; shows need for reflection/supervision around this area

- Provider financial barriers: staff not paid enough, overtime usually not an option, not compensated to stay after work to engage parents; lack of substitute teachers and floating classroom aides also an issue
- Family barriers: time off work to come to events, not feeling comfortable to engage with staff
- Community barriers: neighborhood violence and safety concerns traveling to evening and weekend programs
- Public/system barriers: administrative burden of child care subsidy system, takes away from relational work staff could be doing
- Community engagement
  - Overall, programs didn't have much feedback on this topic, shows it's still an emerging area
  - Programs don't have enough staff to leave the site and build community relationships
  - Some centers maintain a community presence, but primarily for marketing purposes, keeping their name visible at community events
  - Agreement that building community relationships are important, especially with: libraries, banks, community colleges, community service agencies
  - Some programs do collaborate with other programs; in some communities providers noted a shift in focus from "competition to conversation" over the last few years
  - More engagement could exist if (K-12) school system viewed early childhood providers as colleagues; lack of respect is barrier to collaboration
  - Useful approach is bringing community into the classroom, utilizing guest speakers and presenters
  - Some providers are limited by location/setting, they literally do not have community links to even make
- Documentation (how do programs demonstrate that they're successfully engaging family/community?)
  - Providers used full range of methods: from formal tracking databases to informal sign-in sheets
  - Programs struggle to document the relational part of their work, they know they're doing it, providers frustrated not being able to show it
  - Major challenge is the ways programs/funders want activities documented doesn't necessarily capture the real work
  - Programs want new ways to document
  - Most program/funders' outcomes are intensive, long-term outcomes (ex: school readiness), however family engagement is ongoing—and perhaps highly successful—even if official outcomes aren't reached; points to need to identify intermediate outcomes
- Support, training
  - To do this work well, programs need additional staff, more financial support (tiered QRIS reimbursements)
    - but since these changes are less likely, need to find ways to leverage existing staff; one promising idea is creating networks of directors (real/virtual) across programs (community and/or statewide)
  - Reflective supervision can be helpful, important for staff to internally reflect; create climate of support for staff to share their struggles
  - Encouraging self-care in staff

- Strategic Planning Discussion
  - Today's charge: Develop potential goals to be grouped around the following overarching priorities:
    - Prioritizing the most at-risk children
    - Sustaining and leveraging the gains from current state/federal grant opportunities

Group Brainstorm...

- Develop and distribute resources about the FCE Awards of Excellence
- Develop and distribute community/statewide resource lists
- Support opportunities for agencies to collaborate; formalize, set up, and maintain these (driven by someone other than local center director)
- Create additional resources and other supports for family and community engagement
- Shift perspective/framing: providers' job is no longer only engaging children; providing specific training on adults, adult learning, family systems
- Develop (family engagement) documentation strategies that align with ExceleRate
  - Potential piloting of the FPTRQ (Family Parent Teacher Relationship Quality measure) to be released by October 2014
- Revise CCAP policies to support continuity of care, ease administrative burden, extended eligibility periods, etc.

*Members noted that more discussion time is needed before finalizing goals.*

*Similarly, additional clarification as to role of P/P subcommittee members in leading Awards of Excellence support/training work is useful.*

Given this, **the following 4 potential work areas will be shared at the October 3, 2014 Full FCE meeting for feedback and discussion:**

1. Work on different documents that would be useful for the field such as a document on best practices for promising family engagement that may be useful for Awards of Excellence and/or ExceleRate Illinois.
2. Create a "toolbox" of family and community engagement resources that are useful for providers – potentially host on ExceleRate Illinois.
3. Community engagement – what are the best practices? Create a document on this topic.
4. Looking at "Outcomes" – identifying how to document the informal engagement strategies that are meaningful for families.

- Upcoming Meeting Dates
  - Full FCE Committee... October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 (Friday, 1-3pm)
  - P/P Subcommittee... November 18th 2014 (Tues, 10am-12pm)
  - Full FCE Committee... January 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 (Wed, 1-3pm)
  - P/P Subcommittee... February 5<sup>th</sup> 2015 (Thurs, 10am-12pm)