Diving into Data: Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement

Heidi: And welcome everyone to the third webinar in our Parent, Family, and Community Engagement webinar series. Our first webinar gave us a broad look at the PFCE Framework's program foundations. The second webinar took a closer look at one of those program foundations, program leadership, and in this webinar we're going to focus on another key program foundation, continuous program improvement.

Our presenters will take us on a deeper dive into the use of data to understand and improve program services and family progress toward outcomes. Before we turn it over to our presenters, I want to make note of a few things. If you are experiencing any technical issues, please direct them to our behind the scenes team by sending a private message to leaders and assistants using the private tab in the chat box below.

We will be posting an archive of this webinar, along with an accompanying resource list to ECLKC after the webinar. As you can see, we have a great set of presenters with us today. They are going to be presenting for about an hour and their presentations will be followed by a 15-minute Q and A, and then a 15-minute peer to peer chat, during which you can use the chat box to share ideas and related resources. Please hold your questions for the presenters until the Q and A begins.

Our first presenter is Kiersten Beigel. Kiersten has been with the Administration for Children and Families, and Health and Human Services for 10 years, and in her role as Family and Community Partnerships Specialist with the Office of Head Start for five years. Kiersten is a Social Worker by training, and prior to her federal work, she worked with parents and children in schools, hospitals, child welfare, mental health settings, and shelter programs.

We were very fortunate to have Kiersten kick off our first two webinars, and we are thrilled to have her back to kick off this one, as well. So Kiersten, with that, I will turn it over to you.

Kiersten Beigel: Thank you, Heidi. Well, hello Head Start nation. And I say that because I had so much fun looking at all the folks who are on this webinar, checking in on where you're from, so it looks like we are well represented across the United States. And I welcome newcomers to this, who you haven't been to the first or second in our series yet, and also, a hearty welcome back to those of you who are sticking it out with us.

There are so many people who signed up for this webinar. We had over 1,200 folks sign up, and I noticed that there's an incredibly diverse array of roles that you undertake in your program, so we've got – family service managers, coordinators, front line staff. We have T and TA staff. We have Head Start directors. We have Ed. directors and Ed. managers. We have consultants and parent involvement folks.

We have Head Start collaboration directors, house managers, some nurses, and of course, we have – a nice handful of information systems folks with us today, so we use the slogan at OHS and at the National

Center that family engagement is everybody's business, and I think that our participation is well represented in that today. And I guess we could also extend that to say that perhaps data is also everybody's business.

So, – as Heidi kind of said, we're going to talk about what it takes to create a culture of continuous improvement today, and how to use data to do it. We have the good fortune of hearing from two programs today, and by sharing their experience, they're going to help us reflect on how we can use data to better understand how our families are doing.

We'll also consider ways to understand how families are doing after they have left the program, and how we can continue to support them as advocates for their children's learning. Okay, so hopefully, you recognize this yellow column. This is the program foundations column for our PFCE Framework.

Continuous improvement is a critical element of effective PFCE practices, and the framework defines continuous program improvement as when leadership is committed to continuously improving systems and activities to engage and support parents and families.
So, as one of the three pivotal program foundations, along with leadership and professional development, continuous improvement processes really help programs to strengthen their ability to achieve effective family engagement. And they influence the development and the refinement of family friendly program environments, and quality family partnerships, effective teaching and learning, and collaborative community partnerships. So those are – those are the elements, the service areas – the impact areas, as we say – the pink column of the framework.

Continuous improvement processes also help programs understand and address the needs of children and families and the needs and interest of staff as well, so for example, making informed decisions about new staff orientation training or professional development opportunities and other efforts that improve staff's ability to partner with families, as well as support families' aspirations and more urgent needs.

Now everyone, I think, recognizes how critical it is that children and families are able to learn and grow and develop new skills and receive services that support family wellbeing, but figuring out measuring progress over time – both for individual families and groups of families, well, we know this can leave folks feeling a little overwhelmed and unsure where to begin or what aspects of this to tackle.

So, you may actually have a lot of data at your fingertips, but perhaps not the right processes or systems in place yet to use that data meaningfully or in ways that you can understand what – what difference your services are making for families Or you may have examples of where this is working well, but other areas where it's, maybe, not so much. So, stay tuned and we'll give you some ideas for thinking about this in more detail.

So let's take some of the pressure off this idea of data and start with the bigger picture – question. And then what does it take to create a culture of continuous improvement? If you want to think about it as –

you know, we talk about program environment a lot, so what kind of a culture or program environment really – kind of, supports and emanates, if you will, continuous improvement.

So, a good place to start, I think, is to embrace, both in principal and in practice, this idea of building learning organization. Now, according to David Garvin and his colleagues, there are three major building blocks of a learning organization.
First, these organizations offer a supportive learning environment, so basically, an environment where staff feel safe asking questions, recognize – there's a recognition of, you know, posing ideas, there's – a certain level of comfort with risk-taking and putting new ideas out, and interests and/or willingness to explore what is not known to folks. And this type of learning environment – promotes meaningful dialogue about an organization's policies and services and other programmatic – programmatic aspects. And it helps people think of new and innovative ways to do their work.

So, the second building block that David Garvin and his colleagues talk about is that learning organizations have concrete learning processes in place, so you know, these include ways to generate, collect, make meaning of information, disseminate information, – and processes for identifying and solving problems, so these processes are really necessary for organizations to really walk the walk when it comes to using data.

And the third building block is leadership that reinforces the learning. In learning organizations leaders are willing to listen to alternative viewpoints and spend time identifying and reflecting on – problems. And you know, we know this takes more time, but there's a willingness to, sort of, engage in active questioning and listening. And this type of leadership is what the PFCE Framework calls for in promoting continuous program improvement.

So programs can become learning organizations by adopting these practices and creating this, kind of, culture of learning, and this can help program leadership and staff shift their mindset beyond the idea of collecting data just for compliance to a broader mindset of – thinking about compliance, of course, as it's part of your – your daily reality, but also really embracing this idea of using data for learning and improvement.

Essentially, learning organizations are made up of – of staff who are skilled, or developing skills, at creating, collecting, and sharing knowledge or data, and who are flexible and able to adapt to changes or unpredictable circumstances, which I know that you might have some of those on a daily basis yourself – unpredictable – predictable challenges that come up for you in your work.
I wanted to point out to you – I'm not sure how many of you have the chance to read it, but you can Google this report – be the quickest way to tell you to get to it, the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Development. This committee met last year and was made up of leading researchers in the field of early childhood and family engagement, and program directors – Head Start – a couple of program directors.
It was released last August and the committee's first recommendation was for Head Start to adopt a data-driven focus on school readiness and other key outcomes, and so other key outcomes really refers

to family outcomes here for our purposes, and here we can think about the outcomes for the PFCE Framework in the blue column, which are directly and indirectly linked to children's school readiness. And there was also – I mean, this recommendation underscores the importance of using data for continuous improvement as programs are seeking to understand which strategies and approaches are most effective. And the committee also recommended that we strengthen Head Start as a learning organization, and that we do that by committing to use data for continuous improvement, and developing appropriate assessments, and – help programs use their results to guide their practice, and then also to integrate and align practices and policies.

So, there's a lot of interesting summaries of the research in this report and we're trying to incorporate some of these recommendations in our efforts here at OHS going forward. So, the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement has already created several resources that can help Head Start programs engage in continuous program improvement, which you can check out on the ECLKC.

And incidentally, we're going live with a new web design tomorrow, so be sure to check us out. We're very excited about that. We're going to have an interactive framework where you can, kind of, click on elements in the framework and get resources, so definitely take a look.

But one such resource I wanted to highlight for you, if you aren't familiar with it, and I'm sure a lot of you already are, is the Digital Markers of Progress. This resource prompts programs, in fact, to identify where they are on a scale of starting point, to progressing, to innovating with regards to their PFCE efforts.
Programs can save and track their work over time and just want you to know it is password protected, so it's only visible to you and your colleagues. It's not something that OHS or the National Center is looking at. It's meant for you to be able to use over time, so we wanted to ensure that you had the privacy to do that.

Anyway, this slide here shows a section related to continuous improvement and how that data drives effective PFCE decision-making. It's kind of hard to read, but examples of across indicators help programs understand – different, sort of, data practices across the program – or sorry, across a progressive continuum of quality. So, I encourage you to take a look at that when you have a chance.

And the programs can use their self-assessment data from this markers of progress guide to identify ways that you can advance your continuous improvement work. So, whether you're moving from the starting point to progressing, or progressing to innovating, or innovating to world class, I don't know, we should – you know, for truly a learning organization, I guess we should encourage ourselves to think beyond innovating even, if there is a category for such.

Okay, so here we have a series of questions and these questions are designed – or sort of, listed here, to support you in your quest for effective data-driven family engagement. And before using data for continuous improvement purposes, you first have to ensure that you have the right data to work with.

Right? That the data will actually tell you something about how your program is working, so the data you need depends on the questions you ask about your program, or your families' progress.

So really, the first question is what do you want to know? What is it that you really want to understand better? What is it you want to evaluate? So, suppose you wanted to know families your program serves are making progress toward outcomes, what information do you need to have to know whether progress is taking place.

What data do you need from your families or from your program about how services have been provided or used? And keep in mind, of course, that depending upon what you want to know, you may already have that data that you need as well, you just might not be using it in quite that way, or using it at all, I know in some cases.

So, once you have information about your families' progress toward outcomes, think about how that information connects to school readiness, indicators and other measures of healthy functioning for children and families, or perhaps there are other things you'd like to know.

So think about the relationship between the families' progress and children's school readiness. What connections would you hope to see there? So, for example, would you like to see greater improvements in language and literacy? For children whose parents are participating in, say, some kind of a reading program or dialogic reading training, or something like that – just as an example.

And you also need to think about the systems and structures that you have in place for gathering, storing, organizing, analyzing all this information. And I know we probably have some experts on that here with us today – as participants. But you use surveys, interviews, focus groups, standardized assessment measures, screeners, counts of events or activities, and really what – what methods seem most appropriate given what you want to know – what the questions are that you have?

So once the data has been gathered, where are you storing it? Do you have a central computerized data management system that allows staff to review multiple data points about a child's or family's progress? Does your data system ensure that the different staff who interact with the family are able to coordinate data entry and build on each other's work so that there aren't, you know, duplicated efforts going on? We'll hear from two programs, again today as we mentioned, about how they're approaching some of this.

But once the data are analyzed – I'm just, kind of, working my way through these questions a little bit, how are the results shared? So, maybe you have staff meetings where you can do data review and discussion so that staff can reflect and act on updated information about children's and families' progress, or maybe you can set aside time to do program-wide data reviews to see how families are faring across different program sites, or again, specific outcomes.

This information can help you understand where a program is doing well and where you might be, you know, needing to make some improvements. And this kind of new awareness can help you develop action steps to strengthen your PFCE practices.

So the National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations created this program planning cycle that outlines steps for program planning in Head Start, and if you look to the middle circle – the smaller circle on the inside, – you can see there are three boxes there. I'm looking at implement a plan of action, evaluate progress, and respond with course corrections.

This part of this cycle is really what we were talking about in depth in the previous slide as – as we asked all those questions about, you know, data collection and what to collect, and as we were thinking about the systems and processes that are needed to evaluate progress, so keep that in mind. But this planning cycle just allows us to take a step back to see how goal setting and planning are an important part of a larger continuous improvement cycle as well.

So the planning cycle starts with programs evaluating their progress through self-assessment, and also community assessment data, of course, and you know, you can be working with other data sources as you're thinking about this planning cycle as well. And programs are next to that on the goals, and you communicate those goals to your stakeholders. The goals you then translate into action through a plan that describes the action that program will take to realize goals.

And then once your goals are set, you're implementing them through that plan of action and you're collecting data to illustrate what you're doing, how you're progressing toward goals, and as you implement your plan, you're using your ongoing monitoring system to evaluate progress toward goals.

So, you know, the staff continually respond to the data with mid-course corrections, of course, in that interlude to make sure that you're making progress and you should – can, kind of, think of these as continuous improvement loops, but they are also part of this idea of the planning cycle, which many of you have been using for a long time now.

So that's, kind of, a refresher, and that's something that the National Center on – Program Management and Fiscal Operations is using as a way to, kind of, guide the new training that they do around planning. And then they have another resource that is highlighted here, and it's called – Data in Head Start and Early Head Start: Creating a Culture that Embraces the Data – or Embraces Data.

It's a module that walks through five core activities that help create a culture of continuous improvement and while it is focused – on general data use, there are several accompanying video clips that feature family engagement scenarios, so they really tried to bring in different areas of content on this. That's a helpful resource for you to consider, as well, as you're thinking about strengthening continuous improvement processes.

So, you know, in the past, programs and program staff have shared that – and still currently, I still hear that they were intimated or they are intimidated by the prospect of using data because they either feel unprepared to analyze and apply it, or they feel nervous that the data might suggest that their program, you know, wasn't working well, and what does that mean?

So, I think what we want to try to do is make a shift to focusing on the principles of being a learning organization. And again, that's not meant to discount, you know, the very real pressures that programs face in being effective quality programs for children and families, but I think adopting a continuous improvement approach to evaluation makes data use a little more approachable and less threatening, in a way as, you know, staff are able to ask questions and reflect on data in a supportive learning environment with leadership that's really committed, ultimately, to using it to support progress, rather than to judge staff on performance.

But this helps us move, I think, from a mindset of data is something that can be scary and compliance-driven to information that relates to compliance, but that – you know, not in all aspects, but in some aspects, but that also has real learning value for staff and families, as programs put the data to use in ways that – really strengthen their PFCE practices.

Heidi: Thank you, Kiersten. At this time we're going to show you a short five-minute video from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. This video depicts an animated theory of change that shows the importance of building adult capacities to improve child outcomes. There are a number of parallels between this theory of change and our own PFCE Framework.

In the video, you'll hear the narrator, Jack Shonkoff, discuss how a strong foundation in early childhood leads to better and more effective development later on, something that we strongly believe in our own work. The video also discusses how children develop within the environment of relationships they have with families and their other caregivers, and that children need this entire environment of relationships to be invested in their healthy development.

This is similar to our emphasis on positive goal-oriented relationships and the importance of strengthening relationships between parents and children, as well as, between program staff and families in order to help families make progress toward outcomes and achieve positive child outcomes. The video also talks about the need to focus on developing adult's capacities to deal with adversity, so they can achieve healthy functioning and promote positive child outcomes.

This includes developing family member's capacities, as well as, the capacities of the caregivers, such as program staff, that the children interact with. While this theory of change is not exactly the same as our own PFCE Framework, we thought it would serve as an interesting visual depiction of some of the principles of our own PFCE work and the importance of focusing on family outcomes as a way to bring about positive learning and growth among children. And with that, let's turn to the video.

[Video begins]

Jack Shonkoff: The social challenges that face modern societies, whether it's the ability to work productively, to be a good citizen, stay healthy, have their roots in early health and development. A strong foundation in early childhood results in much better and more effective development later.

A weak foundation really puts us behind. The most important thing children need to thrive is to live in an environment of relationships that begins in their family but also extends out to include adults who aren't family members, in child care centers and other programs. What children need is for that entire environment of relationships to be invested in their healthy development.

We've shown from decades of testing interventions that we can improve outcomes. But the magnitude of those impacts is not good enough. Science is now available to help us think about what we might do that would have a bigger impact than the best of what we've done before. So we began to ask, what could we be doing differently? What could we do to be smarter? Children who are at the greatest risk for the poorest outcomes in learning and health and behavior are children who experience a pile up, a cumulative burden of one after another after another of risk factors.

And then, the burden is more than any child could be expected to overcome. So we began to focus on the development of the adults. What could we be doing to strengthen the capacity of everyone who interacts with children? This led us to think about the kinds of skills you need to deal with adversity. These skills of focusing attention, planning, monitoring, delaying gratification being able to solve problems, being able to work in teams, executive function and self-regulation.

They're also the kind of skills you need to create a well-regulated home and school environment in which healthy development and learning can take place. And then brain science started to tell us that differences in those skills start to develop in infancy based on the environment kids live in.

So, how do those skills get built? If you don't develop them early, how do you develop them later? Actually, you can build them later because the period of flexibility and plasticity of this part of the brain doesn't fully mature until age 25 to 30. So then the light bulb went on. The reason we're not getting a bigger impact is not because we don't know about how to influence development but because we're giving information and advice to people who we need to do active skill building with, skill building by coaching, by training, by practice, but we're not doing that.

So we now have developed this theory of change that says we need to focus on the development of the adults who are important in kids' lives.

Person 1: So try this.

Person 2: How does that work?

Person 3: That's a new idea.

Person 4: Buen trabajo [Spanish]

Jack: We need to focus on their skills, their needs in order for them to be better, more effective parents, in order for them to be better prepared to be employable which would enhance the economic stability of the family which is also good for children.

Second of all, we looked at many people in preschool programs and child care centers and we said, what are we doing to build those skills in the providers? They need skill building as well. And also, the community can help to build and reinforce the capacities that parents need. And the community also includes programs in which people who work in the programs have sufficient skills.

Third of all, what are the major sources of toxic stress in this community and how can we reduce them? Moving it up to a policy level, how are our policies strengthening communities' abilities to reduce sources of toxic stress and caregivers abilities to provide what kids need? The development of our human capital is our future. The development of a productive workforce is our future. The development of a healthy population is our future.

This kind of future orientation is critical for a healthy society. It's critical for a thriving business. It's critical for a successful environment of relationships to raise children. It's all about being able to plan for the future, to have a future. That's why this is so important. [Video ends]

Heidi: As you saw in the video, it's critically important to help adults – family members and other caregivers, develop their own capacity to deal with stress and achieve a healthy level of functioning in order to affect positive change in children's lives. While the theory of change in the video focuses on skill development, there are many parallels between the capacity building work it called for and our own focus on helping families make progress toward family outcomes.

Our PFCE Framework focuses on seven family outcomes, all of which serve to help parents and other caregivers strengthen their ability to achieve healthy functioning in ways that contribute to children's healthy development and school readiness. From family well-being, to positive parent-child relationships, to family connections to peers and community, progress toward all of these outcomes requires that we work with families in a strength-oriented way to build their capacities in these areas, and help position them to support their children's learning and growth.

Now we'll turn to our next presenter, Cristy DeLorenzo, who is the Director of Operations at The Children's Aid Society. Cristy, I'll turn it over to you.

Cristy DeLorenzo: Thanks, Heidi. Before I dive into our family partnership assessment, I'll provide a brief background of The Children's Aid Society and our early childhood program. Children's Aid Society is a New York City based social service agency that serves children from birth through college with a variety of support programs.

Our early childhood division alone serves approximately 1,000 children from zero to five years old in targeted high-needs neighborhoods. We currently run 17 programs that consist of Early Head Start home visiting programs, Head Start center-based programs, and childcare programs... Well, my focus today will be on the data we collected for our family partnership assessment this year, I just want to share with everyone the foundation of our – FPA – the Family Partnership Assessment began.

And this is the planning and development phase. The first point on this slide is evaluate effectiveness of systems through self-assessment. This is really how our FPA came about. We took time to evaluate what our systems were, specifically, in gathering meaningful information about family engagement across all our programs, and we realized through this self-assessment process that, in fact, we did not have a consistent or effective system.

For example, our intake packages and family agreements had become, essentially, home grown per site and moreover the agreements were put in files and not utilized in a way that could truly impact programming. Furthermore, there wasn't a clear way to manage, monitor, or follow up on family goals.

So once we identified this problem, we knew it was time to make a change, and that led us to the development process. Once we committed to this change process, our early childhood director, deputy director, and I all met to brainstorm the plan of action, and it was at this point we decided that we could use the Parent, Family, Community Engagement framework as our guide to create a new tool and system that our programs would use uniformly.

We drafted our vision of a Family Partnership Assessment using the seven outcome indicators from the framework as its own section. So in each section, we then developed targeted questions that we found pertained to the outcome indicator and would be helpful in engaging families in conversations and assessing their strengths and needs. And each section of questions also had standard responses so that we could, ultimately, aggregate the data.

If you look at the example on this slide, this is our FPA section one: families as lifelong educators. Underneath the section title we indicate what the outcome indicator means. So under families as lifelong educators, the outcome is that parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, school, and in their communities.

Below this we then engage in conversation asking families questions, which is how often in the past month have you and your child one, read books at home; two, sang songs; three, danced; etcetera. While our family workers are having a discussion with families around these questions, they're also recording whether the response would fall into five categories, which is never, rarely, a few times a month, a few times a week, once a day or more.
In this development process of creating the tool, we also cross-referenced the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Study, as well as the Head Start Impact Study, and also incorporated firsthand

experience... We found the next step the most important part of the process, which his engaging frontline staff and including them in the development of the tool.

Once we had a draft version, we then had a meeting with all family workers and directors and presented the overall meaning of the tool, but really encouraged feedback. We've not only discussed – this at length at the meeting, but also gave our staff a couple weeks to review it, digest it, email us with questions, concerns and edits.

And after we felt comfortable the staff were on board and the tool was revised, we then brought it to the policy council and also encouraged feedback. And it was buy in from both staff and parents that we – it was critical in order to get to the implementation stage. And as a side note, we did also translate the FPA in Spanish and had staff and policy council approve this final draft, as well.

The final piece of the original development of the tool was to get it on Serve You, which is our data management system. We found the most challenging part here was the restrictions and the variability of the responses, as well as the level of detail. We, ultimately, had to tweak the Family Partnership Assessment so there would be standard responses per section, but it's an area we continually try to improve and work with our data system in order to get the best information possible.
Once the Family Partnership Assessment was finalized on paper and our data management system, the next phase was implementation. Professional development for the family workers was the first step. If was important for us that they felt confident in the content of the PFCE Framework, as well as the delivery of the assessment with parents.

First we trained staff internally on the content through several Family Partnership workshops, and then we noticed a real need to have a formal training on the delivery of the FPA, so we held a two-day motivational interviewing training in order to drive home to the staff that one, this is not simply a survey that parents fill out, and two that this is a tool meant to be a starting point to engage in deeper conversations with the parents.

Prior to conducting the assessments, we also had family workers conduct mock interviews with each other so that they felt comfortable using the tool, and also so they knew what it was like being on the receiving end as a parent.

The next step was, actually, conducting the assessments and collecting data. So we started the entire development process in the 2011-'12 program year, and were finally able to – conduct assessments this past Fall 2012. All family workers sat with families and completed the FPAs and then entered the results in our database.

And while there was some resistance of extra work in the data entry, overall, staff seemed to understand the importance of inputting in Serve You so that we could aggregate the data in order to look at trends across programs, neighborhoods, and agency-wide. That being said, our ultimate goal is that staff have the resources to input the information directly on the computer, rather than on a paper first.

And finally on this slide, I have monitoring and quality assurance. So the great part about entering the assessment on Serve You is that I have the ability to centrally monitor the completion of the FPA and the responses, but the true challenge is in monitoring the quality of the Family Partnership Assessment, and we did this as best we could through site visits and meetings with family workers, and we found the true sign of a correctly completed FPA, one with tons of notes, and a clean copy with checks only made it clear that it was no conducted in a very engaging way that we had planned.

So this is also an area of plan to improve and has set some new procedures for the coming year in order to ensure it's utilized to its fullest potential. At mid-year we were finally able to dive into the data by using the information entered into our database by our family workers, I was now able to aggregate by site, neighborhood, and agency-wide.

And as you can see on this slide, the outcome was surprising to us. Out of the seven indicators in the PFCE Framework is in family connections to peers and the community. Through the data we collected, we noticed a real opportunity to make impacts with our families in this domain. So to quickly take a step back before we look at these results, when we first set up the FPA in our database, I worked with our data system to create a report that coded responses that the family workers clicked on in the system, so if they had clicked on never, it produced a one; rarely, two; few times a month, three; few times a week equaled four, and once a day or more, five.

And once I generated this report, I was able to export the data to Excel, look at trends and patterns, as well as calculate averages or look at percent's of families needing support in certain indicators. And the ability to export the information to Excel is also what allowed me to aggregate across all programs, as well as look at particular groups.

So now if you look at the chart on this slide, these are the average results from our section two – family connections to peers and the community. So here we asked how many times in the past month have you – and then the questions down the side say visit relatives or relatives visit you; go on a play date with your child; take your child to religious events; take your child to a museum or a zoo, go to the library; go to the park or playground; and do activities outside of your neighborhood.

The data showed us that our families, on average, responded between rarely and a few times a month overall on these questions. And then honing in on the data on this indicator, we were further surprised to see the huge opportunities to connect our programs and families with our local libraries.

In addition, we looked at the data more specifically by site and neighborhood. We noticed our programs that have predominately Spanish only speaking families – many for us, which are first time Mexican immigrants, responded to questions regarding connections to peers and community with an even greater need. Most responded in the never and rarely categories. And this also aligns with our

Community Needs Assessment that describes how many of these families are not only linguistically challenged, but socially isolated as well.

So, many of our families also live with the fear that comes with the undocumented status, and we've seen many of these families form a tight knit group together, but are less able to form linkages with other community members. So, ultimately, the data from the FPA, combined with our Community Needs Assessment gives us a tremendous reason to focus our attention and resources in helping these families form these community connections. This leads me to our biggest success.

The FPA allowed our family workers to work with parents to set concrete and achievable individual goals. For instance, family workers were now setting goals about getting library cards, visiting the library once a month, visiting a museum or the zoo, among other concrete goals. And all – all goals that, not only could they benefit from, but could, actually, achieve.

Our second success was the ability to use the FPA data to impact programming and partnership. At the program and center level, this guided our decision to expand our partnership with agencies such as Raising a Reader, which rotates books in the home, and also incorporates library involvement. And this also reinforced the need to continue our strong partnership with Mexican – Consulate to support some of our most vulnerable families. One other example of how this tool impacted programmatic decision is in the outcome indicator families as learners.

This isn't on the slide, but in this section we asked about different training and education opportunities that parents would be interested in and simply added up the responses. This allowed us to understand focus on workshops and classes that we knew parents would engage in. We saw that classes that had the highest level of interest last year were computer classes, money management, and child development/parenting classes.

Having the data though to know that 500 parents responded they were interested in money management, for example, let us know that this is a good investment for us as a program to put time, energy, and money into. And finally, one of the highlights for me was also the communicating this data back to staff and parents. Our family workers, especially, are not used to using data in this way and they were all surprisingly excited to understand what the data showed and how individually and programmatically we could use this information to make decisions to inform our practice.

It also provided for really meaningful and engaging conversation about the experience they had using the tools, what worked and what we could continue to fine tune... All right, lessons learned for continuous improvement. Now that we've been preparing for this 2013-'14 year, we've been working on improving the FPA based on feedback and experience.

The first item listed is that we revised some questions. And this piece came, mainly, from feedback from our family workers about how parents were responding. So, for example, we realized our original approach to asking some questions, on the outcome indicator on positive parent/child relationships was being received as slightly negative, – and some of the questions seemed a little repetitive.

So this year we've rephrased questions, added new questions, and also removed ones that were too similar to others. And the piece that makes these edits a little more challenging is that any revision on the form also has to be edited on our data management system, at the same time, not losing any previously entered information.

So it's definitely not an easy process, but we're committed to continually – dedicating our time to it. And the next area, I believe, we can continue to enhance is our goal setting. While this is one of our greatest successes, I also noticed that follow-up on continuous dialogue on goals with families, is an area we can strengthen.

So for example, if a goal is set to visit the library twice a month, there should be notes on the progress every 30 days, not just at random checkpoints throughout the year, which leads to the quality assurance piece. We not only want to monitor that the FPA goals are being completed, but we also want to ensure that these are being completed well.

To do this, we've done two things this year. We hope to strengthen our practice. One, we have altered our monthly monitoring reports so that this information's being captured in more detail, and two, we'll conduct internal audits to see if the assessments are being used in a meaningful and reliable way. We also realized we still have work to do in training staff to make the FPA as successful a tool as we believe it is.

This again, includes workshops on the contents of the PFCE Framework, and also the delivery of the assessment with parents. And – finally – while this isn't mentioned on the slide, we have partnered with early childhood agencies that are doing similar things around data, so that we can share ideas and learn from them to enhance our practice. So, all in all, we know that this tool in the development process has strengthened our program in just this past year.

For one, our family workers have more targeted engagement with parents, and two, we really do feel we're making more informed programmatic choices driven by the data we've collected. That's it. Thank you. And now I'd like to turn this over to Matt Hamilton-Kraft. He is the Early Education and Youth Services Director from Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.

Matt Hamilton-Kraft: Okay, thank you, Cristy. My name is Matthew Hamilton-Kraft. I am the Early Education and Youth Services Director for Chautauqua Opportunities. I've been with Chautauqua Opportunities for a little over eight years in a number of different capacities, and have been in my current role, which includes Director of Head Start, Early Head Start for the past year.

Okay, so – what I was going to talk a little bit about today was our data collections systems and how we've used it to refine our services and make changes to how we approach both staffing services, how we define our gaps, and all – and all that kind of thing.

So, our data collection system, which is universal, we come at it from a perspective of everything we do we want to be able to assess it, have the information to analyze it, be able to then respond to it, monitor it, and then report out on it, and we sought to be able to do all of these things within one universal system.
So, some examples of what we've done – so, our child outcomes, for example, in Head Start, we – all of those are done on very specific parameters and then they're entered into our data system, and that data is provided to us three times a year.

We have developed family self-sufficiency outcomes that also – that are defined from a matrix, which is a tool that we've had tested for validity and provides us with a roadmap to developing additional family services against a continuum of care, which takes us from in crises to thriving. And those pieces of data are collected monthly, reported into our system, and then we can report out on them from any various sort of ways – cohorts by enrollment, by age of children, by program option. So we look to look at all those different things.

We have developed a 360 degree feedback mechanism so that we can, in addition to the hard data that we have from our assessments, we get feedback from our staff, from our partners, from our parents, sometimes from our funders, and then, we put all that – and our managers – at different levels, and we put all that feedback into a mechanism where we review it on a number of applications during the year, and then we produce an annual report.

But, what we do is we take the responses from those surveys and those feedback sessions and we have a specific threshold that we look to achieve of success of 85 percent, and anything that falls below that success rate, we develop strategies and track those strategies and report on them [inaudible].

From all of these pieces, we developed follow-up data sets, which are structured into our overall service model. So what that means is we may have a very specific set of data from assessments for, let's say the literacy domain of the child outcome.

And after we look at the data, we separate it out. We can separate it again by classroom, by teacher, by a.m., by p.m., by gender, by Spanish speaking, non-Spanish speaking. So once we look at all those we try to analyze exactly where we can improve or where we can alter service to provide the best – possible resources for our customers, our families.

And so from that, we may determine that a specific classroom needs additional support with family engagement, let's say, and, you know, in a specific area. So we would develop a strategy, identify what the specific datasets were that are connected to that child outcome. It may be two or three things. We would monitor those and then report out on it so that everybody involved – the teacher, the staff, whomever, are involved in the whole process.

We then have our performance appraisals and staff development, which we've tied into our data collection system. And what I mean by that is that all of this data from our outcomes and our family self-sufficiency, and our feedback – all of that provides us with our' general overall outcomes for success. And we use that to then, not only write our strategic plan – which we'll get to a little later, but to develop performance goals, which are all of our staff are connected to in one way or the other.

And then in order to help ensure that our staff achieve those performance goals and that our services are responding to the data that we've collected. That's all tied directly to our staff development plan and so the trainings that we offer, the frequency with which we offer them, are all based on the data that we collect, whether it be hard data from assessments or our 360 feedback. And then those are all monitored and also reported out on.

So it's a full universal system and it's all in one database. So, as I've talked a little bit about the database – so this provides us with ultimate accountability. So this universal database allows us to have a routine review of functionality and integration and what that means is that a family that, for example, may be a Head Start family, while the database will contain the scores of child outcomes, and the specific family self-sufficiency goals that they – are working toward.

A family may also be one of the customers of our housing division and that housing services who may be rapidly rehousing a potential homeless family, or they may be having a family progress through home ownership, if they've made progress in other areas, all that data is also in this system, and because we have that universal family self-sufficiency assessment with matrices and continuums that we've developed, we're able to pull those reports from all over the agency and all the services, and all the programs that we have to give us an overall picture of how our families are doing.

Now what that does is it allows us one, to strategize with a lot of the other supporter services that we offer families that are connected with Head Start, with our other programs. But it also allows the refinement and delivery of services to always be driven forward in a collective measure, and so that all services, all staff have that same accountability as everybody else in the organization, and we're all responsible for family progress.

Okay, then we take all that stuff and we have a gaps analysis, so again, because we've got that holistic family data in this universal system, we can pull reports almost in any area that we want that gives us our customer data connected to the programs or the services that we offer and we can determine, because we have refined the services in logic models and based on this roadmap, which is our matrix and our continuum.

We can then identify specific areas where groups of families, or groups of children are stopping progress, and then we can identify in our services why that is what resources we don't have, what service options we're not offering, and then that allows us to develop – to look at a strategic way to develop our partnerships to bring in more resources.

It gives us a very targeted approach on going after funding, as well as, gives us evidence to initiate different teacher evaluations, or to redesign family tools, all those kinds of things that we do, are all able to be pulled from this one database.
And then because we have this universal central system, our self-assessment becomes much easier, and our strategic plan, which those goals are made from all these things that I've talked about, all gets pulled from that data in this universal system and all the assessments, and the monitoring, and all those things that we do.

So we have a pretty good idea every year of what our growth potential is, where our barriers are, and what our resources are to be able to achieve that, and what timeframes are. So it keeps everybody – staff, management, it keeps everybody connected to the bigger picture.

In addition, we have a number – the other critical part of this in its accountability, is being able to track and report it, and who's invested in it. And so from our perspective, everybody needs to be involved in the accountability system. So, we've all built the system together, we have feedback on the system.

So our executive director and our policy council and board of directors, for example, they receive monthly reports on, not only the child domains and the pre-determined family outcomes, but all those smaller data sets on improvements in our gaps analysis or performance appraisals. All those things are put together in a comprehensive report monthly, along with our monitoring to make sure everything is done on time, and our executive director reviews it and our policy council and board of directors has access to all of this information, and it's tracked centrally by our operations department.

And then we're able, as a result of that, to – and this gets back to our 360 degree feedback, our staff at every level, from the parts – from a substitute teacher assistant, all the way to a, you know, very seasoned mental health professional working with families has an opportunity to look at this data and we can separate it out again in areas that are of use to them.

So by classrooms, or by service, or by site, by the risk level that families are in and the staff that are working with those risk levels of families. And staff are able to give feedback on that data and they're able to see how the changes they've made and the work that they do every month, how that translates to increased outcomes, more contact with families – all that – is able to happen through this universal sharing of data and accountability.

So, I was asked to share some specific data examples and how we use this to make changes, so I've got a couple of examples, all right. So we – in our children with disabilities, from the data we collected, we realized that we needed to have stronger partnerships with our school districts in order for our transitions to be more successful for our children and our families.

So with that data, we set up some additional school partnerships. Once those were in place, the data that we got in the last couple of years showed us that the rate of declassification of our children with disabilities, as they transitioned from kindergarten to the early grades from Head Start, for example, was well above the average of declassification. Something like 85/86 percent of our kids were being declassified by the time they reached kindergarten.

Well this was really high because we knew the services and we knew the supports that many of these families still required. So by using that information, we then looked at the specific areas of why and where the declassifications were happening.

We looked at how we had taught and were educating parents on communicating with school districts, we looked at the number of staff that – had direct contact with school districts after a transition happened, and we looked at how we were reporting to schools those high-risk kids as they were leaving Head Start, so from all that, we made some specific service revisions.

We went after some additional resources for specific areas, such as speech and autism. We used that justification to create a different staff member that was specifically geared toward, not only educating parents on what they were going to encounter when they got to school, but being an additional level of advocate for the parent in the – you know, in the K1 through three range.

We then provided additional training to all of our classroom teachers and our family support staff, because we knew that every contact that we had with a family with a child with a disability, we wanted to reiterate and we wanted to reaffirm the parent's rights and how that transition to school was going to differ from Head Start.

And what we wanted to prepare them for, both with child care, and communication with schools, and all those kind of things. What meetings would look like, all those kind of things. So we wanted to reiterate those key components at every step of the way.

And then we tracked our contacts and we went on and enhanced our partnerships to provide some additional resources to families that we couldn't provide after they left Head Start, and then, basically, set up an additional data collection system with the schools, so that we could continue to get data back on these children for a couple of years after they transitioned.

Specifically around the services they got, when and how they had their meetings, communication with families, those kind of things. And then what we did with the information was to share the information with the schools, and other partners, and our report out on it show in areas where certain kinds of kids with disabilities were regressing because they lost the classification, and certain areas where it didn't have as much impact, and as a result we're able to work out a real, sort of, staff symmetry with a couple of our larger school partners to better support these families and these children with this transition.

So – and another area that we – this is a new one, so I did say that I would talk about it, but we'll be waiting on the results this year, but we had identified that based on our child domains and the risk levels of our – families of children coming in to Head Start, we've identified that 15 to 18 percent of them over the last couple of years were coming in and their families were in somewhat of a stable situation, and that the children were – testing out in – or their initial assessments had them at established at the beginning of the year in all the major domains – literacy, mathematics, those kind of things.

But whether there was – there may have been a behavior problem, there may have been a disability, there may have been some risk areas in a household, like a foster child or a recent, you know, layoff that had left the family vulnerable, but foundationally they were sound. And so, there were different challenges, we found, with these children to – keep them realizing their potential.

We wanted to be able to, again, develop – whether it be advocacy or different modes in which the parents could be involved in the ongoing education of these children which had high cognitive aptitude and to keep them, again, pursuing.

So we had looked at different service designs, and again, just like we did with our kids with disabilities transitioning, we looked at the resources we had available and what we had to get, the staff development and training on who would be responsible for engaging these families and these children in gifted and more highly functional cognitive academic and community work, and then went to look for partners that would provide some incentives, as well as, some challenge to these children as part of their individualization.

And so we did all that and we've established some of those datasets, we've got our tracking in place, we have created a staff position that it's in their job description they're responsible for that, and are currently putting together some of the advocacy pieces and education for parents around what it may mean to have a child that's cognitively high-functioning, but socially may be a little behind or awkward because of – whether it be because of I.Q., whether it be because of family – dynamics or environment, and how those kids provide as much of a challenge in public school, currently, as low-functioning or kids needing remediation.

And so as we're putting all that together now, and we'll be training – and we're training our family staff and creating different events and venues in the community. So at this time next year when we sit with school districts and we sit with our staff, we'll be sharing all that data with – that we've collected on what we've done, seeing what we can do better or do different, and then championing different approaches, both in the community with non-traditional partners – music, arts, recreation, as well as, to connect it to the schools. And it keeps our staff informed.

So this – we did this through organizational change. This didn't happen overnight and it was nothing that I, or the former director, just said do. This took a significant amount of preparation and buy-in and strategies, but what we knew we had to do was first, spend a lot of time with management at all levels to get buy-in on the practice of changing the way we do things through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, which was somewhat foreign to a lot of human service folks.

And so we knew that whatever we did, we had to come to an agreement on the datasets and that whatever data we chose to collect needed to be part of our overall management systems so that it was functionally a new approach to drive the services and the work that we already were doing, without having it seem as though it was extra responsibilities.

So we looked at our strategic plan, and our gaps analysis, and our self-assessment, and our risk assessment, and all those different things that we do as part of our management system to keep our organization and services viable, and we connect those datasets there and use it – also as a vehicle, not just for customer progress, but for mission and for driving the completion and the live use of these management systems.

And after we did that, there was a lot of, sort of, cheerleading and motivation to help staff get over the fear of this quantitative analysis. And so it was key that staff were involved at all levels, as I've already spoken about, but not just in the dissemination of the data, but in talking through why we were doing it, what we were doing, and what the results could be to benefit their job positively.

And we needed to make sure that we used it in a routine, and a transparent, and a visible way to make our decision, so that they saw it as consistent and as equitable.

So, if we had made a decision around looking at domain scores, for example, around classrooms, and we were going to use that as a methodology to form our teaching teams, and we might recognize that one classroom was stronger in one area than another, we had to use that for every single thing that we did around structuring our classroom team to make sure they understood that the data wasn't about hunting out and finding everything they were doing wrong, but yet instead, it was just the opposite.

It was about continuing to support, purposely, what we were doing right and putting the right people in the right places, so that we could do as much right as we possibly could. And then we had to train people on data analysis.

And again, not just for them to take what we said as rote and just to digest what we said, but to train them to think in an analytical sense, so that when they – so in another words, rather than us just come in and sit down with a teacher and say here's your data and this is bad, and this is good, and this is weak, and this is strong, they get the first crack at it.

So they see their numbers, they see their data first, the pieces that they're in control of, and they get an opportunity to come to their own analysis on what they see, and so when we sit down to do performance reviews, or to develop training, they've already come to – at this point, come to some conclusion about what they've seen in their classrooms, and will more often than not, have recommendations about curriculum changes, schedule changes – the kind of things that they've thought about that may have had an impact on a specific thing being stronger or being weaker.

And that was a critical turning point when our teachers and staff starting to be able to do that and not fear the fact that their particular classroom had, you know, more lower numbers than higher, or higher than lower, depending on what it was.

So at this point, I want to thank everybody – for letting me go through our universal data system with you. I'm going to turn it over now to Leslie Maxfield.

Leslie Maxfield: Thanks, Matt. My name is Leslie Maxfield and I'm an ECE Specialist with Region X Training and Technical Assistance Center. I've also had the opportunity to work very closely with several programs as they design their activities for Parent, Family, Community Engagement.

So I'd like to take a few minutes now just to talk about what we've heard today and reflect on some of the messages that have been shared. I really love hearing the strength of the key messages of family engagement.
The first one is that family engagement is everyone's business. That was stressed by every presenter that no matter what the roles are within the program, we all have a piece within family engagement by developing really strong positive goal-oriented relationships with families.

I also like hearing about family engagement being systemic, integrated, and comprehensive. Both Matt and Cristy talked about how they used their assessment and monitoring and management systems to integrate family engagement into ongoing planning within their program.

And I think this is really important for programs to see that family engagement is not a stand-alone, but it really needs to be integrated into every aspect of the program.

Another key message I heard is that data is everyone's business. I think that as an ECE specialist and a TA provider, we are seeing that throughout the Head Start, people are starting to learn of how important data is, and that they are a part of it, whether it's a classroom teacher, family services staff, working with families, governing bodies in the community. And Cristy really alluded to having staff and everybody have buy-in into the importance of data.

Finally, one thing that I really love is that everyone talked about how positive family outcomes have a direct impact on child outcomes and school readiness. And I think that, the more programs can see the integration with what they're doing with family engagement and school readiness, we'll see extraordinary outcomes for children that are in Head Start as they move into public school settings.

In terms of continuous improvement, the idea that Kiersten really spoke about is programs seeing themselves as learning organizations. This is really critical. By looking at what your current data systems are, and looking at the list of questions that was posed, and becoming intentional about what you're doing with families.

I read in a paper one time that talked about moving beyond random acts of family engagement, and we really are at the point where we need to be strategic and intentional about what we do with families, what we do with the data we collect, and how we aggregate and analyze that data.

So it really is key to know what questions we want to ask about families and about their children, and then use the data to guide action plans and continuous improvements. And within the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement there are fantastic resources that are available that have been referred to by other presenters and there's more coming out every day.

So there's lots of resources available to programs. From field experiences – I'm speaking, primarily, from my experience in Region X, but also my experience as being part of the Family Engagement Liaison Network. I think programs are really looking at how they can integrate school readiness schools and family engagement.

In some programs we're seeing that family service staff and education staff are doing joint home visits to really develop this strong relationship and partnership with families from the beginning, so that they can, together, start setting meaningful goals for both families and children. They're looking at what they already have in place, such as, quality literacy programs that can support family outcomes, as well as child outcomes.

I saw that Cristy found that within their program families were feeling disconnected, and in our region we've seen a lot of that as well. In one program that I'm familiar with, they're starting the year off by having parents serve as buddies within classrooms. Kind of like the PTA system of having room parents. So, we really believe that we can help parents become involved and develop relationships through the work that we're doing with family engagement.

Now, I want to stress for everyone that you're ECE specialists are available, through the T and TA system, and they can really help guide you and support your work as you go through the process of continuous quality improvement by helping you use the resources that are available, helping you ask the questions that you need to have answered, and linking the information to the data that you already have in your program.

So thanks again to the National Center for hosting this call and to our wonderful presenters, and at this point we're going to transition to some question and answer slides.

[Music]