Background

It is well documented that children are better prepared for school and for life when their parents are actively engaged in their early learning. After all, parents are children’s first teachers and their lifelong advocates. Early childhood providers are wise to engage parents fully, both in the teaching of their children and in the broader offerings of the program. When this is done—when there is a deep, relationship-based partnership between families and early childhood programs in service of children’s development and learning—there are positive outcomes for children, families, programs, and communities.

Across the country we see a growing number of examples of family engagement among child care, Early Head Start, and Head Start programs. Engagement is moving from one-way communication with families during drop-off to a more respectful and responsive relationship in which families and providers are contributing equally and working hand in glove to support children. While some of this has emerged naturally, movement in this direction is also informed by a research-based framework—the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework\(^1\)—that identifies best practices for a systemic, integrated, and comprehensive approach to family and community engagement.

This summary provides highlights from the Family and Community Engagement Technical Assistance (FACE-TA) project, which was conducted by Save the Children with 12 Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership grantees in California, with grant funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation.

The Purpose and Design of FACE-TA

With the launch of the EHS-CC Partnership program in 2015, the Heising-Simons Foundation recognized an opportunity to support these new partnerships with intentional strategies for uplifting family and community engagement practices. Twelve grantees from California (see list at end of this document) participated in FACE-TA. They came together for two statewide meetings, six geographically based cluster meetings, and three webinars. In addition, consultants worked one-on-one with grantees during regular site visits and technical assistance (TA) calls. In some cases, consultants provided training to staff.

Promising Steps Toward Intentional Family and Community Engagement

At the end of the 12-month project, we look back on the gains made across the programs.

- **Identifying and supporting partners.** Grantees recognized the need to build relationships and capacity with partners from the start. One grantee identified potential partners and hosted a six-session training to orient them to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and expectations for the EHS-CC Partnership effort, with stipends offered for participation.

- **Building grantee capacity for family and community engagement.** With partners on board, grantees worked to support their capacity around the basics of Head Start, including family and community engagement. One grantee sponsored trainings after hours for family child care partners. Another worked hand in hand with a partner agency and trained the staff on administering the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire* and how to use it for goal setting with families. Recognizing the newness of home visits for the child care partner, another grantee attended the first round of visits to support staff. Yet another grantee adapted the PFCE Framework into a handbook which fit the needs of their community. Family assessments in a variety of areas are included in the handbook for Family Support Workers to use as applicable. A few others looked at how they could gather, analyze, and use data in meeting their PFCE goals.

- **Engaging families in new ways.** Grantees worked to create a more responsive environment, with some grantees changing meetings to times that would make participation easier for parents. Several grantees surveyed parents to identify topics that interested them. A program serving teen parents launched a Parent Café series. One grantee organized a Family Fun Day, connecting parents to each other and to services in the community. A child care partner invited parents to help with development of the curriculum for a unit of study. From private Facebook pages to Instagram and texting, grantees and their partners explored new ways to connect with families.

- **Engaging communities to support families and their children.** One grantee worked to focus on building the quality of care offered by a multitude of providers in the community, using both the EHS-CC Partnership and the local quality rating and improvement system as levers. Other grantees, such as community action agencies, worked to situate the EHS-CC Partnership within those organizations to ensure an array of services and supports for families.

### Learnings Along the Way

**Before grantees and their partners could focus on family and community engagement, they first needed to build their partnership.** From logistical challenges to philosophical and cultural differences, grantees and their partners needed to work through several issues for their partnership to become productive. We saw a high level of agreement with respect to values and principles, but there was still the need to find common ground and make the partnership work. There needed to be openness to understanding each other’s perspective and seeking solutions that could work for all.

Upon reflection, we realize that more time is needed up front to have open and ongoing two-way conversations between grantees and partners to clarify roles and expectations and to develop a common language. Leadership of grantees and partners needs to be fully committed to the partnership beyond issuing a ceremonial memorandum of understanding.

**Although everyone theoretically embraces the notion of family and community engagement, embedding it into practice as envisioned by the PFCE Framework continues to be something that most programs hold as an aspirational goal.** We saw how essential it is to have commitment of program leadership in supporting PFCE. Further, as part of relationship building and perspective taking, it is important for both Early Head Start and child care partners to recognize their starting points and make plans for uplifting practices so that they all can work toward higher levels of engagement.
The FACE-TA project created a space for grantees and their partners to think about and become more intentional with their family and community engagement efforts. Our first step was to build trust and partnership by following their lead and tailoring our TA accordingly. Grantees commented that FACE-TA was valuable because it created a space to think about and become more intentional with their family and community engagement efforts. We were able to listen to the needs of grantees and their partners and to help identify the research-based resources and tools that could best help them reach their goals. We were also able to bring grantees and their partners together for networking so they could share challenges and strategies and could deepen their understanding of family and community engagement approaches.

Undergirding all progress are three essential aspects: relationship-based practices, the developmental nature of partnering, and co-creation. This work reminded us that at the heart of successful engagement—whether it is engagement with partners, parents, the community, or even our TA consultants—are strong relationship-based practices, an appreciation for the developmental nature of partnering, and a commitment to genuine co-creation. This work also reminded us that it is a process that ebbs and flows and becomes stronger with commitment to communication, respect for one another, and trust.

Next Steps and Recommendations

All those involved in FACE-TA—from the grantees and partners to the FACE-TA team and advisors—look back with admiration at the progress made in a short 12 months. Not only did the FACE-TA grantees and partners work with purpose during this effort, but at the closing meeting they committed to next steps they would take to extend their work.

We hope that program leaders, funders, and policymakers will draw on the lessons and pursue related next steps. First, we hope they will understand that successful implementation of programs takes time and requires strong reciprocal relationships. Second, one-on-one coaching and intensive, tailored support are highly effective strategies for helping programs identify challenges, set goals, and bring about change. Finally, we hope funders and policymakers will recognize that the EHS-CC Partnership model holds promise for expanding access to quality early childhood opportunities for many more children. The bonds being created between the grantees and their partners can have a meaningful and lasting effect. As best said by a child care provider attending the October 2016 closing FACE-TA meeting: “I was all alone in a center, and now I have an army behind me.”

Participating EHS-CC Partnership Grantees

Child Start, Inc. (Napa)
Partners: Therapeutic Child Care Center, Solano Community College, and New Beginnings Child Care Center, as well as six Family Child Care Homes

Community Association for Preschool Education (Livermore)
Partners: Kidango and Family Child Care Centers

Crystal Stairs, Inc. (Los Angeles)
Partners: 25 Family Child Care Home Providers

Foothill Family Services (El Monte)
Partners: Akitoi Learning Center and several Family Child Care Providers
Kern County Community Action Partnership (Bakersfield)
Partners: Blanton Child Development Center and Bakersfield College Child Development Center

Kings Community Action Organization (Hanford)
Partners: Kings County Resource and Referral Program and 17 Family Child Care Homes

Los Angeles County Office of Education (Downey)
Partner: Mexican American Opportunity Foundation, Plaza de la Raza Child Development Services, Inc., Para Los Niños, Pomona Unified School District, St. Anne’s Maternity Home, and Youth Policy Institute

Pacific Clinics (Pasadena)
Partners: Four Child Care Centers and 24 Family Child Care Home Providers

Placer Community Action Partnership, a.k.a. KidZKount (Auburn)
Partners: Six Family Child Care Homes and two Child Care Centers

Plaza Community Center (Los Angeles)
Partner: Salvation Army

Volunteers of America—Southwest (San Bernardino)
Partner: Volunteers of America

YMCA of the Central Bay Area (Berkeley)
Partner: YMCA of the East Bay

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