

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PENNSYLVANIA: STATE PROFILE

### Infrastructure

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is coordinating efforts to embed or expand the Strengthening Families™ framework within all child and family service systems in Pennsylvania. State agencies joining the work include Pennsylvania's Children's Trust Fund; Department of Welfare's Office of Children, Youth and Families (Child Welfare) and Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; Department of Education; Department of Health; Commission on Crime and Delinquency (Juvenile Justice) and Early Intervention Technical Assistance. Other partners include Center for Schools and Communities, Pennsylvania KEYS and Regional KEYS training and technical assistance system for certified child care providers; Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance; Pennsylvania Parent Teacher Association (PTA); Prevent Child Abuse Pennsylvania; American Academy of Pediatrics–Pennsylvania Chapter; Parent Education Network, Child Welfare Resource Center, PA Head Start Association, PA State Afterschool Youth Development Network, county child welfare agencies, local school districts, family centers, intermediate units and higher education; and United Way.

The leadership team is working to weave Strengthening Families into existing policies and programs across child and family service systems using three key areas where an investment in focused work can leverage opportunities to integrate Strengthening Families ideas into a large number of programs and/or have a sustainable impact over time. These key areas are (1) building collaboration across systems, (2) infusing protective factors into professional development and (3) building parent partnerships.

The state leadership team meets quarterly to oversee and guide the integration of the protective factors into all child and family serving systems. Funding for leadership team activities and staffing are provided through OCDEL and with funding from the Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund.

### Parent Partnerships

A pilot Community Café event was held in November 2011 in a rural community in central Pennsylvania. Since that time, additional trainings on using the Community Café and Parent Café concepts have been shared with professionals and parents across the state. This sharing has been conducted through experiential workshops designed to prepare participants to conduct cafes with parents by providing genuine opportunities for leadership skill development. The work with parent partnerships and cafes will continue as a focus of the leadership team.

### Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building five protective factors:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

Using the Strengthening Families framework, more than 30 states are shifting policy and practice to help programs working with children and families focus on protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other child and family serving systems.

Nationally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) coordinates Strengthening Families and works with more than a dozen national partner organizations to create a new vision in which communities, families, institutions, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on protective and promotive factors
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families

For more information, visit  
[www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

**Implementation Checklist**

Protective Factors used in Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems or other early childhood systems planning	✓
Protective Factors used in Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention RFP Process	✓
Protective Factors integrated into state Quality Rating and Improvement System	✓
Child Care Resource & Referral Network in state supporting program implementation	✓
Strengthening Families included in State Home Visiting Plan	✓
Strengthening Families is being implemented into child welfare system	✓

**State Coordinator**

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**Deepening Knowledge and Understanding**

In May 2014, 30 family support professionals participated in a "training of trainers" to certify participants in presenting the Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work courses to audiences throughout the state. This training, facilitated by the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, provides participants with an "in-person" version of the online training currently available. A plan to disseminate workshops across the state is being developed and a database to capture information about the participants in the courses has been created. The recent Instructor's Institute built on the existing group of regional KEYS Instructors who were trained in 2010 to offer professional development workshops at the local level to early childhood practitioners.

**Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems**

The state leadership team continues to grow its membership (see partners list above) and remains guided by the mission and vision statement developed in 2010. Members are strategically moving the Strengthening Families concepts into other family serving systems.

Pennsylvania's quality rating and improvement system, KEYSTONE STARS, was updated to incorporate Strengthening Families language in worksheets and best practice guides. Also, Pennsylvania's Early Learning Standards for infants, toddlers and pre-kindergarten children used the Strengthening Families Protective Factors. The Head Start Family Engagement Standards and PTA Family Engagement Standards also used the protective factors as the basis of the development of the Program Partnership Standards, which provide guidance and supportive practices related to partnering with families and communities.

Since 2006, the Pennsylvania Children's Trust Fund grant application has included requirements for the use of the Strengthening Families framework in funded programs. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families also incorporated requirements for family center grantees to demonstrate ways that the Strengthening Families Protective Factors approach is embedded in their work.

**Ensuring Accountability**

Instructors who receive training in the Strengthening Families protective factors complete an online report after they provide a workshop within their local region. The results are compiled and shared with the leadership team. Leadership team members developed an evaluation brief regarding evaluation of training efforts in Pennsylvania. Current Children's Trust Fund grantees are using evaluation tools based on the Protective Factors Survey and a staff survey to collect data from their program participants.

**Evolving Work**

The early childhood, education and social work professional development systems are considering ways to attach credit hours to completion of the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds' curriculum (both through the online and face-to-face modules) with the Protective Factors Framework.

*Profile last updated: June 2014*