ABOUT THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ SELF-ASSESSMENTS FOR CHILD- AND FAMILY-SERVING PROGRAMS

The program self-assessment is a key implementation tool for Strengthening Families. It helps programs compare their practices with what was learned from the original national study of exemplary practice. It uses concrete, observable items to show how the Strengthening Families protective factors can be supported through "small but significant changes" in program practice. Over time it has been revised using what has been learned from Strengthening Families implementation across the country and in different kinds of programs.

In 2012, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) began updating core Strengthening Families materials including the foundational ideas and research, program self-assessments and other core materials related to training and implementation. This document provides an overview of the self-assessment tools released in 2014 and how they differ from previous versions.

Multiple versions

CSSP heard from users that there was a need for versions of the self-assessment specific to different kinds of programs. Strengthening Families self-assessments are now available for:

- Center-based early care and education programs
- Family child care settings
- Home visiting programs
- Community-based programs such as family resource centers

While there is significant overlap in content across these separate versions, there are also specific strategies aligned with the particular context of each setting. These changes may be as simple as changes in language, or as extensive as the addition of sections that are particular to areas of practice within these settings. These "Strengthening Families in Special Circumstances" sections include concrete actions related to Responding to Possible Child Abuse or Neglect (included in all four self-assessments) and Supporting a Child's Transitions to School or Other Programs (for the early care and education and family child care tools).

Each of the revised versions of the self-assessment was field-tested with a panel of reviewers representing practitioners within that field.

Organization by protective factors and everyday actions

Each of the revised Strengthening Families program self-assessments is organized by the five protective factors in the Strengthening Families framework. Within each protective factor, a set of "Everyday Actions" describe a variety of experiences and resources that programs can provide, which help families build and strengthen that protective factor. Each Everyday Action is accompanied by a list of concrete, actionable, observable and measurable items that programs can adopt.

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.

For more information, visit
www.strengtheningfamilies.net.

Enhanced content in core areas

Responding to learning from local programs, CSSP worked with external and internal partners to enhance items in key areas:

- Ensuring practice is responsive to all families and family members regardless of race, culture, home language, family composition and sexual orientation and identity
- Engaging fathers
- Partnering effectively and respectfully with parents

Enhanced alignment with other nationally recognized early childhood standards and frameworks

The revised self-assessments include new language to strengthen the tools' alignment to nationally recognized indicators of quality, including the Head Start Program Performance Standards; the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework; the National Association for the Education of Young Children's accreditation standards; the Frank Porter Graham's Environmental Ratings Scales for Early Childhood Programs (EC-ERS), Infants and Toddlers (IT-ERS) and Family Child Care (FCC-ERS); and the Program Administration Scale (PAS) from the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership.

Tiering

The versions of the self-assessment developed for early care and education programs (center-based and family child care) are tiered to facilitate use with states' Quality Rating and Improvement Systems. Items in both tools are divided into three tiers that represent different depths of implementation in the program: Baseline (what all programs can do very easily), Mid-level (may require some degree of planning, training or resources to implement) and High (feasible for most high-quality programs but may require more significant shifts in practice, additional resources or technical assistance for other programs to implement). The center-based tool includes a fourth tier, Comprehensive Service Programs, for those centers that offer a comprehensive range of supports and services to children and families in addition to early care and education (e.g., Head Start, family support centers, etc.). More than 100 reviewers representing providers, program directors, local and state-level administrators and other stakeholders from around the country provided input on the placement of items within the tiers.

A note about the tools' length

The self-assessment is intended as a tool to guide practice and encourage reflection. Its length is a reflection of the depth and breadth of concrete actions that programs and providers can take to help families build protective factors. Particularly for the family child care and center-based early care and education program tools, the formatting also adds significantly to the length.

Users can approach the use of the tool to suit their needs. For example, providers can complete one protective factor section at a time to break it up. Whether they are using a paper copy or entering the self-assessment online, programs will be able to do these sections at their own pace. However, it is important to keep in mind that the protective factors are interrelated and not mutually exclusive. If a subset of the self-assessment sections are used, it is important that programs and providers are still aware of and understand how the other protective factors come into play. Program directors and policy administrators can support this awareness through professional training and guidance. Another approach for early care and education centers and family child care programs is to focus first on all Tier 1 items and return at a later date to items in the higher tiers. Because the self-assessment is intended to promote reflection and continuous improvement, the hope is that it is used as part of an on-going, active process and not treated as a one-time administrative requirement.

The Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal

Programs may choose to enter their self-assessment data in the online Strengthening Families Evaluation Portal, provided by CSSP's national partner, Mosaic Network. Programs can create an account, enter their self-assessment data, develop an action plan based on their self-assessment and collect or enter parent surveys and staff surveys. A variety of reports can be generated in the system to help programs analyze and document their self-assessment results or help state-level administrators track aggregate data across programs. All four Strengthening Families self-assessment tools are available at www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluationportal.com.

Overview of Each Tool

EARLY CHILDHOOD

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR
CENTER-BASED EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Program Self-Assessment materials in this document are applicable to center-based early childhood programs of any size, budget or structure. On average, the self-assessment form can be completed in approximately 90 minutes.

The Self-Assessment for center-based early care and education programs has been tiered to facilitate use by states' Quality Ratings and Improvement Systems. Items are divided into four tiers that represent different levels of depth of implementation: Baseline (i.e., items that any early childhood program should be able to implement), Mid-level (i.e., items that require more specific attention to parent engagement) and High (i.e., items that reflect a high level of focus on parent engagement and support). The fourth tier, Comprehensive Service Programs, applies to those centers that offer a comprehensive range of supports and services to children and families in addition to high quality early care and education (e.g., Head Start, family support centers).

CSSP strongly recommends that programs create a Self- Assessment team that represents a number of different perspectives at your program, including:

- Administrative staff and/or program director
- Early care and education teachers
- Family support staff (if applicable)
- Parents whose children participate in the program

EARLY CHILDHOOD

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR
FAMILY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

The Strengthening Families Self-Assessment for Family Child Care Providers is written for family child care providers who want to work better with and support the parents of the children they serve. The Self-Assessment takes 20-30 minutes to complete.

The Self-Assessment for family child care providers has been tiered to facilitate its use with states' Quality Ratings and Improvement Systems. Items are divided into three tiers that represent different levels of depth of implementation: Baseline (i.e., items that any family child care provider should be able to implement in their day-today interactions), Mid-level (i.e., items that reflect a more intentional focus on supporting and engaging parents) and High (i.e., items that reflect a high level of focus on parent engagement and support—note these may be most appropriate or easiest to achieve for family child care settings that are themselves receiving systemic support).

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL
FOR **HOME VISITING** PROGRAMS

The Program Self-Assessment materials in this document are applicable to home visiting programs of any size, budget or structure. The strategies described can be implemented without creating new staff positions, making significant changes to existing facilities or raising additional financial resources. On average, the self-assessment form can be completed in approximately 90 minutes.

CSSP strongly recommends that programs create a Self-Assessment team that represents a number of different perspectives at your program, including:

- Administrative staff and/or program director
- Home visitors
- Parents who participate in the program

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL
FOR **COMMUNITY-BASED** PROGRAMS

The Program Self-Assessment materials in this document are applicable to community-based programs serving children and families. The concrete actions described in the self- assessment can be carried out in a variety of settings such as family support and parenting education programs, health care settings, community centers and others. The strategies described can be implemented without creating new staff positions, making significant changes to existing facilities or raising additional financial resources. On average, the self-assessment form can be completed in approximately 90 minutes.

CSSP strongly recommends that programs create a Self- Assessment team that represents a number of different perspectives at your program, including:

- Administrative staff and/or program director
- Direct service staff
- Parents who participate in the program (or whose children participate in the program)