

HOW STRENGTHENING FAMILIES™ ALIGNS WITH THE HEAD START PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

This paper explores the alignment between the Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP's) Strengthening Families approach and the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework so that leaders in states, agencies and early childhood programs, including Head Start programs, can understand the contributions of these frameworks and make informed decisions about implementation strategies to promote parent, family and community engagement to support children's healthy development and improved outcomes.

Introduction

As the growing understanding of the importance of children's early years drives increasing attention to early childhood programs, more state systems and local programs are seeking tools to effectively engage parents as partners in supporting young children's learning and development. The Strengthening Families approach and the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework were each designed with this in mind. As states and programs use these frameworks to guide their family engagement efforts, it is helpful to understand more about the intended uses and areas of emphasis of each framework.

At the heart of both Strengthening Families and the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement framework is the understanding that partnering with parents is essential to promoting children's learning and development. Each provides useful platforms for building community partnerships and coordinated systems that put the needs of families at the center.

Overview of the Frameworks

The PFCE Framework

The Head Start (HS) PFCE Framework is a tool for implementing related Head Start Performance Standards and best practices. The Head Start PFCE Framework is a research-based approach that shows how programs can work together as a whole—across systems and service areas—to promote parent and family engagement as well as children's learning and development. It was designed with input from researchers, training and technical assistance providers and parents, and it defines optimal family engagement outcomes for HS and Early Head Start (EHS) programs.

The PFCE Framework outlines a systemic, integrated and comprehensive approach for achieving effective family engagement. Specifically, it identifies the elements needed to achieve progress toward seven family outcomes that support children's learning and development. These elements include program leadership, continuous improvement and professional development (shown in the yellow column on the next page). The PFCE Framework also identifies the program service elements that contribute to family and child outcomes (pink column). These include the program environment, family partnerships,

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:

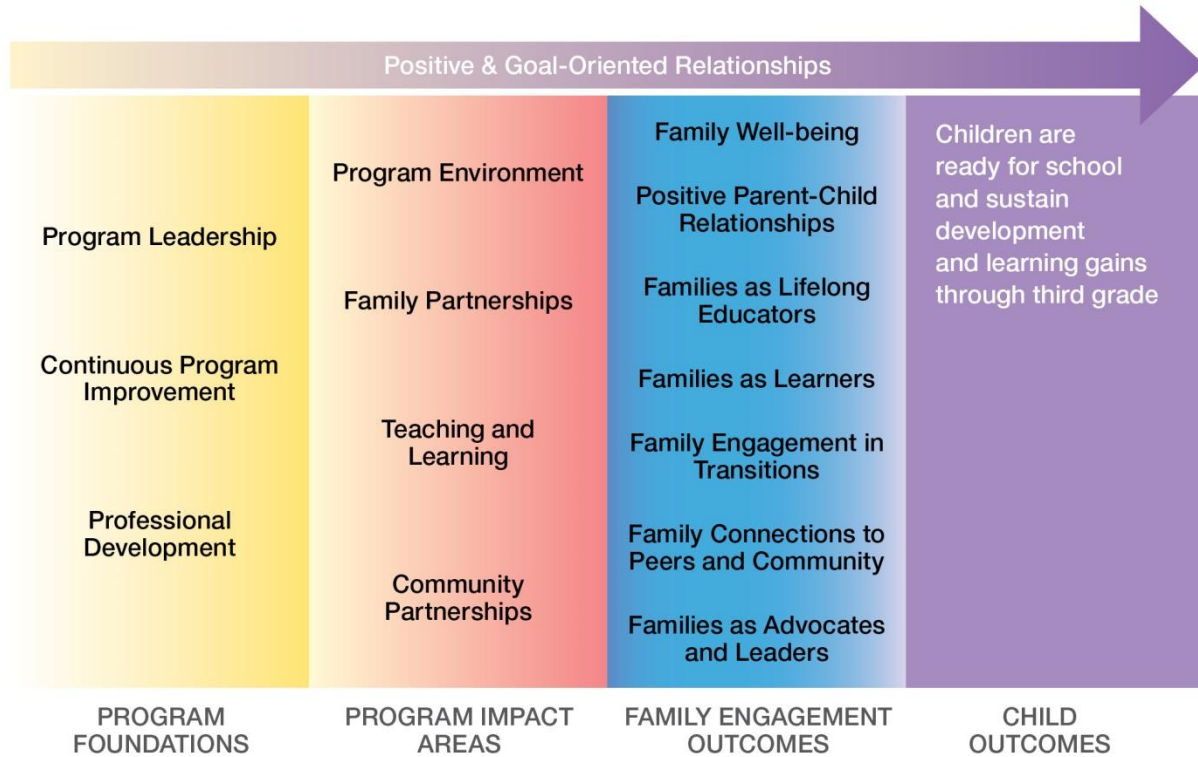
- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

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

teaching and learning and community partnerships. Positive, goal-oriented relationships with families are building blocks for effective engagement across the elements of the PFCE Framework (purple arrow). Effective family engagement is built on responsive, reciprocal and respectful relationships with families.

The Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework



The Strengthening Families Approach

Five research-informed protective factors are the foundation of the Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP) Strengthening Families approach. These factors are: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need and social and emotional competence of children. Research shows that together, these protective factors promote optimal child development, build strong families and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. The five protective factors offer a framework for guiding how service providers interact with families to achieve better outcomes for children.

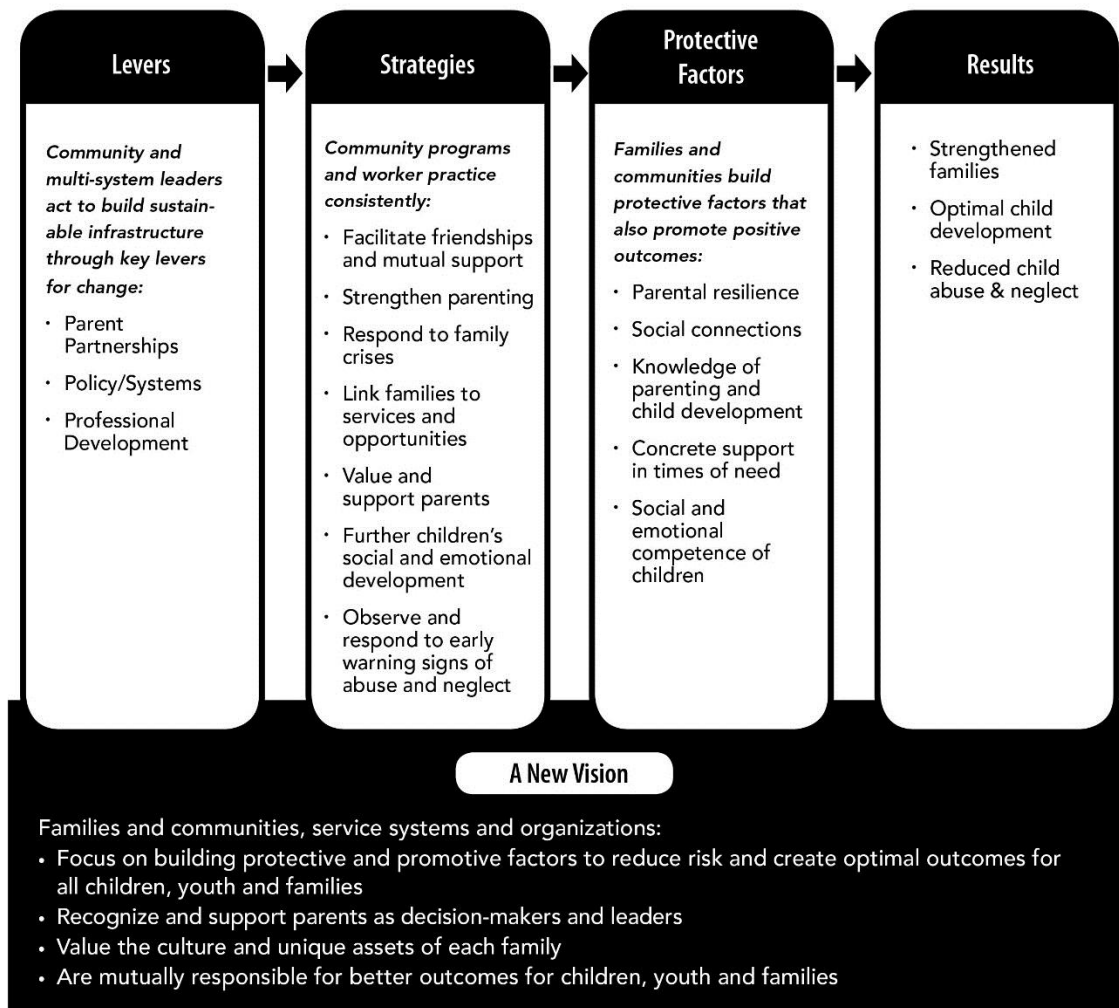
CSSP initially designed Strengthening Families for early learning settings (i.e., Head Start, Pre-K programs and child care programs) and examined exemplary programs across the country to identify the everyday practices that enhance a program's capacity to build the protective factors. Many programs nationwide are using the Strengthening Families approach because it offers an intuitive framework for supporting families. Strengthening Families provides a broad range of concrete low- and no-cost actions that programs of all types can implement, as well as free, easily accessible tools to support implementation at the program, policy and system levels.

Because Strengthening Families is also applicable to other programs and services, today more than 30 states are using the framework in early care and education, home visiting, family support, child welfare, child abuse and neglect prevention and other services and systems that support children and families. The protective factors offer a common outcomes framework and shared language that can improve cross-sector collaboration and service coordination for children and families.

Mobilizing partners, communities and families
to build family strengths, promote optimal
development and reduce child abuse and neglect

The Strengthening Families Approach

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge



Similarities and Differences

The PFCE Framework and the Strengthening Families approach emphasize many of the same concepts that contribute to positive child outcomes: building staff-family relationships that support family well-being, encouraging strong relationships between parents and their children, promoting ongoing learning and development for both parents and children and strengthening families' social connections and engagement in the community.

The PFCE Framework was designed with the needs of Head Start and Early Head Start programs in mind but is being used by state early childhood planners and many early childhood programs in addition to Head Start. The Strengthening Families approach was designed for and is being used by a broad range of child and family serving programs (e.g., home visiting and family support programs) as well as early care and education programs. The PFCE Framework is tailor-made to help programs meet federal performance requirements and achieve school readiness outcomes. In contrast, Strengthening Families offers a common framework for connecting with other community services to help families build protective factors.

Both the PFCE Framework and Strengthening Families offer assessment tools designed to be used by teams that include parents, program leadership and managers and front line staff. These assessment tools encourage reflection on programmatic practice and action planning that leads to enhanced parent partnerships and improved family engagement.

Each approach can be used to guide program practices that meet many of the required Head Start Performance Standards related to parent, family and community engagement and other areas of practice. For example, program strategies outlined in the Strengthening Families approach align directly with language in the Head Start Performance Standards related to:

- Education and early childhood development (§ 1304.21)
- Child mental health (§ 1304.24),
- Family partnerships (§ 1304.40),
- Community partnerships (§ 1404.41),
- Program governance (§ 1304.50),
- Human resources management (§ 1304.52) and
- Parent participation and transitions for children with disabilities (§ 1308.21)

In some instances the PFCE Framework offers specific guidance that is more tightly aligned to the Head Start Performance Standards. For example:

- The PFCE Framework addresses the importance of sharing child assessment results with parents to involve them in decisions about their children. It also addresses transitions from one early care and education setting to the next and offers more detail on what programs can do to prepare children and families for the transition from Head Start to kindergarten.

Resources for Program Implementation

Programs that choose to adopt the Strengthening Families approach can use the [Strengthening Families self-assessment tool](#), access an [online training curriculum](#) from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds and find [other resources](#) from CSSP and its Strengthening Families national partners.

Likewise, programs can use the [PFCE Assessment Tools and Guides](#), and access the [Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Interactive Framework](#) to find research, resources and regulations related to program foundations, program impact areas, family engagement outcomes and child outcomes.

- The PFCE framework addresses supporting parents around attachment, parenting knowledge and skills with additional focus on family literacy and the needs of pregnant women and expectant parents. Strengthening Families addresses supporting parents on a broad range of parenting knowledge and skills, with added emphasis on children's social and emotional development.

CSSP's *How Strengthening Families Aligns with the Head Start Performance Standards* (forthcoming) is a more detailed comparative analysis that programs can use as a guide to understanding this alignment.

Summary

The value of the frameworks and practice tools for engaging families lies in the positive changes for children, families and communities that come from effective implementation. Programs can choose to use the resources from one or both organizations in ways that best suit the needs and goals of their program or local initiative. What is most important for all programs is that families are engaged in meaningful partnerships to support their children's optimal learning and development.

This document is based on the findings of a working group of state administrators and Head Start grantees convened by CSSP. It also reflects extensive discussion between CSSP, the federal Office of Head Start and the Head Start National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. CSSP deeply values and appreciates the contributions of all of these individuals and organizations.