④ Equity

Parents are partners in creating a responsive and equitable early childhood system

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR EQUITY

Measurement	Resources needed	System stakeholder engagement	Data collection requirements	Timeframe
				Level of Effort
4.1 Parent Engagement*				
Enables stakeholders to understand the extent to which their system engages deeply and authentically with parents and caregivers.	· Lead convener · Facilitator (optional) · Analyst/evaluator to summarize survey data	· Agency leaders from across the system · Front-line staff and administrators · Parent leaders	· Self-assessment tool (full tool, abridged tool, and/or funder/system leader tool)	1-3 months Moderate to High
4.2 Advancing Equity*				
Measures the level of attention that is paid to ensuring that the early childhood system meets the needs of *all* young children and their families	· Lead convener · Facilitator (optional)	· Agency leaders from across the system	· Self-assessment tool	1-6 months Low to Moderate

* Measure is in development (i.e., not piloted) but included due to its importance in measuring system performance.

4.1 Parent Engagement

Level at which parents are engaged as partners and leaders in the early childhood system

Purpose

This measure enables system stakeholders to understand the extent to which agencies operating within the early childhood system engage parents as partners and leaders and the extent to which the early childhood system supports those efforts. The tool that has been developed to help communities assess parent engagement grew out of several CSSP initiatives that expand the concept and practice of family engagement from separate strands of programming to an integrated, continuing stream of opportunities for parents to be leaders in their families and communities, as well as in policies and systems (see Resources). By engaging in this self-assessment, systems are encouraged to extend parent engagement from the preschool classroom, where most resources have been focused, into early childhood systems of care, including family support, children's health, mental health, and community resources. The anticipated results of improved engagement are more responsive, equitable, and accountable services and, ultimately, better outcomes for families and children.

Definition

This measure recommends a process whereby a group of system stakeholders can improve their system-level understanding of parent engagement performance through the internal, agency-level implementation of a self-assessment tool by a broad range of system agencies. The Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool acts as a starting point for dialogue and planning where agencies and systems—in collaboration with parent leaders and other community-based stakeholders—will be able to identify current strengths, target areas for development, and plan targeted actions. You may choose to use one or more of the following tools:

- **Abridged Assessment Tool.** For those seeking insights on family engagement strategies that have a more limited time and scope, we recommend the Abridged Assessment Tool as a starting point. Engaging staff teams, cross-system collaboratives, and parent leaders in this abridged version can build awareness, spark ideas and point to areas to develop.

- **Comprehensive Assessment Tool.** For agencies, collaboratives, and systems ready to fundamentally reshape the approach to engaging families, we recommend using the Comprehensive Assessment Tool. Engaging multiple stakeholders—including parent leaders—the comprehensive tool can inform a strategic planning or other significant change process.

- **Questions for Grantmakers, Policy Advocates & Capacity-builders.** For those agencies and systems partners whose work affects families but does not touch parents directly, these questions can help determine where you can change practices and leverage influence to expand parent leadership and engagement in the field.

Each of these tools guides the user to assess an agency or system's competencies across four "pillars": family-centered, equity-driven, collaborative, and transparent. Within each pillar, four "dimensions" are assessed: the system or agency's commitment, capacity, and practice, and the degree of influence parents have. Competencies are rated across a four-point scale: (1) Not Evident; (2) Developing; (3) Progressing; and (4) Integrated.

As the steps outline below, a group of early childhood systems agencies agree to field the appropriate tool internal to their organization, seeking the input of a broad range of agency stakeholders, including front-line staff, administrators, and parent leaders. The agency representatives in the group then convene to collectively review their individual agency results and assess the system's overall level of parent engagement based on these individual agency results. The implementation of the abridged tool is likely to prompt individual agencies to take actions to improve engagement in the areas identified as needing work, or agencies may elect to implement the comprehensive tool as a part of a planning or evaluation process. The process hopefully will also lead to system-wide actions, such as including a commitment to equity and engagement in each agency's core values, changes in policies and practices, and/or funding allocation.

Communities may first wish to implement the tool as an internal agency system performance measure, rather than as a part of a broader system assessment of parent engagement. Implementing the measure internally and sharing findings with other system agencies may be a good first step toward engaging other system stakeholders who may be wary of a system-wide assessment.

Implementation

Tool or Survey

The tools are included in a separate Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Guide and Toolkit, and can be accessed online:

- Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool: Abridged

- Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool: Comprehensive

- Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool: Questions for Grantmakers, Policy Advocates & Capacity-builders

Summary of Steps

The tools are sufficiently lengthy to prevent a presentation in the toolkit, but they can be accessed online:

1. **Set intention:** Consider agency or system-wide goals, recent efforts, and constraints related to parent engagement as a first step. What is your system's goal for implementing this measure? For example, are you just starting out and want to build awareness and buy-in around parent engagement? Completing the Abridged Assessment Tool is likely the right strategy to quickly get baseline information and initial identification of gaps and opportunities. If there is already extensive system buy-in, you may choose to use the Comprehensive Assessment Tool for an in-depth look at the agency or programs. If you are part of an agency that does not directly serve children or families, you may prefer to use the Questions for Grantmakers, Policy Advocates, and Capacity-Builders.

2. **Stakeholder engagement:** Based on your intentions and goals, form a group of interested stakeholders. In some communities, this may be an existing collaborative that has identified parent engagement as a strategic goal and is seeking a way to measure their growth in this area. For others, the group or intent may still need to be developed. All participants should agree to implement the Abridged Assessment Tool (at minimum) within their agency and to participate in a meeting to review and discuss the results.

3. **Implement tool:** Depending on the group's intention and following the implementation instructions included with the Assessment Tool, each agency in the team completes either the abridged or comprehensive tools. Ideally the agencies will have many different agency stakeholders complete the tool, including parents, front-line staff, administrators, and/or grantees.

4. **Convene:** Reconvene the team after the introductory tools have been completed by the participating agencies. Review and compare results. Identify areas of commonality and difference across pillars and different agency stakeholders. Discuss how your system would rate its state of development at this stage. What actions could improve development? What barriers need to be overcome and what successful practices could be replicated?

5. **Plan:** The assessment team will want to plan next steps, which may include:

   a. *Actions:* Determine if there are actions that can be easily implemented at the system level and by the participating agencies, then identify potentially more challenging actions. Use the action planning template in this toolkit or in the Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool to identify targets, priorities, resources, and responsible parties. The actions are likely to be agency specific, but there may be actions that can be implemented system-wide.

   b. *Further research:* If the abridged tool was implemented, determine if the assessment team or individual agencies need or want to implement the comprehensive tool. This may be the case if the participants do not feel they can adequately identify actions based on the findings from the abridged tool. Or, agencies may simply wish to go deeper than the abridged tool allows.

   c. *Monitoring:* Decide when you will meet next and how frequently you will reassess your system's progress toward parent engagement.

Stakeholders

The intent is to create a cross-system group of early childhood agency leaders to participate in the implementation of this measure, which includes individual agency completion of the Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool. Within each agency, the tool should be completed by a range of agency stakeholders, including front-line staff and providers, administrators and managers, parent leaders, grantees, or others with knowledge of the agency's programs and practices. Some communities may already have parent-led organizations that advocate for changes in at least some sectors of the early childhood system; these organizations are a natural starting place for parent engagement.

Data Sources

Data are self-created through the implementation of the Parent Engagement and Leadership Tool.

Tips For Successful Implementation

It may be important to impress upon participants that low ratings are to be expected for most communities since the tool expands the boundaries of common understandings of family engagement. Few agencies will have achieved the highest, or even moderate, levels of engagement, but the process of implementing the tool helps agencies consider new, broader, and more authentic ways to engage with families.

Limitations

The process described for implementing this measure has not yet been directly tested, although the methodology is similar to measures that have been piloted. The Parent Engagement and Leadership Assessment Tool is in the early stages of pilot testing and may evolve as more communities implement the tool. The Abridged Assessment Tool has not been tested, to date, but it is a subset of measures contained in the Comprehensive Assessment Tool. The Abridged Assessment Tool was created to increase the accessibility of the tool and allow for measuring an agency's level of parent engagement in a less time-intensive process. As a subset of the comprehensive tool, the abridged tool may not lend itself as directly to actions, but it provides an entry point for communities and may lead communities to participate in a deeper analysis with the comprehensive tool.

Resources

▸ Ripples of Transformation: Families Leading Change in Early Childhood Systems, Center for the Study of Social Policy
This toolkit provides strategies for providers and program leaders to build family engagement by identifying family engagement as not only central to children's early learning and healthy development, but also as a core strategy to advance equity and community empowerment.

▸ Manifesto for Race Equity and Parent Engagement in Early Childhood, Center for the Study of Social Policy
Developed by parent leaders and staff members from across EC-LINC communities in 2018, and building on both Strengthening Families and the *Ripples of Transformation* Toolkit, the *Manifesto for Race Equity and Parent Engagement* outlines a vision, goals, and Five Commitments for Change for the transformation we want to make so that all parents are supported and empowered to give their children a strong start in life.

▸ Strengthening Families, Center for the Study of Social Policy
CSSP's Strengthening Families approach engages families, service providers, systems, and communities in building five protective factors that all families need to thrive. With active cross-systems leadership teams in 35 states, Strengthening Families is being used to transform child- and family-serving systems, with a focus on shifting how service providers interact with parents.

▸ Opening Doors for Young Parents, Annie E. Casey Foundation
This resource helps agencies understand barriers young families face, which is a key first step to improving parent engagement.

▸ National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) This organization provides resources to help agencies document their family engagement work.

4.2 Advancing Equity

Level at which attention is paid to ensuring that the early childhood system meets the needs of all young children and their families

THIS MEASURE IS IN DEVELOPMENT

Value

There are pervasive disparities in early childhood outcomes by race and ethnicity, and significant challenges in achieving equitable outcomes across other factors like family income, neighborhood, language spoken at home, disability status, and immigration status. One of the contributions of an effective early childhood system can be to focus attention on these issues and pursue solutions that would not be possible for individual service providers.

A well-functioning early childhood system allows leaders and stakeholders to look across the programs and services that make up the system to assess and improve: how well it is meeting the needs of the community's entire population of young children and their families; where there are gaps; and where the system is perpetuating inequities or not serving some families well. While this includes looking closely at the available data to determine where there are disparities in outcomes, there are also other steps that system leaders can take to advance equity in the early childhood system and in the community. Early childhood system leaders can use their position to influence the work of the system as a whole, as well as practice within direct-service programs, through training, coaching, incentives, and requirements.

Advancing equity will likely raise some issues that can seem to be outside of the core responsibilities of an early childhood system – for example, addressing homelessness, or equitable access to safe play spaces. Early childhood systems can't solve these problems on their own, but they can work in ways that raise the likelihood that elected officials and other community leaders will act on them. At the same time, most early childhood systems will find issues within their realm of direct influence, such as disparities in preschool expulsion and diversity of the early childhood workforce and leadership, which can be addressed from within the system.

Definition

Equity has been defined as "just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential."[8] This system performance measure prompts an assessment of how well leaders and stakeholders in the early childhood system are using the system-level perspective and influence they have to advance racial, economic, and social equity in the community.

The tool below is focused around ten topic areas which include activities at the system level, activities related to influencing practice within the sectors that make up the early childhood system, and activities at the program level. With these activities, early childhood system leaders can understand and improve the ability of the system to meet the needs of all families with young children and reduce disparities in access, quality, and outcomes.

Communities can use the reflective self-assessment tool to discuss and give a rating of how well the early childhood system uses strategies to advance equity in each of ten domains and then assign an overall rating of current efforts to advance equity.

Summary of Steps

1. **Set intention:** Decide on your community's goals with respect to assessing how well the system is advancing equity.

2. Stakeholder engagement: Identify early childhood system leaders or representatives to participate in the assessment process. With the stakeholder group, affirm or revise intentions.

3. **Convene stakeholders:** Convene the group to talk through the assessment, reflect on the results, and determine what to do next with the information/analysis. Communities can use the Action Plan template in this Toolkit to help plan next steps.

4. **Rate:** Discuss each of the ten domains in the tool, arriving at a rating of 1-4 for the question(s) within each domain. Then discuss how well the early childhood system is doing on advancing equity overall.

5. **Interpret:** Communities should consider several questions as they analyze and interpret their responses on the assessment tool.

   a. What differences did you see in how various stakeholders assessed the system's current efforts? While there will always be variations in perspective among a group of people, it is particularly important to pay attention to differences by group when discussing questions related to equity. Did parents' responses differ from those of service providers and system leaders? Did people of color assess the system's efforts differently than white participants? Where you see patterns of differing perspectives, devote some extra time to discussing those perspectives. It may be that system efforts are not visible to community members; and it may be that the efforts being made are not meeting the needs of people in the community. Both of these scenarios offer opportunities for learning and improvement.

   b. What would it take for your community to get to the next level in one or more domains, or overall? Responses may reflect various factors including political will or resources.

   c. If you achieved a level 4 in any of these domains or overall, what led to that success? How can these successes be shared with other communities to support their improvement?

6. **Determine what action should be taken as a result of the analysis, and record in action planning guide.** Use this assessment as an entrée to a larger conversation to support system building efforts.

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[8] Angela Glover Blackwell, Policy Link. "Equity Is..." Published October 2016. http://putnam-consulting.com/philanthropy-411-blog/equity-is/

Stakeholders

Leaders of the early childhood system should be involved in this assessment process. Ideally this would be led by someone in a convening or coordinating role for the system. It is particularly important for this measure that the stakeholder group include people from a range of backgrounds who can represent multiple population groups and neighborhoods within the community, including parents of young children.

Data Sources

This performance measure uses a self-assessment tool. Participants' assessment of the system's performance may be informed by disaggregated data on child and family outcomes, quality and access data from the sectors within the early childhood system, neighborhood or community needs assessments, and other sources.

Limitations

This measure is preliminary and has not been pilot tested.

Research Opportunities

CSSP is interested in identifying funding and community partners to further develop a tool for early childhood system leaders and stakeholders to assess their current efforts in advancing equity in the community and in the early childhood system itself, as well as to assess the effectiveness of those efforts. This is a critical need in the field, and it will require a thorough process to do it well.

Resources

‣ RACE Matters: Organizational Assessment, Annie E. Casey Foundation

‣ Racial Equity Impact Assessment, Race Forward

‣ Racial Inequality in Policies that Impact Infants, Toddlers, and Families, Zero to Three and Center for Law and Social Policy

4.2 Advancing Equity: Rating Tool

Participating stakeholders collaboratively discuss how well the early childhood system as a whole and each of its component parts use strategies to advance equity in each of the following domains. For the questions in each domain, we suggest that communities identify:

▸ A significant strength and/or recent accomplishment that they can build upon;

▸ A significant challenge they need to address in order to make further progress;

▸ A tentative rating on a four-point scale about the extent to which these practices are being used, as follows:

    1—This is not being done or done rarely

    2—This is being done at times or within particular sectors

    3—This is being done pretty consistently across most sectors

    4—This is core work throughout the early childhood system

1. Data	
a. Data are routinely disaggregated and analyzed by race, ethnicity, neighborhood, and other relevant factors.	1 2 3 4
b. System and sector leaders use the data to drive action to address gaps and disparities that are revealed in analysis of early childhood data.	1 2 3 4
2. Policy analysis	
a. Proposed policy and practice changes are analyzed for the differential impact they may have on children and families in specific neighborhoods, racial or ethnic groups, or on parents and children with disabilities.	1 2 3 4
b. Parents are part of the decision-making process to design solutions that will work for them and their neighbors. (A lower rating may reflect that parents are invited to give feedback on proposed changes but not involved in designing solutions.)	1 2 3 4
3. Access and high quality	
a. High-quality services for children and families are located equitably throughout the community. (For example, all neighborhoods have access to high-quality early care and education.)	1 2 3 4
b. High-quality services are accessible from all areas within the community. There are public transportation options or other supports for families that need to travel to access needed services.	1 2 3 4
4. Investment	
a. The system invests its resources in a manner that makes services more equitably available to underserved and historically underinvested groups and neighborhoods.	1 2 3 4
b. Funding processes are accessible to smaller, grassroots organizations and those led by people who represent the communities they serve.	1 2 3 4
5. Professional development	
a. Organizations and direct service providers within the early childhood system participate in professional development on topics such as race, racism, implicit bias, cultural humility, and partnering equitably with parents.	1 2 3 4
b. Service providers have access to coaching and consultation to help them better serve the children and families in their programs, such as infant mental health consultation to address challenging behaviors.	1 2 3 4
c. Career pathways and professional development opportunities are available to help increase the diversity of the early childhood workforce.	1 2 3 4
6. Leadership	
a. There is diversity within the leadership of the early childhood system and the sectors within it.	1 2 3 4
b. The leadership has demonstrated commitment to addressing issues of equity and justice.	1 2 3 4

7. Partnership				
a. The early childhood system is connecting and partnering with other community leaders to address drivers of inequity and disparity that are outside of the early childhood system.	1	2	3	4
b. The early childhood system is connecting and partnering with other community leaders to address drivers of inequity and disparity that are outside of the early childhood system.	1	2	3	4

8. Communication				
a. The system communicates the importance of equity to service providers, decision-makers, families, and the community as a whole.	1	2	3	4
b. Materials like posters and brochures are reflective of the families that live in the community in terms of race, disability, and family structure.	1	2	3	4
c. Materials are translated, and interpretation is offered, so that non-English-speaking families can participate fully in the programs that serve their children and in early childhood system efforts.	1	2	3	4

9. Incentives				
a. The early childhood system incentivizes or encourages programs and services to take concrete action on equity in their own programs or neighborhoods	1	2	3	4
b. The early childhood system helps programs and agencies identify steps they can take to work toward more equitable outcomes and provides funding to support that work.	1	2	3	4

10. Equity agenda				
a. The early childhood system has articulated an equity agenda.	1	2	3	4

After considering the domains above, communities can evaluate the current performance of their early childhood system on advancing equity overall. Levels are defined as follows:

Level 1—There is limited activity related to advancing equity in the early childhood system.

Level 2—Some programs or services are focused on advancing equity, but these efforts are not crossing over into other parts of the early childhood system; there is no coordinated activity at the community or system level.

Level 3—System-level efforts are underway to work across programs and services with a focus on equity.

Level 4—Equity is a focus of the early childhood system, including tracking the effects of efforts to reduce disparities at the child, family, and/or community level.