

3.1 Public Understanding

Level at which early childhood systems effectively engage in efforts to increase public understanding of the importance of early childhood and the public's role in supporting children and families

Purpose

This measure seeks to gauge the extent to which systems are able to build public understanding of the importance of early childhood development and of what actions on the part of parents, neighbors, and community institutions are most likely to support the healthy development of all children in the community. Results help early childhood system leaders assess their efforts to educate the community about the importance of early childhood and, when possible, assess the effectiveness of that outreach. The expectation is that improved public understanding translates to improved parent, caregiver, and community attitudes and behaviors toward young children as well as the development of community advocates who will support investment in early childhood initiatives.

Definition

This measure provides a preliminary tool for a team of system leaders to self-assess the extent to which they are collectively able to build public understanding of the importance of early childhood development.

As detailed below, the tool helps communities gather information and evaluate their current public outreach efforts in terms of:

- ▶ Message content
- ▶ Message dissemination
- ▶ Two-way communication
- ▶ Evaluation, adaptation, and impact

Taking into account the ratings of each of these four factors, communities then assign themselves an overall rating of Level 1 (limited activities to build public support) through Level 4 (responsive activities and measurable improvement). After assigning a level, communities are encouraged to identify what, if any, activities or changes they want to commit to based on this self-evaluation.

Implementation

Tool or Survey

The tool at the end of this section is preliminary; communities will want to consider the elements within this model and innovate or customize.

Summary of Steps

- 1. Set intention:** Decide your communities' goals with respect to measuring public outreach and engagement.
- 2. Identify and engage stakeholders:** Communities identify which system leaders should participate in collaboratively completing the self-assessment tool.
- 3. Refine tool:** Communities may wish to refine or format the tool to facilitate implementation and to ensure the criteria are

Measurement Option: Public Opinion or Community Norms Polls

For communities with an existing positive community norms initiative, or a community-level survey or poll data about public attitudes about early childhood, communities can use these data to track change in attitudes and behaviors over time, potentially in response to their public outreach efforts.

locally appropriate.

- 4. Convene meeting and rate:** The tool can be completed collaboratively at an in-person meeting.
 - a.** Using consensus facilitation methods, self-rate based on four topic areas in the tool.
 - b.** Taking all the ratings into account, rate performance based on the Level 1 through Level 4 overall scale.
- 5. Interpret:** Communities should interpret results using question prompts provided in the Interpreting Results section.
- 6. Plan:** Determine what action should be taken as a result of the results, and record in action planning guide. Use this assessment as an entrée to a larger conversation to support efforts to influence public opinion about early childhood.

Stakeholders

The self-assessment tool should be completed by a small group of early childhood community leaders, or an existing early childhood system collaborative body.

Data Sources

Data are collected from system leaders participating in the self-assessment tool.

Limitations

This measure is preliminary. To date, the self-assessment tool has not been piloted, although the format was based on similar tools that were piloted over the course of the initiative.

Opportunities

Additional opportunities include the following:

- ▶ Find relevant population-level surveys in place in communities, states, or internationally to create a question bank for communities to use in the development of their own community-level survey.

Resources

▶ [Introduction to Positive Community Norms by the Montana Institute](#)

Public awareness-building is a key strategy of the community norms field, which examines community values, perceptions, and knowledge as compared to actual behaviors, in an effort to promote positive behaviors. The difference between what the public understands about early childhood and the support they are willing to provide, or how they behave with young children offers important information for stakeholders seeking to close gaps between knowledge, values, and actions.

▶ [Meta-Analysis of Public Opinion Data on Support for Early Childhood Services by Fairbank](#), Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3), January 29, 2018

This resource analyzes the results of 21 separate surveys conducted in California related to public attitudes about investments in early childhood. It provides recommendations on messages that are compelling to the public, as well as those that are not.

▶ [Early Learning Community Progress Rating Tool](#)

Communities will find helpful rating tools within Building Block #1 (Community Leadership, Commitment and Public Will to Make Early Childhood a Priority), Target #1.3: Community members support and understand the importance of early childhood health, learning, and well-being.

▶ These articles discuss the link between knowledge and behavior; parents with more knowledge are more likely to engage in positive parenting practices, whereas those with limited knowledge are at greater risk of negative parenting behaviors.

• [Association Between Knowledge of Child Development and Parenting: A Systematic Review](#), September SJ, Rich E, Roman N. (2018) *The Open Family Studies Journal*, volume 10

• [Parenting knowledge and its role in the prediction of dysfunctional parenting and disruptive child behavior](#), Morawska A, Winter L, Sanders MR. (2009) *Child: Care, Health and Development*, Mar;35(2):217-26

• [Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8](#), Breiner H, Ford M, Gadsden VL, editors. (2016) National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; Board on Children, Youth, and Families; Committee on Supporting the Parents of Young Children, Washington (DC): National Academies Press

3.1 Public Understanding: Rating Tool

For each of the four topics below, communities make a preliminary rating on the following four-point scale:

- 1—Not yet meeting any of these standards
- 2—Initial progress on some of these standards
- 3—Meets several of these standards, with work still to be done.
- 4—Meets most or all of these standards

<p>1. Message content. Higher ratings should reflect these standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Content is well-grounded in scientific findings. ▶ Content includes: the importance of early childhood beginning with the earliest years; actions by parents that support healthy development; and actions by family members, neighbors, and community members that support healthy development of all young children. ▶ Content is developed with a grounding in effective framing and social messaging, emphasizing positive, actionable messages. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>2. Message dissemination. Higher ratings should reflect these standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Culturally relevant messages are tailored to the needs of different segments of the community. ▶ A dissemination plan that takes into account numerous ways of transmitting and reinforcing the key messages. ▶ Messages are consistent across multiple early childhood sectors. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>3. Two-way communication. Higher ratings should reflect these standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Numerous opportunities exist for community members to provide feedback about the messages, to discuss what they need and want in order to succeed, and engage in dialogue about issues related to early childhood. ▶ Evidence that this information from the community influences the system. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>4. Evaluation, adaptation, and impact. Higher ratings should reflect these standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ An evaluation plan, identifying the type of data that will be collected to gauge the impact of the effort to build public understanding and support for early childhood. ▶ Evidence that the system has adapted its approaches based on what it learns from the data. ▶ Evidence from the data that the messages are having an impact on public understanding and support for early childhood. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>

Taking into account the ratings of each of these four factors, communities should assign themselves an overall rating of Level 1 through Level 4:

Level 1—Limited activity to build public understanding and support for early childhood development, with little evidence of impact.

Level 2—Information about developmental science, early health and learning, and parenting is disseminated to the community, with messages that are accessible and relevant to different cultural groups.

Level 3—The messages described in Level 2 are provided consistently across multiple early childhood sectors in a coordinated effort that has developed strategies to reach all sectors of the community. Communication is in two directions, as families are engaged in providing feedback about the messages and in communicating to early childhood leaders what they need in order to be successful. The system has begun to gather data to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts.

Level 4—The system is adjusting its activities based on its evaluation findings. The activities described in Level 3 have led to measurable improvement in public understanding and support for early childhood development.