



EC-LINC

MANIFESTO for Race Equity & Parent Leadership in Early Childhood Systems



To help early childhood systems learn to work with parents in ways that promote equitable outcomes and maximize opportunities for all children, 40 parent leaders and agency staff from nine EC-LINC communities came together in January 2018 to create a manifesto for change.

EC-LINC is an
Initiative of CSSP.



**Center for the
Study of
Social Policy**
Ideas into Action

What We Believe

Preamble to Our Manifesto

To ensure that all children have equitable outcomes in education, health, and life, we must view engaging parents and developing their leadership as “Mission Critical.” A parent — by which we mean anyone who is the primary caregiver for a child — is their child’s first teacher and best advocate. And research shows that when parents are engaged as partners and leaders in the programs, services and policies that support young children’s learning and healthy development, children thrive and systems improve.

Families want to work with early childhood systems to improve outcomes for their kids, but face barriers. Rooted in structural racism and bias, which pervade the attitudes, behaviors, policies and practices of these systems and our society as a whole, these barriers prevent many parents of color from being true partners and leaders in their child’s healthy development and early learning.

This Manifesto and its 5 Commitments for Change outlines our vision, goals and strategies for the transformation we want to make so that all parents are supported and empowered to give their children a strong start in life.

This Manifesto builds on the groundbreaking work of Strengthening Families™, which at its heart is about changing how service providers interact with families to support them in building protective factors. This Manifesto seeks to further transform systems to eliminate the barriers families of color face in their day-to-day interactions with systems and elevate their leadership and power.

“The manifesto means we are finally addressing race equity and parent leadership. This is a new lens. If you look around racism is everywhere, but race is never addressed. Even as a child, I dealt with racism, but it was never addressed. It’s important to have it be part of the manifesto. We’re putting it on the front page.”

— Lisa Melara,
Parent Leader, Boston, MA

Our Vision for Race Equity

We envision a transformation in which early childhood systems of care are centered around families and responsive to their needs and ideas. System leaders acknowledge the ways that agency policies, procedures, staffing and culture create barriers to equity and parent engagement and respond by making changes and improving collaboration. Staff reflect the diversity of the community. Systems work to improve families' access, experiences and outcomes.

Because of this transformation, children, families and communities thrive. Families — especially families of color, disenfranchised fathers, parents who do not speak English, and families whose children have special needs — have equitable access to opportunities, resources and supports in their communities, such as social connections, parenting resources, quality schools, good jobs and safe neighborhoods.

- 1. Parents are at the Center:** Agencies and systems center everything they do around families: listening to them, developing their leadership, engaging them at every level and including them in decision-making.
- 2. Parents are Participating at All Levels:** planning and implementing ideas, programs and policies; making decisions, including how funds are spent; gaining career opportunities; influencing policy and organizing in their communities.
- 3. Parents are Valued as Experts:** Staff and providers value parents of all cultures as experts. Parents know their rights and have the tools and resources to access opportunities for their children.
- 4. Parents are Powerful Leaders:** Elected officials regularly engage with parents and the community and take action. Parents develop their leadership and run for office. In partnership with those most affected by racism, parents with privilege advocate for equity.



“The Manifesto means that I’m no longer feeling like just a throw in: Dads and dad language were included from the beginning. In all the programs my son and I got involved in, everything was about moms and kids. There was almost never informative information about Dads. In the offices, there would be 30 pictures of Moms, Mom with her children and not ONE picture of a Dad or Dad with his children. That was mystifying! Workers were telling me to just imagine it said dad every time it said Mom. It made me feel some type of way.”

— Anthony Queen,
Parent Leader, Grand Rapids, MI

Our Beliefs on Race Equity and Parent Engagement

Race equity in early childhood systems means that all children can reach their fullest potential, no matter their race or ethnicity. Additionally, it means that parents are included in their children's learning and healthy development because they are seen as true partners, advocates, and leaders.

Race equity in early childhood systems means that parents are invited to be partners in early childhood systems.

Achieving race equity in early childhood systems means the systems that serve young children and their families must change.



Why Race Equity and Parent Engagement?

- Racism plays a major role in shaping and reinforcing inequitable outcomes for children and families.
- Authentically engaging parents has great potential to create and expand positive and equitable outcomes for children.
- Implicit bias, access to opportunities and power influence how families engage and lead within early childhood systems.

Our Manifesto

The terms we use:

Why “Parent”?

We define a parent as anyone who is the primary caregiver for a child, whether they be the biological, adoptive or foster mother or father, or relatives, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Why “Manifesto”?

We use this term to make clear our commitment to manifest the 5 Commitments — to express them, embody them and realize them in our daily actions and long-term goals.

Why “Equity”?

Equity is distinct from Equality. Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful. Equality is treating everyone the same. Equity acknowledges that not everyone starts at the same place, and not everyone has the same needs.

“I’m excited about giving a platform to parents experiencing these difficulties to come forward. For a long time, people would shy away from these things because they didn’t know their rights. They were afraid of the things they were seeing going on. This gives us a platform to bring forward things that really mean a lot to everyone.”

— Deena Smitherman,
Parent Leader, Boston, MA



This Manifesto is a guide for early childhood agencies and systems to help them address inequities and racism by giving parents a voice and opportunity to be engaged and lead at all levels of change.

The Manifesto details 5 Commitments for Change that will create and promote equitable outcomes for all children.

Race Equity & Parent Engagement



5 Commitments for Change

To support equitable outcomes for children and families, we call on leaders in early childhood agencies and systems to:

1. **Challenge Racism**
2. **Embrace Parent Leadership**
3. **Prioritize Resources**
4. **Create Career Pathways**
5. **Maximize Equitable Outcomes**

Challenge Racism



To eliminate barriers, staff and leaders in early childhood systems must enhance capacity and skills to challenge racism and bias and provide a welcoming and respectful environment for families.

ACTIONS

1. Commit to challenging racism through equity-driven parent engagement and leadership strategies.
2. Ensure that the existing workforce is committed to race equity and parent leadership and they have the needed knowledge, skills and support.
3. Be intentional about respecting, welcoming and promoting parents as partners at all levels: as their child's first teacher and best advocate; in planning, implementing and evaluating programs; in opportunities for leadership and advocacy.
4. Provide training for staff to reflect on and navigate through issues of race, power and privilege in relationship to families.
5. Build the knowledge, skills and capacity of policy makers and system leaders to promote race equity and engage families

Embrace Parent Leadership



To fully embrace parents as partners and leaders, agencies and systems leaders must create radical shifts in the way parents are seen and included.

ACTIONS

1. Commit to a strengths-based approach with families, recognizing and bolstering the strengths that families have and asking them to identify where they need support.
2. Share decision-making with parents at every level: the care of their child, program development, policy, funding, etc.
3. Support parents who have the desire to consistently and actively participate do so in diverse ways, including: planning and implementing ideas, programs and policies; creating their own initiatives; making decisions; advancing their careers; advocating and organizing for policy change.
4. Be transparent about how decisions get made, make information accessible and report back to parents how their feedback impacted decisions and priorities.
5. Join with and invest in parent and community-based organizations to support their ideas and priorities.

Prioritize Resources



To realize the positive impact of parent engagement and leadership, agencies and systems must prioritize the funding, time and resources to make these efforts effective over time.

ACTIONS

1. Allocate robust resources to develop parent leadership and advocacy, including staffing and staff development; support for families' full participation; and ongoing leadership development.
2. Provide staff with sufficient time, flexibility and skills training to build relationships with and be responsive to families in their roles as partners and leaders.
3. Provide ongoing funding for parent engagement, leadership development, and family-centered operations.

Create Career Pathways



To better reflect the families and communities served and expand their opportunities, agencies and systems must create career pathways for parents to enter the early childhood workforce.

ACTIONS

1. Partner with community-based and parent-led organizations to recruit parent leaders for open positions and provide support and mentorship.
2. Modify job descriptions to substitute life experience for educational attainment.
3. Create paid positions for parents to become peer educators, system navigators, developmental screeners and outreach workers.
4. Partner with community colleges to create accessible programs for parents to attain their high school diploma or GED and to become early childhood teachers, community health workers, home visitors and other early childhood professions.
5. Provide ongoing professional and leadership development for parents in early childhood career pathways, with the long-term goal of diversifying leadership in early childhood systems and organizations.

Maximize Equitable Outcomes



To maximize equitable outcomes for children and families, agencies and systems must align operations with this goal.

ACTIONS

1. Use data to measure the impact of and continually improve family engagement efforts and be transparent with results.
2. Use data to identify and track disparities in outcomes, access and engagement for children and families from different racial, ethnic, language or socioeconomic backgrounds.
3. Diversify staff and leadership to reflect the communities they serve.
4. Improve collaboration across community, agencies and systems to maximize support for children and families.
5. Be accountable for commitments made and hold partners accountable.



Manifesto Team

Alameda County, CA

First 5 Alameda County

Parent Leaders: D'Jon Banks, Jr.; Michael Ja'Rey; Jacqueline Jackson; Sydney Ledbetter; Katty Perea

Boston, MA

United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley; Boston Family Engagement Network

Parent Leaders: Lisa Melara; Deena Smitherman

Denver, CO

Denver's Early Childhood Council; The Civic Canopy

Parent Leaders: Jason Vitello; LeVar Williams

Hartford, CT

Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Hartford

Parent Leaders: Caroline Austin; Mary Bastian-Gandelman

Kent County, MI

Great Start Collaborative; First Steps Kent

Parent Leaders: Courtney Myers-Keaton; Anthony Queen

Lamoille Valley, VT

Child Development Division, State of Vermont

Los Angeles County, CA

First 5 Los Angeles; CADRE

Parent Leader: Roslyn Broadnax

Palm Beach County, FL

Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County; Housing Partnership, Inc.

Parent Leaders: Cortney Butler; LaQona Tuff

Ventura County, CA

First 5 Ventura County; Aspiranet; Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project; Port Hueneme/South Oxnard Neighborhood for Learning

Parent leaders: Manny Arroyo; Irene Gomez



EC-LINC

About EC-LINC

The Early Childhood Learning and Innovation Network for Communities (EC-LINC) is developed by and for communities and convened by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. EC-LINC's mission is to support families and improve results for young children in communities across the country, with a focus on accelerating the development of effective, integrated, local early childhood systems.

About CSSP

The Center for the Study of Social Policy works to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. We do this by advocating with and for children, youth, and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.

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“The manifesto is the opportunity to bring to the forefront difficult conversations that people usually shy away from rather than face head on. I have had recent conversations with people who are in charge of programs. They have said they don’t believe race equity and parent leadership belong together. There is no inclusion. The inclusion conversation is not really there. When you try to get in touch with someone to talk about this issue, they don’t respond. The manifesto brings the opportunity to have these difficult conversations.

It upset me when people said race and parent leadership don’t belong together. There are so many ways this matters. If I’m a Black parent sitting at the table with other parents who are not Black and they don’t want to listen or if they shut me out, that’s an issue. In certain areas, some parents have more voice than others because of their color. Those are just the basics, but there are even more nuanced issues that are much deeper. ”

— **Caroline Austin,**
Parent Leader, Hartford, CT

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