

ACTION 1.2

Require child and family systems and programs to use strategies that intentionally engage and learn from families, and connect those strategies across systems and programs.

REQUIRE LINKED STRATEGIES across PROGRAMS to ENGAGE and LEARN from FAMILIES

Families are a critical resource in planning and implementing services for children. Involving them as equal partners and leaders in decision making from the beginning is an equity strategy that can result in systems that are responsive to the immediate and emerging needs of children and families. To minimize the stress that families report when they have to navigate multiple systems that each have different and sometimes conflicting rules for eligibility and access, strategies that work well in one system can be replicated across child and family-serving systems to ensure they are family centered. Involving families as equal partners and leaders in decision making is a crucial strategy for advancing more equitable early childhood systems.

WHAT WE KNOW

It is crucial to involve families in designing how services are accessed from the beginning to minimize misunderstandings about eligibility and access. This looks like consulting families in all steps of their children's education and healthcare—including deciding what is most important (agenda setting), planning, implementation, and evaluation—as well as providing support as needed to maintain involvement.

WHAT WE NEED

Strategies to engage and learn from families include: working with community-based groups to reach families where they are, asking families to share their knowledge, and becoming familiar with and supporting informal community-based family networks. [The New Practice Lab](#) provides numerous resources and ideas for how to design services “in partnership with the people who use them.”

THERE ARE 36 DIFFERENT FEDERAL PROGRAMS WITH DIFFERENT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA that support child and family wellbeing. These are supplemented and complicated by numerous state and local initiatives with varying access rules.



HOW TO SUPPORT

Equity in the minimization of barriers to access needs to be a priority when developing family friendly systems and services. This means considering how race and ethnicity, immigration and socioeconomic status, literacy and disability, inflexible work schedules, transportation, and many other factors can affect family engagement with services.

Children and families can be supported at age-based transition points between systems, such as the transition into kindergarten. Children experience a smoother and more successful transition to formal schooling when kindergarten classrooms are connected with families through their child care and preschool programs, before they make the transition.

As part of the 2016-17 budget, NC Senate Bill 740 directs the Department of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Department of Public Instruction and any other interested early childhood agencies, to devise a standardized process for preschool teachers to transition children into kindergarten. The North Carolina Early Learning Network provides a host of resources to support communities, schools and educators who want to improve this transition point for children and families.

Incorporating a diverse group of families in all stages of the planning process is the best way to ensure that the needs of all North Carolina's caregivers and children will be at the forefront of policy implementation.

INITIATIVES WORKING IN THIS AREA



Family Support Network of North

Carolina is a statewide organization

committed to drawing on lived experience of staff to help families with children with special healthcare needs navigate systems and overcome structural barriers. Family members in the FSN network are provided platforms to uplift their lived experience and wisdom by serving in state and local leadership opportunities.



Advocates for Medically Fragile Kids

NC is dedicated to advocating for the rights and needs of medically fragile

children and their families. Powered solely by volunteer family advocates who work with legislators and other policy makers, they work with individual families as well as collaborate with other organizations serving children to best educate and empower families to advocate for their medically fragile children.



ourBRIDGE for KIDS supports the education, acculturation, and resilience of newly arrived immigrant

and refugee children and their families in Charlotte, NC. They do so through full-day Out of School programs that support socio-emotional development, academic skills, and English language acquisition. Their Community-Based programs include cultural events, educational opportunities, connection to necessary resources, and overall family support.

Visit the Pathways Action Map to learn more about these and other initiatives leading efforts in this area.

