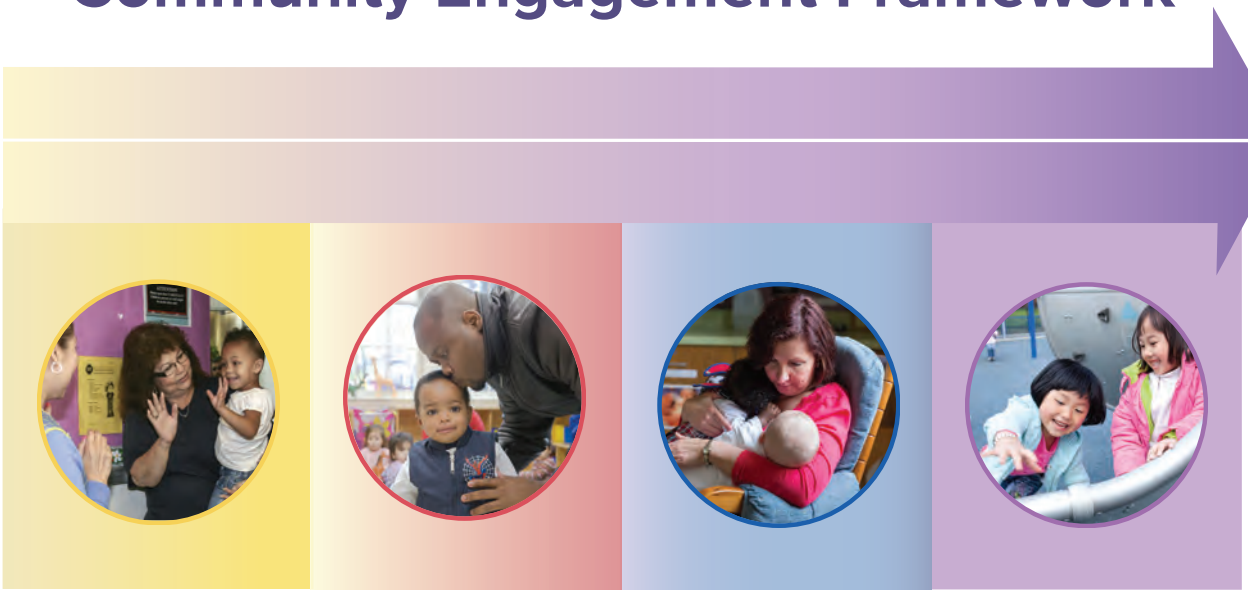
Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



2nd Edition

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Early Childhood National Centers

NATIONAL CENTER ON Parent, Family and Community Engagement

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Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework

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INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, a revision of the PFCE Framework published in 2011 by the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families.

The Head Start PFCE Framework provides programs with a research-based, organizational guide for implementing Head Start Program Performance Standards for parent, family, and community engagement.

We have revised the Head Start PFCE Framework to reflect the experiences of the field in using the Framework. This version is the product of more than 5 years of continuous learning and improvement, based on feedback from readers like you. If you used the original Head Start PFCE Framework, this version will look familiar.

This revision retains the organizational approach to systemic, integrated, comprehensive parent, family, community engagement. That's because this approach has helped programs to coordinate the Program Foundations and Impact Areas (program elements) to make progress toward Family and Child Outcomes.

Family partnerships services, 45 CFR § 1302.52(b)

A program must implement intake and family assessment procedures to identify family strengths and needs related to the family engagement outcomes as described in the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework, including family well-being, parent-child relationships, families as lifelong educators, families as learners, family engagement in transitions, family connections to peers and the local community, and families as advocates and leaders.

We have added Access and Continuity, a new Program Impact Area, because access to and continuity of services—within programs and across communities—are critical to positive child and family outcomes. The child outcomes now include school readiness and other dimensions of children's health and development. Each of these dimensions depends on the others.

The organizational approach and the more holistic child outcomes are intended to help Head Start and Early Head Start leaders and staff see how the many resources provided by the Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System can be used together to complement and reinforce each other.

Head Start and Early Head Start leaders and staff have helped us see the need to sharpen definitions of family and community engagement, the Program Foundations and Impact Areas, and the terms "systemic", "integrated" and "comprehensive". We highlight the importance of equity, inclusiveness and cultural and linguistic responsiveness to family engagement. Finally, for each program element, we offer many new strategies as well as some familiar ones—together with parent perspectives—for making progress toward achieving family outcomes. These are presented in a separate resource, ***Strategies for Implementing the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework***.

We hope that the Framework helps you—directors, teachers, family service workers, home visitors, parents and other family members, in short, everyone in Head Start and Early Head Start programs—recognize and value the roles that each of you play in promoting positive child and family outcomes. Family engagement is a shared responsibility. PFCE is everyone's business.

DEFINING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement is an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families.

At the program level, family engagement involves parents' engagement with their children and with staff as they work together toward the goals that families choose for themselves and their children. It also involves families and staff working toward goals to improve the program. Head Start and Early Head Start staff work together with families, other professionals, and community partners in ways that promote **equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness**.

Children are at the heart of meaningful family engagement. They are the inspiration for positive, goal-oriented, parent-provider relationships.

Parents enter into relationships with staff on their children's behalf, and they deepen these relationships with their children in mind. They know their children better than anyone—their temperaments, personalities, strengths, vulnerabilities, talents, and special needs. They know their own cultures and the cultures they want to transmit to their children. When parents share their knowledge, they improve provider practices and program quality.

Head Start and Early Head Start staff create authentic partnerships with parents when they convey their eagerness to welcome parents' expertise and their readiness to share the care. Parents can believe in the partnership when they feel the passion providers share with them—for the quality of the child's everyday experiences, for supporting the parent-child relationship, and for laying the foundations early for a thriving future.

Community engagement refers to the mutually respectful, strengths-based interactions of Head Start and Early Head Start staff and families with community members and agencies at all levels. These partnerships support parents' roles as valued community members and their progress toward their goals for themselves and their children.

Head Start and Early Head Start staff and community agencies build partnerships that honor and are responsive to the languages and cultures of the families they serve.

Community partners provide tangible child development supports and resources that families and staff want and need. They can work with families and Head Start and Early Head Start staff toward such goals as parents' educational advancement, economic mobility, and other aspects of family well-being.

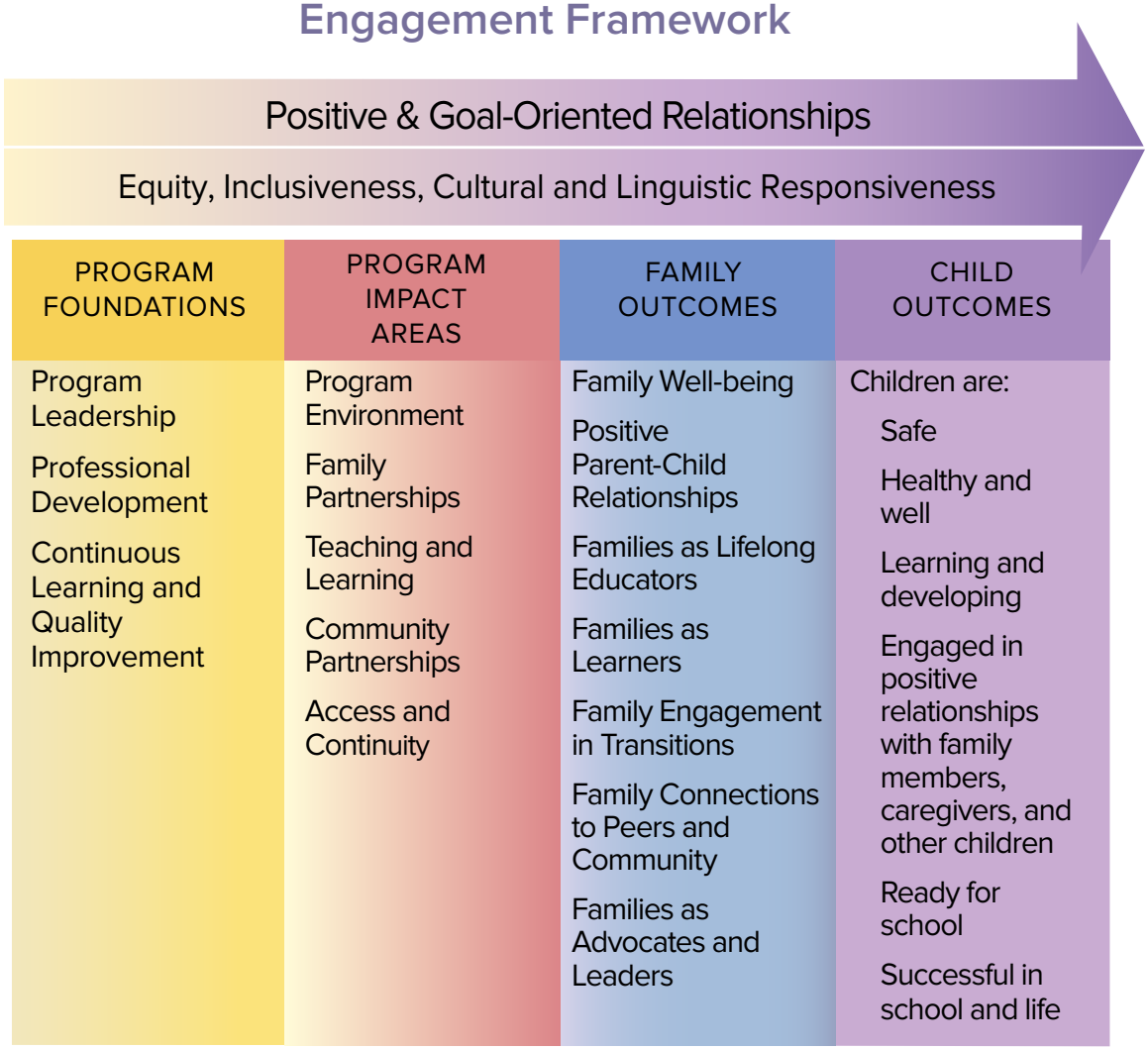
Head Start and Early Head Start staff actively seek out and respond to community voices, strengths, and needs. They collaborate with families, community members, and other local agencies to identify common goals, align resources, and share data for continuous improvement and effective partnerships.

What is the Purpose of the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework?

From the beginning of life, families nurture their children to be healthy and to develop the capacities they will need to be ready for school and successful in life. Head Start and Early Head Start program staff share these goals and collaborate with families as they work toward these goals. The Head Start PFCE Framework is an organizational guide for collaboration among families and Head Start and Early Head Start programs, staff, and community service providers to promote positive, enduring outcomes for children and families.

The Head Start PFCE Framework describes the program elements—Program Foundations and Impact Areas—in early learning programs that can work together to positively influence child and family outcomes. The Framework identifies equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and positive goal-oriented relationships as important drivers for these outcomes.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES ARE SYSTEMIC, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE

Every day, parents, other family and community members, and professionals in Head Start and Early Head Start interact in many ways. These interactions include valuable, relationship-based practices that help families achieve their goals. These interactions can become more effective and more likely to result in lasting outcomes if they are mutually reinforcing and carried out in a coordinated way. By that we mean that the interactions are part of a plan that connects them to a program's full range of family engagement efforts intended to achieve family and child outcomes.

The Head Start PFCE Framework draws on a range of research conducted in Head Start and Early Head Start and other early childhood programs, as well as K-12 schools. The terms, such as "provider" and "teacher" used in the **What the Research Says**, correspond to the terms used in the studies cited.

In order for parent, family, and community engagement practices to be effective and have long-term impact for children and families, they need to be systemic, integrated, and comprehensive. These terms are defined as follows:

What the Research Says

The organizational context of early childhood programs is important for establishing quality family partnerships (Douglass, 2011) that lead to positive child outcomes.

High-quality family partnership practices are best achieved when leaders model reciprocal, professional, caring relationships and share power within the entire organization (Douglass, 2011; Douglass & Gittell, 2012).

Establishing relational trust and focusing on accountability across systems of care are shown to improve partnerships with families and promote progress toward addressing systemic challenges (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Systemic

All staff in Head Start and Early Head Start programs have a role to play in promoting Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. By *Systemic PFCE*, we mean that individuals understand the roles that they and others in their program play across systems and services. They see how these roles work together to promote the vision of PFCE that they share. PFCE is everyone's business.

Integrated

All parts of a program achieve better Parent, Family, and Community Engagement results by working together. By *Integrated PFCE*, we mean that everyone in Head Start and Early Head Start programs coordinates and reinforces each other's efforts in order to maximize their impact. Staff coordinate within and across their different roles and the services they provide. They also coordinate with community partners to help families access community activities and services and to provide seamless experiences for families.

Comprehensive

Program services are designed for holistic staff responses. By *Comprehensive PFCE,* we mean that staff consider the full range of strengths, interests, and needs of each child and family. Staff then connect families with all the available services and resources they need to achieve their goals. A comprehensive response increases the likelihood that progress in one area will reinforce progress in other areas.

POSITIVE, GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS ADVANCE FAMILY AND CHILD OUTCOMES

Positive, goal-oriented relationships develop over time through interactions among families, family members, and staff in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These relationships

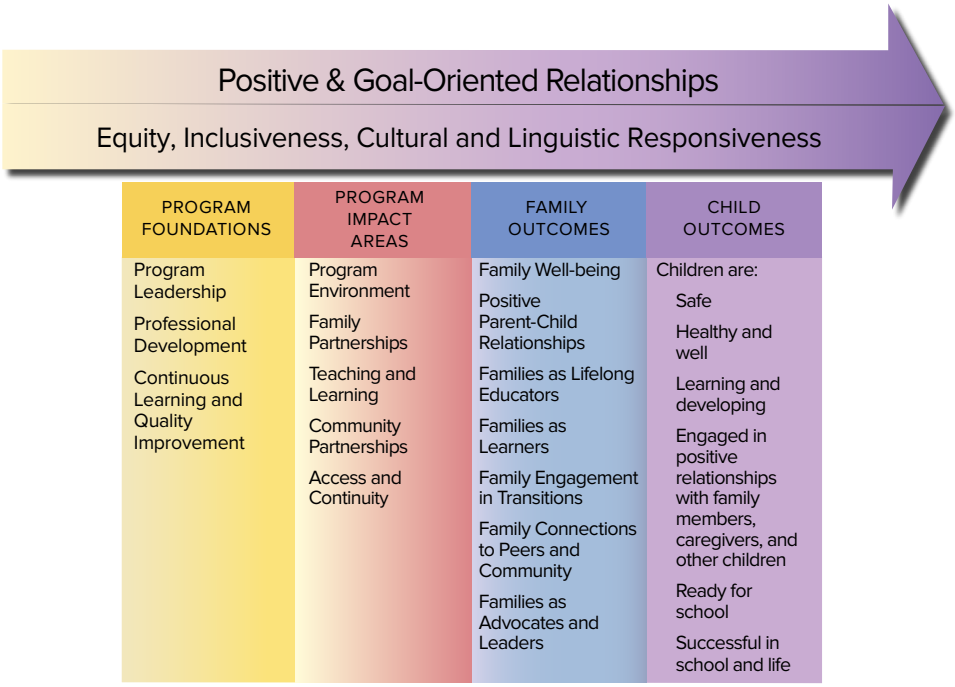
- are fueled by families' passion for their children,
- are based on mutual respect and trust,
- affirm and celebrate families' cultures and languages,
- provide opportunities for two-way communications,
- include authentic interactions that are meaningful to those who participate in them, and
- often require an awareness of one's personal biases and how those biases can affect mutual respect and trust.

What the Research Says

Programs that prioritize effective family engagement practices support the efforts of providers and all staff to build positive, goal-oriented relationships with families.

Families who are active, respected participants in their children's learning and educational settings can help providers see new ways to build safe, welcoming, and trusting environments (Reedy & McGrath, 2010; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010).

Positive, goal-oriented relationships improve wellness by reducing isolation and stress for both families and staff. When these relationships focus on shared goals for children, staff and families can experience the support that comes from knowing that they all are on the same team. These relationships support the aims of equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness.



PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BEGINS WITH THE END IN MIND

Systemic, integrated, and comprehensive parent, family, and community engagement begins with the end in mind. With positive, goal-oriented relationships, PFCE focuses on the family and child outcomes that it is designed to achieve.

Child Outcomes

In line with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, the overarching outcomes that virtually all programs strive for are that children are

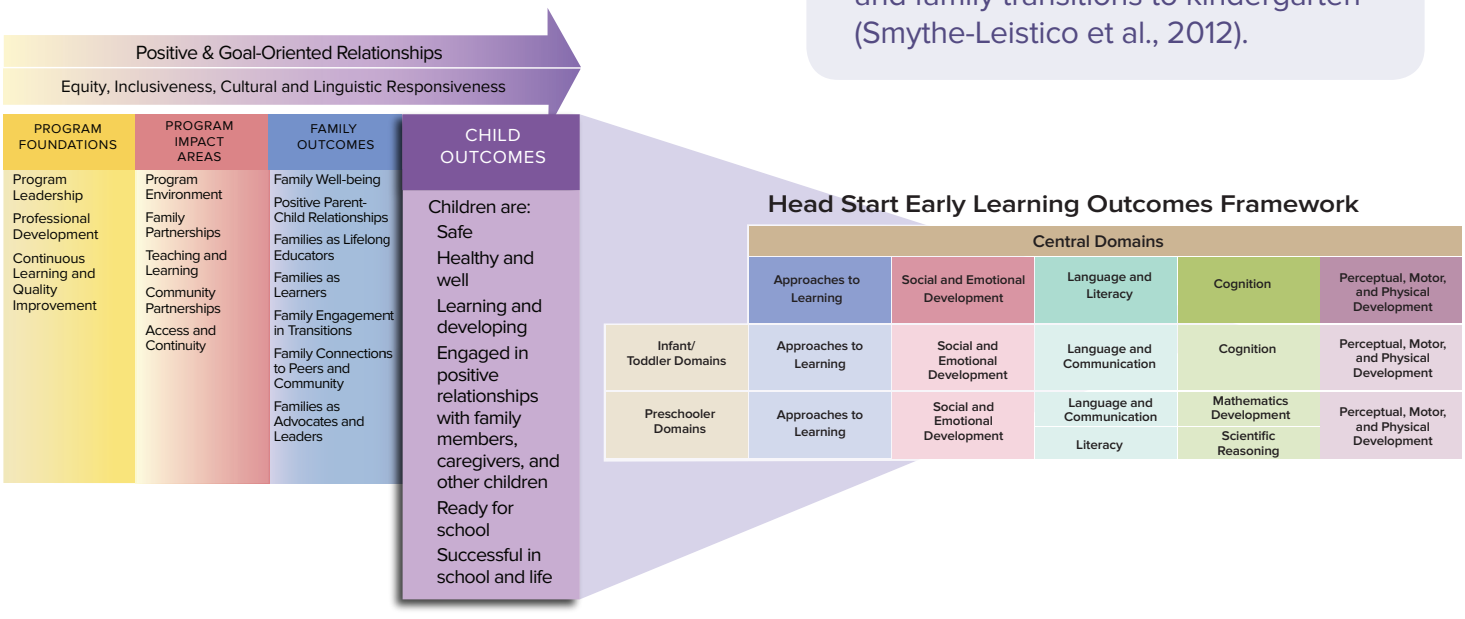
- safe;
- healthy and well;
- learning and developing;
- engaged in positive relationships with family members, caregivers, and other children;
- ready for school; and
- successful in school and life.

What the Research Says

The early years of a child's life are critical times to foster bonds between children and their families and other primary caregivers, and to establish positive relationships that promote children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Klebanov & Travis, 2015).

Family engagement plays a major role in children's school readiness, influencing their social-emotional and academic competencies (e.g., Starkey & Klein, 2000; Powell et al., 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011).

These effects have been found all the way through K–12 and beyond (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2013; Jeynes, 2016). Family engagement also improves child-teacher relationships (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008) and helps smooth child and family transitions to kindergarten (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012).



Family Outcomes

The Head Start PFCE Framework specifies seven family outcomes that research has shown to promote positive child outcomes.

Family Well-being

Families are safe, healthy, have opportunities for educational advancement and economic mobility, and have access to physical and mental health services, housing and food assistance, and other family support services.

Positive Parent-Child Relationships

Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's health, development, and learning.

Families as Lifelong Educators

Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, at school, and in their communities.

Families as Learners

Parents and families learn about their child's personality, development, and learning style. They also advance their own learning interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.

What the Research Says

Head Start and Early Head Start programs improve families' knowledge of child-rearing practices (Love et al., 2005). In Head Start and Early Head Start, parent knowledge relates most directly to three of the PFCE Framework family outcomes:

- Positive parent-child relationships
- Families as lifelong educators
- Families as learners

Access to information about their children's learning and development affects families' self-efficacy, confidence, and skills (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005).

This access also influences families' motivation to trust, collaborate, and remain positively involved with providers and programs (Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002; Powell et al., 2010).

Family Engagement in Transitions

Parents and families encourage and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments within and between, Early Head Start, Head Start, early childhood services, early elementary grades, and beyond.

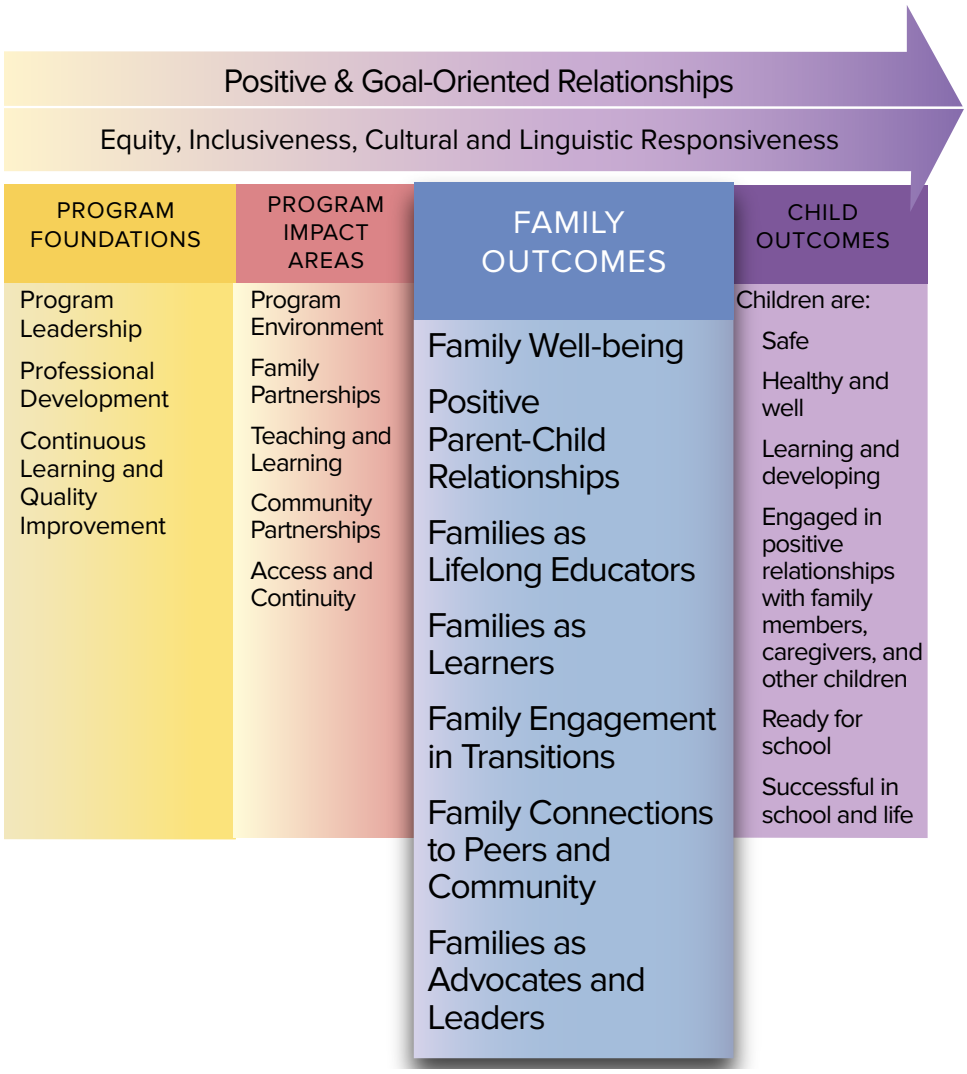
Family Connections to Peers and Community

Parents and families form connections with peers, mentors, and other community members in formal or informal social networks. These networks are supportive and educational. They honor and are inclusive of families' home language and culture, and they enhance families' social well-being and community life.

Families as Advocates and Leaders

Parents and families advocate for their children and play leadership roles in Head Start and Early Head Start. They participate in decision-making, policy development, and organizing activities in communities and states to improve children's safety, health, development, and learning experiences.

These outcomes can guide Head Start and Early Head Start staff as they partner with families on the goals parents set for themselves and their children, and as they track progress together toward these goals.



PROGRAM ELEMENTS PROMOTE STRONG OUTCOMES

The program elements are the defined Program Foundations and Impact Areas within Head Start that promote strong family engagement and child outcomes. There are eight program elements that work together to promote systemic, integrated, and comprehensive PFCE. These elements represent selected systems and services in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Program Foundations

To create lasting change for families and children, Head Start and Early Head Start programs need strong Program Foundations that work together: Program Leadership, Professional Development, and Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement.

Program Leadership

Head Start and Early Head Start program directors and other leaders, managers, and parent leaders set expectations and model effective PFCE practice. Leaders set a clear vision and goals and make sure that program policies, operational procedures, and practices (such as hiring) actively promote PFCE. They monitor activities in all of the Program Foundations and Program Impact Areas and make changes when needed to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing. Leaders advocate for the inclusion of diverse family voices at all levels of the program, including in formal decision-making groups, such as parent committees and policy councils.

Professional Development

PFCE professional development is important for all staff, regardless of staff role. Professional development plans can be aligned with both continuous learning and improvement data as well as family and community feedback. These plans include training, ongoing supports (such as coaching, supervision, recognition of challenges, and successes), and information about career options.

When staff members come together as a community of learners, they create a mutually supportive environment for continuous learning and improvement. Families, other community members, and staff can co-design and co-lead training to strengthen family and community partnerships.

What the Research Says

Programs are better able to work toward effective family engagement when they are committed to open, two-way, ongoing communication with families (Reedy & McGrath, 2010).

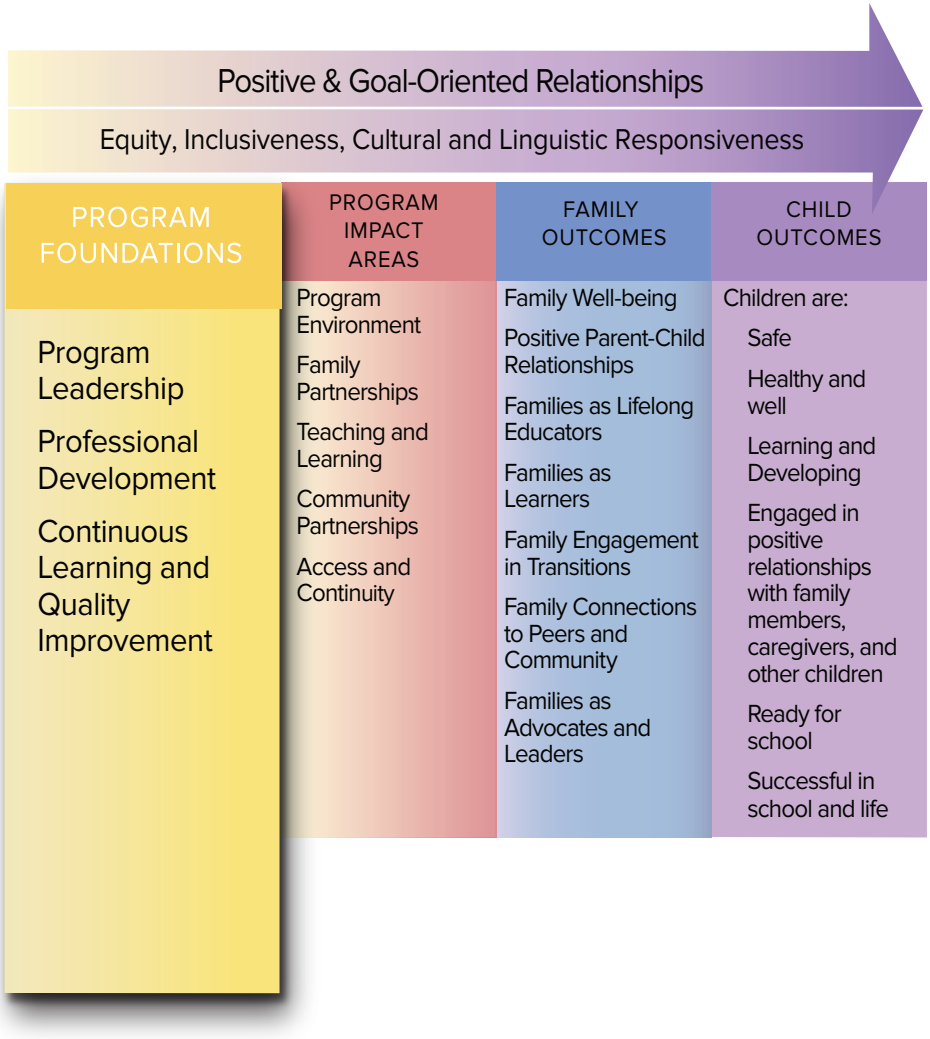
Providers' positive experiences with family engagement contribute to their professional development and job satisfaction.

When providers experience less stress (Jepson & Forrest, 2006), as well as professional growth and satisfaction with their work, they are more likely to remain in the field (Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009; Wells, 2015).

Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

Head Start and Early Head Start program leadership, staff, and families are committed to using data to improve family engagement practices on a continuous basis. Leaders and managers build support and capacity for this work among staff, families, and community partners. Together they can work in selecting indicators of PFCE progress, planning for continuous improvement, and interpreting data, including community strengths and needs assessments.

Program leaders seek out opportunities to use their program data to inform local and state planning and policy decisions. They monitor their own progress toward PFCE outcomes and periodically refine plans and actions.



Program Impact Areas

The Program Impact Areas are selected service activities that have the greatest influence on family outcomes. The Program Foundations are coordinated to support Program Impact Areas.

Program Environment

Program environment refers to the features of the program and its physical setting that affect the interactions and relationships that families and staff experience. High-quality program environments help protect the health and safety of children, families, and staff; make them feel welcomed, valued, and respected; and promote their well-being, learning, and development. High-quality environments facilitate cultural and linguistic responsiveness, promote open and regular communication, and provide a sense of support to families. These environments create opportunities for families to build relationships with other families and community organizations.

Family Partnerships

In family partnerships, program staff and families build ongoing, reciprocal, and respectful relationships. Program staff value families' unique expertise about their children. Staff engage in regular communication with families to understand their goals for their children and themselves and work toward those goals together.

Families' goals may include, among others, obtaining a job, seeking housing stability, advancing their education, developing their own advocacy and leadership skills, and contributing their skills and strengths to Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

What the Research Says

Strong partnerships between teachers and families help to build their trust in each other (Karakuş & Savaş, 2012). Mutual trust helps providers feel more confident and open with families, especially when discussing concerns about a child's development or behavior (Reedy & McGrath, 2010).

Families' perceptions of teacher responsiveness are an important aspect of parent-school relationships. Their perceptions are linked to the frequency of their involvement in their children's schools (Powell et al., 2010).

Teaching and Learning

Through teaching and learning, families and staff work together to promote children's learning, development, and school readiness. As children's first and most important teachers, families are engaged as partners in their children's learning and development.

Families share their knowledge about their child. Teachers and home visitors share information about the child's progress. Head Start and Early Head Start programs build connections with community partners to offer children and families access to other learning opportunities.

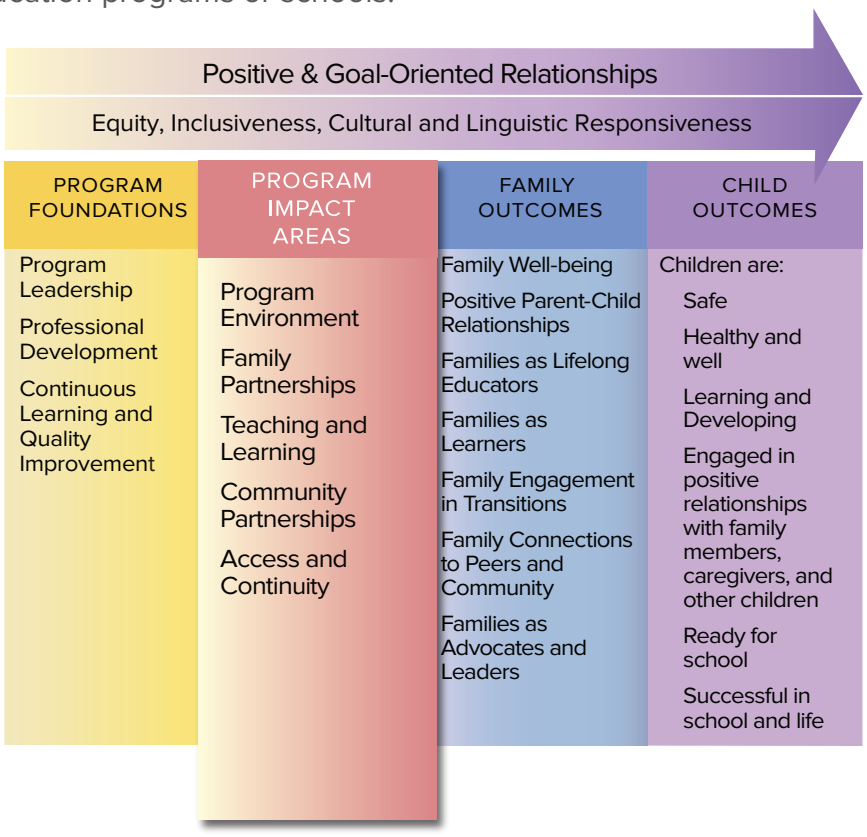
Community Partnerships

Through community partnerships, Head Start and Early Head Start, child care programs, and community organizations build collaborative relationships that support positive child and family outcomes. These organizations may include libraries, health centers, schools and school districts, sources of economic support, the workforce, higher education, human service agencies, faith-based organizations, businesses, and others.

These organizations can respond to families' interests and needs, connect families to outside resources, encourage parent and family engagement in children's learning, and use community strengths and needs assessment data to guide their collaboration. Partnerships also can promote successful transitions for children and families from one service setting to another over time, for example, or when multiple services are needed during the same time period.

Access and Continuity

Within Head Start and Early Head Start eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance (ERSEA) procedures are developed by using community assessment data and engaging former and currently enrolled families, staff, and community members. These policies and procedures help Head Start and Early Head Start programs to provide services for families most in need of them. The intention is to address specific challenges, such as family homelessness, that can interfere with consistent service access. Transitions procedures and practices can also ensure effective transitions from Early Head Start to Head Start and to other early childhood education programs or schools.

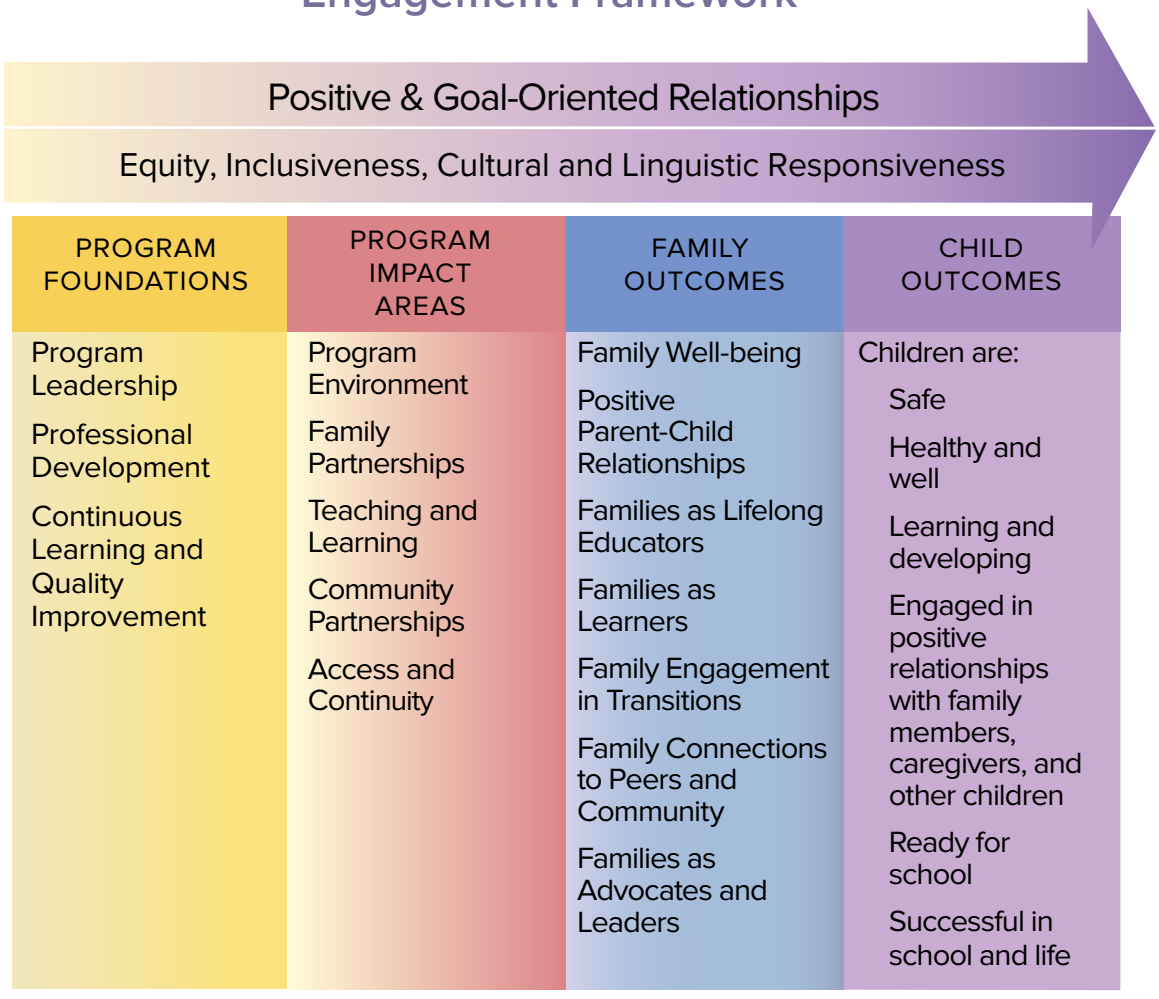


USING THE HEAD START PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Head Start PFCE Framework can be used in program-wide strategic planning, program design and management, continuous learning and improvement activities, and professional development for staff, as well as with governing bodies and parent groups. The Framework can also be used to help all staff members to see their role in systemic, integrated, and comprehensive PFCE, and to coordinate their PFCE efforts with those in other roles.

Consider using the PFCE Framework to enhance and coordinate program services. You might use the Framework to inform community partners about Head Start and Early Head Start parent and family engagement goals and the importance of those goals for school readiness and success in school and life. The Head Start PFCE Framework is intended to inspire a renewed spirit of collaboration with families and community partners as programs identify and take next steps to engage families and communities to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework: Strategies for Progress

Programs and families are more likely to achieve family outcomes when PFCE Program Foundations are coordinated with each other and with Program Impact Areas. While all the family outcomes are relevant for each Head Start and Early Head Start Program, they may not all be relevant for each family. Each family's Head Start and Early Head Start experience is uniquely determined by their own interests, needs, strengths, and the goals they set for themselves and their children. Families and programs work toward these goals by deciding together about meaningful opportunities, recognizing barriers, and measuring progress.

Explore selected examples of strategies that programs and families can use to achieve family outcomes using the Head Start PFCE Framework. Keep in mind that there are many more strategies than are shown here. Many of these strategies can be used to promote progress in several family outcomes at the same time. The following tables offer examples of broad strategies that more generally promote all seven family outcomes.

See ***Strategies for Implementing the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework*** for more examples of strategies.

Strategies for All Family Outcomes

Consider these examples of strategies that promote the achievement of all seven outcomes.

Program Foundations	Family Well-being	Parent-Child Relationship	Families as Lifelong Educators	Families as Learners	Family Engagement in Transition	Family Connections to Peers and Community	Families as Advocates and Leaders
Program Leadership	Leaders have systems, supports and structures in place to inform family and staff about program goals to support effective long term strategic planning within the five-year project period. Leaders promote collaboration across content areas and multi-disciplinary teams to ensure responsive and coordinated approaches to make progress toward both family and program goals.						
Professional Development	Leaders create and maintain professional development systems that promote positive, goal-oriented relationships, cultural responsiveness, reflective practice, and workforce development with the intention of supporting family, program, and community growth. Program staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers are required to comply with program confidentiality policies and professional ethical standards.						
Continuous Learning & Quality Improvement	Leaders analyze and use program self-assessment and community assessment data to set strategic long-term goals for the provision of family and community engagement program services. Leaders include families and community partners in assessing and monitoring progress toward each program goal.						

Strategies for All Family Outcomes, cont.

Program Impact Areas	Family Well-being	Parent-Child Relationship	Families as Lifelong Educators	Families as Learners	Family Engagement in Transition	Family Connections to Peers and Community	Families as Advocates and Leaders
Program Environment	Program staff reflects on daily practice and experience to enhance self-awareness and to build relationships with families. All program staff welcome, honor, and support all family structures, sizes, and arrangements, and the unique cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of families. Leaders and program staff create family-friendly spaces with pictures and materials that affirm and welcome all families.						
Family Partnerships	Families and staff seek opportunities to build strong, mutually respectful relationships, and staff collaborate with families to identify family interests, needs, and aspirations. Program staff use the Family Partnership process as a tool for ongoing relationship-building and as a basis for goal setting, individualized family services, and follow up.						
Teaching & Learning	Families and program staff consistently participate in positive, goal-oriented relationships to support children's learning and development. Program staff and families partner and share what they know and learn about in their care. Families and staff engage in sharing what they each know and learn about their child, while acknowledging parents' primary role as their child's first teacher.						
Community Partnerships	Program staff and families engage community members and organizations as partners to help address the goals, interests, needs, and aspirations of families. Program staff link families with meaningful support networks, peer-to-peer groups, and volunteer opportunities in the community.						
Access & Continuity	Leaders engage currently and formerly enrolled families to understand families' perspectives on their experiences of program access, participation, and community support.						

A NOTE FOR PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems

As you know, Head Start and Early Head Start programs are part of State, Territory, and Tribal early childhood systems that are also working on aspects of family and community engagement.

To support early childhood systems for family engagement, we have developed a PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems. This Framework was developed in partnership with the Office of Child Care and Office of Head Start, with extensive feedback from State, Territory, and Tribal Child Care and Development Fund lead agencies and their partners as well as other early childhood national and local stakeholders. It is a resource intended for use in systems level family engagement planning and implementation.

The Head Start PFCE Framework has been adopted as a central part of this systems level resource. In the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems, the Head Start PFCE Framework is referred to as the program level framework, in order to be inclusive of all early care and education environments. Please note that the PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems is not a requirement for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems provides a vision for integrating family engagement across early childhood systems. At the program level, the Framework specifies the elements that can be coordinated to make progress toward child and family outcomes.

At the systems level, the Framework defines seven **system components** that can work together to promote family engagement in early childhood systems and programs. These systems components include:

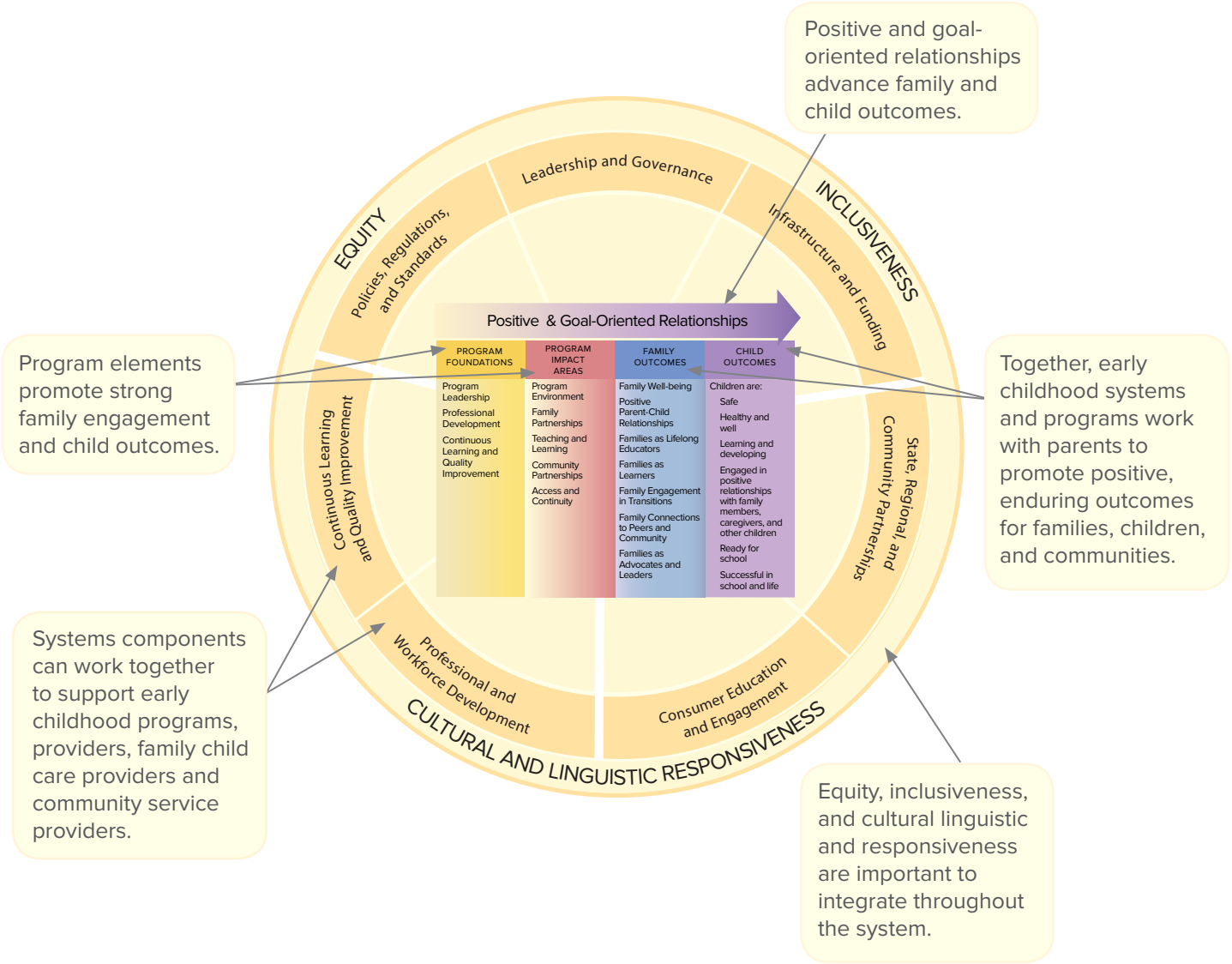
- Governance and Leadership
- Policies, Regulations, Standards, and Licensing
- Infrastructure and Funding
- Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement
- State and Community Partnerships
- Consumer Education and Engagement
- Workforce and Professional Development

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems identifies important drivers for these outcomes across the entire early childhood field—equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and positive and goal-oriented relationships.

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems: A Visual Guide

The PFCE Framework for Early Childhood Systems is a visual guide for understanding how early childhood systems components can be aligned to support early childhood programs providers, family child care givers, and community service providers. Together, early childhood systems and programs work with parents to promote positive, enduring outcomes for families, children, and communities. Equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness are important to integrate throughout the system.

Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems



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