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# QSLA Family Engagement Framework: Research & Practice

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## Introduction and Purpose

Parents are the first teachers of their children. Family engagement in offspring's early educational experiences prepares them for school and supports their future academic achievement and health. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and neighbors play a critical role in nurturing a child's intellectual, physical and socio-emotional development.<sup>1</sup> There is a strong research base confirming that everyone (child-parent-teacher) benefits and everything (classroom-program-system) works better when families collaborate with educators and schools.<sup>2</sup>

The basis for successful family engagement in early care and education rests on the ability of school-system leaders to develop a socio-pedagogical environment nurturing genuine, respectful and dynamic partnerships with the populations they serve.<sup>3</sup> Families are embedded in communities and folks know where they are welcomed, respected and valued. Based on the work of developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner, Head Start was conceived as a system to strengthen the interaction between school, family and community to foster the wellbeing of disadvantaged children.<sup>4</sup> The tenets for effective family engagement—applicable to this day—were embedded in the program's objectives since its inception: strengthen families as the primary nurturers of their children, make community services accessible to them and involve them in decision-making.<sup>5</sup> The program arose with a clear and effective vision for family engagement and advances in neuroscience have enabled researchers to corroborate the soundness of the model which conceives the interactions of school, family and community as essential.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars, policy makers, practitioners and advocates have offered various definitions of family engagement over the past half century. Bronfenbrenner, De Gaetano, Epstein, Espinosa, Halgunseth, Henderson, Weiss and many others have helped shaped the field's theoretical and methodological canon.<sup>7</sup> Conceptual and pedagogical progress in early education has enabled

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, & U.S. Department of Education, (2016). *Policy Statement on Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/policy-statement-on-family-engagement.pdf>; National PTA Center for Family Engagement, (2017). *Report to the Board of Directors by Helen Westmoreland, Director of Family Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/report-august-2017-final>.

<sup>2</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, (2017). *The Family Engagement Inventory (FEI): A Brief Cross-disciplinary Synthesis*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

<sup>3</sup> Aspen Institute, (2012). *Two Generations, One Future: Moving Parents and Children Beyond Poverty Together*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute; Delgado-Gaitan, C.D., (2004). *Involving Latino Families in Schools: Raising Student Achievement through Home-School Partnerships*. Thousand Oaks, CA Corwin Press.

<sup>4</sup> Bronfenbrenner, U., (1979). *The Ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University; Bronfenbrenner, U., 1986. Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6).

<sup>5</sup> Zill, N., Resnick, G., Kim, K., O'Donnell, K., Sorongon, A., McKey, R.H., D'Elío, M.A., (2003). Head Start FACES 2000: A whole-child perspective on program performance (Fourth Progress Report). [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/faces00\\_4thprogress.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/faces00_4thprogress.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Bronfenbrenner, U., (2004). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; Castro, D. C., Bryant, D. M., Peisner-Feiberg, E. S., & Skinner, M. L., (2004). "Parent involvement in Head Start programs: the role of parent, teacher and classroom characteristics." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 19(3).

<sup>7</sup> De Gaetano, Y., (2007). "The role of culture in engaging Latino parents' involvement in school." *Urban Education*, 42(2); Epstein, J. L., (1987). "Toward a theory of family-school connections: teacher practices and parent involvement" in K. Hurrelman, F. X., Kaufman, & Losel (Eds.) *Social intervention: potential and constraints* (pp. 121-136). Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter; Espinosa, L., (1995). *Hispanic parent involvement in early childhood programs*. ERIC Digest. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education; Halgunseth, L., Peterson, A., Stark, D., & Moddie, S., (2009). Family engagement, diverse families and early childhood education programs: an integrated review of the literature. National Association for the Education of Young Children and Pre-K Now, (2009). *Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and*

leaders to move beyond understanding parental involvement to promoting family engagement. Teachers are aware of the organizational, programmatic and, especially, child development benefits accruing from their integration of new research-based concepts and culturally relevant approaches into their daily practice.<sup>8</sup>

In what follows, we will review the definition and key dimensions of family engagement. Next, we will compare the two theoretical-methodological frameworks circumscribing Quality Start Los Angeles' (QSLA's) family engagement efforts. Moreover, we will evaluate the elements of QSLA's Family Engagement Capacity-Building Model as they relate to the organizational and operational frameworks norming its functions and goals. Lastly, we will offer programmatic and curricular recommendations to support implementing partners' capacity-building activities.

### What is Family Engagement?

Family engagement can be conceived both as a normative criterion and a programmatic obligation. Researchers describe it as a process comprised of indispensable features to achieve optimal relationships/partnerships between families and programs.<sup>9</sup> Practitioners consider it a necessary organizational element in sound early childhood systems, programs and centers.<sup>10</sup>

California's local control funding and accountability regulations offer communities greater freedom to define their operations and concomitant responsibility to explain how local plans address student needs in eight priority areas. Parent engagement is one of the key areas and there are multiple approaches to facilitate and increase family involvement and participation in school—including the framework released by the California Department of Education in 2014 which is employed by many school districts in the state.

The core of all research and corresponding parental engagement models in existence stems from Bronfenbrenner's work. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) produced a research synthesis identifying six key dimensions in the continuous process of family engagement.<sup>11</sup>

- Encourage and validate participation in decision-making
- Facilitate consistent, culturally responsive communication
- Exchange of skills, knowledge and cultural assets
- Create and sustain learning activities/opportunities at home and in the community

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*Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature.* NAEYC, The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/research/FamEngage.pdf>; Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L., (2002). A new wave of evidence: the impact of school family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual Synthesis 2002. Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved from <https://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>; Weiss, H. B., Caspe, M., & Lopez, M. E., (2006). *Family involvement in early childhood education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

<sup>8</sup> García, E. E., Jensen, B., & Cuéllar, D., (2006). "Early academic achievement of Hispanics in the United States: Implications for teacher preparation. *The New Educator*, 36(2).

<sup>9</sup> EdSource, (2014). The Power of Parents: Research Underscores the Impact of Parent Involvement in Schools. Retrieved from <https://edsources.org/wp-content/publications/Power-of-Parents-Feb-2014.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> California Department of Education, (2014). *Family engagement framework: A tool for California school districts.* California Department of Education & WestEd. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/pf/documents/famengageframeenglish.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children and Pre-K Now, (2009). *Family Engagement, Diverse Families, and Early Childhood Education Programs: An Integrated Review of the Literature.* NAEYC, The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/research/FamEngage.pdf>.

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- Value learning at home and establish home-school goals for children
- Offer professional development to teachers and program leaders

The genealogy of the dimensions parallels the stages in early childhood family engagement scholarship. Early studies focused on parental involvement—individual agency—and showed a positive association between parent participation in school-defined practices and child outcomes.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, researchers began incorporating family and structural factors impacting individual agency and participation, confirming that integrative, multidimensional parental engagement models yield positive child outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

Recent studies of family engagement centering on relational approaches have offered strong evidence that culturally appropriate family-school partnerships founded on shared values and co-defined practices produce benefits across all areas of the early education process.<sup>14</sup> Research suggests that respectful, reciprocal partnerships between families and early childhood educators are associated with a) children’s learning, development and wellbeing; b) families’ sense of self-efficacy, quality of parenting and empathy toward the school and staff; and c) teachers’ connectedness to and communication with families.<sup>15</sup>

QSLA’s definition of family engagement identifies it as a programmatic responsibility. This conceptualization was crafted by early childhood leaders and stakeholders convened under the auspices of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment in 2014-2015.<sup>16</sup>

Among other findings, the group highlighted that there was inconsistent support and engagement of families in Los Angeles County and proposed a vision to turn *authentic* family engagement into a core value and central component of the region’s early childhood systems ecology. They defined family engagement as follows:

*“Family engagement is a shared responsibility among providers, caregivers, and families in which institutions and organizations commit to working with families in meaningful and culturally respectful ways. Family engagement is continuous across a child’s life from cradle to career and carried out everywhere children learn—at home, in childcare settings, in health settings, and in community places and spaces.”*

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<sup>12</sup> Mantzicopolous, P., (2003). “Flunking kindergarten after Head Start: An inquiry into the contribution of contextual and individual variables,” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(2).

<sup>13</sup> Weiss et al.; Caspe, M., & Lopez, M. E., (2006). *Lessons from family-strengthening interventions: Learning from evidence-based practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

<sup>14</sup> Bromer, J. & Bibbs, T., (2011). “Relationship-based professional development for support staff and quality improvement in family child care: From research to program development.” *Zero to Three Special Issue on Family Child Care*.

<sup>15</sup> Porter, T. & Bromer, J., (2013). *Family-Provider Partnerships: Examining Alignment of Early Care and Education Professional and Performance Standards, State Competencies, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems Indicators in the Context of Research*. Issue Brief OPRE 2013-35. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>16</sup> LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment & Harder + Company, (2015). *Family at the center: Recommendations on family engagement from early childhood stakeholders in Los Angeles County*. Retrieved from <https://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/LA-Family-Engagement-Report-Oct-20151.pdf>

The conclave of the Angeleno early childhood intelligentsia yielded two crucial results. First, it defined a set of guiding principles to engage families in our culturally diverse context informed by research focusing on family-school partnerships, shared values and co-defined practices:

- Foster mutual respect, shared responsibility and trusting relationships
- Support strong social networks and connections
- Engage families where they are
- Respect, value and be responsive to cultural and linguistic assets
- Identify opportunities to strengthen an integrated systems approach

Second, the leaders and stakeholders suggested the integration of family engagement into the streamlining of quality rating improvement systems underway in Los Angeles County. In that regard, they highlighted the need for additional and consistent training in the most prevalent family engagement model in Los Angeles: Strengthen Families Protective Factors Framework (SFPPF). Such a framework along with the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE) circumscribe QSLA's vision and implementation of family engagement.<sup>17</sup>

### **Comparison of Family Engagement Frameworks**

As seen above, relational family engagement research suggests that authentic family-school partnerships develop where the prevailing culture supports and honors reciprocal relationships; leaders are committed to earning the trust of families; staff, parents and communities share a common vision and have opportunities to develop the skills needed to engage in reciprocal relationships; and practices and policies are co-defined by *all* stakeholders.

QSLA's family engagement implementation efforts are normed organizationally by the PFCE and operationally by the SFPPF. The former specifies systemic structures and functions that can be integrated to foster continuing learning, improvement, institutionalization and sustainability of family engagement. The latter highlights specific strategies to increase family strength and improve child wellbeing. Both PFCE and SFPPF identify family outcomes supporting early learning and development. PFCE defines program foundations and impact areas to achieve family and child outcomes, while SFPS offers concrete, low cost actions and tools to support implementation. In light of the common research base informing the frameworks, they are conceptually and methodologically congruent.<sup>18</sup> They emphasize the development and strengthening of family-educator partnerships, family well-being, parental-child bonding, continuous learning and social interconnectedness.

#### *What are the key elements of the PFCE?*

The PFCE comprises a series of systemic activities integrated across program foundations and impact areas to achieve child outcomes. Program foundations encompass clear leadership

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Office of Head Start, (2011). *The Head Start parent, family and community engagement framework: Promoting family engagement and school readiness from prenatal to age 8*. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/pfce-framework.pdf>; Harper Browne, C., (2014). *The Strengthening Families approach and protective factors framework: Branching out and reaching deeper*. Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/2014/The-Strengthening-Families-Approach-and-Protective-Factors-Framework-Branching-Out-and-Reaching-Deeper.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Weiss et al. and Caspe et al.

priorities, strategic program management plans, data-driven continuous improvement systems, and role-specific staff development. Program impact areas comprise a culturally amenable environment where families are valued and respected, goals are co-developed, teaching and learning take place concurrently at home and in school, and community partners collaborate with programs. There are seven family outcomes under the PFCE:

- Family wellbeing – safe, healthy and financially stable parents and households
- Positive parent-child relationships – knowledgeable and loving parents
- Families as lifelong educators – parents guiding and partaking in children’s learning
- Families as learners – parents seeking information and advancement
- Family engagement in transitions – parents supporting children’s learning in new environments
- Family connections to peers and community – parents connected with peer networks for wellbeing
- Families as advocates and leaders – parents advocating and organizing for their children’s sake

*What are the key elements of the SFPP?*

Strengthen Families is a cost-effective, research-based strategy to increase family stability, promote child development, and reduce abuse and neglect. The approach helps families to develop protective factors by helping them to develop support networks, learn about parenting, cope with problems and stress, access services and opportunities, better nurture and protect their children, and make informed decisions. There are five SFPP protective factors:

- Parental resilience – families that can manage stress, challenges, adversity and trauma
- Social connections – families that can obtain emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support from other parents and friends
- Knowledge of parenting and child development – parents who understand child development and support their children’s physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development
- Concrete support in times of need – access to concrete support and services that address a family’s needs and help minimize stress caused by challenges
- Social and emotional competence of children – family dynamics that help children communicate clearly, control their emotions and make friends

*Core characteristics of an optimal capacity-building family engagement model: foundations of QSLA’s parent engagement objectives (Research Question 1a)*

QSLA implementing partners are developing a family engagement model based on organizational and operational elements framed by PFCE and SFPP. The objective is to create standard operating procedures enabling families a) to experience culturally and linguistically appropriate services conducive to the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of children and parents; b) to develop relationships of trust and open collaboration with staff and other families; and c) to facilitate access to information and community partners enabling families and staff to continue learning, improving and reinforcing the soundness of the system.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Quality Start Los Angeles Logic Model – Family Engagement, (2017). Source materials provided by Los Angeles County Office of Education.

Organizationally, PFCE sets the principles by which QSLA's leadership promotes family engagement outcomes. That is, PFCE outlines the manner in which an early childhood care and education system can foster healthy, loving, knowledgeable, engaged and purposeful families. First, system leaders must guarantee the availability of resources for professional development, continuous improvement, adequate program environments and authentic partnerships. All plans and activities must be anchored in the wellbeing of children and families. All personnel must be appropriately and opportunely trained and supported, they must not be overburdened, and they must collaborate with their local communities and organizations. Second, program leaders must employ all available tools and data sources (e.g., assessments, surveys, meetings, etc.) to understand community-family needs/interests and evaluate the effectiveness of their programmatic and organizational practices. Lastly, teachers and staff must gain the trust of families by respecting their cultures, recognizing/utilizing their assets, sharing knowledge, and co-creating holistic pedagogical opportunities encompassing critical facets of family life (e.g., financial literacy).

Operationally, QSLA implementing partners have ample discretion to conduct family engagement activities. Yet, in congruence with the California Department of Education's Continuous Quality Improvement Pathway, all family-centered, intentional supports offered by programs are framed by SFPF. PFCE defines the expected family outcomes while SFPF identifies and illustrates concrete actions to achieve the outcomes. The framework aligns with national indicators of quality such as Environmental Rating Scales and NAYEC's accreditation standards and allows for flexible implementation. Ideas for implementing and sustaining SFPF in states and communities are constantly updated through a national network sharing best practices from over 30 states across the country.

The core characteristics of an optimal capacity-building family engagement model comprise seven foundational principles:

- Use two-generation approach – teachers work with both parents and children simultaneously to achieve and sustain significant gains
- Consider culture – leaders and teachers are culturally competent and humble
- Focus on strengths – schools use and fortify parental assets
- Mitigate stress – schools create an infrastructure to mitigate toxic stress
- Develop resilience – programs work with families and children to adapt to adversity and come out stronger
- Promote well-being – teachers understand that children and family well-being are one and the same
- Reduce of risk – schools mitigate exposure to risk

Successful family engagement strategies help parents to develop protective factors. They are able to cope with contextual and individual stressors; they show inner strength, self-confidence, hopefulness and the ability to solve problems. They are emotionally available to their children, knowledgeable about age/stage-related developmental expectations, and exercise positive discipline. They build trusting relationships to a) obtain/offer emotional support, b) gain access to resources to help meet basic health and safety necessities, c) understand rights and available services, d) seek help, and e) achieve financial security.

## Quality Start LA Family Engagement Model

QSLA has committed to undertake family engagement efforts grounded in SFPF. Implementing partners have aligned family engagement programmatic and operational principles to promote family resilience and optimal development of children.<sup>20</sup> They envision a system enabling families to become ongoing advocates and decision-makers for their children, schools and communities. They intend to create a system where all programs have a comprehensive and sustainable family engagement plan that actively involves teachers, families and community members in building meaningful and continuous partnerships.

*QSLA family engagement: sharing responsibility among stakeholders in a culturally meaningful manner across settings.*

The QSLA family engagement logic model establishes five categories of inputs (tools, data, personnel, incentives and training) organizing the activities carried out by coaches and providers (technical assistance, data collection and capacity building) to generate short-term and long-term outcomes in various areas (planning, professional development, communication, pedagogy, management and sustainability). Access to family engagement supports and incentives is limited to Tiers 4 and 5 QSLA sites that are expected to integrate family engagement/parent education components into their Quality Improvement Plans (QIP). Coaches are the drivers of the system and the efficacy of QSLA family engagement efforts depends on their work with site administrators, teachers and staff. Jointly, they must follow California's Quality Continuum Framework and the specific Family Engagement Pathway.<sup>21</sup>

Family Engagement Coaches/Specialists are expected to enable fifteen sites to adapt SFPF activities to their families' needs, cultures and languages. They must utilize a family strengths-based approach and reflective practices to conduct monthly (two hour) site visits, complete and update data-collection instruments and reporting forms, offer technical assistance (in person and remotely), develop QIP and promote events. There are multiple diagnostic tools available to coaches so that they can gauge the status of family engagement efforts in terms of a) the quality of family-school relationships, b) families' opinions about programs, and c) site and staff SFPF implementation.

Program administrators, teachers and staff in sites receiving QSLA incentives must, in collaboration with coaches and specialists, a) integrate SFPF into everyday practices, b) use data to inform implementation, c) build capacity in family-school partnerships, and d) offer staff professional development opportunities. Ultimately, sites must a) utilize culturally relevant practices to help families manage and overcome challenges, b) help families identify child development milestones and strengthen their parenting skills, c) offer opportunities to establish parent-to-parent and staff-to-parent relationships, d) assist families to access services and advocate for their children, and e) provide training, resources and activities so that families can support their children's social and emotional development.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> California Department of Education, (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/rt/caqrispathways.asp>.

<sup>22</sup> Quality Start Los Angeles Logic Model – Family Engagement, (2017). Source materials provided by Los Angeles County Office of Education.

QSLA's family engagement model establishes that programs which have received over two years of support and incentives must guarantee that their QIP will include at least one staff-facilitated activity connected to each of the protective factors. Coaches must be able to observe/track a) new policies implemented by sites,<sup>23</sup> b) tools and data used by sites,<sup>24</sup> c) improvement in family-school relationships,<sup>25</sup> and d) the number of training sessions offered.<sup>26</sup>

QSLA implementing partners have used Caring Conversation Café sessions and Abriendo Puertas curricula to offer direct technical assistance to programs.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, they have employed various assessment instruments and data-collection tools to gauge implementation progress including: DRDP Family Survey, the Family Engagement Site Assessment (beginning and end of year), PAPF and the FPTRQ measures. The use of multiple tools and instruments is intended to enable program directors and coaches to develop capacity in, and assess components of, family-school partnerships—the key foundation of successful family engagement efforts—through both the PFCE and SFPF criteria. The use of FPTRQ measures allows the assessment of each component of family-school partnerships individually (attitudes, knowledge, practices and environment) and prevents the comingling of constructs in a system framed by both PFCE and SFPF, as is the case of QSLA.

Again, the tenets of SFPF constitute the basis for QSLA's family engagement capacity-building model. Ultimately, QSLA's long-term objective is to enable programs and sites to empower families by promoting their resilience and well-being, harnessing their strengths, and reducing stress and risk. The model is premised on a comprehensive understanding and purposeful use of culture and diversity to expand its reach and effectiveness.

### **Quality Start LA Family Engagement Implementation**

QSLA's family engagement efforts are in full compliance with federal, state and local policy guidelines. The model is founded on the most current and pertinent research base. Implementing partners are socializing the SFPF canon through training institutes and they are employing innovative, evidence-based human-centered approaches to empower parents. Notwithstanding the above, there are structural and contextual factors which limit QSLA family engagement activities' reach and effectiveness.

First, California preschool and child care systems rely on a multiplicity of funding streams designed for distinct purposes with different implementation and reporting requirements which impact the operations of local educational agencies and all their associated systems and

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<sup>23</sup> New systems and policies include: home-school connection and social networking activities, communication plans, community partnerships/resources plans, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Data-collection tools and instruments include: SFPF self-assessment, Teacher Reflection Assessment, Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality Measures (TPRQM), Parent Assessment of Protective Factors (PAPF), Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ), parent focus groups, and satisfaction surveys.

<sup>25</sup> Betterment of family-school relationships accruing from staff development, parent education, cultural sensitivity/competency, advocacy, and attention to children with special needs.

<sup>26</sup> For example, trainings covering SFPF, school readiness, family-friendly environments, male engagement, literacy, trauma, positive discipline, child development, and mandated reporting.

<sup>27</sup> Information accruing from the piloting of such tools will offer QSLA's leadership a basis to determine the most appropriate curricula to meet desired objectives.

stakeholders.<sup>28</sup> QSLA implementing partners must reconcile the need to address all policy-reporting requirements prior to engaging in any operational changes. Additional activities and/or programs require time for implementation. Establishing authentic partnerships with families requires institutional culture shifts that demand time and resources across the system from executive officers, program directors and teachers to support staff, family providers and volunteers. Also, added demands on time ought to be compensated with better remuneration—especially in a comparatively low-remunerated occupation.<sup>29</sup>

*QSLA long term goals alignment to family engagement core characteristics*

In the long term, QSLA family engagement efforts intend to create a sustainable system to help providers cement a clear and positive two-way communication system between families and sites; a strong home-school connection; continuous parental leadership at school and home; and integration of community resources. QSLA family engagement capacity-building activities correspond to the outcomes expected by QSLA leadership. All the elements required in a sustainable system are clearly defined yet there are contextual constraints to implementation. Specifically, the majority of families served by QSLA's implementing partners face socioeconomic strains.<sup>30</sup> Not only is their time availability limited due to long work hours but their participation in school activities is inhibited by linguistic and/or cultural factors. Poverty, immigration status, and safety impede community and individual wellbeing and QSLA's efforts are nested in contexts that are disproportionately affected by such factors.<sup>31</sup>

Although implementation data was not collected for this report, Juárez & Associates attended a meeting of the QSLA Family Engagement and Parent Education Workgroup and reviewed an evaluation workshop conducted by one implementing partner for the 2015-2016 academic cycle.<sup>32</sup> During the group meeting, the evaluation team learned about implementation successes and challenges. Partners shared that they had succeeded in a) establishing the systemic prerequisites for a functioning system (framework, logic model, data-collection instruments), b) piloting different tools/models that will help identify the best approaches, c) training coaches with QSLA's approach, and d) familiarizing providers with SFPF tools and activities.

Also, partners identified some of the challenges they have faced during implementation. First, although the SFPF has been socialized, providers are not yet integrating SFPF activities into their routines. Second, even though partners have developed a plan and are starting to use the tools, it has been problematic to use some of the measures to assess implementation and to grasp the alignment of goals to objectives. The evaluation of one of the implementing partners' family

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<sup>28</sup> Governor's State Advisor Council on Early Learning and Care, (2013). *California Comprehensive Early Learning Plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ce/documents/compearlylearningplan2013.pdf>; Public Policy Institute of California, (2016). *Family engagement practices in California schools*. Retrieved from [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R\\_616RLR.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_616RLR.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> County of Los Angeles, (2016). *The State of Early Care and Education in Los Angeles County: Los Angeles Child Care Planning Committee 2017 Needs Assessment*, Retrieved from [http://ceo.lacounty.gov/ccp/pdf/ECE%20Needs%20Assessment\\_Executive%20Brief%2003-30-2017.pdf](http://ceo.lacounty.gov/ccp/pdf/ECE%20Needs%20Assessment_Executive%20Brief%2003-30-2017.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Children's Defense Fund-California, (2017). An analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (Table B17024). Retrieved from <http://www.cdfca.org/newsroom/press-releases/2017/2017-Census-poverty-data-resources.html#viz1505366485831>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> LAUP, (2016). Evaluation of LAUP's New Family Engagement Model: A Strengthening Families Framework FY 2015-16. Retrieved from [http://child360.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/LAUP\\_FE\\_BRIEF\\_FE2016\\_rev20160922.pdf](http://child360.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/LAUP_FE_BRIEF_FE2016_rev20160922.pdf).

engagement model offers valuable insights for a more effective generalization of the SFPP framework among all QSLA participants:

- Sites must offer ample and consistent access to coaches during visits
- Programs should collect data from families (not for the site) to prepare meaningful parent workshops
- Coaches should be given more time for face-to-face meetings with providers and families
- QSLA leaders must clarify and socialize the purpose of family engagement, the role of coaches and the expectations for programs
- Coaches and sites should have access to data and assessment results in a timely fashion
- QSLA leaders should create additional incentives for providers to attend and complete training
- Providers should have opportunities to practice how to integrate SFPP into their routines and QSLA should conduct follow up activities on their progress
- QSLA leaders should use appropriate instruments and clear processes for program, site and family assessment
- Coaches should prioritize relationship-building activities with programs and teachers
- QSLA leaders should foster program, site and family buy-in and effective communication
- Programs should have flexibility to engage parents in ad hoc schedules
- Sites should offer resources related to immigration

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The foregoing describes how QSLA's partners conceive family engagement and what they are doing to implement their proposed model. The system is normed organizationally by the PFCE and operationally by the SFPP. It defines family outcomes/protective factors supporting early learning and development: family-educator partnerships, family well-being, parental-child bonding, continuous learning and social interconnectedness. QSLA partners envision a system enabling families to become ongoing advocates and decision-makers for their children, schools and communities. They foresee a system where all programs have a comprehensive and sustainable family engagement plan that actively involves teachers, families and community members in building meaningful and continuous partnerships. In essence, QSLA capacity-building activities aim to enable providers to develop dynamic and empowering relations with the families they serve. QSLA's framework encompasses both PFCE family outcomes and SFPP protective factors.

Attachment 1 specifies the alignment of QSLA's long-term outcomes-impact<sup>33</sup> to SFPP and PFCE frameworks.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, it identifies various curricular models/tools<sup>35</sup> that QSLA

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<sup>33</sup> Quality Start Los Angeles Logic Model – Family Engagement, (2017). Source materials provided by Los Angeles County Office of Education.

<sup>34</sup> SFPP and PFCE have analogous objectives. SFPP promotes the development of protective factors and PFCE is geared to produce family outcomes. The long-term objectives of QSLA's architects integrate all outcomes into family characteristics/impact areas: strong, loving, resourceful, informed, dynamic, connected, and fighting families.

<sup>35</sup> Abriendo Puertas <http://ap-od.org/>; AVANCE <http://www.avance.org/>; Caring Conversations <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/657-caring-conversations-cafe-model-facilitator-guide>; CSEFEL Positive Tools for Families [http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training\\_parent.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_parent.html); Getting Ready Intervention <http://cyfs.unl.edu/docs/Publications&Presentations/CHOP%20-%20school%20readiness.pdf>; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3967127/pdf/nihms561668.pdf>; National Parent Leadership Institute

implementation partners can use to help providers nurture strong, loving, resourceful, informed, dynamic, connected and fighting families.<sup>36</sup> There is no perfect recipe to attain family engagement outcomes. In congruence with the autonomy of implementation approaches prevalent among QSLA partners, the illustrative curricula listed offer multiple options for partners to select a variety of approaches to tackle a goal or a set of objectives.

Implementing partners and providers must consider management priorities, site contexts, family circumstances, existing partnerships, cost and other matters when selecting a training organization and/or curricula. For example, it is crucial for all participating QSLA programs to understand the SFPF model and to integrate it into their daily practices. If a program has sites and/or teachers that have yet to utilize SFPF, the program director should select a curriculum that covers all protective factors: Abriendo Puertas, Caring Conversations or Parents as Teachers. Conversely, if a program director knows that her sites are utilizing SFPF resources and she wants to augment parents' continuous leadership at school and home, she can resort to Community Organizing and Family Issues or the National Parent Leadership Institute.

All implementation partners recognize that there are structural and contextual factors which limit QSLA family engagement activities' reach and effectiveness: a multilayered early childhood education system that requires its stakeholders to divert time away from pedagogy and engagement to administration and reporting; teachers and staff employed full time yet earning close to subsistence salaries; families unable to participate in school activities because of work responsibilities; and communities facing poverty, crime and discriminatory policies.

QSLA's efforts will continue to be impacted by the aforementioned factors and program performance expectations should be understood accordingly. Similarly, given the marginal relevance of family engagement for a provider's QRIS score, it could be perceived as a less important element.

Based on the experiences shared by the partners and on evidence-informed successful practices, QSLA's implementation efforts would benefit from the following:

#### *General Recommendations*

- Conduct a strategic planning session – refine the model's alignment of activities to objectives and goals
- Gather clear data and share it – conduct an evaluation of the partners' activities
- Evaluate the tools/curricula piloted by partners – homogenize operational practices
- Obtain private sector funds – launch a capital campaign
- Create economic incentives with existing resources – offer flexibility on materials acquisition

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<http://www.nationalpli.org/>; Nu Parent <https://www.nuparent.org/>; Parents as Teachers <https://parentsasteachers.org/>; Parent Voices <http://www.parentvoices.org/>.

<sup>36</sup> The table listing curricular options indicates QSLA outcome areas covered by a particular program and/or tool. Icons for the SFPF and PFCE indicate the specific correspondence of a particular program/tool to the SFPF protective factors and/or PFCE family outcomes.

*System Strategies*

- Focus on protective factors and transition all activities to providers
- Hire a system-wide family engagement consultant
- Provide paid time (across all levels) to plan and implement family engagement activities
- Offer SFPPF assessment training to staff across the system
- Prioritize use of innovative, evidence-based strategies and supports
- Set up family engagement centers

*Program/Center Strategies*

- Integrate culture and community – celebrate everyone, translate materials, have interpreters, go out into the community
- Provide a welcoming environment – conceive the system and the service as customer-friendly
- Develop partnerships with the families – co-define objectives with families, inform them of progress made and offer them information on parallel/supportive home-based activities
- Learn the neighborhood – visit families early on and see how they live and learn
- Offer resources – refer families to health and other services
- Make it easy – offer childcare and transportation for families to enable engagement
- Utilize untapped human capital and create alliances – invite seniors/retirees to volunteer

*Culturally-based Recommendations*

- Study clients' cultures and integrate real world experiences – showcase families with Dreamers
- Cultivate personal touches – promote face-to-face interactions to gain trust
- Practice non-judgmental communication – resort to strength-based communication vs. deficit mentality
- Explain the benefits for maintaining involvement – share what families can learn to improve their parenting skills
- Offer bilingual support – translate all communications
- Exercise strong leadership and administrative support – cultivate flexible, collegial environments
- Conduct staff development sessions focused on culture – train culturally competent staff
- Conduct community outreach – lead families to needed resources

Attachment 1

**QSLA Family Engagement Outcomes-Impact**



		<b>STRONG FAMILIES</b>	<b>LOVING FAMILIES</b>	<b>RESOURCEFUL FAMILIES</b>	<b>INFORMED FAMILIES</b>	<b>DYNAMIC FAMILIES</b>	<b>CONNECTED FAMILIES</b>	<b>FIGHTING FAMILIES</b>
<b>Family Engagment Frameworks</b>	<b>QSLA Long-term Architects' plans</b>	Families and communities engaged		Extend early learning school-home connection	Site-family two-way communication		Integrate community resources	Parent leadership decision making individual-school
	<b>Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework SFPF</b>	Parental resilience	Social & emotional competence of children	Support in times of need	Knowledge of parenting & child development		Social connections	
	<b>Parent, Family, Community Engagement Framework PFCE</b>	Family well-being	Positive parent-child relationships	Families as lifelong educators	Families as lifelong learners	Family engagement in transitions	Family connections to peers & community	Families as advocates & leaders

Attachment 1

### QSLA Family Engagement Core Objectives



**Family Engagement Curricula/Tools**

	<b>STRONG FAMILIES</b>	<b>LOVING FAMILIES</b>	<b>RESOURCEFUL FAMILIES</b>	<b>INFORMED FAMILIES</b>	<b>DYNAMIC FAMILIES</b>	<b>CONNECTED FAMILIES</b>	<b>FIGHTING FAMILIES</b>
<b>Abriendo Puertas</b>							
<b>AVANCE</b>							
<b>Caring Conversations</b>							
<b>Community Organizing and Family Issues</b>							
<b>CSEFEL Positive Tools for Families</b>							
<b>Getting Ready</b>							
<b>National Parent Leadership Institute</b>							
<b>Nu Parent</b>							
<b>Parents as Teachers</b>							
<b>Parent Voices</b>							

Strengthening Families Protective Factors

Parent, Family, Community Engagement Framework