

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT/ENGAGEMENT TASK GROUP

### Working Definition of Family Engagement

*(adapted from No Child Left Behind, Section 1118)*

Authentic family engagement is defined as the participation of families in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication about child and youth wellbeing, as well as relevant services and supports, including:

- Nurturing their child’s development;
- Being actively involved in their child’s system of care;
- Serving as full partners in their child’s services and supports, and being included in decision-making and governance.

### Over-arching Principles of Family Engagement

*(adapted from Family Support America Principles & Premises)*

#### Principles

1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
2. Staff enhance families’ capacity to support the growth and development of all family members– adults, youth and children.
3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
4. Programs affirm and strengthen families’ cultural, racial, sexual and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

#### Premises

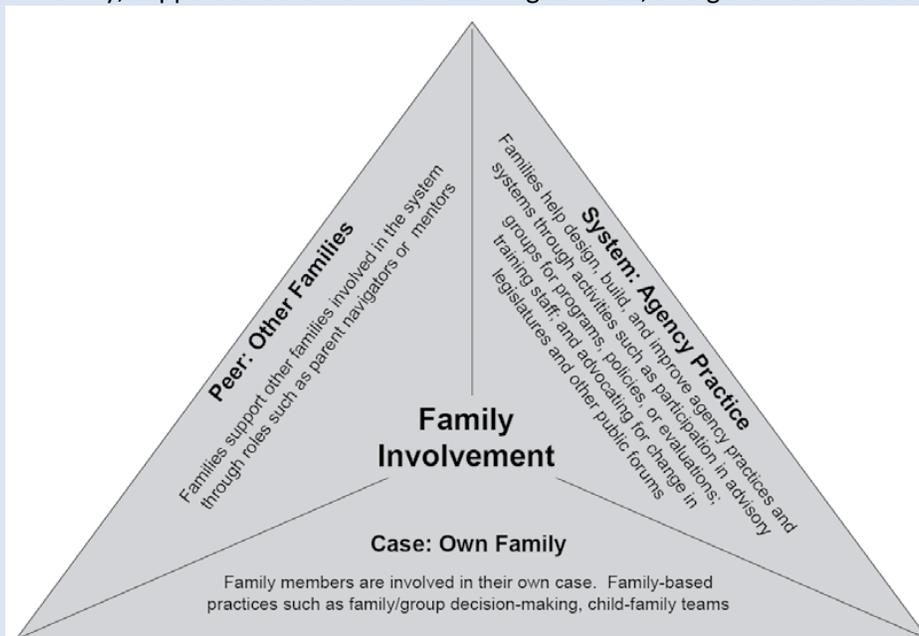
1. Primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear their children.
2. Assuring the well-being of all families is the cornerstone of a healthy society, and requires universal access to support programs and services.
3. Children and families exist as part of an ecological system.
4. Child-rearing patterns are influenced by parents’ understandings of child development and of their children’s unique characteristics, personal sense of competence, and cultural and community traditions and mores.
5. Enabling families to build on their own strengths and capacities promotes the healthy development of children.
6. The developmental processes that make up parenthood and family life create needs that are unique at each stage in the life span.
7. Families are empowered when they have access to information and other resources and take action to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities.

### Task Group Policy Recommendation Priority Areas

Policy Area	Purpose
Clarity of roles and responsibilities	To provide a clear and consistent definition of family engagement, and articulate the various roles in which family members should be engaged in a meaningful, authentic way. Policy will address engagement at three levels: in service planning for own family; in support of other families receiving services; and in governance and oversight.
Quality Training and Support	To specify the skills and knowledge required for a) professionals and family members to partner effectively, and b) family members to be successful in the various leadership roles outlined above; to outline plans for adequate infrastructure to support training and development in those areas.
Comprehensive Accountability and Evaluation	To identify strategies related to evaluation of family engagement strategies and associated accountability mechanisms to ensure that family engagement activities are meaningful and aligned with the principles of family engagement above.
Sufficient Resources and Funding	To describe specific strategies through which the state can fund family engagement activities, as well as build requirements and incentives for meaningful family engagement into its funding processes (e.g., Requests for Applications).

## Policy Recommendation #1: Clarity of Roles & Responsibilities

**Purpose:** To provide a clear and consistent definition of family engagement, and articulate the various roles in which family members should be engaged in a meaningful, authentic way. Policy will address engagement at three levels: service planning for own family; support of other families receiving services; and governance and oversight.



*Image from  
National Technical  
Assistance and  
Evaluation Center,  
2008*

### Policy Statement

Family engagement is defined as the participation of families in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication about child and youth wellbeing, as well as relevant services and supports, including:

- Nurturing their child's development;
- Being actively involved in their child's system of care;
- Serving as full partners in their child's services and supports, and being included in decision-making and governance.

Partnerships between families and system professionals are guided by a commitment to reciprocity, honoring the expertise and contributions of all parties. Family representatives have the following key roles and responsibilities in each of the three areas above; examples of the specific roles/responsibilities in each area are provided, though this is not intended as an exhaustive list.

#### A) Service Planning

- Opportunities for leadership (ex. options to lead meetings, set agendas, organize groups)
- Participation in identifying a process for discussions and decision-making. This process will be documented (e.g. family group conferences).
- Option to identify natural supports to be included in all aspects of service planning
- Opportunity to drive selection of services as appropriate and allowed by financial and legal restrictions

#### B) Family Support Partners

- Mentoring peers through service planning processes and in navigation of systems
- Advocating for individuals and family engagement as a whole
- Linking parents and families to services, supports and advocacy
- Participating in evaluation and accountability efforts
- At multiple levels, including parent to parent, parent to professional, and parent to staff.

#### C) Governance and Oversight

- Serving as full board members with equitable voting rights and voice
- Active participation in evaluation of programs and services
- Involvement in all decisions, including hiring, allocation of resources, program changes/design of services, and design of rules and regulations
- Clear agreement/expectations as to who family members represent (themselves or a larger constituency).

### Policy Recommendation #1: Clarity of Roles & Responsibilities

#### Required Support

#### *(additional steps needed by the state for full implementation of policy)*

- The definition of family engagement needs to be broadly disseminated and incorporated into all relevant documentation related to policies and procedures; rules and regulations; programs and standards; RFPs; and other program materials.

### Policy Recommendation #2: Quality Training & Support

**Purpose:** To specify the skills and knowledge required for a) professionals and family members to partner effectively, and b) family members to be successful in the various leadership roles outlined above; to outline plans for adequate infrastructure to support training and development in those areas.

#### Policy Statement

In order to have trained, knowledgeable staff and family members, with all parties effectively prepared to serve as leaders, agencies and groups working with family representatives will implement the following:

- Family representatives and staff participate in a recognized Family Engagement/leadership training program or menu of programs (to be specified) that includes the Principles of Family Engagement included in this set of policy statements (see page 1) as core competencies. These staff and family trainings are coordinated to ensure crossover of knowledge, role clarity and competencies
- Entities receiving funding for behavioral health programs will require that all staff paid through these funds complete the above described training
- Family representatives are compensated for time and expenses required to participate in trainings
- Family representatives receive consistent, ongoing, competent supervision from a trained staff person
- A state level, trained family leader is contracted or staffed to oversee, monitor and evaluate trainings as well as identify and make available new training opportunities statewide

#### Required Support

#### *(additional steps needed by the state for full implementation of policy)*

- Existing family engagement trainings that fit the Over-arching Principles of Family Engagement (see page 1) need to be identified and assessed for their capacity to meet the training need in Colorado.
- A list of “approved” trainings needs to be developed.
- A state level family leader needs to be hired or contracted to coordinate this work, and an agency must be identified to “house” and support this individual.

### Policy Recommendation #3: Comprehensive Accountability & Evaluation

**Purpose:** To identify strategies related to evaluation of family engagement strategies and associated accountability mechanisms to ensure that family engagement activities are meaningful and aligned with the principles of family engagement above.

#### Policy Statement

Evaluation and accountability are required components of reporting on family engagement and an evaluation plan must be included in all grant requests (specifically SOC grants, but other future grants as well). Specifically, grant requests should:

- Adopt Principles of Family Engagement (see page 1) as outcomes for evaluation plan
- Require that communities and agencies include process and outcome evaluation in their evaluation plans.

Additionally, all approved family engagement trainings should be required to include pre/post evaluations aligned with Principles of Family Engagement (page 1), as well as participant evaluations of the quality of the training and trainers.

#### Required Support

#### *(additional steps needed by the state for full implementation of policy)*

- Develop or adopt specific performance measures/indicators for Principles of Family Engagement (page 1).

## **Policy Recommendation #4: Sufficient Resources & Funding**

**Purpose:** To describe specific strategies through which the state can fund family engagement activities, as well as build requirements and incentives for meaningful family engagement into its funding processes (e.g., Requests for Applications).

### **Policy Statement**

In order to support and promote authentic family engagement, the state will:

- Allocate funding to support development and implementation of family engagement trainings described in Policy #2: Quality Training and Support
- All RFAs, RFPs, and other funding methods supporting behavioral health efforts in the state will:
  - Require applicants to allocate sufficient funds to compensate Family Partners
  - Require applicants to allocate funds to pay a Family Partner supervisor
  - Require applicants to allocate funds to support Family Partners in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities (e.g., time and expenses)
  - Specify deadlines/timelines related to required hiring of Family Partners and consequences for failure to meet those deadlines/timelines (i.e., partners must be hired in a timely fashion)
  - Specify Family Engagement performance goal(s) and attach incentive money aligned with performance on those goals
- Provide incentive funds in recognition of strong performance related to family engagement goals
- Provide guidance about implications of Family Partner compensation for public benefits

### **Required Support**

***(additional steps needed by the state for full implementation of policy)***

- Research existing guidance documents (ex. Iowa Parent Partner Handbook) to develop Colorado guidance document about implications of Family Partner compensation and public benefits
- Develop appropriate performance goals, informed by Policy Recommendation #3 above
- Develop a distribution formula for any family engagement incentive funds made available