

Family Partnerships and Engagement Update

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is required in statute and committed to building a strong early learning system with the voices of families integrated into the work and has been exploring options for strengthening parent voice. In the Spring of 2014, DEL met with families in a full-day focus group to help plan effective structures and processes for engaging families in shaping policies and programs that affect them. The ways families shared that they prefer to be engaged can be captured within three partnership and engagement strategies:

- **Broader Family Connections and Engagement:** opportunities for families to connect and engage in state and local conversations on an individual basis, as time and capacity allow.
- **Community-based Conversations:** state and local gatherings open to all families to encourage connections and inform and influence state and local efforts.
- **DEL Parent Advisory Group:** a sounding board for the agency's decisions, ideas and questions to ensure policies and programs support families' strengths and needs.

DEL has been working with early learning partners to implement all three strategies, and in this past year, has taken the lead with re-establishing the Parent Advisory Group in a thoughtful, sustainable and inclusive way.

State and Local Family Partnerships & Engagement Meeting

On February 27, 2015, DEL and Thrive convened members and family engagement leads from the ten Early Learning Regional Coalitions (ELRC) and parent leaders from across the state to discuss how to continue to build state and local capacity to meaningfully invite, engage and sustain family voice and action within communities in their many diverse forms. The goals for the meeting included:

- Sharing best practices and approaches when partnering with families;
- Informing DEL and Thrive on how best to integrate family voice and develop the PAG;
- Providing opportunities to engage and learn from one another; and
- Connecting participants to resources and ideas that support, inform and align with state and local plans and efforts.

Participants shared ideas and insights on the following topics:

- Opportunities to increase or expand parent voice and engagement in communities;
- Activities or actions that are strongest, weakest or thwart engaging and sustaining parent voice; and
- Input on developing the PAG, including recruitment, selection, membership development and support and how to connect with the ELRC's.

Subsequently, Thrive convened a cross-coalition conversation to reflect on the February meeting and discuss how to involve parents or parent voice at the coalition table March 25, 2015 ELRC statewide meeting.

Update on the Parent Advisory Group

DEL released the PAG membership recruitment announcement on May 20, 2015. Many ideas shared during the state and local family partnerships and engagement meeting are reflected in the notice and recruitment process, including:

- Clearly communicating the purpose, time commitment and supports available for participants

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- Changing the application to a recruitment form with an interest questionnaire, so families can be connected to other ways they would like to be engaged in addition to the PAG
- Encourage creative ways to respond, including video, interview and letters
- Working on providing information in multiple languages upon request
- Support multiple options for participating in meetings, including in-person, conference calls, and videoconferencing.

DEL will be working with trusted messengers, such as the ELRC's and organizations that work with families to recruit PAG members and parents interested in sharing their wisdom and perspectives through other avenues.

How has DEL considered the Early Learning Advisory Council's input?

DEL will continue to use ELAC's input to plan how to coordinate and work with partners on implementing the family partnership & engagement strategies (Broad Connections, Community-Based Conversations and Parent Advisory Group). The State and Local Family Partnerships & Engagement meeting was convened as a result of hearing from ELAC that efforts to engage families should be focused in communities and at the regional level. DEL's goal is to support family partnership and engagement through many different avenues at both the local and state levels.

One priority of the Parent Advisory Group membership is to have representation from each of the 10 Early Learning Regional Coalitions. The state-level group would serve as a mechanism for getting diverse regional and experiential perspectives, and DEL will engage the Regional Coalitions in recruiting and partnering with PAG members. DEL will also be intentional about making sure the PAG has diverse and new voices. Example experiences include kinship and foster caregivers, families with diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds, immigration, experience with incarceration and fathers.

For any questions, please e-mail elac@del.wa.gov.