

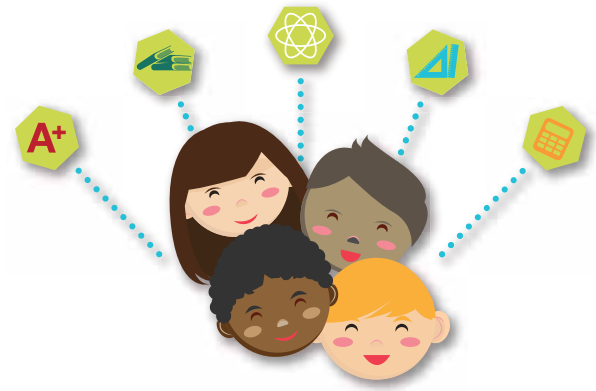
EVALUATING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



CASE STUDY

of the

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IMPACT PROJECT (FEIP)



This resource was produced in partnership with:



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Policy Research

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This brief lays out six key steps used to evaluate the Family Engagement Impact Project (FEIP). The goal of the brief is to help guide practitioners and evaluators as they seek to assess how well they are providing family engagement services and how these efforts lead to outcomes for families.

The Heising-Simons Foundation's FEIP initiative sought to enhance the capacity of communities, professionals, and parents to engage in children's learning and improve educational outcomes for low-income, immigrant children from birth through age eight.

Family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of children's success in school and beyond.¹ For this reason, schools and communities around the country are actively creating opportunities for families to enrich their children's learning at home, in schools, and in the broader community. However, the characteristics of family engagement often make progress hard to measure.

- **Family engagement is not a 'one-size-fits-all' set of steps or programs with standardized practices, but rather a set of constantly changing interactions and relationships among families, schools, and communities.**
- **Family engagement practices look different across time, depending on the age and developmental level of the child.**
- **Family engagement is most successful when it is coordinated and integrated across various systems and organizations, making it sometimes difficult to 'tease out' the precise activities and strategies that are making a difference.**

Although not all programs will have access to funds for planning or hiring an external evaluator, the steps described in this document and evaluation tools can be helpful for all programs seeking to better track their family engagement work. The FEIP took place in two California counties, San Mateo and Santa Clara, and consisted of three phases: (1) a planning phase (2013), (2) an implementation phase (2014-2016), and (3) a sustainability phase (2016-2017). Multiple grantee partnerships were awarded funds to leverage existing community resources and strengthen public-private partnerships to coordinate and integrate family engagement efforts across organizations.² Grantee partnerships operationalized and developed strategies to address the community-defined needs. Thus, the mix of strategies and programming used in each community was different.

Complete suite of FEIP resources:

1. FEIP Infographic
2. Capacity Building Brief
3. Evaluation Brief ✓
4. Raising A Reader
5. Supporting Teachers
6. 10 Tips from FEIP



STEP 1: **Use Data to Plan and Set Goals**

In Phase 1, grantee partnerships were provided an 8-month planning period to develop initiatives suited to their own local context. As part of this planning, the John W. Gardner Center at Stanford University conducted community needs assessments in each grantee partnership community. The community needs assessment consisted of both a family and provider survey.

- **The family survey focused on family experiences, perceptions, and needs regarding family engagement practices and early childhood education in their community. For example, families provided information about their households, supports and resources for parenting, awareness of resources in the community, and relationships with early childhood providers and elementary schools.**
- **The provider survey focused on local family engagement practices, provider perceptions, and coordination of services.**

Service providers, tended to deliver programming built around parent education or child enrichment with few opportunities for a parent and child to learn and play together. Multiple grantee partnerships therefore adopted Raising A Reader+ Family Nights as their evidence-based intervention to support parent-child relationships around literacy. A different grantee partnership adopted the National Network of Partnership Schools evidence-based school reform model because data showed a clear need for the school district to develop a systemic and organized leadership structure around family engagement.

Approximately 800 families and 140 providers participated. Based on the results, grantee partnerships began to develop their plans and set goals for their work. For example, the highest needs expressed by parents were opportunities to learn and play together with their children.



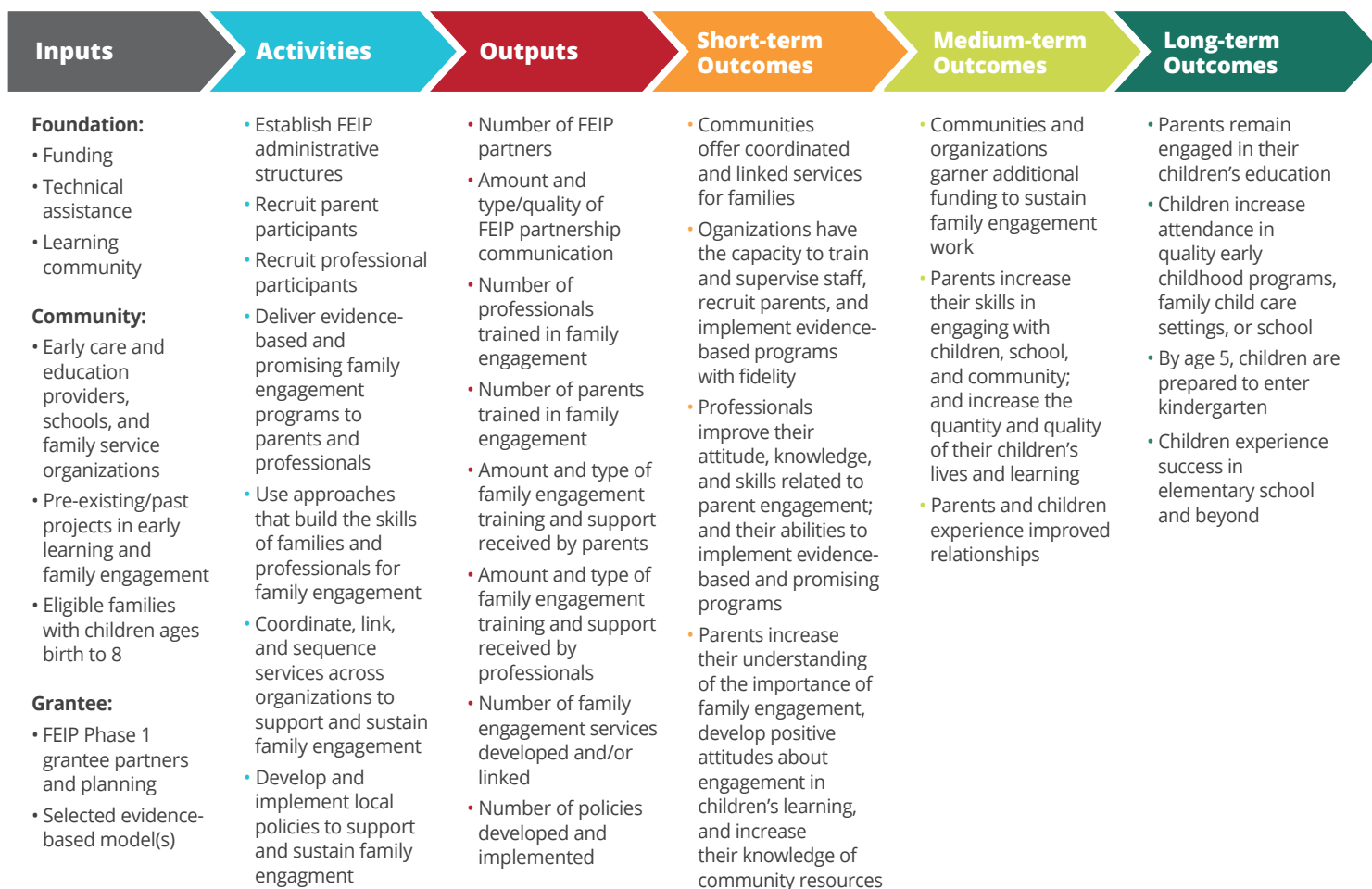
STEP 2:

Develop a Logic Model to Connect Strategies and Outcomes

In Phase 2, five grantee partnerships were awarded funds for two years to implement their plans. To evaluate Phase 2, the Foundation contracted with Mathematica Policy Research Inc. The evaluation assessed the FEIP as an initiative, rather than individual grantee partnerships. To begin the process, Mathematica developed a logic model for the entire project (Figure 1) and then helped grantee partnerships develop logic models for individual communities.

The FEIP logic model clarifies how the FEIP could build capacity for family engagement and improve children's success in school and beyond. The model illustrates the foundation, community, and grantee partnership-level inputs that were expected to affect the implementation of FEIP activities. The outputs of these activities were anticipated to lead to a variety of short- and medium-term outcomes for families, professionals, organizations, and their communities.³ The logic model also outlines contextual factors that could influence the ability of the foundation and grantee partnerships to implement the FEIP and produce the desired outputs and outcomes.

FIGURE 1



Contextual factors: County resources (existing partnerships, county offices of education support and services, external grants and funding) and policy context (transitional kindergarten, Local Control Funding Formula, parent engagement requirements in Title 1 schools, Common Core State Standards).



STEP 3:

Seek to Understand Both Implementation and Outcomes

Based on the FEIP logic model, the Mathematica team designed an evaluation study to understand the implementation of the project and its outcomes.⁴ The implementation study focused on the outputs of the work including how grantee partnerships put FEIP into practice. The evaluators set out to answer the following implementation questions:

- **What elements of the FEIP are implemented, and how does implementation vary among grantee partnerships?**
- **With what degree of fidelity are evidence-based interventions being carried out?**

The outcome study examined how the FEIP influences community, organizational, professional, and parent changes. The questions included:

- **Does the FEIP lead to changes in community and organizational capacity to support family engagement, including availability of funding?**
- **Do professionals improve their attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to family engagement?**
- **Do parents improve their understanding of and attitudes about family engagement, increase their knowledge and uptake of engagement opportunities, and increase the quality of their involvement and relationships with children?**

Driven by an interest in how the FEIP changed families’ knowledge, attitudes, and family engagement practices, the study focused on four expected family outcomes (see Table 1).

TABLE 1:

Expected Outcomes and Measures Used in FEIP Parent Survey

Expected Outcome	Result
Improvement in understanding of and attitudes about family engagement	<p>Self-efficacy for family engagement. The degree to which parents agreed with statements such as whether they know how to meet their children’s needs or feel successful about their efforts to help them learn.</p> <p>Importance of family engagement. The degree of importance parents placed on engagement behaviors such as taking time to talk with their children or reading and sharing books with them.</p>
Improvement in family perceptions of community coordination of family engagement supports	<p>Community coordination and support for family engagement. The degree to which parents agreed with various statements about community efforts and whether programs in the community were working together to support families and young children.</p>
Increases in parent knowledge and uptake of family engagement activities	<p>Knowledge of community resources for family engagement. The degree to which parents agreed with statements about knowing where to get advice about how to help their children learn and how to find and use services and programs their families want or need.</p> <p>Uptake of engagement opportunities in the community. Whether parents participated in a parent activity (such as a parent group or parenting education class) and a parent-child activity (such as a music class, gym class, or formal playgroup) in the last 6 months.</p> <p>Frequency of parental engagement in parent-child activities. The frequency with which parents engaged with their children in (a) general involvement activities such as singing songs or playing, (b) home learning activities such as working on number skills or drawing or coloring, (d) school learning activities such as reviewing children’s school work or attending parent meetings at school, and (d) library visits.</p> <p>Time spent looking at books. The number of minutes that people in the household usually spend each time they look at books with children.</p>



STEP 4: Collect Data Using a Variety of Sources

The evaluators utilized a variety of data collection methods to gather relevant information.

Table 2 below shows which data sources were used, the purpose, and a brief description. By diversifying the data sources, the evaluators could paint a more complete picture of the FEIP progress and areas for improvement and provide information that could inform mid-course corrections for the grantee partnerships.

TABLE 2:
Data Sources

Data Source	Purpose	Description
1. Document review	To understand the FEIP planning, decision making, and implementation and fidelity to evidence-based models.	Documents included grantee partnership applications, implementation plans, and progress reports submitted to the Foundation.
2. Interviews	To understand grantee partnership approaches to family engagement and the evolution of partnerships and activities.	Evaluation team members conducted semi-structured interviews with grantee leads.
3. Grantee partnership form	To collect information on grantee partnership characteristics and functioning.	The form tracked the frequency and content of partnership meetings, collaboration levels, and financial infrastructure.
4. Implementing agency form	To collect data on services, lead and partner organizations provided to children, parents, and professionals.	The form captured the number of programs and services offered to families over the course of the project.
5. Parent survey ⁵	To assess expected parent outcomes. See Table 1 (Page 4).	Agency staff administered surveys as close as possible to the beginning and end dates of each family engagement service.
6. Parent participation report	To gather information on parent involvement in direct services.	Staff entered the number and types of FEIP activities the parents attended and parent level of engagement into a spreadsheet.



STEP 5:

Analyze Data with Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

The evaluators used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand the implementation and outcome data.

Qualitative Approaches

The evaluators used qualitative analyses to understand how grantee partnerships implemented FEIP and the factors that hindered or facilitated their ability to do so and to shed light on quantitative findings. The evaluators coded site visitors' interview and document review notes.⁶ They used a qualitative software program to assist in the process. One of the key qualitative findings was that establishing administrative structures was critical to the successful coordination of FEIP activities. For example, partnerships that regularly convened oversight committees were better able to maintain communication and coordination among partners and build a FEIP identity than those that did not.

The advisory council can be the central point of problem solving, but also knowing what's going on. [It's] a way for everyone to stay engaged in the ways that everyone is rolling out Raising A Reader+ Family Nights. People can give feedback... focus on problem solving, and [look] at what works and what doesn't work.

– Grantee Lead

Qualitative analyses were also used to understand evolutions over the course of the FEIP. For example, analysis of interviews showed that in four communities there were positive transformations in community and school culture around family engagement. One grantee lead expressed how the service organizations in the community are now thinking of family engagement differently.

We are talking about family engagement in a way that we weren't before. We now think of family engagement as being meaningfully engaged in the life of our children, starting at birth. Agencies are thinking and acting on this knowledge, and they are taking it on themselves to promote these messages.

– Grantee Staff



Quantitative Approaches

The evaluators used statistical techniques to analyze quantitative (numerical) data across several data sources. The team examined these statistics to explore patterns describing the grantee partnerships. Quantitative analyses of the implementation data showed that grantee partnerships collectively served more than 4,700 parents and nearly 500 professionals in new or expanded family engagement programming. To understand FEIP's influence on families, the evaluators also conducted a series of analyses on the parent survey data (see Table 3 for results).

TABLE 3:
Family Survey Analyses and Results

Analysis	Result
Longitudinal	Families' understanding of, attitudes about, and uptake of family engagement increased over the course of their participation in the FEIP programs in some areas.
Level of Participation (whether changes are more pronounced among parents with greater exposure to the FEIP)	In some cases, parents who participated in multiple FEIP programs had more pronounced outcomes than those who did not.
Subgroups (whether changes in home reading are more pronounced among parents who participated in Raising A Reader Plus Family Nights)	Families participating in the RAR Plus Family Nights tended to ask their children more questions while reading than parents who did not participate.

Quantitative Analyses were used to describe the population served by FEIP

- More than 85 percent of parents indicated that Spanish is the primary language spoken in the home.
- More than 90 percent of families self-identified as Hispanic or Latino.
- More than 70 percent of parents reported educational attainment of no more than a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Nearly 75 percent of parents reported annual household income of \$30,000 or less.



STEP 6:

Learn From Data for Continuous Program Improvement

Phase 3 focused on building sustainability for the initiative among grantee partnerships. FEIP grantees reflected on data and lessons learned and honed their work leading to shifts in professional development strategies, in services offered, and in systems-building approaches. Phase 3 also involved disseminating lessons learned to the field via professional conferences, webinars, and briefs (including this one).

Over the course of the project, grantee partnerships had multiple opportunities to learn from data and make program improvements based on the findings. The Foundation put two mechanisms in place to facilitate this: a learning community and data dashboards.

Learning Community

Grantee partnerships participated in a learning community that was facilitated by an external consultant. The learning community met four times. Each meeting focused on a unique topic and included dedicated time for grantee partnerships to share updates, exchange lessons learned, and engage in collaborative problem solving. Learning community participants valued the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, share best practices, and network and collaborate with other grantee partnerships to help improve their work.

Data Dashboards

Grantee partnerships received data dashboards from the evaluator at three time points describing each grantee partnerships' participation in the FEIP, their partners' efforts, and a summary of what other grantee partnerships were doing. The dashboard featured information on the number of parents, children, and professionals served and implementation fidelity markers for the evidence-based programs.

Authors:

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1. Van Voorhis, F.L., Maier, M. F., Epstein, J. L., Lloyd, C. M. (2013). The impact of family involvement on the education of children ages 3 to 8: a focus on literacy and math achievement outcomes and social-emotional skills. New York: MDRC. 2. The FEIP supported grantee partnerships (e.g., schools, early childhood groups, non-profits organizations) in replicating at least one evidence-based family engagement model and developing opportunities that build the skills of parents and professionals, with a focus on enhancing family engagement at home. In Phase 1 there were six grantee partnerships; in Phase 2 there were five grantee partnerships; and in Phase 3 there were four grantee partnerships. Each grantee partnership identified a "lead partner" who was responsible for managing the grant. 3. This initial evaluation did not focus on child outcomes due to the difficulty of independently measuring child outcomes across communities and in identifying a common child outcome that might be affected by the variety of programs implemented. 4. The study design accounted for the fact that grantee partnerships implemented different evidence-based and other family engagement programs under varying conditions and in different contexts. 5. Parents who completed a followup survey received a \$10 gift card as a token of appreciation. To prevent disclosure of respondent data, identifying information was replaced with numbers. The survey prioritized measures that have been used with similar populations such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) and the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES).