

Elm City Project LAUNCH

Partnering with Parents

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Jaclyn Vancour, April 2017

Meaningful stakeholder involvement is not as straight forward as simply adding stakeholders to a council. There are many barriers that can impede participation, as well as important facilitators that ensure stakeholder voices are heard (1). LAUNCH is committed to involving parents in meaningful and sustainable ways, and has experienced great success on a local-level. As LAUNCH continues to grow and has solidified their State Young Child Wellness Council, the project has been exploring how to meaningfully involve parents at a state-level. To assist in this process, informal qualitative interviews with LAUNCH parents and staff were conducted, as well as a review of the literature and best-practices. This document highlights findings from these interviews and the current academic literature.

Why Should Parents Be Involved?

Meaningful participation of parents in councils leads to many advantages for the community (2).

- By hearing parents' voices, health providers can provide care that is specific to the community's needs, values, and culture.
- Health providers can use their resources more efficiently.
- Councils that include both service providers and parents allow for collaboration between these groups.

What Makes for Successful Parent Involvement?

Balance of Parents & Providers

- Parents feel their presence and voice are valuable.
- Service providers are guests at the LAUNCH Parent Wellness Group meetings.
- It is important for providers to see parents as equals and experts in their lived experience. When providers leave their expertise at the door, they are more likely to see themselves as partners and learners of parents. This gives parents the room to identify their needs, instead of their needs being identified for them (2).

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"Parents own the meetings." - LAUNCH Staff

Supportive Environment

- Parents feel safe and supported at the Parent Wellness Group. If they need help, they know that other members and LAUNCH staff will be able to help them by listening to their concerns and recommending resources.
- To create a supportive environment, trust and respect needs to exist between parents and providers and parents need to be treated as partners (2).

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*"You might have so much stress, but before the day ends, you see people smiling. They come and see hope, there is someone to talk to and share with."
- LAUNCH Parent*

Educational Value

For Parents -

- Providers attend meetings and share information about the resources they provide and answer any questions parents may have.

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"If I wasn't in this program, I would never find out about all the resources for food, budgeting, who takes this insurance, and other important resources for the family." - LAUNCH Parent

For Providers -

- Parents share their needs and lived-experiences with providers, a teaching that enhances providers' abilities to tailor their practices to fit the needs of the community.

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*"I believe it is best for [providers] to attend these meetings so they understand what we are struggling with, to give us the best services and be able to recommend services that we might need."
- LAUNCH Parent*

Valued Role

- Parents take pride in being a resource for other members, their family, neighbors, and friends.
- Parents see their perspectives as being valuable to providers. They give recommendations on how to better serve their families.
- It is important that parents' voices be valued by all members of the council. Lack of adequate supports to parents can result in "token" participation, where parents' input is not adequately addressed or genuinely valued (3).

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"We are a part of making history, we're trying to lay a foundation so more parents can benefit from it later on." - LAUNCH Parent

This project was conducted by Jaclyn Vancour under the direct supervision of the LAUNCH evaluator, Ashley Clayton. We would like to thank the LAUNCH staff and parents who participated in this project for their generosity of time and spirit.

Six LAUNCH parents and three LAUNCH staff were interviewed for this project. All participants agreed to interviews voluntarily, providing verbal consent; no compensation was provided. All quotes are based on detailed notes taken during the interviews and are reported as close to verbatim as possible.

What Contributes to Parent Involvement?

Recruitment

- LAUNCH staff recruited parents by going door-to-door to speak with parents, and by visiting local businesses and school events to hand out flyers.
- When a parent was interested, the LAUNCH staff would take them to breakfast to get to know them.

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"We need to make more parents aware... Letting people know that [the council] is here is critical. I know many parents at the schools and in the community that don't know about the council." - LAUNCH Parent

Child Care

- Any organization that wants parents to be involved needs to include child care arrangements. This allows parents to attend meetings and fully participate.

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"Incorporating child care takes the guess work out of if parents can attend. We need the voice of everyone, especially parents because you are caring for us and our kids." - LAUNCH Parent

Time of Meetings

- Council meeting times need to occur when parents are available. Meeting times during the typical workday can exclude parents who are working or taking care of children.
- It is important to not overburden parents with participation requirements. Parents' willingness to participate in a council may decrease due to the amount of time required for their participation (4).

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"Meetings have to be consistent and meet the schedules of parents who want to attend." - LAUNCH Parent

Transportation

- Parents may not be able to afford transportation or have a reliable way to get to meetings (3,5).
- Transportation will be especially pertinent when involving parents from around the state as parents may be geographically dispersed.

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"[Providing bus tickets] shows how much you care about the challenges parents are going through. Asking them to take their time and that you pay for their transportation to access these services is a great motivator for participation." - LAUNCH Parent

Financial Incentives

- Payment for time has been found to motivate community involvement in health planning councils (2).

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"If we want parents to come to a meeting, we should pay parents to come to a meeting, just like professionals are paid to be there. Once parents embrace their profession as a parent, [their] voice changes, they have more confidence." - LAUNCH Staff

Food

- Meals and snacks during meetings are incentives for parent involvement (3,5). Food can keep participants focused and can reduce expenses for the family.

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"That family doesn't need to worry about food when they get home. That is a dinner they don't need to pay for, giving them extra money for other things. This is a good, healthy food at night that is guaranteed." - LAUNCH Parent

Recommendations

Lessons Learned From the Local Council

- LAUNCH staff's recruitment efforts created trust with parents early on, which contributes to the supportive environment of the meetings that parents talked about. To engage parents at the state level, using this recruitment style as a model may make parents more likely to participate.
- LAUNCH parents recommended creating flyers that could be passed out in schools, which would inform parents about the council and invite them to participate.
- One LAUNCH staff stated that payment for parents should be built into any grant or organizational budget for organizations who want to involve parents.
- The importance of timing, child care, transportation, and food should not be underestimated (3,5). If these are not accounted for, attending council meetings will be difficult or impossible for some.

Survey State Partners

- LAUNCH should survey organizations who are on the State Young Child Wellness Council about their current councils and parental involvement. By understanding how current partners are or are not involving parents, LAUNCH will be able to provide support in promoting the voices of parents in organizations across the state.

Workforce Development for Parents and Providers

- Trainings are one of the most powerful predictors of community involvement in health councils (2). Workshops for both parents and providers facilitate community participation, resulting in increased parent participation, and parents feeling that their participation is meaningful.
- Trainings for parents should focus on informing them of current health policies and work to increase their communication, self-advocacy, and leadership skills (2,3). Workshops such as these have been found to result in community members attending more meetings, becoming more involved in the council, and feeling more influential.
- Parents and providers should receive training on how power hierarchies can hinder parent involvement in council meetings (2). Trainings should focus on increasing group facilitation, conflict resolution, partnership building, and communication skills. These trainings will help reduce power differentials and increase meaningful parental involvement.

1 - Wright, B. (2013). Do patients have a voice? The social stratification of health center governing boards. *Health Expectations*, 18, 430-437.
 2 - Pivik, J. R. (2002). Practical strategies for facilitating meaningful citizen involvement in health planning. *Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, Discussion Paper #23*.
 3 - Caldwell, J., Hauss, S., & Stark, B. (2009). Participation of individuals with developmental disabilities and families on advisory boards and committees. *Journal of Disability and Policy Studies*, 20(2), 101-109.
 4 - Sleath, B. & Rucker, D. (2001). Consumer participation in health policy decisions: Empowerment or puffery? *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 12(1), 35-49.
 5 - Williams, T. T. & Sanchez, B. (2011). Identifying decreasing barriers to parent involvement for inner-city parents. *Youth and Society*, 45(1), 54-74.