

2014-15 PSESD Early Learning Self-Assessment: Family Goal-Setting ¹

Have parents set at least one goal for their family? What early learning program supports have families experienced in making progress toward those goals? Which have been helpful and which not helpful (e.g. parent events)?

Survey Demographics

- Of 215 **Site Staff** survey respondents, **55%** ($n=118$) work as Family Support Staff/Family Advocate or Home Visitor.
 - Some teachers pointed out that they share some of the responsibilities of providing family support services formally (e.g., taking on role in summer) or informally (e.g., conducting home visits when families request or for conferences).
- Of 76 **PSESD Early Learning staff**, **59%** ($n=45$), reported that they support sites on setting goals with families.
- Of 583 **Parents/ Families**, **84%** ($n=492$) reported that they worked with their Family Support Staff to identify goals for their family.

Strengths

- **Setting Family Goals**
 - **75%** of the 122 **site staff** ($n=92$) consider themselves **at least very capable** in supporting families to set specific and achievable family goals. An additional 21% ($n=25$) felt that they were somewhat capable.
 - **88%** of 42 **center leaders** ($n=37$) feel **at least somewhat capable** in supporting their staff to set specific and achievable family goals with families.
 - **88% of 485 parents/family members** ($n=426$) found the process for setting specific and achievable family goals was **at least very helpful**.
- **Progress towards Family Goals**
 - **71%** of 122 **site staff** ($n=86$) thought that they were **at least very capable** in helping families make progress toward and achieve their goals. Another 21% ($n=25$) of respondents felt that they were somewhat capable.
 - **88%** of 42 **center leaders** ($n=37$) considered themselves **at least somewhat capable** in providing support to their staff to help families make progress toward and achieve their goals.
 - **74% of 483 parents** ($n=355$) reported that their families are making progress toward their goals. Another 20% ($n=100$) stated that they have achieved the goals they set for their families.
- **Staff and center leads** identified several aspects that support family goal setting:
 - Building trust with families facilitates goal-setting process.
 - Setting goals that are realistic and parent-driven.
 - Some staff use the term “plan” as opposed to “goal”. This helps families understand and the conversation feels less forced. It is helpful to work on one concrete goal (e.g., budgeting) and check on it in a friendly way when staff see parents and have the chance.
 - Also, checking-in regularly with parents, including calling /emailing to touch base rather than waiting for the second home visit.
 - Not calling the process “goal-setting”, but providing families with resources based on their

¹ Data sources; Surveys from 264 site staff; 50 center directors; 81 PSESD Early Learning Staff, 649 parent/family members, and 11 focus groups with 74 parents/ family members and 15 focus groups with 115 site staff and center leaders. Total N's/number of respondents for surveys may vary because not everyone answered all survey questions.

Strengths

identified needs.

- Having parents write their goals on the form rather than the family support staff doing the writing as a positive step to help parents think about their own goals and not feel hurried.
- Taking the approach that is not necessarily the most important thing to meet the goal, but it is important to have a goal and make progress towards it.
- Family Support staff observing child in class is helpful for big-picture goal-setting with the family.
- New staff being able to job shadow to learn goal-setting process.
- Goal-setting in Early Head Start is a natural part of home visits and close relationships with families.
- Seeing families follow through on their goals is exciting.

• Family Supports that Are Helpful for Setting/Achieving Goals

- Parents appreciate family support staff, home visitor, and teacher help in setting/achieving goals.
- Many families mentioned their children's development as their goals, including literacy, numeracy, physical-motor skills, and social interaction, self-regulation, and attention skills. Parents and family members appreciated site staff work with their children.
 - Early Head Start parents cited the weekly visits to show parents, step by step, how to read a book or, show them how to introduce letters so child can begin to recognize letters, especially letters that spell their names.
- Most families set goals during home visits with help from Family Support staff. Some parents are asked for personal, family, and child goals which are helpful distinctions.
- Family Support follow-up that is friendly and consistent is helpful to families (e.g., reminders about dentist check-ups for the family; check-in on how a financial plan is going).
- Family Support staff are helpful for a range of different goals:
 - Providing help and resources, like English as a Second Language classes where childcare is provided, or recommending that a parent serve on Policy Council to be able to contribute and participate actively in life
 - Sharing resources for basic needs (e.g., how to pay bills; getting social security number; applying for a job; getting healthcare coverage)
 - Guiding families to support goals, like obtaining GED to go to college; finding stable housing; becoming financially stable; staying on top of life changes—new baby, going back to school after military service
 - Providing support during crisis periods (e.g., power cut; loss of job; family transitions; homelessness because of domestic violence).
- Having bilingual family support is helpful for families who speak a language other than English to talk about needs and goals.

• PSESD Support for Family Goal-Setting

- **70%** of 40 PSESD EL staff ($n=28$) indicated that training and support from PSESD in supporting sites to work with families to set specific and achievable family goals are at least somewhat helpful. A third of the respondents rated the PSESD support as at least very helpful.
- **Site staff and leaders** cited the following positive aspects to the goal-setting process:
 - The new goal setting sheet is helpful – a clear layout, and begins with family strengths.
 - The new form with only one goal per family (instead of three goals) works better.
 - Able to scan and email or make a copy of the goal form for the family to take.
 - Helpful that it does not require the parent signature anymore.
- The form is a useful tool that helps guide the conversation.

Challenges

- **PSED Support**
 - 37% of 41 PSED EL staff (n=15) reported that they found supporting sites in working with families to set specific and achievable family goals at least somewhat challenging.
- **Site staff and center leaders** noted challenges to supporting family goal-setting:
 - Lack of time
 - Limited time to meet with families, with many things to get through during the home visit, where goal setting is just one of them.
 - Some sites have built in planning time during the week and paid planning time on Fridays, others are paid only for time when children are present and do not have paid planning time.
 - Loss of hours in program, staffing has been depleted. There is limited time to talk with other staff about family goal setting.
 - Family support staff have a heavy workload and multiple tasks and paperwork to complete.
 - Lack of resources or knowledge about resources.
 - Lack of computers, printers, or technology to offer parents to look for jobs.
 - Lack of information about where to find resources or help for families, in situations like homelessness or joblessness and how to help.
 - Supporting goals for some families, such as those who are undocumented, raises issues of trust and proper guidance/support – for example, parents who want to get a social security number to get a job, and knowing how to direct them to resources that will not change when federal administration or policies change.
 - Several parents would like to get their GED, but they meet barriers. For example, “\$160 fee is prohibitive for families who are struggling”.
 - Goal setting is not a process that most families are familiar with. It requires trust and a built relationship to be meaningful to families.
 - It is disappointing for families when they do not meet a goal they set.
 - For some families, setting goals is not hard. If asked, they can come up with one. It is moving towards goals that is challenging
 - Family circumstances changes through the year, so what is documented may become irrelevant and very families meet the original goals.
 - Many things go on in the lives of families that interrupt progress toward goals. Keeping after families to meet their goals only makes them feel like failures.
 - For some families, especially those with a single parent with little support at home or those that are in crisis, getting their child to the center is all they can do and they are not thinking beyond this as a goal.
 - It interferes with building a relationship with families when staff are taking notes on the goal-setting form instead of paying full attention to families while they are talking.
 - Getting through all paperwork, especially where there is duplication of questions, **such as** on the family partnership plan and the family support summary form.
 - Some site staff shared their perception that there is less communication between Family Support staff and teachers. An example cited: “in the past site staff used ELMS to enter information and now each staff is keeping their own logs and not sharing information.”
 - Some families seem not to be interested. They may identify a goal (e.g. budgeting), and when given resources to help, the resources are found later in waste bins at site or, if asked, they have forgotten where they have left resource list or other brochure, etc.
- **Parents** identified some main factors that affect setting or achieving goals:

Challenges

- Long work hours, schedules for other activities and responsibilities, and life events. One parent commented, “There are plenty of goals you can set but there is only so much you can do. With work, the most we can do is have dinner together to have family time.” Or, “Life changes such as having a baby, especially if prematurely born; losing a job or one’s home.”

Suggestions for Improvement

- **Site staff and center leadership** suggested the following improvements to Center Leadership or PSESD support to supporting families to set and achieve goals:
 - Make the goal setting process more family driven.
 - Make the goal setting form more family friendly.
 - Match forms to family languages and literacy levels.
 - Hold a family activity where families learn how to set goals before actual one-on-one family goal setting.
 - Develop materials for parents about importance of setting goals, for example by citing research about self-improvement, the value of having a plan.
 - Example activity: (from a Birth to Three, Public Health nurse type project) have a deck of cards with life topics like basic needs. The worker and the parent would play this game about “what would really make a difference in my life?” looking at 20 topics which help the family talk about and identify what would make a difference, which is what a goal is.
 - Show parents a sample sheet in the orientation packet so parents know what the expectation is.
 - Have parents do regular check-ins about progress on their goals.
 - Train staff on the changes and on basic systems.
 - Provide more support and orientation when requiring staff to use new forms and explain the rationale for the new form and for the process of goal-setting.
 - Give examples of strong goals and family support documentation that demonstrates good work that helped families reach their goals.
 - Provide training and support how to write goals, such as ongoing vs. time-bound
 - Offer training and support when staff start, not waiting until the next year or only when staff does not meet requirements.
 - Have teachers, FSS, other staff learn about what each person does.
 - Offer peer training or one-on-one training as options for learning. Share success stories and strategies.
 - Have time specific for FSS and teacher to meet on a regular basis throughout the week (paid time). Increase staffing hours to allow time for staff to connect daily when children are not there.
 - Create efficiencies in forms/paperwork.
 - Reduce duplication in paperwork to avoid recording the same information in multiple places.
 - Make the Partnership Summary fillable online, and/or keep Partnership Records online to save everyone a lot of time.
 - Return to having electronic rather than paper logs so that all staff have access.
 - It would be very helpful if the PSESD provides support for GED-testing:
 - Offer GED testing at no cost.
 - Enable parents to take GED test at Early Learning program centers so that they feel at ease.
 - Partner with a GED prep organization, possibly with a voucher or waiver for fees to support

Suggestions for Improvement

families.

- **PSESD EL staff** suggested the following steps to help in their work with sites to support families to set and achieve specific and achievable goals:
 - Develop a comprehensive resource guide that can be updated.
 - Include resources across each county.
 - Include community-specific resources for specific areas such as employment, housing, food/utility assistance, legal rights issues, mental health, community events, etc.
 - Include other agencies in addition to the usual-DSHS, WIC, CCR, etc.—such as community-based organizations.
 - Take a more integrated, holistic, cross-service approach in support of implementation.
 - Provide new staff with sample files and updated forms and go over process within first month of hire.
 - Provide all staff clear directives, clear guidance, clear procedures, clear timelines, and clear expectations that are communicated in a timely fashion.
- By and large, parents were very pleased with the work of the sites that most did not think the sites needed improvement in their goal setting efforts. Those who had suggestions offered the following ideas for improvement to the process of setting and achieving family goals:
 - Provide reminders (e.g., vision board; or a simple print-out copy) so parent does not forget goals and can check themselves. More follow-up with parents would also be helpful.
 - Provide resources toward achieving family goals.
 - Identify and provide list of community resources (e.g., rent/financial assistance; help with transportation to and from doctor appointments).
 - Identify a support system that can help to achieve goals.
 - Increase communication between parents/families to share strategies for achieving goals.
 - In two-parent families, have both parents agree on goals.
 - Provide strategy for parents to work together, think ahead, and identify and set goals.
 - Consider time and effort required.
 - Set both short-term and long-term goals, to be realistic and only as many as families can handle. Set goals that are attainable yet challenging. And help set priorities, e.g., from simpler goals at start and harder ones for later.
 - Review timing for different models, e.g., one program meets once a week and families work on short-term goals every 3 months. For such a program, it may be more helpful to set even more short-term goals every time parents meet with site staff at home.
 - Provide more time for specific family-goal planning using an hour per week. And increase home visit time so that one hour is for family goal setting and the other hour is for child gals-setting.
 - Keep the focus on children’s readiness goals instead, and check child chart if they are met.