

## TOPLINE IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS

### The Third in a Series Strengthening Families Rhode Island: 2005-2009

Prepared for Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island



## Field Study: Examining the Impact of Strengthening Families Rhode Island on Parent Engagement

Prepared by graduate students  
at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University\*:  
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### Field Study Sites:

**Stork's Nest Child Academy, Inc.**  
440 George Washington Hwy  
Smithfield, RI 02917  
**Site Visit:** September 17

**John F. Kennedy Child Development Center  
Naval Station**  
1376 Bushnell Street  
Middletown, RI 02942  
**Site Visits:** September 23, October 7

**December 2009**

\*Under direction of Professor Susan P. Curnan in partial fulfillment of course requirements for HS511b: Contemporary Issues in Policies and Programs for Children, Youth and Families



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**Thank you!**

**Series of Reports Prepared by The Center for Youth and Communities and graduate students at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University:**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Topline Report: Leadership and Pilot Implementation, Summer 2008</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Authors:</b> Susan P. Curnan, Professor &amp; Director; Della M. Hughes, Senior Fellow; Lanni Isenberg, Executive Research Assistant</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Field Study: Implementation – Successes and Challenges, Spring 2009</b></p> <p><b>Two Sites:</b> Child and Family Service in Middletown, RI and Child and Family Service in Newport, RI</p> <p><b>Authors:</b> Graduate Students of the Heller School* – Farida Ahmatiy, Sami Ullah Band, Cristiana Carvalho, Isatou Jeng, E. Shavshishvili, Anna Gazos, Shailendra Kumar, Lebo Moleboneng Sello, Toni Schwarzenbach, Patricia Vaccaro</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Field Study: Examining the Impact of Strengthening Families Rhode Island on Parent Engagement, December 2009</b></p> <p><b>Two Sites:</b> Stork’s Nest Child Academy, Inc., in Smithfield, RI and John F. Kennedy Child Development Center, Naval Station, in Middletown, RI</p> <p><b>Authors:</b> Graduate Students of the Heller School* – Faith Behum, Theadora Fisher, Carrie Ozols, Allison Stagg</p>

\*Under direction of Professor Susan P. Curnan in partial fulfillment of course requirements for HS511b: Contemporary Issues in Policies and Programs for Children, Youth and Families

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## Table of Contents

1. **Purpose**
2. **Overview of SFRI Model, the Role of Parent Engagement, and the Parent Engagement ‘Starter’ Logic Model**  
Exhibit A: SFRI Parent Engagement ‘Starter’ Logic Model
3. **Approach**
  - 3.1 **Participants**
  - 3.2 **Instruments**
  - 3.3. **Design**
  - 3.4 **Method**
4. **Findings**
  - 4.1 **Relational Bureaucratic Model**  
Exhibit B: Theorized Pattern of Relational and Conventional Bureaucratic Organizations
  - 4.2 **Managing Complex Change Framework**
5. **Assets Summary**
6. **Opportunities for “Heightening the Positive Potential” of SFRI**
7. **Conclusion**

### Sources Consulted

### ATTACHMENTS

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Appendix A.</b> | <b>Strengthening Families Initiative, Rhode Island, Logic Model</b> |
| <b>Appendix B</b>  | <b>Protocol – Interview Questions for SFI Field Study</b>           |
| <b>Appendix C</b>  | <b>Parent Survey – JFK Child Development Center, Naval Station</b>  |
| <b>Appendix D</b>  | <b>Managing Complex Change Model</b>                                |
| <b>Appendix E</b>  | <b>Parent Engagement “Tip Sheet”</b>                                |



## 1. Purpose

The purpose of our field study was to examine the Strengthening Families Initiative Rhode Island (SFRI) model for early childcare providers. The model intends to incorporate parents, providers, stakeholders, and the community to enhance a child's early care and reduce risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect. In order for SFRI to be successful, it is paramount that parents and guardians are engaged in the care and welfare of their child. The focus of our study was to observe the impact of the SFRI training method on augmenting parent engagement with childcare providers.

Our team consists of four students at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management enrolled in the class, "Contemporary Issues in Policies and Programs for Children, Youth and Families," under the leadership of Professor Susan Curnan. Through this course we were directed to conduct a field study, and our team chose to observe the role of parent engagement in the SFRI model. Visits to two early childcare centers - in Middletown and Smithfield, Rhode Island – allowed us to observe the SFRI model in action.

Our examination of the incorporation of parent engagement into the SFRI model was guided by the following questions:

- What are sites currently doing in the area of parent engagement, involvement, and leadership?
- How did the SFRI training impact providers' understanding of parent engagement?
- What can we learn about integrating the SFRI model into an array of childcare programs?

## 2. Overview of SFRI Model, the Role of Parent Engagement, and the Parent Engagement 'Starter' Logic Model

The Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI), a national project initiated by The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) in Washington, D.C., is dedicated to preventing child abuse and improving educational and social outcomes for children. In pursuit of this goal, SFI has synthesized and presented research on both preventing child abuse and early childhood development to identify five protective factors that are associated with positive family outcomes. These include:

1. Nurturing and attachment<sup>1</sup>
2. Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development
3. Parental resilience
4. Social connections
5. Concrete supports for parents (DHHS, 2009, p. 20)

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<sup>1</sup> SFRI has adapted this to read "Social and emotional competence"



These protective factors have been identified by SFI as important components of an initiative, delivered by childcare programs, to prevent child abuse and neglect and ensure that children grow up healthy and successful. In order to increase knowledge and understanding of these factors, childcare centers are a key part of the effort to reach out to parents, educate them about parenting and child development, and encourage them to take an interest in their child's education both in the center and at home. By building trust between parents and staff, parents are given a place to turn to when they are at risk of abusing or neglecting their child.

As one of seven SFI pilot states, Strengthening Families Rhode Island (SFRI) takes the research done by SFI and brings it to childcare centers across Rhode Island. Child abuse is most likely to occur in families that are isolated and lack resources, as well as during times of great stress. The protective factor framework refocuses prevention from identifying families at risk of child abuse and thus stigmatizing them, towards building the protective factors for all families at facilities that they are already familiar with. Under the auspices of Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island (PCARI), this program has the potential to reach a broad range of families in Rhode Island.

One research based assumption shared by parents and providers alike is that parent engagement is an important foundation for promoting the five protective factors. On a fundamental level, building connections with and between parents is essential for bringing resources to parents. Parent engagement, as defined by the Harvard Family Research Project, is "a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development" (Weiss & Lopez, 2009). A committed organizational focus on parent engagement is essential to welcome parents and guardians into the centers and facilitate relationships among each other and with the staff, to provide a support system and allow staff to reach parents with information about the protective factor framework.

Through the commitment and leadership of PCARI, SFRI has a good opportunity to increase parent engagement and foster parent leaders as part of its broader goal of improving outcomes for children and families in Rhode Island. To assist SFRI in doing this, our team created a Parent Engagement 'Starter' Logic Model (Exhibit A) as a baseline proposal for SFRI to build upon in developing and documenting/evaluating explicit strategies, activities and outcomes around parent engagement. SFRI and the leadership team organized by PCARI had developed a "meta-level" Organizational Logic Model prior to our team's involvement and used it to guide their work to date (Appendix A). The "starter" Parent Engagement Logic Model, illustrated below, combines the overall goals of the organization with a specific focus on parental engagement. Various components of this logic model state the connection between the presence of parental engagement and increasing the presence of the five protective



factors. Under ‘Assumptions,’ for instance, it is stated that “Parental/guardian engagement and leadership is essential for integrating protective factors and catalyzing parent engagement and connections.” The ‘strategies/activities’ and ‘outcomes’ are aligned to show how this assumption can be implemented and increase parental engagement in the SFRI childcare programs. This Model was created after we observed and interviewed the childcare centers’ caregivers and teachers and spoke to PCARI/SFRI staff. It incorporates the voices of all of these professionals as well as research that has been presented on parental engagement.

## Exhibit A: SFRI Parent Engagement ‘Starter’ Logic Model

**Mission:** To mobilize community partners and leaders from state departments of health, education, human services, and children, youth and families to expand and coordinate early care and education programs that build protective factors known to reduce child abuse and neglect. These factors include: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children.

FOR WHOM	ASSUMPTIONS	STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<p><b>Children and Parents in Rhode Island</b></p> <p><b>Early Care and Education Providers in Rhode Island</b></p> <p><b>Policy Makers, Practitioners and Change Agents Throughout Rhode Island</b></p>	<p><b>Children &amp; Parents/Guardians</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parental/guardian engagement and leadership is essential for integrating protective factors and catalyzing parent engagement and connections</li> <li>Parent engagement enhances learning and reduces school readiness gap</li> <li>Lack of time and busy schedules are two of the biggest barriers preventing parental engagement</li> <li>Limited time in a parent’s schedule makes it incredibly difficult to engage them.</li> <li>Approximately 30% of parents are involved in their child’s education and interact with center staff members frequently, another 30% want to be involved but are unable to find the time, 30% do not want to be involved; boundaries between these groups are fluid and parents tend to move from one group to another frequently</li> <li>Tension between parents/guardians and child care providers and the roles each has in child development complicates implementing actions increasing parental engagement</li> </ul> <p><b>Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parental Engagement allows for better child care</li> <li>Parental Engagement provides a base for implementing other services such as crisis services</li> <li>Competing priorities hinder growth of parental engagement; i.e. providers can be overwhelmed with curriculum requirements or simply caring for children every day hence parental engagement becomes one more action to focus on an already overwhelming list of priorities</li> <li>Negative attitudes towards parents decrease likelihood of parental engagement being implemented</li> </ul> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use Relational Bureaucratic Organizational Context to successfully infiltrate caring/relational initiatives into organizational culture*                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administration at centers recognize the value of child care staff’s input in implementing parental engagement initiatives</li> <li>Parental engagement initiatives are considered to be as important as educational curriculum thus promoting the importance of relationships with parents and guardians for both the success of the center and the children it serves</li> </ul> </li> <li>Training on parental engagement must be coupled with structural changes for results to last                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From a Relational Bureaucratic context this means that trainings become a place where providers interact with one another and share their own knowledge of and experience with parental engagement hence increasing staff ownership and participation in increasing parental engagement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Children &amp; Parents/Guardians</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying parent leaders and directing them to additional trainings is a way to utilize center’s resources in the form of human capital in implementing parental engagement initiatives**</li> <li>Recognize multiple opportunities to build parent leadership in programs and communities and place parents in leadership opportunities                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples: annual leadership meetings for parents, PAT, COZ Center groups, workshops, parent mentorship</li> </ul> </li> <li>Build parent involvement in self-assessment and parent to parent support. This encourages parent participation and shares responsibility in implementing parental engagement strategies-an important aspect of the relational bureaucracy model</li> <li>Involve parents in determining strategies for discipline and learning.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourages shared ownership and ‘we are in this together’ mentality**</li> </ul> </li> <li>Provide meaningful volunteer opportunities at various times of day with differing levels of commitment</li> <li>Create ways to involve parents through activities that can be done in the classroom or at home to contribute to class                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutes ‘action plan’ for engaging parents in activities at the center**</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide daily communication with parents/caretakers either verbal or written on overall daily performance and special notifications</li> <li>Learn about parents personal skills/talents that can be incorporated into the classroom</li> <li>Develop personal relationships with parents that are ‘caring, reciprocal, and respectful’ and promotes getting to understand parents on an individual level*</li> <li>Produce a center wide parent engagement shared vision that everyone is invested in. This allows for a better understanding of what parent engagement is and why everyone is working towards this goal**</li> </ul> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a shared space and maintain an open-door policy</li> <li>Provide opportunities for families to socialize and foster a sense of community</li> <li>Make staff knowledgeable about the importance of parent engagement and how to foster it</li> <li>Commitment to parent engagement as a core instructional strategy</li> <li>Robust communication systems involving all stakeholders. Promotes participation and a democratic power structure for both families and providers to interact within and further the presence of relational bureaucracy at the centers*</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children &amp; Parents/Guardians</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent/Caretaker engagement and leadership</li> <li>Supportive relationships between early care and education providers and parents/caretakers</li> <li>Supportive relationship between parent to parent</li> </ul> <p><b>Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skilled and knowledgeable providers</li> <li>Strong, mutually supportive relationships between providers and parents/caretakers</li> </ul> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate encouragement of parent involvement; i.e. Are parents volunteering? Are the providers following the shared vision of the center?***</li> <li>Policy changes – long term value of parent support and engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect</b></p> <p><b>Children Healthy and Ready to Learn</b></p> <p><b>Sustainable, High Performance Leadership Team in Support of Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p><b>Policies and Resources Aligned with Protective Factors</b></p> <p><b>Child Abuse and Neglect Programs are Recognized as a Priority in RI</b></p>

Developed by: Carrie Ozols, Faith Behum, Allison Stagg, and Theodora Fisher for *Field Study: Examining the Impact of Strengthening Families Rhode Island on Parent Engagement*, October 22, 2009

\*Cited from Douglass, A. (2009). *Dissertation. Strengthening Families Illinois: How Management and Policy Interventions Influence the Quality of Professional-Parent Partnerships in Child Care*. Presented to the faculty of The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, August 2009.

\*\* Based on the Managing Complex Change framework (vision, skills, incentive, resources, action plan, evaluation) developed by Adams, A., Kingsley, C., and Smith, P. from the Center for Youth and Communities at the Heller School at Brandeis University are articulated above to ensure strategies with optimal results.



### 3. Approach and Methods

**3.1. Participants.** Our team visited two distinctive sites: Stork’s Nest Child Academy, Inc. a private business located in Smithfield, R.I., and the John F. Kennedy Child Development Center located on the Naval Base in Middletown. We interviewed multiple classroom teachers at both sites. Those who were interviewed had been working at the centers for various lengths of time, but overall we found a lot of staff longevity – at both sites, many staff members had worked there for five or more years. The teachers worked with children ranging from infants to first graders. In addition to teachers and providers, we interviewed the Director of Stork’s Nest, who participated in the SFRI training along with the staff. At the JFK Center, we spoke with the Training Coordinator as well as parents whose children are currently enrolled in the Center. Both Centers appeared to be “well resourced” compared to traditional non-profit centers.

**3.2. Instruments.** Our team developed interview protocols based on other surveys assessing parent engagement (Appendices B and C). The questions focus on current parent engagement practices in the centers, the effectiveness of the training in altering staff’s knowledge of or opinions about parent engagement, and possible changes that might happen in their center as a result of SFRI. The nature of the day-to-day work at these sites made it challenging to systematically conduct the interviews as planned. Time constraints and sporadic interruptions were commonplace. Most interviews were conducted while the teachers were in the classroom working with the children. Given the intensive environment in which the interviews were conducted, our protocol was intentionally flexible and questions were adapted to the reality of the classrooms.

**3.3 Design.** All four Heller School students participated in the field study at both locations. The interviews were conducted in pairs or one-on-one, depending on the situation. Each student interviewed multiple teachers; our entire team interviewed the Training Coordinator and Director. Because both childcare centers we visited for this study benefit from a high level of resources and fairly low level of stress, we were able to observe the process of implementing the SFRI initiative in an environment with high potential for success.

**3.4 Method.** The questions and subsequent analysis of this study was guided by Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This method emphasizes “...the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system ‘life’ when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. [Appreciative Inquiry] involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). This method is designed to uncover the basic goodness and inherent strengths of the system that is being analyzed; in our case, the aim is to highlight the strengths and assets that exist in the SFRI model and its



implementation in childcare centers. Through our findings we were able to offer recommendations aimed at “heightening the positive potential” of the SFRI model.

#### 4. Findings

Our findings from the field study are structured around two theoretical frameworks, which we find are consistent with the Appreciative Inquiry approach. The frameworks also examine the SFRI “change process” in the environment of early childcare centers. These frameworks, the Relational Bureaucratic Model (Exhibit B), and Managing Complex Change (Appendix D), are briefly outlined below.

**4.1 Relational Bureaucratic Model.** This frame of analysis proved particularly useful when examining the effectiveness of SFRI’s parental engagement efforts within the context of internal structure of the organizations. In any effort to implement change, it is important to consider the configuration of the organization itself and examine whether or not the structure is conducive to successfully implementing the changes that are sought.

**Exhibit B:  
Theorized Pattern of Relational and Conventional Bureaucratic Organizations**

Component of Organizational System	Key Dimensions of Relational Bureaucracy	Key Dimensions of Conventional Bureaucracy
1. People	Staff reflect the cultures/languages of families served	Staff may not reflect cultures/languages of families served
2. Power Structures	Democratic and participatory structures	Hierarchical staff structures
3. Relationship Structures	Systems exist to support relational competencies for caring, flexible and responsive approach to individual needs	Rigid rules, boundaries, and policies exist to guide uniform approach
4. Processes related to power	Opportunities to share knowledge, expertise, and power	Hierarchy of expertise, knowledge, and power
5. Processes related to relationships	Staff relationships are caring, reciprocal, and respectful. Relational competencies are recognized, valued, and developed	Staff relationships are formal, hierarchical and impersonal. Adherence to rules and protocol is recognized and valued

Cited from Douglass, A. (2009). *Dissertation. Strengthening Families Illinois: How Management and Policy Interventions Influence the Quality of Professional-Parent Partnerships in Child Care*. Presented to the faculty of The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, August 2009.

A recent Heller School PhD graduate (now a professor at University of Massachusetts) studied the Strengthening Families Initiative in the state of Illinois for her dissertation and examined the parent-teacher partnerships in the context of the type of



organizational structure in four childcare programs. This study compared two types of bureaucracy – conventional and relational – building on the theory of relational coordination developed by Heller faculty member and Director of the MBA Program, Jody Hoffer Gittel. In short, relational bureaucracies are characterized by open communication, democratic processes, and sharing of knowledge and power. Conventional bureaucracies are characterized by rigid hierarchies, formal relationships, and adherence to rules and protocols.

The Illinois study hypothesized that the relationships that exist in an organization will be replicated in the relationships formed between the staff (in our case, childcare providers) and the clients (in our case, the parents). The study found that conventional bureaucracy inhibited parent-teacher partnerships. The most successful parent-teacher relationships occurred in the context of a relational bureaucracy, where parents and teachers were able to share power and step outside of a rigid hierarchy. Parent-teacher relationships are made easier through the kind of knowledge-sharing that is found in a relational bureaucracy. Specifically, the power structures and relationship processes through this sort of structure facilitate both sharing of knowledge and expertise as well as caring, respectful, and reciprocal relationships.

Our team's extension of these findings is that childcare centers have a natural inclination towards a relational organizational structure due to the nature of the work. The two sites we visited exhibited relational characteristics such as a relatively flat hierarchy, staff empowerment in decision-making, and caring, respectful relationships both between staff members and between staff and clients. SFRI's core training further contributes to the relational structure of the centers in two ways: a) it brings teachers together and gives them a forum for communication and sharing knowledge collectively, and b) it brings new information into the childcare centers, which providers can then pass along to parents through events, trainings, and conversations in the classroom. Throughout our analysis, we will relate the changes that SFRI is initiating through the Managing Complex Change framework to the relational bureaucratic model.

**4.2 Managing Complex Change Framework.** The Managing Complex Change framework, developed by the Center for Youth and Communities at Brandeis University, is a seven-element model addressing the basics of organizing and implementing complex, systemic change – not unlike SFRI's current efforts to more deeply integrate parental engagement at childcare centers across Rhode Island. Our team applied this framework to analyze our findings. Furthermore, because it is a well tested diagnostic tool that has been utilized by Heller teams working with SFRI in the past, we hope that situating our team's findings in a familiar context will be particularly useful for the readers.

The purpose of the Managing Complex Change framework is to help organizations think through the process of initiating, shaping, and encouraging an environment in which effective change can be managed and achieved. The seven essential elements, each



of which will be addressed in turn, include: (1) Shared vision, (2) Knowledge, skills, and abilities, (3) Resources, (4) Incentive, (5) Ownership, (6) Action plan, and (7) Evaluation. Achieving the desired end result requires all seven elements to be present and functioning well – if not all the time (nearly impossible), at least some of the time. Missing or neglected elements can result in problems in the change effort, and each element is associated with a particular negative outcome that can hinder or derail the change process. The framework helps users identify problem areas and pinpoint where in the change process to potentially devote more attention. Throughout our analysis, we have adopted a “traffic light” approach to gauge SFRI’s progress in parent engagement in each of these areas: “green light” elements indicate successful, go-ahead areas, whereas “yellow light” and “red light” elements deserve further reflection (we identified no “red light” elements through our analysis).

## Managing Complex Change

### Element # 1: Shared Vision – Green Light



Change starts with a vision – a detailed “big picture” of the ultimate goal and how it will be achieved. As outlined above, the vision of parent engagement adopted by SFRI clearly articulates a shared responsibility for meaningful family integration in order to advance the five protective factors. Achieving shared vision, however, involves not only defining the end result but also ensuring that it is built and embraced by the many organizational actors who are ultimately responsible for its success. Shared vision is thus the foundation of the Managing Complex Change framework: it is the “starting point for all change efforts, and from it all subsequent steps can be drawn” (Adams et al., p. 37). If the vision is not shared by key stakeholders, is poorly communicated across the organization, or is unclear, confusion may develop. During our site visits, we were interested in the degree to which providers and staff expressed a consistent vision of parent engagement and their role in achieving this goal.

Throughout our conversations with providers, we found that they shared an intuitive recognition of increased parental involvement as a positive and worthwhile goal. This belief was articulated by both SFRI training participants as well as staff who did not participate in the training. When asked what ideal parent engagement would look like in their classroom, providers expressed themes consistent with SFRI’s vision, such as parents who are more involved at the Center’s events after-hours, who ask questions about their child’s day, and who are knowledgeable about the learning that takes place. Strategies to obtain this goal varied, but throughout these explanations teachers acknowledged their role in realizing the ultimate outcome. Generally, then, we suggest



that the development of a shared vision is likely to benefit from the implicit value of connections with families embedded in the organizational culture of childcare work.

General operating assumptions, however, are still a step away from the shared vision necessary for the long-term change process. SFRI's training closes this gap. Participants repeatedly emphasized that the training offered an important opportunity to clarify why parental engagement is important and to visualize the role they could play in achieving this goal. Although they may have entered the training with a tacit belief in the vision, engaging in dialogue around the benefits of parental engagement reinforced the significant value of actively pursuing this common goal as a program. Furthermore, strategic consideration of how to attain the goal provided an important opportunity for participants to establish their role in the process. Participating in the visioning process reinforced the need for providers to make an explicit and collective effort to achieve a higher level of involvement.

In short, participation in SFRI's training facilitates providers' adoption of parent engagement not as an abstract "good" but as the end result of a process in which they will be intimately involved. As the SFRI program grows and spreads, it may be helpful for SFRI to consider adopting a precise and repeatedly articulated definition of parent engagement that would help it assist centers in developing their own vision around parent engagement. In the long-term, SFRI could clarify their specific definition of parent engagement to further build a cohesive vision among stakeholders. Overall, however, our findings suggest that shared vision is a "green light" area; SFRI training participants and some non-participants share the big-picture vision.

## Element #2: Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities – Green Light



After participants in the change process have addressed the question of "Why?" through a shared visioning process, the next fundamental questions to arise are typically "How?" and "What do we need to know and be able to do?" Implementing change requires that the people and institutions involved possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to reach the vision at a high level of quality. While the particular competencies needed to achieve increased parental engagement may differ at various levels of the organization (i.e., teachers and administrators may employ different tactics or need to communicate in different ways), all participants must feel capable of fulfilling their role. A deficiency in this area produces stress and anxiety, as providers and staff attempt to implement a new idea and feel inadequately prepared.

During our visits, we observed an unusual degree of longevity among teachers. Because so many providers we spoke with have been working in this field for an extensive period, they possess a high degree of knowledge about child care.



Particularly at the Navy site, where staff are required to complete 48 hours of professional training per year, staff are clearly knowledgeable about the kind of work they do.

Even with such a high level of experience, participants reported that SFRI’s training provided a valuable learning opportunity. One teacher, a 12-year veteran in the field of child care, said that she appreciated the information provided through the training because "...after being in the profession for awhile you get stale." Other long-term teachers called it a good opportunity to build on what they already know through acquiring new information and gaining “different ways of doing things.” Even staff who mentioned that the training covered many practices they already employ in their classrooms found the experience valuable because it served as “a refresher.” We propose that the training further serves to professionalize the work at the centers by validating that teachers not only have the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities but are often fully employing them. The validation and enrichment offered through the training has the affect of alleviating potential anxiety about the change process.

In addition to acquiring new information and ideas to bring back to the classroom, participating teachers were also able to share knowledge and skills with each other. In many cases, conversations continued among staff beyond the few hours they were in the training together. Such collaborative behavior is an essential ingredient in the “how” of achieving sustained change: open lines of communication between providers facilitate sharing of new information and ideas as the organization learns and adapts over time. The exchange of knowledge is particularly consistent with the relational bureaucracy model of organizational behavior: staff need opportunities to share knowledge, expertise, and power. Rather than establish a hierarchy of knowledge dominance, the training served to level the power-knowledge structure.

Our team concludes that the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities is high at both centers, and that SFRI is recognized as helping to affirm and increase the teachers’ solid foundation in parent engagement and childcare. Given this, we highlight this element as a “green light” area.

### Element #3: Resources: Yellow Light



A well-trained and able staff is an integral component of achieving success. But, sustainability and effectiveness equally depends on access to the resources needed to do the job well. Such resources certainly include sufficient financial resources to maintain facilities, equipment, supplies, and materials. Equally important, however, are less tangible resources such as human capital and time. Without adequate resources –



both monetary and intangible – change will take longer and participants will be frustrated.

Based on our observations, both sites benefit from an impressive supply of material resources: large and well-maintained buildings and playgrounds, supplies in the classroom, and abundant materials (such as resource libraries and pamphlets) for parents and providers. It is true that human service organizations rarely have excessive resources – and this is only exacerbated during an economic recession. However, the sites we visited (one private, one military) were privileged to have more physical resources than many other childcare centers.

Those who participated in the training repeatedly indicated that PCARI/SFRI as an intermediary organization, and in particular the SFRI Coordinator, were critical resources in the change process. As providers explained in our interviews, the training extended beyond simply reading a book into the dynamics of personal experience, telling stories, and asking questions. The training was so enthusiastically received in part because of the skill of the trainer, and her ability to relate complicated research findings to real life in a way that made them accessible to the staff. This was a common theme echoed across staff at both sites.

However, our observations point to the lack of one critical resource that threatens to undermine progress: time. Particularly at JFK, new regulations banning overtime pay have led to a cancellation of weekly after-hours staff meetings. As one staff member explained, “It’s frustrating. They don’t give us the means to accomplish what they want us to.” Appropriate time for collaboration was valued by providers at both sites we visited. We propose that lingering elements of conventional bureaucracy have created a disconnect in the organization: those at the top of the administrative hierarchy do not place the same degree of priority on ensuring adequate time for staff to get together. Until administrators and those at the ground level collaboratively resolve this tension, the change process will suffer. While not at the level of toxic stress, lack of time as a resource is certainly creating frustration among staff. Thus, we suggest resources is a “yellow light” area that deserves more attention.

#### Element #4: Incentive – Green Light



For change to be sustained over time, those involved in the process must realize rewards for their efforts. Incentive is about “What’s in it for me, for those I serve, and for my organization?” Without adequate incentive (internal and external), the change process achieves only slow, gradual progress. While external sources, such as monetary incentives, are commonly employed as motivational tools in organizations, it is certainly not the only (or even the most powerful) form of incentive. For many



choosing nonprofit and human services work, the knowledge that one’s efforts are making a difference is inherently motivating.

It was readily apparent during our site visits that providers deeply believe they can influence the quality of life of children and families. Staff at all levels of the organization show a high degree of commitment to children’s well-being and long-term developmental needs. Fundamentally, providers are motivated by the opportunity to make a difference. This is a deeply powerful, personal, and underlying incentive for providers to put forth time and effort necessary to achieve the long-term vision of increased parent engagement. They understand that a deeper integration of parent engagement strategies will make a positive impact on the children and families they serve.

Furthermore, the providers we spoke with also recognize the immediate benefits of parental engagement for their daily work. One Stork’s Nest teacher explained that classrooms simply work better when parents know each other and talk together. These kinds of relationships are fostered in a relational bureaucracy, which emphasizes shared knowledge and flattened power structures. Another teacher at JFK reinforced that ultimately “parents are the first teachers,” so when parents engage with their children in the learning process during out-of-school time the children also become more active participants in classroom activities. Thus, from the provider’s perspective, parent engagement is not only good for the kids, it is good for them as teachers too. Given the high level of incentive demonstrated by the staffs at both centers, we give this element a “green light.”

### Element #5: Ownership – Yellow Light



Shared ownership among all stakeholders is an essential component of the change process. It is only when everyone has a “we’re in it together” mentality and has bought into the vision that program and policy change can be successful. Employees and all other parties involved must value the initiative, and demonstrate their buy-in through individual and collective effort toward the vision. The failure to reach shared ownership leads to resistance and resentment.

At both sites we observed, buy-in to the vision of parental engagement appears to be strong among providers. After completing the training, many teachers expressed enthusiasm about trying out new strategies to enhance the involvement of parents and guardians in their classrooms. Furthermore, among both SFRI-trained and non-trained staff, open communication with parents is a strategy that is actively nurtured. In both centers the practice was to give parents daily reports on their child as often as possible; in the JFK Center reports are sent home daily with information about the child’s day.



According to the relational bureaucratic model, which operates from a shared power structure (as opposed to a hierarchical one), we suggest that the staff see themselves not above parents but rather on the same level and thus are able to share the appropriate knowledge whenever necessary. Such open communication is an asset in building a sense of shared ownership.

Despite these strengths, we also identified several stress points and areas for improvement and ultimately suggest shared ownership is a “yellow light” area. The first stress point relates to a concern we have already expressed: change is inhibited when participants cannot interact and build cohesive teams. By its very nature, childcare can be an isolating profession. Most of a teacher’s day is spent in a classroom, leaving few opportunities to interact with adult colleagues. Creating a culture of shared ownership, however, requires information sharing and collective accountability in pursuit of the vision.

Second, our interviews suggest that shared ownership of the vision has not yet been achieved between teachers and parents. While providers are quite clear about the rationale for parent engagement, this has not yet been communicated with parents and guardians. At the same time, clear roles for parents in achieving the vision have not been established. Communication between the parents and providers exists, but the exchange of the necessary information to facilitate parental buy-in has not yet occurred. The disconnect leads to possible resistance or resentment among staff as they move forward implementing their new strategies. Several providers expressed doubt about whether parents would have the time or energy to engage in classroom activities and increase their presence at the center as a result of their efforts, citing parent stress and busyness as factors preventing buy-in. Due to this lack of shared ownership, teachers may unfairly view parents as purposefully disengaged when in fact they may not have been invited to buy into the vision and/or able to find sufficient time to invest in it.

### Element #6: Action Plan – Yellow Light



Even if the other elements of the change model are in place, progress is slow without a short- and long-term plan of action, which “lets people know what their roles are, what they must do within those roles, by when, with whom, and how” (Adams et al., p. 38). Without a clearly-defined strategy to follow as the organization manages implementation of the new ideas, the complex process of change will be plagued with false starts.

The SFRI training incorporates action planning, which providers and staff at both sites recognized as a critical opportunity to develop strategies to use in their classrooms. During the eighth and final training session each participant creates an action plan to take back to his or her room with a list of ideas and plans that they will implement to



foster community and parent relationships. However, because these plans are solely the responsibility of the individual provider, there is a danger that implementation of these strategies will fall by the wayside as the providers step back into the demanding and fast-paced atmosphere of their classroom, where daily routines are well-established.

At an organizational level, providers at both sites discussed that the facility operates with an open-door policy. In this case, an open-door policy means that parents are welcome in the classrooms at any and all times. However, this seemed to be the only explicit organization-level strategy related to parent engagement that precisely defined the roles and expectations of the staff. A broader and more comprehensive action plan that all providers are knowledgeable of and invested in would be helpful to give structure and direction to providers in reaching the vision of more widespread and meaningful parent engagement. This is an element which deserves further exploration – a “yellow light” area – in order to ensure the present energy for change doesn’t conclude in a false start.

### Element #7: Evaluation – Blinking Green Light



Evaluation offers an opportunity for self-reflection – both for making immediate changes in implementation when things are going wrong, as well as for making systemic adjustments in the organization by taking a step back and gauging how the entire change process is going. Without evaluation, the change process will plateau. When evaluation is used as a management and learning tool to both prove and improve how a program works, evaluation ensures continued improvement.

SFRI’s interest in and enthusiasm for our analysis in this report and from previous field study teams demonstrates the organization’s commitment to continual reflection and improvement. Providers and staff are encouraged to provide critical feedback at the conclusion of the training sessions, which is always used to improve SFRI’s future training and other programs. It has been our experience in working with SFRI leaders that they are “mission driven” and thoughtful about monitoring the change process, which suggests that achieving increased parental engagement across Rhode Island may avoid a plateau and, if all other elements are aligned, could succeed. Because PCARI/SFRI evaluation plans could be more consistent and multi-layered, and because all stakeholders welcome opportunity to learn from evaluation, we encourage PCARI/SFRI to pursue a longitudinal study of SFI “students” over a 5-10 year period. Knowing this is a long term goal requiring greater resources, and knowing PCARI/SFRI is committed to ongoing, annual field study, we give this element a “blinking green light.”



## 5. Assets Summary

As we examined the impact of the SFRI model on two sites through the lens of the Managing Complex Change Framework, it was evident to us that there are many strengths to the initiative. Providers and staff embrace a shared vision of parent engagement and inclusion, and understand the correlation between parent engagement and improving childhood development outcomes. Parent engagement provides a solid foundation for change and a platform for building the five protective factors. The SFRI model has increased the staff's understanding of the potential role of parents in order to formulate and expand upon the vision.

The SFRI training reinforces the high level of knowledge, skills, and abilities that providers bring to their daily work. In both sites, staff members were already highly experienced but SFRI provided important new skills and information for both providers and parents in the childcare centers. The new skills gave providers a strategy to improve their relationships with parents. Many of the providers were extremely satisfied with the knowledge they gained through the training.

At both locations we observed, the staff was significantly motivated by the benefit of their work with the children. Providers demonstrated a strong belief that they can truly make a difference in the lives of children, which is an enormous incentive to be involved in childcare work, and this is ultimately why they believe that this process of change is worth the time and effort. Early education and care is a difficult profession, but the staff are invested in the children.

Finally, the importance SFRI places on regular reflection and feedback-gathering demonstrates a commitment to ongoing evaluation – a key component of any change process. SFRI has placed time and resources in strengthening their model and has already benefited from the ongoing evaluations carried out by the Heller School. The logic model based solely on parent engagement (Exhibit A) can be used as a mechanism to further enhance SFRI's strategy around the issue of parent engagement. SFRI's current process of reflection and improvement will allow for the change process to continue and make the model stronger in the future.

As suggested previously, a relational bureaucracy exists to a degree in both sites. The SFRI model's goal and methods of training augment the relational bureaucracy components that already exist and build upon them. A strong relational bureaucracy in childcare centers will benefit parent engagement.

## 6. Opportunities for “Heightening the Positive Potential” of SFRI

Our research revealed that the SFRI training had a positive impact on providers in both sites. The information the staff received in the training informed their practices to



enhance a child's experience. However, as stated previously, there are a few areas (yellow lights) that would benefit from improvements to increase the strength of the model.

The availability of resources – particularly time – is an area that should be addressed. Time spent together outside of the classroom is critical in order for providers to sufficiently communicate and work as a team. The interaction of staff facilitates the cohesive accomplishment of the parent engagement vision. It is often difficult for centers to establish a regular, common time for staff to come together, but even the busiest organizations must find a way overcome this barrier and create opportunities to meet and talk with each other. SFRI cannot magically create more time for providers. But perhaps they can help organizations develop innovative strategies that will enable providers and staff to devote time toward developing and implementing new parent engagement strategies. SFRI can also emphasize to the centers it works with the importance of time spent sharing knowledge and expertise among staff members.

Shared ownership exists among the staff at the centers. They understand the importance of parent engagement to not only achieve the five protective factors, but also to create the best environment for the children they serve. However, a disconnect was noted between parents and providers about the importance and strategies related to the vision of parent engagement. Clear roles for the parents as participants in the change process have not been defined, and the center's goals have not been sufficiently relayed to this stakeholder group. An increase in parent education around their roles in partnering with providers would potentially alleviate some resentment among staff and enhance engagement among parents. Expectations of parents could be communicated through a training session offered by an outside organization like SFRI, or by the providers themselves. Strong lines of communication already exist between parents and the staff working at the centers, which will make the sharing of new information easier.

The providers who participate in the training create individual action plans to implement in their classrooms. In many instances the individual's plan remains isolated, neither shared among colleagues nor integrated into a broader, more comprehensive organization plan. In order to create cohesiveness among the organization's many classrooms and teachers, a site-wide action plan based on classroom strategies and outcomes would build consistency and unity. The Parent Engagement "Tip Sheet" (Appendix E) could be used to inform the creation of the larger plan and provide a useful reference for teachers in their classrooms. As an organization-level plan is developed, sites should also establish a process of follow-up with providers after they have completed the training and taken their action plan back to their classrooms. Though it is an excellent step for each teacher to brainstorm activities and plans that would be feasible to implement on their own, it would be helpful to regularly engage with teachers about the status of their plans and reflect on whether their strategies have created change in their classrooms and fostered more connections with parents. Highly



successful ideas could then be collected by SFRI and shared with other childcare centers as an ever-growing collection of best practices.

## 7. Conclusion

Parent engagement is essential for reducing the risk of child maltreatment and abuse and strengthening the five protective factors of the SFRI model. The Managing Complex Change framework provides a useful roadmap for assessing where in the change process an initiative is thriving and identifies troublesome areas that, when responded to appropriately, could enhance the level and quality of change. As we have repeatedly affirmed, SFRI has much strength on which to build, and childcare centers across Rhode Island have benefited from the training. But the process of managing change requires continual growth. Focus on these opportunities for improvement will both enhance the experience of participating centers as well as achieve greater success towards the organization's vision of parent engagement. SFRI is a strong initiative, well managed by PCARI, and is well-positioned to promote the vision of parent engagement across the state of Rhode Island through its innovative training program.



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## Appendix A: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES INITIATIVE, RHODE ISLAND

### Logic Model

Date Approved: 8/23/07

Mission: To mobilize community partners and leaders from state departments of health, education, human services, and children, youth and families to expand and coordinate early care and education programs that build protective factors known to reduce child abuse and neglect. These factors include: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children.

FOR WHOM	ASSUMPTIONS (Theory of Change)	STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Children and Parents in Rhode Island</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Early Care and Education Providers in Rhode Island</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Policy Makers, Practitioners and Change Agents Throughout Rhode Island</b></p>	<p>An evidence-based framework that integrates a universal support system for families, providers and EEC programs is the approach of choice</p> <p><b>Children &amp; Parents/Caretakers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All 5 Protective Factors are necessary for preventing child abuse and neglect and preparing children to learn—they are evidence based building blocks.</li> <li>Regardless of soc-economic circumstances, children and families who are provided with all 5 can grow into strong, healthy, productive adults</li> <li>Parental/Caretaker engagement and leadership is essential for integrating protective factors and catalyzing parent engagement and connections</li> <li>Family race, culture, language and other diverse characteristics are a critical component to respect in a strength based approach</li> </ul> <p><b>Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For more than 30 years practice and policy has been based on a model of family risk and deficits</li> <li>Shifting to a strength based approach will take time, leadership, expertise, resources and political will</li> <li>The practitioners and programs are willing and ready to learn but may not have the skills and knowledge to make the shift</li> <li>No one agency or program can achieve desired outcomes in isolation, collaboration and shared learning is necessary</li> <li>Core training needs to have depth, duration and dosage to support the long term changes in practice.</li> </ul> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A need to have a favorable political climate for innovation in early care and education policy through education and advocacy</li> <li>Embedding the SF framework in ECEC programs, PBIS, QRS, ELS &amp; other partnered state initiatives is necessary for sustainability and strengthens all systems</li> <li>The new strategy is doable, affordable and has widespread support</li> <li>Shared understanding of this approach provides opportunities for continuity for families</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children &amp; Parents/Caretakers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A place-based approach by enlisting early care and education providers</li> <li>Expand and develop statewide</li> <li>Assess and prepare programs to implement protective factors frame</li> <li>Document outcomes and use data for continuous improvement</li> <li>Identifying parent leaders and directing them to additional trainings</li> <li>Recognize multiple opportunities to build parent leadership in programs and communities and place parents in leadership opportunities                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Such as: annual leadership meetings for parents, PAT, COZ Center groups, workshops, parent mentorship</li> </ul> </li> <li>Build parent involvement in self-assessment and parent to parent support</li> </ul> <p><b>Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand a broad-based peer to peer learning and support network with connections – representation on the Leadership team</li> <li>Deliver effective, responsive TA tools and processes to support shifting practice in programs (delivered by skilled and knowledgeable individuals)</li> <li>Embed respect for family diversity in all PD/TA delivered to providers in order to improve skills specific to dealing with diverse families</li> <li>Develop an effective strategy – build a broad-based provider “buy-in” for the paradigm shift</li> <li>Deliver and institutionalize an effective, high quality consistent PD experience that has the depth, duration and dosage needed to change practice</li> </ul> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educate and build awareness about SFI</li> <li>Launch communication campaign – using lessons from the pilot and other learning opportunities</li> <li>Strengthen the specific action plan for embedding SF framework in ECEC programs, PBIS, QRS, ELS and other state initiatives – involving regular intro trainings and collaboration – and identify the added value SFRI would bring to each</li> <li>Secure a dedicated development person to secure sustaining funding</li> <li>Leadership team – define roles and monitor progress</li> <li>Positioning SFRI (through language) so that it is recognized that the most vulnerable children benefit from this program</li> <li>Flexible funding for parent engagement and parent leadership activities</li> <li>Link to newly emerging Early Childhood council (state level)</li> <li>Use cyclical evaluation with all stake-holders as a management and learning tool. Self-assessment, program improvement planning (goals and strategies) implementation and re-assessment</li> <li>Collaborate to build a favorable climate for innovations in early care and education policy through education and advocacy</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children &amp; Parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent/Caretaker engagement and leadership</li> <li>Supportive relationships between early care and education providers and parents/caretakers</li> <li>Reduced investigations</li> <li>Fewer expelled, excused children</li> <li>Supportive relationship between parent to parent</li> <li>Build the 5 protective factors in the family unit to prevent child abuse and neglect</li> </ul> <p><b>Providers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skilled and knowledgeable providers</li> <li>Strong, mutually supportive relationship between providers and parent/caretakers</li> <li>Human and materials – resources are available to deliver PD and TA to all providers state-wide</li> <li>Providers understand, support and celebrate parent/caretaker family diversity</li> <li>ECEC programs are connected to resources, services and supports in their communities and integrated into a comprehensive system of care</li> </ul> <p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy changes – long term value of parent support and engagement</li> <li>State budget changes</li> <li>Annual Report Card – to all stake-holders</li> <li>SF framework is embedded in ECEC programs, QRS and other state initiatives</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Children Healthy and Ready to Learn</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sustainable, High Performance Leadership Team in Support of Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Policies and Resources Aligned with Protective Factors</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Child Abuse and Neglect Programs are Recognized as a Priority in RI</b></p>

## **Appendix B: Protocol – Interview Questions for SFI Field Study** Stork's Nest Child Academy and JFK Child Development Center

### **ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONS**

6. What is your goal/vision of parent engagement and leadership? (Clarification of goals articulated in logic models) What does good parental engagement look like? How do you tell if a parent is engaged?
7. What does day-to-day engagement look like? What structures exist? What opportunities do parents have to get involved at your center? What strategies have you tried that have worked well so far? What new strategies are you pursuing or intending to implement related to parental engagement and leadership?
8. What outcomes are you targeting through these strategies?
9. How many parents (rough estimate) are regularly/occasionally involved? Are you happy with the level of parental engagement in your childcare facility?
10. What challenges/barriers exist related to parental engagement?
11. Is there a difference between teachers who have been trained and teachers who haven't in terms of their knowledge of parental engagement techniques and strategies?
12. Whose "job" is it to engage parents?
13. What type of literature do you offer parents? Is it mostly on issues pertaining to parenting? Is information on community programs offered?

### **PROVIDER QUESTIONS**

- How did the training help understand the goal of SFI?
- What do you see as strengths to being involved in SFI and utilizing their training?
- Do you think parental engagement makes a difference in the lives of the children you serve? Why, and how?
- What is your goal/vision of parent engagement and leadership? (Clarification of goals... consistent with logic models?) How do you tell if a parent is engaged? (What measurable outcomes do you look for?)
- How many parents (rough estimate) are regularly/occasionally involved? Is there a pattern among the parents who are involved? Does it vary by activity? What strategies have you employed that have been successful thus far?
- How well do you feel like you know the parents of the children you serve? (do you know them by name, etc) When do you have opportunities to interact with parents? (pick-up & drop-off, other events) How do you usually communicate with parents? (email, letters home, face-to-face, phone, etc.)
- Do you make a point to reach-out to parents who are isolated from the center and its social gatherings?
- What challenges/barriers exist related to parental engagement? For example...
  - Does interacting with parents increase your workload?
  - Do you find it more challenging to engage some parents over others?
- Did the training increase your ability to engage parents, or knowledge of how to engage parents?
- Whose "job" is it to engage parents?
- Are parents involved in determining day-to-day learning activities for their child? How active are parents in making decisions about their children's education?

## Appendix C: Parent Survey – JFK Child Development Center, Naval Station

Please take a moment to answer the following questions, which were put together by Masters students at Brandeis University. Your input is confidential and will be used to inform the programs and policies of Strengthening Families Rhode Island.

1. What do you see as the strengths of the JFK Child Development Center? What sets it apart?

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2. What could the center do, in your opinion, to make it easier for you to become involved? (including every day activities as well as special events)

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3. Is there anything else you would really like us to know about your experience with this facility and/or its programs? (Please use back of sheet for additional room)

## Appendix D: Managing Complex Change Model

Based on the Managing Complex Change Model developed by the Center for Youth and Communities (1996).

	+	Knowledge, Skills and Ability	+	Resources	+	Incentive	+	Ownership	+	Action Plan	+	Evaluation	=	Confusion
Shared Vision	+		+	Resources	+	Incentive	+	Ownership	+	Action Plan	+	Evaluation	=	Anxiety, Botched Job
Shared Vision	+	Knowledge, Skills and Ability	+		+	Incentive	+	Ownership	+	Action Plan	+	Evaluation	=	Frustration
Shared Vision	+	Knowledge, Skills and Ability	+	Resources	+		+	Ownership	+	Action Plan	+	Evaluation	=	Gradual, if any, Change
Shared Vision	+	Knowledge, Skills and Ability	+	Resources	+	Incentive	+		+	Action Plan	+	Evaluation	=	Apathy or Resentment
Shared Vision	+	Knowledge, Skills and Ability	+	Resources	+	Incentive	+	Ownership	+		+	Evaluation	=	False Starts/Short- term Affect
Shared Vision	+	Knowledge, Skills and Ability	+	Resources	+	Incentive	+	Ownership	+	Action Plan	+		=	Plateau
Shared Vision	+	Knowledge, Skills and Ability	+	Resources	+	Incentive	+	Ownership	+	Action Plan	+	Evaluation	=	Change & Continuous Improvement

## Appendix E: Parent Engagement: “Tip Sheet”

### What is it?<sup>1</sup>

- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful
- Parenting skills are promoted and supported
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning
- Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families
- Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

### What can we do?<sup>2</sup>

- Inclusion is the first step – make parents welcome at the center and in the classrooms. “Open-door policy.”
- Demonstrate cultural competency – staff should reflect the ethnic and cultural background of the parents and children.
- Have a clearly articulated plan for conflict resolution, and a Parents’ Bill of Rights.
- Talk with parents about their lives outside of school and challenges they face with their children.
- Break down barriers to engagement – hold meetings and events at different times of day, and differing time requirements.
- Caregivers and organizations share the values of responsiveness, reciprocity, and positiveness, and encourage these values in parents as well.
- Two-way trainings: staff trains parents about organizational processes as well as five protective factors, and parents train staff in meeting their needs and building on their strengths.
- Facilitate groups of parents to get together and address issues in the community, such as derelict playgrounds/parks or voter registration drives.
- Arrange field trips to local events or locations to bring families together and introduce them to the resources in their community.
- Facilitate parent-parent relationships; encourage them to get together outside of school.

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<sup>1</sup> This section drawn from the National PTA’s standards for parent/family involvement programs. [<http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/index.asp>] PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnership: An Implementation Guide. (2009) National Parent Teacher Association, Chicago, IL.

<sup>2</sup> This section drawn from all resources listed.

Putting Parent Engagement into Action: A Practical Guide. (2002) Family Support America, Chicago, IL.  
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