Family and Community Knowledge Systems:
New Tools for Engagement

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Introduction ● ● ●

Minnesota, like other states, is in the early stages of designing an early childhood data management system that will provide information about young children and their families and the public services they receive. This unified data system will integrate data across the departments of education, health, and human services and provide information useful for:

- Monitoring and evaluating programs for improvement and accountability
- Tracking progress on achieving goals
- Assessing impacts of policies and services on young children and their families
- Identifying and analyzing gaps in service access and disparities in well-being and other outcomes based on geography, income, and race/ethnicity

The early childhood database will in time be integrated into the broader P-20 Longitudinal Data System.

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative has identified the basic elements of a coordinated state data system that center on early childhood experiences within formal programs and services, including child-level demographic and program participation data, child-level data on development, and program site data on quality.

However, many families choose to not participate in any formal early care and education (ECE) programs and instead use informal care for a variety of reasons, including trust, cultural continuity, convenience, and economic factors. For example, two-thirds of children age 2 and younger in Minnesota are cared for by parents or by family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) caregivers (Chase, 2010). Unemployment, stagnant or declining wages, and the cost of formal care suggest that the number of families using informal care may grow.

Accordingly, to get a full picture of child development and to meet the needs of these children and families, in addition to linking existing child-level *program* data, we must look to other sources
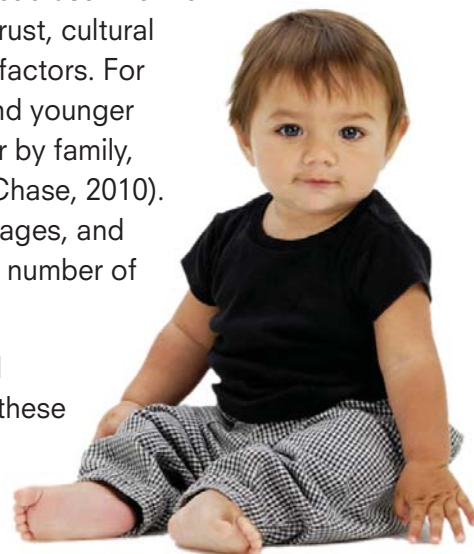
for indicators of child well-being. This goes beyond accounting for the children not participating in ECE programs and appropriately addressing issues of ethnicity, language, and culture (BUILD Initiative 2009). It requires recognizing the role of family and community knowledge systems in child development and documenting, as part of the child-level data on development, the informal learning that children acquire through experiences and relationships at home from family and community.

Moreover, an inclusive data system would include family and community knowledge system elements in the ratings of ECE program quality, assessing, for example, the extent to which programs have family engagement strategies that incorporate what they learn from families into their work.

Purposes of this report

This report, therefore, is intended to ensure that unified data systems will also provide information useful for:

- Monitoring and evaluating programs for improvement and accountability for their impacts on and interface with family and community knowledge systems
- Tracking progress on achieving goals on family and community engagement
- Assessing impacts of policies and services on family and community knowledge systems in which young children and their families are embedded
- Identifying and analyzing gaps in service access and disparities in well-being and other outcomes based on geography, income, and race/ethnicity as they relate to family and community knowledge systems

To that end, it identifies constructs and indicators representing family and community knowledge systems that should be incorporated in the Minnesota unified early childhood data system and the methods for collecting the new data. It also describes how to make the data system available and transparent for use at all levels. In addition, it offers strategies for using the data system to develop feedback loops from families and communities to programs and agencies. Such

Family and community knowledge systems are the informal lessons, patterns, and mechanisms through which children learn in their home and community environments, including values such as honesty, rightness, and order. This natural knowledge system is a basic component of effective families and communities and essential to children because it:

- Constitutes a significant part of the continuity and cohesion that holds family and community together.
- Contributes fundamentally to the resilience of children and families.

In addition, when family and community knowledge learning systems are recognized, their strengths can complement public investments, thereby decreasing costs and increasing effectiveness.

feedback loops are essential to authentic family and community engagement – including rural and cultural communities – and serve to strengthen them.

Underpinnings for incorporating data from family and community knowledge systems ● ● ○

Several reports originating from Minnesota or associated with the BUILD Initiative have described processes and data and have drawn conclusions that evince elements of family and community knowledge systems or that point in that direction. These descriptions have not, however, been fully developed, activated, or realized.

In *Starting Out Right: Developmental Assets for Children* (1997), Peter Benson and others from the Search Institute highlight critical assets that may develop through relationships and patterns of family and community interactions when children are infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. These developmental assets, which form the foundation for a healthy and responsible life, include *a commitment to learning and social competencies*, often found in school readiness assessments, as well as a *positive identity* and *positive values*, such as integrity and honesty.

The Family, Friend and Neighbor – Best Practices Project, led by Betty Emarita on behalf of Ready4K, a school readiness advocacy organization in Minnesota, identified best practices in FFN care and how culturally diverse families teach their children to succeed early in life. The project's purpose was to broaden the understanding and use of Minnesota's early learning standards among extended family members, providers, and teachers providing care to children in the Hmong, Latino, African American, and Native American communities. The project report (2006) highlighted the distinct strengths of families in the development of young children through teaching and fostering emotional intelligence, self-mastery, and character development, including spiritual values. It encouraged viewing children holistically – as members of families and communities, and as participants in their culture – and viewing ethnic communities as assets and from their own perspective.

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In 2006, the Center for the Study of Social Policy began the *Strengthening Families Initiative* to prevent child abuse and neglect by aiding child welfare systems and early care and education programs to assist families develop "protective factors" which build on family strengths, buffer risk, and promote optimal child development and well-being. The five protective factors identified in the research are parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. It is important to note that these factors were *discovered*, not created, by researchers who studied the experiences of children and the behaviors of families and communities. They align with family and community knowledge systems because they grew out of the practices of families:

- **Parental resilience** – the ability to manage and bounce back from all types of stress, solve family problems, build and sustain trusting relationships, and know how to seek help when necessary

- **Social connections** – networks of friends, family members, neighbors and community members and institutions that contribute to community cohesion and provide flexible and

reliable support and advice for solving problems as well as opportunities to avoid isolation and to reciprocate or to "give back" for the good of the whole

• **Knowledge of parenting and child development** – skills and behaviors regarding compassion, empathy, problem solving, and leadership passed down from generation to generation

• **Concrete help in time of need** – the ability to access immediate and flexible help when it is necessary from people who understand the situation at hand

• **Social and emotional competence of children** – skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable children to interact positively with others, navigate nuanced and complex extended family relationships, form relationships within the larger world, and maintain a sense of self

Stakeholders in Minnesota and Illinois, with the assistance of the BUILD Initiative and Strengthening Families have explored adding culture as a sixth protective factor.

Data from family and community knowledge systems will enable programs and agencies to support and strengthen these protective factors as they are expressed in family and community settings rather than competing with or displacing them.

Various groups have focused our attention on the importance of race and culture in child development. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Race*

Matters Toolkit and other publications provided tools for policymakers and advocates to address unequal opportunities by race and to achieve equitable opportunities for all. In 2008, ZERO TO THREE recommended understanding *cultural scripts* that form the basis for shaping reality, including the rules that guide parenting decisions (Maschinot, 2008). *In Building Public Early Childhood Data Systems for a Multi-Ethnic Society – Issues and Opportunities* (2009), Charles Bruner and Betty Emarita assert that the states should build longitudinal data systems in ways that recognize and value the diversity of their young child population. They also recommend that state data systems collect data for evaluating and closing gaps in participation in early care and education and other programs for children, gaps in achievement, and gaps in workforce diversity. This should include data on child ethnicity and language background as well as on the ethnic background and dual language ability of early care and education teachers.

States throughout the nation, with the assistance of the BUILD Initiative and the QRIS National Learning Network, are focused on improving and rating the quality of early care and education and its workforce in order to promote healthy development and success in school. A BUILD Initiative issue brief on QRIS in a multi-ethnic society (Bruner et al 2010) recommends how states can make their ratings more culturally and linguistically relevant and proposes an additional multicultural component regarding materials and curriculum, language development, and staff training.

At the same time, Jack Shonkoff, reminds us in a recent volume of Science (2011) that because many children may experience toxic stress with life-long adverse cognitive, health, and economic consequences before they ever reach age 3 or attend an early education program, child development strategies must also focus on strengthening the capacities of all adult caregivers and providers. This includes parents, family members, friends, and neighbors -- to limit disruptions and to promote positive stimulation for the healthy brain development of very young children.

Recommended indicators that best reflect the family and community knowledge systems in which children are immersed ● ● ●

Methods for identifying new indicators representing family and community knowledge systems

We engaged communities across Minnesota in identifying key features of family and community knowledge systems. Community dialogues were convened by local groups and facilitated by culturally-concordant professional discussion leaders from February to June 2011 in a variety of communities reflective of the 0-5 population of the state: Irish, German, Norwegian, Ojibwe, Swedish, African American, Hmong, Latino, and Somali.

The groups reflected on open-ended questions about their observations and experiences as parents, grandparents, and caregivers, as well as their own experiences as children.

Through debriefing with discussion facilitators and an analysis of discussion transcripts, key features emerged.

Common themes

Building character and developing integrity is a key feature of family and community knowledge systems across communities. As seen in family relationships, responsibility for chores, and specific spiritual or moral training, this feature includes:

* Having compassion for others
* Taking responsibility for one's actions
* Having commitment and contributing to family well-being
* Being honest and trustworthy, having integrity
* Having respect for others as human beings
* Being reliable

> " *Building character and developing integrity is a key feature of family and community knowledge systems across communities.* "

Developing a sense of self is the second common feature. Components include:

* Having a positive cultural or social identity
* Being able to withstand negative messages/stereotypes
* Having a sense of self-determination
* Learning/valuing/respecting one's own language or dialect as well as standard English

Understanding community is the third key feature of family and community knowledge systems, which consists of learning and gaining:

* Respect for elders and the nuances of a social hierarchy within family and community
* Ability to interact appropriately with each level of hierarchy
* Ability to navigate tensions and conflicts, e.g. making one's desires known in ways that are respectful to the social/family hierarchy
* Ability to navigate and repair relationships when one's actions may be seen as disrespectful to the social/family hierarchy
* Acting for the good of the whole

New data to collect and methods for collecting it ● ● ●

Data are collected, or are intended to be collected, at three points for nearly all children – at birth on birth certificates, at ages 3 and 4 during preschool screening, and at kindergarten entry. (A fully integrated system would also include well-child visits at health and pediatric clinics.)

In an inclusive and integrated early childhood data system, each of these data points could be enhanced by adding data that document and elucidate family and community knowledge systems. These enhancements include broadening the current concept of personal/social/emotional development to incorporate the development of character and a sense of self within a cultural context. They also include the addition of new data elements within a new category or domain of community support, skills, and behaviors.

Birth data

Data gathered on a U.S. Standard Certificate of Live Birth now include the mother's marital status and both parents' highest education level and race, prenatal care data, amount of cigarette smoking during pregnancy, use of WIC during pregnancy, and medical and health information related to the pregnancy and the newborn.

We recommend adding one additional question that would describe the extent to which the child is born within an extended family context: *To what extent did this mother rely on family, friends, and/or community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community-specific organizations for advice and concrete help during pregnancy: a lot, some, a little, or not at all?*

Early childhood screening and kindergarten entry data

Early childhood screening and kindergarten entry data now typically include data on child development in five domains: personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, the arts, and physical development and health. We recommend adding family and community knowledge systems indicators of 1) extended family support and connections, 2) the transmission of moral and cultural values, and 3) experience with responsiveness of institutions, programs, and agencies.

We also recommend that the indicators be based on observation and discussion with the parent or primary caregiver during screenings in community-based settings that match the diversity of families.

The specific indicators describe the extent or degree to which the family demonstrates these feelings, skills, and behavior at present:

Indicators of extended family support and connections

1. Regularly relies on extended family members and close friends for assistance in raising its children.

2. Relies on family, friends, and/or community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community organizations for positive cultural or social messages and support.

3. Relies on family, friends, and/or community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community organizations when it needs concrete help.

Indicators of transmitting moral and cultural values

4. Teaches and supports character development, including values like honesty, trustworthiness, and respect.

5. Teaches skills children will need to navigate their cultural and social networks well, such as particular forms of courtesy and respect for elders.

6. Supports and reinforces positive cultural messages children receive from community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community-based organizations.

7. Encourages and teaches children under age 5 to help with family chores and responsibilities.

8. Stresses having a moral or spiritual code of behavior.

Indicators of experiencing responsive institutions, programs, and agencies

9. Feels concerned about how negative images and attitudes toward the child's cultural, ethnic, or social group, or a lack of positive images will affect him or her.

10. Feels need to take extra steps to teach child to be proud of his or her cultural or social background and identity.

11. Feels that the advice received from early childhood providers, teachers, and parenting professionals about parenting do not support its own knowledge and experience, observations, and/or cultural values.

A tool for collecting these data is in the Appendix.

Data about program quality

The last recommended addition to the data system involves program-site data on quality. The typical quality rating systems include data on provider education and training, family engagement, teaching materials and strategies, child development assessments and tracking, and safety. We recommend adding family and community knowledge systems indicators of 1) building character and integrity,

2) helping children develop a sense of self, and 3) understanding and valuing community.

Based on observation and discussion with families and program staff, raters of program quality would document and assess the extent to which programs have family engagement strategies that embody these indicators:

Indicators of building character and integrity

- Support character development, including values such as honesty and respect.

- Use cross-cultural knowledge and awareness to model skills children will need to navigate their cultural and social networks well, such as particular forms of courtesy and respect for elders.

- Reinforce basic core values that are shared by a cross section of the families in the program.

- Support staff in developing the cross-cultural knowledge and skills to work well with children from cultures with communal values as well as those from cultures with more individualistic values through trainings, professional development courses, reflective supervision and staff discussions, or in-house learning teams.

Indicators of helping child develop a sense of self

- Connect families to culturally or socially supportive organizations, advocates, and events in their communities.

- Have a working knowledge about culturally or socially supportive organizations, advocates and events in different cultural or social communities.

- Engage with culturally supportive organizations, advocates, and events in different cultural communities.

- Demonstrate respect for the home language or dialect of children as they learn standard English.

- Recognize and support the positive cultural messages communicated by family, friends, and/ or community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community organizations.

Indicators of understanding and valuing community

- Change, modify, or adapt rules, requirements and/ or regulations in response to what it learns from families and communities.

- Change, modify, or adapt its methodologies, framework, and strategies in response to what it has learned from families and communities.

- Share what it learns from families about understanding and valuing community with its funders and key stakeholders.

- Partner (i.e., share financial and other resources) or contract with knowledgeable and trusted community based programs, organizations, and institutions to provide services.

A tool for collecting these data is in the Appendix.

> *Use cross cultural knowledge and awareness to model skills children will need to navigate their cultural and social networks well, such as particular forms of courtesy and respect for elders.*

Using family and community knowledge systems data to strengthen all families and communities ● ● ●

How the indicators are used is as important as which indicators are selected. The strength-based use begins with how the data are collected. For example, expanding early child screenings by organizations and institutions that are authentic, accessible, and match the diversity of families within each community will go a long way to ensure the collection of valid and trusted information.

On the program level, for working with individual families, the family and community knowledge systems indicators are useful to effectively understand each family's situation and referral needs and to better integrate culturally-appropriate practices for children and families that need help.

On the program level, in the aggregate, these data are helpful for understanding how to improve programs to better reflect and serve all families, particularly within an on-going process that includes feedback from families and monitoring accountability.

On the systems level, the use of indicators from family and community knowledge systems will ensure that definitions of program quality and program outcomes incorporate elements important to all communities. Expanding the frame from individual children to extended families and communities will also expand the possibility of designing intergenerational solutions and promoting opportunities to strengthen the social capital in all communities. Ultimately, the recognition of family and community knowledge systems and the use of family and community knowledge systems data will enable researchers, practitioners and policy makers to support a broad range of healthy norms that reflect cultural differences. Such a result can lead to healthy families within healthy communities for all.

Summary and next steps ● ● ●

To document and elucidate family and community knowledge systems, we recommend collecting new data at birth on birth certificates, at ages 3 and 4 during preschool screening, and at kindergarten entry. These new data consist of the extent to which:

• Children are born within an extended family context.

• Families rely on extended family support and connections, emphasize moral and cultural values, and their experiences of responsiveness in the early care and education institutions, programs, and agencies with which they are engaged.

• Early care and education programs build character and integrity, help children develop a sense of self, and help them understand and value community.

As the first next step, we will reconvene our cross-sector, multi-cultural advisory group to review our progress and plans at the ground and policy levels for 1) implementing the family and community knowledge systems data gathering tools, 2) ensuring the information is available and accessible to policy makers, educators, businesses, foundations, nonprofits, and researchers from every sector, and 3) effectively using family and community knowledge systems data.
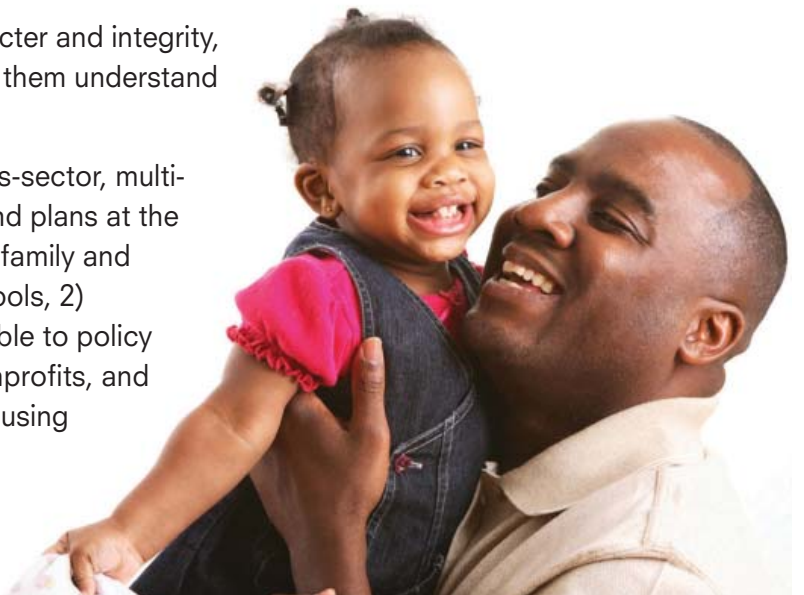
At the ground level, the next steps are to field test the collection, use, and statistical properties of the family and community knowledge systems early childhood and program quality tools and to explore ways to make the data actionable. This will entail working with community-based institutions, organizations, and programs to implement the tools for their own use and to engage these organizations in evaluating the administration and use of the tools at both the family and program level. The accumulated data, in the aggregate, will be analyzed statistically to test for reliability and to determine methods for calculating a child-level family strength score and program-level quality score.

> *The accumulated data, in the aggregate, will be analyzed statistically to test for reliability and to determine methods for calculating a child-level family strength score and program-level quality score.*

At the policy level, we will meet with the new Minnesota Early Learning Council to explain and review the family and community knowledge systems tools and to gain their support for integrating the approach into the state's early childhood data system. In addition, we will pursue similar recognition, support, and implementation with policy leaders in other states and national groups developing early childhood data systems and quality rating systems, including the Early Childhood Data Collaborative and the QRIS National Learning Network.

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Build
INITIATIVE
**Strong Foundations For
Our Youngest Children**

Early Childhood Screening and Kindergarten Entry Assessment
Family and Community Knowledge Systems supplemental items

For each of the following statements, based on observation and discussion with the parent or primary caregiver, describe to what extent or degree (how much or how often) this family demonstrates the feelings, skills, and behavior. **Please check only one response for each statement.**

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS FAMILY:	A lot (clear strength)	Somewhat (adequate)	A little (inconsistent)	Not at all (clear concern)
Signs of extended family support and connections				
1. Regularly rely on extended family members and close friends for assistance in raising its children?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
2. Rely on family, friends, and/or community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community organizations for positive cultural or social messages and support?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
3. Rely on family, friends, and/or community- based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community organizations when it needs concrete help?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Signs of transmitting moral and cultural values				
4. Teach and support character development, including values like honesty, trustworthiness, and respect?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
5. Teach skills children will need to navigate their cultural and social networks well, such as particular forms of courtesy and respect for elders?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
6. Support and reinforce positive cultural messages children receive from community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community-based organizations?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
7. Encourage and teach children under age 5 to help with family chores and responsibilities?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
8. Stress having a moral or spiritual code of behavior?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Signs of experiencing responsive institutions, programs, and agencies				
9. Feel invited to talk about advanced (out-of-the-ordinary) skills, abilities, and capacities that their child exhibits at home?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
10. Feel that the advice received from early childhood providers, teachers, and parenting professionals about parenting supports its own knowledge and experience, observations, and/or cultural values?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS FAMILY:	Not at all (clear strength)	A little (adequate)	Somewhat (inconsistent)	A lot (clear concern)
11. Feel concerned about how negative images and attitudes toward the child's cultural, ethnic, or social group or a lack of positive images will affect him or her?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
12. Feel the need to take extra steps to teach child to be proud of his or her cultural, ethnic, or social background and identity?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4

Quality Rating of Early Childhood Programs
Family and Community Knowledge Systems supplemental items

For each of the following statements, based on observation and discussion with the families and program staff, describe to what extent or degree (how much or how often) this program demonstrates the skills and behavior. **Please check only one response for each statement.**

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS PROGRAM:	A lot (clear strength)	Somewhat (adequate)	A little (inconsistent)	Not at all (clear concern)
Signs of building character and integrity				
1. Support character development, including values such as honesty, trustworthiness, and respect?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
2. Model and teach skills children will need to navigate their cultural and social networks well, such as particular forms of courtesy and respect for elders?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
3. Reinforce basic core values that are shared by a cross section of the families in the program?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
4. Support staff in developing the cross-cultural knowledge and skills to work well with children from cultures with communal values as well as those from cultures with more individualistic values through trainings, professional development courses, reflective supervision and staff discussions, or in-house learning teams?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Signs of helping a child develop a sense of self				
5. Connect families to culturally or socially supportive organizations, advocates, and events in their communities?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
6. Have working knowledge about culturally or socially supportive organizations, advocates and events in different cultural or social communities?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
7. Engage with culturally supportive organizations, advocates, and events in different cultural communities?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
8. Demonstrate respect for the home language or dialect of children as they learn standard English?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
9. Recognize and support the positive cultural messages communicated by family, friends, and/or community-based institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, or community organizations?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
Signs of understanding and valuing community				
10. Invite families to notice, name, and talk about advanced (out-of-the-ordinary) skills, abilities, and capacities that their child exhibits at home?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
11. Change or adapt rules, requirements and/or regulations in response to what it learns from families and communities?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
12. Change or adapt its methodologies, framework, and strategies in response to what it has learned from families and communities?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
13. Feel that the advice received from early childhood and parenting professionals and researchers about parenting supports its own knowledge and experience, observations, and/or cultural values?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
14. Partner (i.e., share financial and other resources) or contract with knowledgeable and trusted community-based organizations and institutions to deliver services?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4
15. Effectively combats and serves as a counterforce to any negative images or behaviors toward child and his/her cultural, ethnic, gender, language, or disability status or a lack of positive images and interactions that affect the child?	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4