ADVOCACY THAT BUILDS PARENTS’ POWER

An Evaluation of Efforts to Center Parent Voice in Early Care and Education Advocacy Ecosystems

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2021, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) funded two 18-month projects to support state policy advocates working in the areas of Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to increase the role that parents play in their advocacy efforts, particularly parents who have experienced the effects of structural racism.

Two national intermediaries led this work—Partner for America’s Children (on IDEA) and ZERO TO THREE (on EHS/HS). After a request for proposals and a selection process that included parents’ voices, five states were selected for each project, with one state selected for both, making a total of nine states.

States Selected and State Leads

Each state had a lead organization that had an established policy advocacy presence in the state. These organizations wanted to change how they engaged with parents so that parents could have more input into shaping policy agendas and could participate more meaningfully in advocacy efforts. States worked on reimagining how their advocacy efforts were shaped and implemented.

The Center for Evaluation Innovation (CEI) partnered with the Center on the Ecology of Early Development (CEED) at Boston University in the Wheelock College of Education and Human
Development to evaluate the two RWJF-funded projects that supported state policy advocates in shifting toward advocacy designed to both win and build parent power. This report offers findings on the approach states used, the progress they made, and the barriers they encountered.

Our formative evaluation documented progress in the states and supported RWJF and national and state partner learning to inform the work.

**EVALUATION QUESTION:** How are state EHS/HS and IDEA early childhood advocacy ecosystems developing the capacity to center families and parent advocates in the work, particularly those impacted by the structural racism that is embedded in services and systems?

**Findings**

All states made progress on the goal of centering the role of parents in their policy advocacy efforts. The findings that follow highlight factors that contributed to their progress and point to the reasons some states made more progress than others.

**FINDING 1**

All states made structural shifts to better center parents in their advocacy efforts.

The nine states started the project with different approaches and capacities for centering parents in their work. All state leads said that centering parent voice and expertise in driving a policy agenda was something they had not prioritized previously. All states ended the year having adjusted their advocacy approaches to shift power toward parents in visible ways. To engage parents directly, state advocacy partners either hired parent organizers or built or strengthened partnerships with existing parent-focused organizers or organizations. The states are still in the process of building trust and ensuring their relationships are sustainable.

**FINDING 2**

States that progressed the most on centering parent voice used an organizing approach, rather than mobilizing.

Organizing is an essential tool for advocacy to build power. “Organizing is about building distributed leadership: capitalizing on people’s motivations and capacities to increase their involvement and building their capacity to organize others to take collective action.”

One-to-one relationships are central to this transformational process. Organizing work includes base building, healing, leadership development, campaigns, and storytelling.

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Advocacy That Builds Parents’ Power

We found states that adopted an explicit organizing stance moved farthest toward the goal of centering parents in their advocacy work. States taking an organizing approach shared that they are taking time to develop meaningful relationships with parents. As a result, their organizing efforts have focused on a much smaller number of parents than their mobilization efforts. But they see how powerful these relationships can be as parents develop into leaders and use their voices to shape policy, working in tandem with policy advocates.

**FINDING 3**

States that are making the most progress on engaging parents impacted by structural racism are using an organizing approach led by people of color who are using an organizing approach that prioritizes relationship building, healing, and leadership development. Advocates and organizers are finding that focusing on care and healing for others and acknowledging the impacts of systemic racism on parents’ experiences is a crucial element to build genuine transformative partnerships with parents.

**FINDING 4**

States have had to work on engaging ecosystem partners not yet fully aligned on how and to what extent parents should be engaged.

As states developed relationships with organizers and grew to rely on them, state leads saw firsthand the value of the expertise that parent organizers and parents brought. Other advocacy ecosystem participants more distally involved in this work so far may not yet be aligned on the importance of elevating parent engagement and leadership. Most notably, in at least six of the nine states, advocates are working on shifting the mindsets of providers, state administrators, and legislators.

While these groups often express interest in parents’ perspectives, the states reported that they do not yet collectively value parents as experts and leaders in the work. Parents expressed that they do not feel listened to in ways that give them confidence that people with the power to change policies and the distribution of resources will prioritize the changes parents want to see. States that have made progress in shifting mindsets among skeptical ecosystem partners have offered opportunities for direct conversations with parents.
What Happens Next

RWJF has committed an additional year of funding to this work, but this funding is not focused explicitly on EHS/HS and IDEA advocacy. Instead, there is a broader focus on economic inclusion for children and families.

State advocacy leads and their partners are now planning their next steps, which include the following:

- **All nine states** have committed to continuing their partnerships with existing or newly created parent groups.

- **Six states** will focus on building parent leadership, seeing this as the next step to engaging a wider base of parents and distributing power among parents and not just parent organizers.

- **Four states** are planning to focus on relationships between decision-makers and parents to continue to underscore the role of parents as experts and to grow decision-maker champions.

The parents we talked to are interested in inviting others to participate in their groups and increasing the number of parents involved. They also would like to exercise their increasing power by advocating for greater compensation for their time and involvement, as well as more opportunities for professional development.

Thank You

The authors thank the many people who contributed to this report. We owe special appreciation to the parents, parent organizers, state partners, and national partners who shared their work and ideas with the research team in interviews and participant observation during the winter of 2021-summer of 2022. We also would like to thank those who supported the team including Amber Sansbury (CEED, research associate) ahead of this work’s publication. We also thank Dragonfly Editorial for the creative design and editing of the report.

Finally, we owe special thanks to Miranda Yates, senior program officer on the Research-Evaluation-Learning team and Krista Scott, senior program officer and child health expert at Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, who supported and envisioned the array of research and evaluation for use in future work.
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Introduction

Advocacy strategies designed for the sole purpose of achieving policy wins can come up short when the goal is the kind of long-term change and transformation needed for systems that serve racial and/or ethnically and socioeconomically marginalized children, families, and communities. Achieving wins that make and sustain meaningful progress, and that equitably meet the needs of those impacted by policies and systems, requires advocacy that builds the power of impacted communities to express what they need and want and to meaningfully participate in the efforts to make those changes.

Professional policy advocacy organizations hold a lot of power in advocacy ecosystems. They do a lot to support the advocacy process, such as conducting policy analyses and research, developing collaborations and campaigns, leading the development of policy agendas and advocacy strategies, and developing and sustaining relationships with decision-makers.

Communities and families impacted by the policies or systems that advocates work on tend to have comparatively much less power in advocacy ecosystems. While they may be mobilized to share their experiences or stories with decision-makers, families often have little say in policy agenda development and are limited to being deployed to support the agenda after it has already been decided. While policy wins are achieved using this approach, impacted families are not treated as experts in the policy advocacy process.

Many policy advocates, particularly those thinking deeply about how to advance racial equity, are working on shifting how they do their work so that they can disrupt these inequitable power dynamics. They are grappling with how to achieve necessary policy wins and system changes while also working in ways that help to build the power of families who are affected by these policies and systems to drive the work and define what those changes should be. They are investigating how to move from advocacy designed to achieve wins to advocacy that also builds and shares power (see Table 1).

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2 By “advocacy ecosystem,” we mean the group of actors engaged in efforts to shape and improve particular policies or systems (e.g., children’s health, child care, climate change, immigrant rights), usually in a particular geographic area (local community, region, state, nation). These may include professional advocacy organizations, researchers or think tanks, government administrators, service or program providers, community organizers, funders, communications firms, or legislative champions. These actors are often, but not always, organized around particular advocacy tables.

3 The University of Southern California (USC) Dornsife Equity Research Institute defines power as “the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision makers that change systems and advance health equity.” Pastor, M., Ito, J., Wander, M. (2020, September). Story of place: community power and healthy communities. USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute.
Table 1. Differences Between Advocacy to Achieve a Win and Advocacy to Build Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy to Achieve a Win</th>
<th>Advocacy to Win and Build Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A “win” is the goal.</td>
<td>A “win” is a means to achieve a longer-term goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy is conducted on behalf of or for impacted communities.</td>
<td>Advocacy is conducted with and by impacted communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing groups may not be part of advocacy.</td>
<td>Organizing groups are centered in advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared analysis is driven by politics and the window of opportunity.</td>
<td>Shared analysis is grounded in root causes and an examination of inequities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A policy solution may or may not be informed by impacted communities.</td>
<td>A policy solution is developed or informed by impacted communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies feature messaging about impacted communities, often within the dominant frame.</td>
<td>Impacted communities drive narratives that tell their stories and challenge dominant frames.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About This Report

The Center for Evaluation Innovation (CEI) partnered with the Center on the Ecology of Early Development (CEED) at Boston University in the Wheelock College of Education and Human Development to evaluate two Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)-funded projects that supported state policy advocates in shifting toward advocacy designed to both win and build parent power. This report offers findings on the approach states used, the progress they made, and the barriers they encountered.

We begin with background on the projects, the actors involved, and their roles. We describe our evaluation approach and primary evaluation question, and then offer four findings that emerged across states in response to that question. The report ends with a section on what comes next for the projects and the partners involved.
Background on the Projects

In 2021, RWJF two 18-month projects to support state policy advocates working on Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to increase the role that parents play in their advocacy efforts, particularly parents who have experienced the effects of structural racism.

The Funder

A longtime funder of both federal and state early care and education advocacy, RWJF was experimenting with how to support state policy advocates to better center parents in ways that challenged traditional power dynamics and advanced racial equity. Without being prescriptive, RWJF offered states infrastructure support funds and technical assistance to make progress toward this goal in ways that made sense within their unique contexts. RWJF also supported evaluation to aid within-state and cross-state learning.

National Partners

Two national organizations (intermediaries) were funded to support each project and to identify and regrant funds to states—ZERO TO THREE for EHS/HS, and Partnership for America’s Children for IDEA. Each organization had a strong background in its respective policy areas and had established relationships with state advocates across the country. ZERO TO THREE and Partnership for America’s Children built collaborative teams with other national partners to strengthen what they could offer to states. Partners included groups that could offer expertise on federal and state EHS/HS and IDEA policies, parent engagement, and racial equity (see Table 2).

Table 2. National Partner Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EHS/HS</th>
<th>IDEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Lead</td>
<td>ZERO TO THREE</td>
<td>Partnership for America’s Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other National Collaborators</td>
<td>Partnership for America’s Children</td>
<td>Start Early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Focused Collaborators</td>
<td>United Parent Leaders Action Network</td>
<td>United Parent Leaders Action Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moms Rising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity Consultants</td>
<td>Counterpart Consulting</td>
<td>Educational Equity Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Consultants</td>
<td>Parent Advisory Group</td>
<td>Parent Advisory Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National partner teams selected states through a request for proposals (RFP). States were offered webinars on the policies and on the role of racial equity in the work. While not originally planned as part of the RFP process, state applicants participated in virtual interviews with a parent panel, which then played a significant role in deciding which states were selected.

**Partners**

Five states were selected to work on each issue area, with one state—Maine—selected to work on both issue areas, making a total of nine states. Each state had a lead organization that had an established policy advocacy presence in the state (see Figure 1). Appendix A summarizes each state’s advocacy ecosystem and the work completed by each for this project.

![Figure 1: States Selected and State Leads](image)

Most state leads selected already participated in established collaborative advocacy tables (e.g., coalitions, alliances, partnerships, campaigns) that focused on EHS/HS or IDEA policies and systems. They wanted to change how they engaged with parents, however, so that parents could better shape policy agendas and participate more meaningfully in advocacy efforts.

During the project, states spent one year working toward this aim. Everyone involved—RWJF, national partners, and state partners—acknowledged that one year was not enough time to meet their goal. But all agreed that one year was enough time to establish traction and momentum.

States worked on reimagining how their advocacy efforts were shaped and implemented. National partners offered support through both state-tailored and cross-state policy advice, as well as consultation on parent engagement efforts and racial equity focus.
Our formative evaluation documented progress in states and supported RWJF and national and state partner learning to inform the work.

**OUR PRIMARY EVALUATION QUESTION:** How are state EHS/HS and IDEA early childhood advocacy ecosystems developing the capacity to center families and parent advocates in the work, particularly those impacted by the structural racism that is embedded in services and systems?[^4]

Appendix B describes our methodology, including the sub-questions we pursued.

The two projects focused on different policies and ecosystems in states, but had similar structures and shared a common aim. Thus, we analyzed data across the two projects and generated the following four findings that apply to both. EHS/HS and IDEA policies and advocacy ecosystems do differ in some notable ways, however, as described in Appendix C.

[^4]: The two projects were initially expected to work on both centering parents and, with parent participation, developing an EHS/HS or IDEA policy agenda with a focus on addressing racial disparities. Because of the one-year timeframe, expectations shifted and the policy agenda output was no longer required.
The Findings

All states made progress on the goal of centering the role of parents in their policy advocacy efforts. The findings that follow highlight factors that contributed to their progress and point to the reasons some states made more progress than others. Examples of the work conducted in each state are integrated throughout.

FINDING 1

All states made structural shifts to better center parents in their advocacy efforts.

The nine states started the project with different approaches and capacities for centering parents in their work. All state leads said that centering parent voice and expertise in driving a policy agenda was something they had not prioritized previously. Most had been connecting to parents through two main avenues—conducting research to learn about parent experiences as an input into their policy advocacy agendas and strategies, and mobilizing parents to support particular policy goals or campaigns.

All states ended the year having adjusted their advocacy approaches to shift power toward parents in visible ways. Most notably, they had made structural changes in the composition of their ecosystems (who participates) and in the connections and power dynamics between partners.

To engage parents directly, state advocacy partners either hired parent organizers or built or strengthened partnerships with existing parent-focused organizers or organizations (see Table 3). Across the nine states, five new parent-focused groups were formed and another 10 existing parent-focused partners were engaged. For existing organizations, state leads regranted the resources they received to support their participation.
Table 3. State Advocacy Tables and Parent-Focused Collaborators

(New groups created through this project are italicized.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>KEY STATE ADVOCACY TABLES</th>
<th>PARENT-FOCUSED GROUPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Maine Children’s Alliance</td>
<td><em>Maine Parent Advocacy Network</em> (organizing group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>North Carolina Early Education Coalition</td>
<td><em>Parent Leadership Council</em> (organizing group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Advocates for Children of New Jersey</td>
<td><em>Parent Leadership Council</em> (organizing group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Early Learning Action Alliance</td>
<td>Parent Ambassadors Program (HS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Children at Risk</td>
<td><em>Parent Coalition</em> (organizing group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>First Steps Alliance</em></td>
<td>(created with Avancé and Child Care Associates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td><em>First Steps Alliance</em></td>
<td><em>Idaho Parents Unlimited</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Kentucky Youth Advocates</td>
<td><em>Play Cousins Collective</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Maine Children’s Alliance</td>
<td><em>Maine Parent Advocacy Network</em> (organizing group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Kids Can’t Wait Coalition</td>
<td><em>Children’s Voice Alliance</em> (organizing group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Right from the Start</td>
<td><em>Parents Leading for Equity Education</em> (organizing group)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importantly, states did not use a symbolic or tokenistic approach to this work by inviting a small set of parents to participate at an existing advocacy table. Instead, they believed this work required that parents have their own space, unconstrained by the power dynamics they might experience in an established group of other advocates.
Each state lead and/or existing advocacy table needed to establish an authentic relationship with the parent-focused group, ensuring that parents’ needs and ideas about solutions were a driving factor in their policy discussions and considerations. States are still in the process of building trust and ensuring these relationships are sustainable. In the six states where we interviewed parent participants, the parents we talked to confirmed that advocacy groups had been welcoming and supportive.

The examples from New Jersey (EHS/HS) and Texas (EHS/HS) below show more specifically how state advocates are operating in ways new to them and how this has led to results. States agree that this work is not easy and requires a significant change in strategy.

New Jersey developed a new parent group with help from Melinated Moms organizers.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ) already had a relationship with Melinated Moms, an organizing group that provides an engagement and advocacy space for New Jersey moms who feel unseen and unheard. For this project, ACNJ sub-granted funds to Melinated Moms to work with ACNJ on the development of a Parent Leadership Council. The council serves as the first point of contact for parents interested in advocacy, and is intended to help shape ACNJ’s work on EHS/HS and other early care and education issues (other advocacy organizations in New Jersey are also developing Parent Leadership Councils).

Once the Parent Leadership Council was formed, ACNJ needed to shift its traditional ways of working to honor and center the parent expertise represented on the council. For example, ACNJ’s staff reconsidered how they develop legislative champions. After much persistence, a staff member connected two state legislators with two parents in a virtual meeting to talk about the issues New Jersey parents face with infants and toddlers. ACNJ staff worked with the parents on sharing their expertise and stories with the legislators, but then stepped back during the call so the parents and legislators themselves could take the lead and speak openly. One legislator was so motivated by the conversation that she introduced an infant-toddler bill known as the Thriving by Three Act, a $28 million grant program to expand the availability and improve the quality of infant and toddler child care options in the state.

ACNJ’s approach required different internal strategies and staff commitments. While more time-consuming, it had clear results—parent leaders were more empowered to share their expertise with decision-makers; decision-makers saw parents as experts; legislative champions were secured for infants and toddlers; and a policy win was achieved (the Thriving by Three Act was signed into law in June 2022).

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5 Parents were interviewed in six states: Maine, Texas, New Jersey, North Carolina, Washington, and Kentucky.
Texas formed a new partnership with community organizing group Avancé.

In Texas, state lead Children at Risk (C@R) formed a new partnership with Avancé, an organization with a history of organizing in the state, particularly with parents and families of color and Spanish-speaking parents. Avancé staff are expert organizers who support relationship and community building among parents in addition to offering advocacy training, leadership development, classes, and other supports. One parent organizer who benefited from Avancé’s offerings and had since taken a leadership role shared that, “Avancé transformed me. …They helped me…and I want that help not only for me, but for other parents like me that are struggling through the same thing.”

Avancé connects parents and families to decision-making spaces so their expertise is considered in policy agendas and decisions. The partnership between the two organizations combines C@R’s coalition-building skills with Avancé’s parent organizing experience.

FINDING 2

States that progressed the most on centering parent voice used an organizing approach, rather than mobilizing.

Organizing is an essential tool for advocacy to build power. “Organizing is about building distributed leadership: capitalizing on people’s motivations and capacities to increase their involvement and building their capacity to organize others to take collective action.” One-to-one relationships are central to this transformational process. Organizing work includes base building, healing, leadership development, campaigns, and storytelling.

Historically, early care and education advocates have been more likely to use mobilization tactics over organizing. Mobilizing encourages “…discrete, transactional encounters with as many people as possible.” Advocates may, for example, develop a large email list of supporters and then occasionally ask them to take action on a particular issue by calling or emailing their legislators or showing up at a rally.

Both organizing and mobilizing are important. Power-building scholar Hahrie Han says, “To meet the challenges of building power, civic associations need to go broad in their mobilizing and deep in their organizing.” Organizing, however, has the profound ability to build power by developing leaders in a community who then engage others. When impacted individuals are engaged using organizing tactics, new leaders, relationships, and community are built.

We found states that adopted an explicit organizing stance moved farthest toward the goal of centering parents in their advocacy work. In five of the states where organizers are leading the work with parents, advocates are actively and visibly challenging status quo power dynamics between advocates and parents. All but one of these states started new groups as part of this project, as opposed to working with existing parent-focused organizations. States that leaned more toward mobilizing were engaging parents, but these parents were not as involved in shaping the advocacy agenda.

The Equity Research Institute developed a visual familiarly known as the “power flower” (see Figure 2) that highlights the distinguishing characteristics of an advocacy ecosystem designed to build power. It features organizing and base-building efforts at its center as the ecosystem’s driving force, connected to a broader collection of organizations and groups—including policy advocates—with diverse capacities, skills, and expertise.⁸

While all nine of the state early care and education advocacy ecosystems we examined still have policy advocacy organizations at the center of their EHS/HS and IDEA ecosystems, the five we found to be challenging traditional power dynamics are holding a future vision that is consistent with this visual.

States taking an organizing approach shared that they are taking time to develop meaningful relationships with parents. As a result, their organizing efforts have focused on a much smaller number of parents than their mobilization efforts. But they see how powerful these relationships can be as parents develop into leaders and use their voices to shape policy, working in tandem with policy advocates. They also look forward to seeing what is possible as organizing efforts begin to mature and scale.

Maine (EHS/HS and IDEA) and New York (IDEA) are two examples of states that hired new community organizers and the early benefits of those efforts.

Maine formed a new organizing group focused on a range of issues affecting parents.

Maine Children’s Alliance (MCA) saw this project as an opportunity to hire a parent organizer, Michael Mosley. With advocacy experience gained through his participation in the Maine Parent Ambassadors Program—a yearlong leadership and advocacy program for HS parents—Michael had both advocacy and organizing knowledge and existing relationships with providers and parents. He built the Maine Parent Advocacy Network (MPAN), through which parents can engage on issues that affect them, including EHS/HS and IDEA. He brought in legislators, providers, and others to speak to parents and also supported parent leaders interested in taking a bigger role and inviting more parents to the space.

Michael says he prioritized organizing as a strategy because it is important for parents to be involved at every step of the advocacy process. He thinks building meaningful reciprocal relationships with parents is of utmost importance in the MPAN community and that mobilizing parents is, by comparison, too little too late.

“When there is legislation to be pushed for, the partner organizations and institutions would get together [and say], ‘This is important for us. Let’s go and see if we can get parent buy-in for it.’ But…there are times where the interests of the institutions and the industry itself are different than those of parents. …And so for us, it’s a different level of participation where we’re not just being asked to give testimony, or we’re not being asked for our input only at the very end stage.”

New York’s commitment to organizing helped the effort to weather transitions.

One of the reasons advocates can be hesitant to hire an organizer is fear of what will happen if that organizer leaves, particularly given the importance of the relationships and trust organizers build. New York offers an example of how an organizing approach can ensure a community is sustained even when an organizing leader departs.

The Children’s Agenda in upstate New York had been mobilizing parents for many years. Most of those they mobilized, however, were suburban white moms who did not access public services. For this project, the organization hired a community organizer, Ja’Nai Barber, to build a community for parents of color interested in advocating on IDEA services and other early care and education challenges.

Ja’Nai started with a series of one-on-one conversations, getting to know parents, their families, and their situations. She built strong relationships and then started to bring parents together. Ultimately, she started the Children’s Voice Alliance (CVA), an organized community of parents of color interested in sharing their experiences and advocating for their children.

Ja’Nai later moved on to another position. Because of the strong relationships Ja’Nai built, however, parents remained committed to the community even without her leadership. This allowed a temporary organizer to step in while The Children’s Agenda worked on hiring another organizer, which they did in July 2022. The trust built between The Children’s Agenda and the CVA helped to maintain momentum despite the staffing transition.
FINDING 3

States that are making the most progress on engaging parents impacted by structural racism are using an organizing approach led by people of color.

As a part of prioritizing parent voice and the development of more equitable policy agendas, all state advocacy partners said that engaging parents of color who have been impacted by structural racism is a priority for them. States that have done the most to reach this goal partnered with or created parent-focused groups that are led by people of color who are using an organizing approach that prioritizes relationship building, healing, and leadership development.

Advocates and organizers are finding that focusing on care and healing for others and acknowledging the impacts of systemic racism on parents’ experiences is a crucial element to build genuine transformative partnerships with parents. As movement builder and social scientist Dr. Shawn A. Ginwright writes, “Our movements for justice are fundamentally about how we collectively have concern and empathy for one another. ...We cannot separate justice from caring.” Ginwright further adds, “Transformative relationships are formed through this willingness to be still, to listen, and to share both our sorrows and our joys. When we exchange pieces of our humanity, become vulnerable, and begin to care and trust, it gives others permission to do the same.”

Kentucky (IDEA) and Rhode Island (IDEA) offer examples of how states are prioritizing parents of color.

Kentucky starts with meeting parents’ basic needs and emphasizes healing.

Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA) created partnerships with three parent organizing groups—Play Cousins Collective, Jack Be Nimble, and La Casita Center. Play Cousins Collective focuses on parent-centered advocacy with parents of color, particularly Black parents. Jack Be Nimble focuses on advocating for the specific needs of youth with disabilities and prioritizes hearing from students and families. La Casita Center is a community-building organization that offers many services, including advocacy, for Latinx families in the Louisville area.

Play Cousins Collective makes sure that parents can meet their basic needs as a first step in the relationship-building process and also emphasizes healing. As a parent organizer said:

[We have to] find a way to empower [parents] with meeting them where they are because they’re like, ‘I’m worried about where I’m going to get my next meal…I’m worried if I can make sure I’ve got toilet paper or not catching COVID.’ …[T]heir children’s education is not on the forefront. So, I think trying to engage parents with their own basic needs as a start… in order to engage families…we have to walk with them.

Through the partnerships with these three parent-focused organizations, a group of family leaders is emerging. So far, parent leaders have, for example, helped to facilitate listening sessions with parents from different communities. All three organizations will continue to partner with KYA, emphasizing authentic relationship building and leadership development.

Rhode Island connects parents of color with people who hold power in systems.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT developed a relationship with Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE), a group that supports and organizes parents of color and Spanish-speaking parents. According to its founder, Ramona Santos-Torres, PLEE began because spaces for parents of color to advocate for their children were hard to come by. PLEE trains parents who are new to advocacy and offers leadership development opportunities. PLEE has been intentional about valuing everyone’s voice and creates spaces where parents can speak their first language.

PLEE challenges power dynamics by creating opportunities for parents to interact directly with people who hold power in early care and education systems. In collaboration with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, PLEE has organized spaces for parents and legislators to come together. In the coming year, PLEE plans to focus on improving relationships between providers and parents by hosting spaces for them to address parents’ concerns about cultural responsiveness and language barriers.

FINDING 4

States have had to work on engaging ecosystem partners not yet fully aligned on how and to what extent parents should be engaged.

While over the course of the year all states increased their commitment to centering parent voice, at the project’s beginning, state leads were initially apprehensive and unsure how to begin. As states developed relationships with organizers and grew to rely on them, state leads saw firsthand the value of the expertise that parent organizers and parents brought.

Other advocacy ecosystem participants more distally involved in this work so far may not yet be aligned on the importance of elevating parent engagement and leadership. Most notably, in at least six of the nine states, advocates are working on shifting the mindsets of providers, state administrators, and legislators. While these groups often express interest in parents’ perspectives, these states reported that they do not yet collectively value parents as experts and leaders in the work.

The parents we talked to feel this apprehension. They expressed that they do not feel listened to in ways that give them confidence that people with the power to change policies and the distribution of resources will prioritize the changes parents want to see.

Advocates note that providers and state administrators tend to adopt a defensive posture regarding parent input, taking a “my hands are tied” stance. When there are discrepancies between parent requests and provider and state agency fulfillment, providers and state administrators tend to bring up regulations, lack of authority, and resources as reasons changes are not possible (all valid reasons, but parents also see them as opportunities for advocacy).

Legislators may be passionate about child and family issues, but they are often more interested in hearing from professional advocates or providers than from parents, whom they may perceive as lacking policy expertise or political power. For this reason, many advocates train parents to share
their experience and ideas with legislators. While some advocates disagree with this approach, saying it creates “polished parents” with a script, all agree that more interaction between legislators and parents is essential to ensuring that parents who experience the impacts of policies and systems firsthand are viewed as the experts.

States that have made progress in shifting mindsets among skeptical ecosystem partners have offered opportunities for direct conversations with parents. Advocates have promoted hearing directly from parents about their needs and ideas for solutions to support the kind of relationship building that is successful in shifting points of view. North Carolina (EHS/HS), Washington (EHS/HS), and Idaho (IDEA) offer three examples of how states have created these opportunities.

North Carolina prioritizes relationships between parents, administrators, and providers.

For this project, the North Carolina Early Education Coalition built a core stakeholder team that includes the state’s Head Start collaboration director, who has some administrative power and influence with EHS/HS agencies and other state entities that serve low-income children and their families. The team also includes EHS/HS directors, the national equity technical assistance partners on this project, and parent leaders. The team offers a facilitated space for parents to interact with and build relationships with administrators and providers. As a result of this direct interaction, the parent leadership team plays a key role in influencing the direction of the EHS/HS policy agenda.

Washington’s Lived Experience Law will help to connect parents and decision-makers.

Children’s Alliance and the Parent Ambassadors Program have a goal of ensuring that decision-makers see parents as valuable experts. The advocacy ecosystem in Washington has already made progress on this goal by successfully passing the Lived Experience Law, which authorizes stipends and expense reimbursement for people participating in state boards or commissions. Advocates from across issue areas mobilized to pass this law, which is expected to amplify the voices of people impacted by policies and systems in the policy process. With the Lived Experience Law in place, parents can be fairly compensated for the time and expertise they share with lawmakers focused on early care and education issues, underscoring the value of parents in the advocacy ecosystem.

Idaho connects legislators and parents by emphasizing parents as constituents.

Idaho Voices for Children is challenged to focus legislators’ attention on early care and education systems given the state’s firm commitment to the value of “rugged individualism.” Rather than confront that value head-on, advocates focus on a different core legislator value—hearing from constituents and valuing one-on-one conversations. Through the First Steps Alliance—a partnership between parents, Idaho Parents Unlimited (IPUL) (a parent training and information center), and key state administrators—parents can have direct conversations with decision-makers about their experiences with the state’s systems and services.
What Happens Next

As stated earlier, all states made progress on increasing the role that parents play in advocacy efforts. After only one year, they are eager to continue to build on their momentum.

RWJF has committed an additional year of funding to this work, but this funding is not focused explicitly on EHS/HS and IDEA advocacy. Instead, there is a broader focus on economic inclusion for children and families. While states can continue to focus on EHS/HS and IDEA, they can also use the funds for a broader range of issues that parents want to address.

State advocacy leads and their partners are now planning their next steps on this work. Table 4 summarizes the progress states made in their first year and their plans for the coming year. Plans include:

- **All nine states** have committed to continuing their partnerships with existing or newly created parent groups.

- **Six states** will focus on building parent leadership, seeing this as the next step to engaging a wider base of parents and distributing power among parents and not just parent organizers.

- **Four states** are planning to focus on relationships between decision-makers and parents to continue to underscore the role of parents as experts and to grow decision-maker champions.

The parents we talked to are interested in inviting others to participate in their groups and increasing the number of parents involved. They also would like to exercise their increasing power by advocating for greater compensation for their time and involvement, as well as more opportunities for professional development.
## Table 4. Summary of First-Year Progress and Plans for the Coming Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>FIRST-YEAR PROGRESS</th>
<th>SECOND-YEAR PLANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Created First Steps Alliance, which engages organizations and parents with a shared interest in improving early care and education policies.</td>
<td>Expand the First Steps Alliance by building relationships with more IPUL parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IPUL expanded its training to include advocacy training and parent leader development.</td>
<td>Continue to support parent leadership development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Formed new relationships with three parent-focused organizations.</td>
<td>Expand parent leadership development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prioritized organizing with parents of color, specifically Black and Latinx parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Hired a parent organizer who then formed MPAN.</td>
<td>Develop a bridge group on EHS/HS and IDEA composed of organizational partners and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IDEA and EHS/HS groups developed a list of policy priorities to work on in year two of the grant.</td>
<td>Grow parent leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support parent interest on a broader set of issues through MPAN.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Created a Parent Leadership Council connected to advocacy organizations in the state.</td>
<td>Continue to develop the Parent Leadership Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worked with community-based researchers and parents to assess the state’s landscape and identify priority issues related to child care and EHS/HS.</td>
<td>Consider connecting parent leadership councils across the state to better align state advocacy efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Continue to grow parent leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Created the Parent Leadership Council to offer parents the opportunity to engage in shaping policy and the space to grow as leaders.</td>
<td>Continue to develop the Parent Leadership Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Created the Stakeholder Coalition to bring together EHS grantees and HS centers that don’t have EHS.</td>
<td>Build deeper relationships with parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Continue to bring parent expertise to legislators focused on child and family policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Hired a parent organizer, who supported the creation of the CVA.</td>
<td>Continue the CVA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prioritized the engagement of parents of color.</td>
<td>Continue building relationships with parents of color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create more opportunities for parents to engage with the existing advocacy ecosystem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Formed a strong partnership among Children at Risk, Avancé, and Child Care Associates.</td>
<td>Continue parent leadership development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Established a new Parent Coalition to help parents become advocates for their children and communities.</td>
<td>Give parents access to advocacy tables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make parents an integral part of legislative champion development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 4. Summary of First-Year Progress and Plans for the Coming Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Engaged parents through PLEE and Rhode Island Parent Information Network. Established a strong role for parent voice in the Right from the Start campaign.</td>
<td>Continue parent leadership development. Continue to build parent and provider relationships to increase the power of parents in developing advocacy priorities for state and local policymakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Helped to pass the Lived Experience Law, which will fairly compensate parents and others for the time and expertise they share with lawmakers.</td>
<td>Continue to shift power from advocates to parents. Focus on parent leadership development through Parent Ambassadors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Conclusion

The states ended their project year in different places. Some are just starting to solidify relationships with parent groups, while others are planning and implementing advocacy strategies with the help of parent leaders. The work varies based on the context, but all agree that parent voice and expertise should continue to be valued and centered in early care and education advocacy ecosystems.

The nine states involved in this project say that there is “no going back” on their commitment to increasing the role of parents in their advocacy ecosystems. They are eager to put another year of funding toward this purpose, and some states are seeking additional funding to further support the work. Although a year seemed like a short time to make sufficient progress, it generated the traction needed, aided by structural and strategic shifts, to deepen states’ commitments to long-term change.

This project challenges policy advocates to focus on how they can reorient their work to help build the power of communities impacted by the policies and systems they work on. In evaluating this and similar projects, we have learned several things about what to expect during this process, and when:

- If a funder is initiating the challenge to policy advocates, the project is likely to start slowly and then gain momentum over time.
- One year was enough time to see substantial traction and momentum, but too short to see if that traction will be sustained and continue to grow.
- The early stages of new organizing efforts or partnerships are likely to involve small numbers of individuals, but the quality of the relationships is more important.
- Leaders are likely to emerge during the second year of new organizing efforts or partnerships.
- It is important to track structural changes in advocacy ecosystems alongside whether and how those shifts are accompanied by a shift in power dynamics.
Appendix A

State Profiles
The Maine Early Care and Education EHS/HS and IDEA Advocacy Ecosystems

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

Maine Children’s Alliance (MCA)

- MCA (the state advocacy partner Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [RWJF] grantee) advocates for sound public policies and best practices that improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families. They operate through four key advocacy strategies: legislative and administrative advocacy, data and research, collaborative work with other organizations, and communicating to educate the public and legislators on important issues.
- MCA was awarded both the Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grants for the RWJF project.
- MCA has two primary tables that include parents and partner organizations. The tables during the 2021–2022 grant cycle were divided between IDEA and EHS/HS. In the coming grant year, MCA plans to combine the two groups.

Maine Parent Advocacy Network (MPAN)

- As a part of this grant work, MCA hired Michael Mosley to organize parents on issues they are passionate about. He started MPAN to offer parents a space to discuss key issues, offer solutions, and examine issues relative to EHS/HS and IDEA spaces.
- MPAN has two primary tables that include parents and partner organizations. The tables during the 2021–2022 grant cycle were divided between IDEA and EHS/HS. In the coming grant year, MPAN plans to bridge the two groups.
- MPAN offered an influential example of centering parent voice both in Maine and across states with its work on this grant, as Michael sought to work with MCA to bring together organizing and advocacy strategies to help parents design and drive the advocacy agenda.

Other advocacy groups

- MCA and MPAN work closely in collaboration with the Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, which houses the Parent Ambassadors Program and the Community Action Program. The Parent Ambassadors Program is designed to train parents to become advocates and to mobilize parents toward reaching advocacy goals.

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE

- A bridge group of many players in the early care and education ecosystem in Maine operates collaboratively to bring parents and organizations together. Providers, administrators, parents, and advocacy organizations cooperate on creating the policy agenda.
ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS

- The ecosystem includes relationships among legislators and advocates, and sometimes with parents. The Parent Ambassadors Program has strong relationships with legislators, and MPAN is growing its relationships with legislators and administrators.
- While policy councils typically offer a space for parents to weigh in on key issues that need solutions within the EHS/HS programs, there are mixed reviews on the effectiveness of these programs, which some say do not trust parent expertise in a genuine way.
- The ecosystem in Maine is shifting to increase its trust in parent expertise.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- MCA and MPAN are close partners that each bring key skills in establishing the policy agenda. MCA brings advocacy expertise and coalition-building experience to the Maine ecosystem and created a bridge group that brings providers, administrators, parents, and advocacy organizations together. MPAN, which participates in the bridge group, organizes parents to collaborate on issues parents experience with EHS/HS and IDEA.
- MPAN goals for the coming year include increasing development of parent leaders and prioritizing issues parents have named as priorities on a range of early care and education subjects.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

- MCA and MPAN both offer strong advocacy and organizing capacities that complement each other. MPAN brings a strong organizing capacity, inviting parents in to explore issues of interest and offer experience-based solutions. MCA brings advocacy experience that supports the use of parent expertise in driving advocacy strategy.
- MPAN has prioritized parent leadership over the course of the last year and plans to continue to develop parent leaders through organizing that honors parents’ skills and expertise.
- MCA continues to prioritize advocacy coalition building, bringing together crucial players for a more robust and aligned policy agenda.
- Using their strong coalition-building and organizing skills, MPAN and MCA together are planning to work on repairing relationships through trauma and healing work as they engage communities that historically have not been a part of the early care and education community but are affected by the related policies.
The North Carolina Early Education and EHS/HS Ecosystem

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

The North Carolina Early Education Coalition (NCEEC)

- NCEEC (the state advocacy partner grantee) is the only statewide advocacy coalition dedicated to promoting high-quality, accessible, and affordable child care in North Carolina. Membership includes statewide organizations, regional and local child care agencies, child care providers, and individuals committed to improving the quality of child care and early childhood education (ECE) in North Carolina.

- NCEEC also serves as the backbone organization for the Think Babies NC Alliance, an initiative that works to ensure that North Carolina’s youngest children, ages 0-3, benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding to promote a solid foundation for what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences.

The Parent Leadership Council

- Formed by NCEEC through the first year of the RWJF grant, the Parent Leadership Council offers parents the opportunity to engage in shaping the policy agenda and the space to grow as leaders.

- The council has two leaders who serve as liaisons with the Stakeholder Coalition (see below).

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE

- The Stakeholder Coalition (aka The Core Team), was created by NCEEC under the RWJF grant. The Stakeholder Coalition brings together EHS grantees and HS centers that don’t have EHS. Additionally, Counterpart Consulting (national partner equity consultants) is a key member of the Stakeholder Coalition, as they provide crucial support around racial equity practices.

ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS

- There are strong relationships across the advocacy ecosystem as partners work together on making positive change on EHS/HS issues. Partners include decision-makers, providers, administrators, and advocates.

- Stakeholder Coalition members agree that advocacy work should focus on advancing racial equity and that parents should help to drive the policy agenda. Alignment among these members helps to facilitate power building among parents, as it creates more opportunities for parents to engage.
Advocates have strong positive relationships with parents. However, advocates and providers agree that parents need more opportunities to interact with EHS/HS administrators and decision-makers to support power building among parents.

Advocates have facilitated some connections between parents and legislators, which has helped to build confidence among parents in their ability to express their experiences in the policy process. However, some parents still do not feel as though decision-makers hear their experiences in ways that can help to effect change.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Parents are involved through the Parent Leadership Council, which gives them a space to advocate for policies that they are interested in shaping at the provider, local, and state levels. Parents feel that this space not only is helpful for learning about advocacy but also supports relationships between them. They can thus depend on and learn from each other as they advocate for their children in EHS/HS.

Future goals of parent-related work are to further improve relationships with parents and to continue to bring parent expertise to legislators so parents can be more centered in child and family policies.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

The ecosystem has strong advocacy capacity, particularly around coalition building. The Stakeholder Coalition fills a crucial role in supporting advocacy that builds power among parents.

The ecosystem also has strong leadership development and support capacity, facilitating the growth and development of both parent leaders and providers.

The Stakeholder Coalition is working on improving connections between legislators and parents to help further shift the narrative so that legislators recognize parents as experts.

Prioritizing parent leaders, particularly parent leaders of color, will help to ensure that their lived experiences are centered in the state’s policy priorities and agendas.
The New Jersey EHS/HS Advocacy Ecosystem

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

**Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ)**

- ACNJ is a statewide multi-issue research and advocacy organization dedicated to supporting children and families and improving their quality of life. ACNJ uses an inside-outside approach to advocacy, both building coalitions of individuals and organizations who work together to advocate, and working closely with local, state, and federal lawmakers and state administrators.

**Melinated Moms**

- Melinated Moms is a community- and membership-based social enterprise focused on breaking down barriers associated with motherhood, womanhood, and sisterhood. Melinated Moms provides a space for women who feel unseen and unheard, using community engagement opportunities that encourage positive, empowering, and motivating interactions. Melinated Moms aims to make its members the drivers of policy agendas and offers support and training to help moms understand how traditional advocacy structures work and how they can communicate their experiences with decision-makers to effect change.

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE

- Through the RWJF grant, ACNJ funded a Parent Leadership Council in partnership with Melinated Moms. Other organizations across the state have also started councils as a strategy for developing parent outreach and organizing. Often, these councils serve as the first point of contact for parents interested in advocacy, and they support the development of sustainable relationships between parents and key advocacy organizations and other tables in New Jersey.

- Advocates have a goal of better connecting the work of the Parent Leadership Council across the state so that they can scale the voices of parents more effectively and better align on a coordinated policy agenda.

ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS

- ACNJ and Melinated Moms worked with community-based researchers to assess the state’s landscape and identify the issues parents were facing related to child care and EHS/HS. Parents and providers were supported in establishing meaningful relationships and given the time and space to discuss policy implications in areas they prioritized, such as issues related to child care centers and home-based care. Parents worked with the researchers to develop questions to interview program staff and parents, and to facilitate focus groups with parents.

- Parents met with both incumbent and recently elected legislators. During these meetings, parents led the conversation and spoke about their experiences while advocacy staff observed.
THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- The relationship between ACNJ and Melinated Moms is based on mutual respect, and it has helped to create more opportunities for parents to engage with advocacy. Parent Leadership Councils are run by parents and offer a space for them to share experiences, challenges, and needs. ACNJ’s council features a diverse mix of parents who vary by race, age, education, and socioeconomic status. Parent participants expressed the importance of feeling that people in the group care about them and their families’ needs, which they considered a meaningful element that has helped to connect them to the advocacy work.

- After successful interactions and relationship-building with parents, some advocates who had been ambivalent about the role of parents in advocacy efforts were able to see how important parents were to advocacy success. The New Jersey Thriving by Three Act, a bill focused on infants and toddlers that was passed into law in June 2022, represented a significant victory for New Jersey early care and education advocates and featured the direct participation of parents who had been involved through ACNJ. The Thriving by Three Act will improve child care availability by awarding one-time grants as incentives for licensed child care providers, registered family day care providers, and EHS/HS programs to open new centers serving infants and toddlers. A State Assembly leader who joined a meeting to listen to a parent who shared her experiences in accessing quality child care later cosponsored the bill. While it can take increased time and energy to make connections between legislators and parents, advocates clearly saw how the time and effort both matter and pay off in the long term.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

- ACNJ is known for its advocacy work and brings long-standing and deep advocacy capacity and experience in the state.

- Melinated Moms has a well-respected track record in parent organizing and bringing diverse groups of parents together.

- Together, Melinated Moms and ACNJ represent a powerful partnership that links policy advocacy with community organizing.

- ACNJ and the early childhood advocacy ecosystem in New Jersey have a clear willingness and capacity to adapt. The RWJF grant was transformative in 2021–2022 in supporting the state to build a clearer strategy around centering parent voice and advancing racial equity.

- The advocacy ecosystem in the state (and in northern New Jersey in particular) has many strengths that can be used to continue to increase parent engagement throughout the state. Advocates aim to connect parent engagement efforts for a more unified advocacy strategy and a more coherent narrative around building parent power.
The Texas EHS/HS Advocacy Ecosystem

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

Children at Risk (C@R)
- C@R is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to understanding and addressing the root causes of child poverty and inequality. Their mission is to serve as a catalyst for change to improve children’s quality of life through strategic research to understand the needs of Texas children and their families, public policy analysis, education, collaboration, and advocacy.

Avancé
- Avancé is a national nonprofit organization that primarily serves Texas. The organization creates pathways to economic mobility for Latino families. Avancé provides parenting, child-focused, and parent-focused programming for families with young children. They work to ensure school readiness for young children and opportunities for parents to build social and economic capital.

Child Care Associates
- Child Care Associates is one of the largest child development providers in north Texas. They serve children and families by supporting academic and social-emotional growth through quality early education and child care programs, including EHS and HS.

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE
- A Parent Coalition is being established through the RWJF grant to help parents become advocates for their children and communities. No matter where parents are in their advocacy journey, the coalition aims to validate and lift them up and to support their leadership.

ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS
- C@R, Avancé, and Child Care Associates have formed a strong partnership through the RWJF grant. Each brings an essential perspective—advocacy, the needs of the Latino community, and child care providers—to the state’s advocacy table.

- Despite a robust community that supports parents’ needs in Texas, the state lacks sufficient governmental investments to meet those needs. While C@R, Avancé, and Child Care Associates have strong relationships with key state officials, they believe that increasing government support for parents will require a change in the narrative about the value that parent expertise can bring to policy-making. Through the RWJF grant, they are working to create opportunities for legislators to hear parent voices.
THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- Preexisting spaces like Avancé and EHS/HS-mandated policy councils, as well as the newly co-created Parent Coalition, provide parents with opportunities to discuss and organize on topics they choose, and to contribute parent-centered solutions based on their experiences.

- Avancé, following an organizing strategy, has prioritized parents’ needs, which helps bring parents to the advocacy table because they feel connected to the program in a meaningful, community-driven way. Avancé supports parents in the development of their leadership skills. They also ensure that parents are present at key decision-making tables, particularly parents of color and parents who speak languages other than English.

- Parents currently have limited access to decision-makers other than through EHS/HS policy councils. Avancé and C@R are working to engage parents, to train them to help lead in legislative spaces, and to develop legislative champions who are willing to listen.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

- C@R provides a strong foundation and capacity for advocacy efforts and brings to the ecosystem important relationships with legislators.

- C@R has built strong relationships with Avancé and Child Care Associates to share resources, strategies, and tactics that support the centering of parent voice.

- Avancé has played a key role in building power among parents to organize on issues on which they have direct expertise and lived experience. Avancé brings organizing capacity to the ecosystem, which will be crucial for the success of the Parent Coalition.

- Avancé has already begun to introduce parents to decision-making spaces. There is space and opportunity for the advocacy ecosystem to develop legislative champions and to strengthen the connection of parent expertise to legislative arenas.
The Washington Early Education and EHS/HS Ecosystem

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

**Children’s Alliance**
- Children’s Alliance (the state advocacy partner) is a statewide, nonpartisan child advocacy organization.
- The organization works to ensure that laws, policies, and programs work for kids. They do so by holding leaders accountable until they secure the resources required to make all children safe and healthy.

**Washington State Association Head Start & ECEAP (WSA)**
- WSA is a statewide nonprofit organization composed of representatives from HS, EHS, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start, Native American Head Start, and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).
- EHS/HS and ECEAP provide comprehensive high-quality preschool, family support, and health services to children from birth to age five in Washington who are the farthest from the opportunity for success in school.

**Parent Ambassadors Program**
- The Parent Ambassadors Program, which is run through ECEAP, offers a way for parents to learn how to advocate and mobilize around issues involving ECE.

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE

- **Early Learning Action Alliance** (ELAA) is a statewide coalition of nonprofits, professional associations, businesses, and industries with a shared belief that all children in the state of Washington deserve to have the opportunities and support they need in their first five years of life to be prepared for school and a bright future. ELAA’s agenda is focused on increasing access to high-quality early learning to close opportunity gaps for low-income children and children of color. It is maintained by Children’s Alliance.

ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS

- Providers via ECEAP, parents, and Children’s Alliance all have a strong connection that fuels advocacy work. The three coordinate regularly on the RWJF grant and work with other key actors, such as EHS/HS programs that are within the ECEAP Association, parents from the Parent Ambassadors Program, and ELAA.
- ELAA as a coalition is going through a number of transitions, which is affecting their interest in exploring new ways of doing things, like centering parent voice. However, Children’s Alliance is hopeful that the transition will lead to positive change.
Right now, parents are engaged and mobilized on the existing policy agenda, which was designed by advocates. Washington advocates have a long-term goal for parents to drive the policy agenda, growing their power to influence change. To accomplish this goal, administrators and government will be a primary target for ensuring that decision-makers see parents as valuable experts. The advocacy ecosystem in Washington has already made progress on this long-term goal by drafting and passing the Lived Experience Law, which reimburses expenses for people participating in state boards or commissions. Advocates from across issue areas mobilized to pass this law, which is expected to increase the number of voices of people of color in making and changing policy.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- Advocates at Children’s Alliance and across the ecosystem are working to build power among parents so that their voices matter. These advocates see the energy that parents can potentially bring when they are driving the agenda, and would like to see parents play a stronger role in doing so. Through the course of the last year, advocates worked on building out existing programs like the Parent Ambassadors Program and other leadership spaces for parents.

- A key strong parent community, the Parent Ambassadors Program, guides parents, through training and mobilization, to engage in advocacy opportunities. A strong and well-developed community, the Parent Ambassadors Program hopes to refocus future energy on engaging parents in the design of the policy agenda in addition to providing training and mobilization. They hope this will grow parents’ power to drive the policy agenda, bring new parents to the table, and develop more parent leaders. While the training is helpful for parents, there is room to investigate what advocacy work looks like for parents after they depart the training and to explore inviting more parents into the advocacy landscape. There is still work to be done around centering parents’ voices, including continuing to give credence to parents as experts. The passage of the Lived Experience Law shows the opportunity for parent voice to matter to decision-makers. Now, additional narrative change work and continued power building will bolster parents as experts and grow their power in this space.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

- Children’s Alliance and ELAA have significant advocacy capacity. ELAA, despite common transitional changes, demonstrates the value of strong coalition building, which can be crucial to advocacy success when resources are scarce.

- The ecosystem is working on engaging key decision-makers as political and administrative champions. They are aiming to shift the narrative so that decision-makers see parents as experts. Evidence of the desire of decision-makers to prioritize parent voice will become more apparent after seeing the effects of the implementation of the Lived Experience Law.

- Advocates and parents have voiced a desire to focus on improving two parent power capacities in particular:
  - Parents are interested in leadership development spaces where they have more power to drive the policy agenda.
  - Parents are also seeking to create their own spaces and to bring additional parent peers into advocacy.
Stronger organizing capacity in these two areas, where parent leaders are developed and parents can learn to engage their peers, will help the state to further scale parent power-building efforts on early care and education issues.
The Kentucky IDEA Advocacy Ecosystem

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

**Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA)**
- KYA is a statewide advocacy organization that brands itself as the “lobbyist for kids.” KYA advocates on all aspects of children’s lives and focuses on ensuring opportunities for all kids to succeed. They are the lead on several statewide initiatives and mobilize advocates to take action on behalf of kids and families through rallies, advocacy training, partnerships, and action alerts.

**Play Cousins Collective**
- Play Cousins Collective was created to focus on parent-centered advocacy with parents of color, particularly Black parents. They also offer children’s programming, healing circles, and parent groups.

**La Casita Center (La Casita)**
- La Casita is a community-building organization providing education, empowerment, advocacy, and wellness services for Latinx families in the Louisville area. One branch of the organization incorporates advocacy for Latinx families.

**Jack Be Nimble**
- Jack Be Nimble advocates for the specific needs of youth with disabilities. They prioritize hearing from students and families to create better outcomes for students and teachers.

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE
- KYA has partnered through the RWJF grant with Play Cousins Collective, La Casita, and Jack Be Nimble to ensure that parents from different communities in Kentucky have a space to share their expertise and experience in ways that help to drive the policy agenda for kids.

ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS
- A strong partnership exists among all the advocacy partnership organizations, and they all recognize the importance of centering parent voice.
- KYA has had strong, positive relationships with legislators, and they have been working to focus the attention of legislators on the importance of racial equity.
THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- Through the RWJF grant, KYA has become more intentional about incorporating parent voice within their advocacy. The centering of parent voice is a new priority for KYA, and the methods and boundaries around parent, advocate, and organizer roles are still being established. With the support of the advocacy partner organizations, KYA created a parent leadership group that engages members from various communities to facilitate listening sessions with more parents.

- KYA continues to engage new key communities to ensure that parent voices are represented. To engage with parents of the Latinx community, KYA formed a new relationship with La Casita and collaborated on listening sessions to incorporate parents’ voices into advocacy efforts.

- As part of their efforts to engage parents meaningfully, KYA focused on supporting the development of parent leaders rather than on the quantity of recruited parents. Parent leaders will have the space to bring more interested parents to the table and gain expertise to drive the policy agenda. In the coming year, KYA will focus on the further development of parent leaders.

- Parents find advocacy trainings to be immensely helpful and empowering. Parents shared that the trainings helped them to feel comfortable speaking in front of legislators and helped to add credibility to their storytelling. Parents may encourage further legislative support for the early intervention (EI) policy agenda as legislative champions interact with them and increasingly see them as experts.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

- KYA brings strong advocacy capacity to the IDEA advocacy ecosystem because of its prominent status and long-standing advocacy efforts. A key component of this ecosystem is the organizing capacities of the three parent-focused organizations—Play Cousins Collective, Jack Be Nimble, and La Casita. Each organization brings unique grassroots capacities to the table.

- The advocacy ecosystem prioritizes trauma and healing support for parents who have experienced difficulties with their children in the system.

- KYA is developing the capacity to support strong parent leaders who can grow advocacy opportunities and build a strong base of interested parents. Parents have expressed their interest in exploring more leadership opportunities.

- Moving forward, parent leaders will support the IDEA advocacy ecosystem in strengthening the narrative that parents are experts. Parents sharing their expertise can also be a resource to further develop legislative champions who will listen and respond to parent’s needs.
The New York IDEA Advocacy Ecosystem

**LEAD ORGANIZATIONS**

**The Children’s Agenda**
- Based in Rochester, New York, The Children’s Agenda advocates for effective policies and promotes evidence-based solutions for children’s health, education, and success. They are especially committed to children who are vulnerable because of poverty, racism, health inequities, and trauma. The organization conducts research, engages in policy advocacy, and supports collaborative system building by bringing together advocates across the state to develop a coordinated policy agenda.

**Children’s Voice Alliance (CVA)**
- CVA is a parent organizing group formed as part of the RWJF grant to organize parents of color in the Rochester area.

**KEY ADVOCACY TABLE**
- The Kids Can’t Wait coalition is a group of parents, providers, doctors, advocates, and educators who are committed to an aligned policy agenda on EI and preschool special education.

**ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS**
- Advocates and legislators in New York have strong, long-standing relationships. Parents, however, do not currently have relationships with legislators that enable them to advocate directly. The Children’s Agenda is prioritizing engagement between legislators and CVA parents to support parent power building and improvement in early childhood developmental systems in New York.

**THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM**
- The Children’s Agenda hired a community organizer to establish meaningful relationships, train parents on advocacy, and amplify parent voice in advocacy. They maintained these efforts when the organizer departed for another position. The initial community organizer created CVA, and when they departed, The Children’s Agenda transitioned smoothly and maintained the goals of CVA and key relationships with parents. The Children’s Agenda refocused the energies of another parent organizer on their staff to keep up relationship-building efforts and prioritized hiring another parent organizer as soon as possible. A new parent organizer was hired in July 2022.
The RWJF grant supported The Children’s Agenda’s focus on engaging parents of color who are underrepresented at current advocacy tables. In 2019 and 2020, The Children’s Agenda developed strong relationships with active parents engaged in local- and state-level advocacy, but recognized that these parents were largely residents of suburban areas. The Children’s Agenda recognized the need to bring parents of color to advocacy tables and strategy development, and spent the year bolstering parent relationships in the Rochester City School District. Parents who live in districts bordering Rochester with very similar socioeconomic backgrounds also joined CVA.

CVA has operated through an organizing strategy that builds the power of parents by involving them in identifying problems they share and their desired solutions to those problems. It focuses heavily on strong, genuine relationships with parents. Parents have invited friends and members of the community to continue to grow the group.

The Children’s Agenda and CVA hope to better pair advocacy and organizing strategies in the coming year to continue to engage parents of color in the advocacy process.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

As the lead group in this work, The Children’s Agenda has strong advocacy capacity, as evidenced through the creation of the Kids Can’t Wait Coalition of providers, doctors, parents, and educators.

Through the CVA, the ecosystem is building its organizing capacity. CVA has prioritized recruiting and training parents of color, which has allowed them to grow their network of parents.

The Children’s Agenda’s ability to transition following the departure of a key community organizer is a strong example of adaptive capacity.

In the coming year, The Children’s Agenda can use their adaptive capacity to bridge advocacy and organizing capacities as their parent community grows and the structural scope of their advocacy strategy shifts.
The Rhode Island IDEA Advocacy Ecosystem

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT (RI Kids Count)**
- RI Kids Count is a children’s policy organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children’s issues, and promotes equity, accountability, and action.

**Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)**
- PLEE is a parent-led, grassroots parent-organizing group founded to support parents of color and parents who live in the four core cities of Rhode Island who felt that they lacked a space to organize around their specific needs. PLEE designs spaces where families are at the center and drive every decision made. PLEE has formed a network of parents interested in addressing problems with EI (Part C of IDEA), preschool special education, early care and education, and other issues. It has always included Spanish-speaking parents.

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE

- **Right from the Start Campaign and Steering Committee** is a legislative and budget campaign led by eight organizations to advance state policies for young children and their families in Rhode Island. The campaign works with the community to develop policy priorities for the year, after which they coordinate with state administrators and state legislators to advance the policy priorities. The Steering Committee for the campaign is coordinated by RI Kids Count and includes PLEE.

ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS

- There are strong relationships between RI Kids Count, PLEE, Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN), and The Arc, and they all agree on the importance of engaging parents. They have been working together with other stakeholders to develop and advance state budget and policy priorities for EI and preschool special education. Each advocacy organization has a broader policy agenda and additional priorities that may sometimes make it difficult to coordinate parent engagement.

- Advocates have good relationships with key EI decision-makers, such as the Early Intervention State Administrator. The Early Intervention State Administrator supports the advocacy strategy and the centering of parent voice.

- Parents do not have consistently strong relationships with EI providers, school districts, or legislators. Parents report that EI providers and school districts can be defensive and worried about being blamed for systemic failures of inadequate funding and ineffective policy. Parents also report feeling that they are often unheard by legislators.
THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- **PLEE** is focused on engaging parents while maintaining a strong relationship with **RI Kids Count**. PLEE organizes parents and is a prominent partner in the IDEA advocacy ecosystem. RI Kids Count has been a collaborative partner with PLEE organizations, providing funding as well as data and other supports.

- **PLEE plays a key role on the Right from the Start Steering Committee and promotes a strong parent voice in policy agenda development and advocacy.** Because PLEE is focused on parent power building, their emphasis on parent leadership development will continue to help grow parent leadership and engagement. Additionally, PLEE has created space for parents to connect with legislators and providers.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

- The advocacy ecosystem has a strong advocacy table through the Right from the Start campaign. It features a strong coalition that facilitates access to legislators and helps the ecosystem to remain adaptive and maintain sustainable and meaningful power-building opportunities for parents.

- **PLEE provides necessary community organizing capacity for parents to express their needs and priorities.** PLEE has focused on leadership development, particularly among parents of color.

- The advocacy ecosystem could use its strong relationship-building capacity to support better relationships between parents, state agency leaders, legislators, school districts, and EI providers.
Advocacy That Builds Parents’ Power

The Idaho Early Care and Education IDEA Advocacy Ecosystem

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS

Idaho Voices for Children (ID Voices)

- ID Voices (the state grantee) is a statewide nonpartisan advocacy organization that convenes groups with a shared interest in improving the lives of children. They consider themselves a unique organization that serves as a bridge between traditional grassroots and grasstops groups that engage both decision-makers and constituents to improve child and family policy.

- ID Voices is part of the larger group Jannus, Inc, which connects and supports their programs with administrative infrastructure services (HR, fiscal, etc.) in Idaho, as well as helps ID Voices to have an ear to the ground on the work of fellow organizations and to stay connected for meaningful partnership.

Idaho Parents Unlimited (IPUL)

- IPUL is a parent training and information center and partner to ID Voices.

- IPUL provides direct one-on-one information, support, training, and resources to families impacted by IDEA.

- Through the RWJF grant, IPUL expanded its training to include advocacy training and parent leader development.

KEY ADVOCACY TABLE

- First Steps Alliance, branded as a part of the RWJF grant, is a part of ID Voices and engages organizations and parents with a shared interest in improving policies and conditions in ECE and EI.

ECOSYSTEM RELATIONSHIPS

- As Idaho has fewer constituents than many other states, advocates tend to have more opportunities to connect with legislators formally and informally. However, advocates must work within the existing Idahoan ethos of “rugged individualism” that shapes the state’s culture and policies. Fortunately, there are many opportunities for child and family advocacy organizations and direct service providers to connect and strategize together due to ID Voices’ significant experience conducting community outreach and their established reputation as excellent coalition facilitators.

- Parents’ voices were previously missing from the ecosystem context. Work on the RWJF grant has prompted their inclusion through the First Steps Alliance. Parents now have a space to help shape the policy agenda that affects their lives.
THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- **IPUL and ID Voices work closely together to ensure that parents are engaged in policy advocacy on IDEA.** They agree that parents should drive the policy agenda. This point of view is not yet shared by all participants in the IDEA advocacy ecosystem, as some see a disconnect between the investment in centering parent voice and the decision-making that happens at a higher level. IPUL and ID Voices are countering that narrative by continuing to invite parents to the table.

- **IPUL and ID Voices have partnered to create two mechanisms to build and center parent voice:**
  - ID Voices started the First Steps Alliance to engage parents in sharing their experiences and speaking with legislators about shaping policy that matters to them and their lives. The First Steps Alliance includes parents, IPUL, and key administrators to help shape a policy agenda to improve the lives of those impacted by IDEA and ECE policy.
  - IPUL is shaping its existing parent advocacy training program to include more focus on EI and ECE issues and to invite more parents to participate. Trainings in all seven regions of the state, both in-person and virtual, support parents in advocating with legislators and on the ground in communities. IPUL also continues to offer a parent retreat for parent leaders so they can learn how to organize within their communities and engage more parents in this work.

- **IPUL and ID Voices are working on engaging parents from communities of color.** They have relationships with parents of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Coeur d’Alene Tribe and are focused on ensuring that parents feel comfortable sharing their experiences and being part of statewide advocacy efforts. A representative from the Office of Refugee Resettlement also participates in the First Steps Alliance to bring the perspective of refugees to the work. IPUL and ID Voices also hope to include the Latino population in the next year of the RWJF grant.

- **Parent engagement goals for the coming year include building out relationships with parents who participated in IPUL trainings to invite them to engage in the First Steps Alliance.** ID Voices and IPUL are hoping to develop more parent leaders in the coming year, which they see as crucial to their longer-term advocacy efforts.

ECOSYSTEM CAPACITIES

- **ID Voices has strong policy advocacy capacity in alliance and coalition building, communications and messaging, and systems change.** IPUL adds legal advocacy support and direct access to, and work with, parents affected by IDEA policy.

- **ID Voices and IPUL are applying their communications, messaging, and training strength to work on shifting the narrative around the importance of centering parent voice in advocacy efforts.**

- On capacity need areas, the lead organizations are working on further building the capacity of the First Steps Alliance to use more of an organizing approach in their parent engagement work so that it invites more parent leadership in addition to engagement.
Appendix B

Evaluation Methodology
Approach
Our evaluation used a multi-case (nine states), qualitative study design to examine in context how it looks when advocacy is designed to build power in addition to achieving wins.

Evaluation Questions

Primary Question: How are state EHS/HS and IDEA early childhood advocacy ecosystems developing the capacity to center families and parent advocates in the work?

Sub-questions: About the EHS/HS and IDEA advocacy ecosystems in the nine states:

- Composition: Who participated? To what extent were ecosystem actors aligned on the importance of centering parents? How are ecosystems challenging traditional power structures?
- Parent-centeredness: How were parents/families being engaged through this work? How did this affect the work? Which types of parents were represented?
- Relationships: How are advocacy actors connected? How did the ecosystem examine norms/practices and create new ones so parents can freely ask questions, issue challenges, and provide input?
- Capacities: What capacities did the ecosystem have to both shift power and achieve policy wins? What capacities may need to be strengthened going forward?

Methods
To better understand the work of state advocacy partners, we used multiple methods to capture their efforts and experiences:

- Semi-structured Interviews. We conducted (and transcribed) in-depth interviews with ecosystem actors who played key roles in the work:
  - State Leads: Interviews were conducted twice—a couple of months after they began the work in November 2021 and again at the end of the first grant year in June 2022.
    - The first round focused on the state context, how and to what extent state leads had prioritized racial equity, and their goals for the first grant year.
    - The second round focused on how state lead strategies played out, what successes and setbacks states experienced, and future priorities.
  - Parent Organizers: Interviews were conducted in February–March 2022 on their role in the work and their strategy for growing parent power in the ecosystem.
  - Other Advocacy Ecosystem Partners: Interviews were conducted in February–March 2022 on their role in the work and how they collaborate on centering parent voice in the ecosystem.
  - National Partners: Interviews were conducted in February–March 2022 on their goals and reflections on the work and perspectives on states’ progress.
Parents: Interviews were conducted in May–June 2022 with parents nominated by advocates and parent organizers from six states: Maine, Texas, New Jersey, North Carolina, Washington, and Kentucky. Parents were invited to share the extent to which they felt they could engage in advocacy, supports and barriers to their engagement, and the usefulness of advocacy trainings and meetings. Interviews also asked how parents relate to the broader advocacy ecosystem, including the extent to which they feel they have power and that other advocacy partners and stakeholders are listening.

- **Document Review and Desk Research.** We reviewed proposals and conducted web research to better understand the context, state history of advocacy on EHS/HS and IDEA, and the state advocacy ecosystem partners. Additionally, we reviewed relevant documents for each state to triangulate and expand on the interview findings.

- **Participant Observation of Cohort Calls.** We participated in bimonthly cohort calls held by national EHS/HS partners during which state leads, parent organizers, and some additional colleagues in their ecosystems could reflect on their progress and challenges.

**Documentation and Analysis**

We used a staged analysis process to achieve deep knowledge of each state case and then assessed themes across states. We integrated learning into living case studies written for each state, responding to the evaluation questions and sub-questions. We will continue to expand on the case studies with additional data collection in the second grant year.

In the second step, we assessed themes across the states to reveal findings to be included in this report about the relationship between advocacy and power building.
Appendix C

Differences Between EHS/HS and IDEA Policies and Advocacy Ecosystems
Age of Children Served

EHS/HS serves children from birth to age five, while IDEA serves children and youth ages three to 21. Given the wider age range, parents and families may be involved in the IDEA advocacy community longer than parents involved in EHS/HS advocacy.

Number of Children Served

In 2019, EHS/HS served 873,019 children ages birth to age five, while IDEA served 723,726 preschool age children (three to five years). However, for the full age range that IDEA supports (youth ages three to 21), the total number served is 7,281,881.

Income Eligibility

EHS/HS serves children who are at or below the federal poverty level, while IDEA serves children from all income backgrounds, the majority of whom are not living in poverty. This income difference means that many IDEA parents may have more time and resources to support their children.

Federal and State Funding

In 2019, EHS/HS received about $10 billion in federal funding, while IDEA received about $13.45 billion. States also contribute funding to IDEA federal dollars, which raises the per-child dollars available, whereas state EHS/HS contributions are rare.

Race and Ethnicity

EHS/HS serves more children of color as compared to IDEA. Given the social stratification of society around race, under which white parents have more power and privilege, white parents may be more visible and recognized in both EHS/HS and IDEA advocacy communities than parents of color. This factor is particularly relevant for IDEA ecosystems, which are more likely to include white parents at higher income levels.

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10 US Department of Health and Human Services. Sec. 645 Participation in Head Start Programs.
Table 5. Race-Ethnicity of Students by Program\textsuperscript{12}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>EHS/HS</th>
<th>IDEA</th>
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<tr>
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<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{12} National Center for Education Statistics. Race Indicators.