



# **Current Status of Parent Education Programs in Kentucky at the State and Local Level**

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**Beth Rous, Ed.D.**

**Rena Hallam, Ph.D.**

**Jaime Grove, M.S.**

**Susan Robinson, M.S.**

**Margaret Machara, M.S.**

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To obtain copies of this report, contact the Interdisciplinary Human Development Institute, University of Kentucky at: 859-257-4015 or write to:  
EC Parent Leadership Initiative, 126 Mineral Industries Bldg.,  
Lexington, KY 40506-0051



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## **I. Project Overview**

The Early Childhood Parent Leadership Initiative, sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is a joint venture between the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and the University of Kentucky Interdisciplinary Human Development Institute. The project is designed to facilitate the involvement of parents with their children in early care and education settings and to build an infrastructure of early childhood professionals who can work collaboratively with parents to support positive child outcomes.

## **II. Purpose**

The purpose of the interviews was to identify and gain an understanding of existing programs providing parent education across Kentucky at the state and/or local level to determine the current structures and supports for reaching and engaging parents.

## **III. Methodology**

State agency personnel from the Kentucky Department of Education, Cabinets for Health Services and Families and Children, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development were contacted and asked to identify specific programs across the state that provide some level of parent education. In total, 22 programs were nominated. Of these, 11 programs consented to the interviews. The other 11 programs either reported that they were not currently providing parent education or chose not to participate in the interviews. In total, 33 telephone interviews were conducted with directors, managers, and representatives from the following programs: Head Start (6), Even Start (10), Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (9), Parent to Parent, GEAR UP KY, Division of Extended Learning Services, Parents as Teachers (PAT), School Based Decision Making (SBDM), Health Access Nurturing Developing Services (HANDS), Office of Parent Leadership in Mental Health, and Practical Parent Education. A

geographically diverse sample was used for the three programs in which multiple sites were interviewed, covering the western, central and eastern portions of the state. Several sites were contacted for these programs, as each program was unique in the services it provided. The remaining contacts were with persons overseeing the programs for the entire state. See Appendix A for a description of individual programs. Program contacts were asked to define the type of parent education program they provide, their target audience, the outcomes and curriculum used, and the frequency and duration of training sessions. See Appendix B for interview protocol.

**IV. Results**

Results are summarized by overall themes identified from the interviews. Major themes included program structures, parent involvement activities, informational classes, communication methods, collaborative practices, supports, and needs assessments and evaluations, each of which is described in detail.

**Program Structure**

There are three main areas of emphasis used by programs to provide services to parents and other family members: home visiting, resource center and individualized services (Table 1).

Table 1

**Program Structure**

<b>Program Structure</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Home visitation	70.0
Resource center	36.0
Individualized	21.0

Note: n=33

A home visiting model was mentioned most often among the program staff interviewed. Among the programs that offered home visits, some programs integrated home visits for first-time parents, while others offered home visits based on family needs and concerns. A number of

programs are structured as resource centers. These programs provided additional support needed by families such as clothing, food, books, materials, and referrals to other professional services as needed. Finally, several programs indicated that parent education and support were structured around the individual needs of the children and families they serve. This differentiation was attributed to the differential needs of families.

**Parent Involvement Activities**

Several of the programs talked about activities they engage in to solicit and encourage parental involvement including literacy, volunteers, social events and parent-teacher meetings (Table 2).

Table 2

**Parental Involvement Activities**

<b>Parental Involvement Activities</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Literacy activities	30.0
Classroom volunteer	24.0
Social events	18.0
Parent-teacher meetings	3.0

Note: n=33

The majority of programs’ staff interviewed identified literacy activities as a component of their parent education programs. Family reading and literacy night are two such activities that were repeatedly mentioned. Many programs also considered opportunities to volunteer in classrooms as a parent education activity. Although it depended on the individual center, parents/guardians were offered opportunities to visit their child’s class and become familiar with its atmosphere and other professionals. Outside of the classroom or center setting, several programs offered family activities, such as “family fun nights,” “fathers’ night out,” family meals, and other social events. Parent-teacher meetings, in which parents and teachers meet to discuss issues regarding the child, were also reported by a few programs,.

## Informational Classes

A majority of programs mentioned various kinds of informational classes offered for parents. These classes often focused on increasing the knowledge and skills of parents. Classes such as parenting skills and discipline strategies were commonly cited as being offered to parents. Several programs offered classes or workshops around issues of decision making and leadership, specifically school laws, Individual Education Plans, communication and assertiveness. Specific leadership and advocacy skill trainings were mentioned in a few of the interviews. In the majority of cases, program staff presented opportunities for parents that involved one-sided communication, that is, information conveyed from the professional to the parent. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the variety of informational classes offered by programs.

Table 3

### Types of Informational Classes

<b>Types of Informational Classes</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Parenting	33.0
Advocacy/leadership training	21.0
Child development	15.0
Health/nutrition/fitness	9.0
Literacy	6.0
Money management	6.0
Employment issues	6.0
Law/procedures	6.0
Stress workshop	3.0
Time management	3.0
Mock testing	3.0
Record keeping/notebook training	3.0
IEP training	3.0
Communication/assertive skills	3.0

Note: n=33

## Communication

The ways in which program staff communicated with parents and other family members were mentioned by most of the program staff interviewed. Newsletters were the most commonly mentioned form of communication, with programs citing them as a way for their program to communicate with families. In addition to newsletters, programs used flyers, brochures, and websites as other forms of communication. Table 4 illustrates the various methods of communication employed by programs.

Table 4

### Methods of Communication Employed by Programs

Communication Methods	% of Programs
Newsletter	27.0
Flyer	6.0
Parent handbook	3.0
2-way calling system	3.0
Parent/child magazine	3.0
Brochure	3.0
Website	3.0
Parent-to-parent	3.0

Note: n=33

## Collaborative Practices

Several programs mentioned types of collaborative practices they were engaged in; however, these practices centered on professional collaboration rather than parent/professional collaboration. Interagency collaboration in the form of referrals to other community agencies was commonly mentioned by programs. Working directly with other agencies was mentioned by several of the interviewees, while several other programs discussed providing referral services for families, such as referring families to health and social service agencies like the Health Department. A few of the programs talked about directly offering health services, such as vision,

hearing, and dental examinations. Table 5 illustrates the types of collaborative practices that programs mentioned.

Table 5

**Types of Collaborative Practices**

<b>Types of Collaborative Practices</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Working with other agencies	55.0
Referral services	39.0
Health services	30.0
Links with community	30.0
Parent networking	24.0

Note: n=33

**F. Supports**

Many of the programs interviewed indicated that they offered support to families.

Several programs discussed opportunities for children to receive health services, such as health screenings, physicals, and dental and vision checkups. One program mentioned that parents could receive a screening for life stressors. Several programs stated that they encourage parent to parent support, where parents educate and encourage each other. Furthermore, a few programs referred to ethnicity-based networking opportunities that they offer. A service that many programs discussed was acting as a resource center for children and families by providing resources, such as lending libraries and other materials. The various types of supports offered by programs are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

**Program Supports**

<b>Supports Offered</b>	<b>% of Programs</b>
Health services	30.0
Parent-to-parent support	24.0
Childcare	15.0
Mentors for children	9.0
Transportation	6.0

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Incentives for participation	6.0
Ethnicity-based networking	6.0
Bilingual materials	3.0

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Note: n=33

### **G. Needs Assessments & Evaluations**

Most of the programs contacted emphasized the necessity of planning programs around the needs of the children and families that participate. The use of needs assessments was mentioned by several interviewees as a method of program planning. These assessments are the basis of the program design and curriculum. A few of the programs interviewed mentioned some type of method, formal or informal, of evaluating the programs in which they are involved.

### **V. Conclusion**

The Early Childhood Parent Leadership Initiative is designed to facilitate the involvement of parents with their children in early care and education settings and to build an infrastructure of early childhood professionals who can work collaboratively with parents to support positive child outcomes. The overall goal of the project is to link state, university, and community resources together to provide training, materials, and policies for three groups: parents, early childhood professionals, and state and regional agency personnel. The general premise of the program is based on an understanding that a parent's involvement in their child's early care and education program can positively impact the child's future success in school. Currently, Kentucky parent education programs are offering an array of family support services, some of which encourage family engagement with school or academic readiness skills for young children. However, findings from this study suggest that no program is specifically targeting the development and maintenance of successful parent-program relationships in the early care and education system. Clearly, there is a need for programs to support both parents and programs in this area.

The overall perspectives and attitudes of most of the interviewees were positive and highly focused on helping children become more successful in physical, cognitive, and emotional realms. Despite being focused on fostering the positive growth and development of children, most of the methods employed by the programs involved the parents indirectly in the care and education of their children and were based on the professional “educating” the parent through the use of one-sided communication techniques. This was especially true for programs offering informational classes on leadership and advocacy. Parents were given information, but a collaboration was not formed. Furthermore, the majority of communication techniques reported by programs involved indirect communication, such as the use of newsletters and flyers.

Programs spoke about professional-professional collaboration in which they either worked directly with another agency in providing services or they referred out to other agencies. However, programs did not speak of parent-professional collaboration as a function of their agency, thus indicating a need for the development of programs supporting parent-professional collaboration in early care and education programs.

## Appendix A

### Program Descriptions

#### A. Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSC)

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSC) formed in 1990 out of the Kentucky Education Reform Act to “meet the needs of all children and families who reside in the community or neighborhood served by the school in which the center is located” (<http://cfc.state.ky.us/frysc>). This goal is met by engaging and empowering families and enhancing students’ abilities to succeed in school. Schools are funded by grants to provide various services to help children overcome non-cognitive barriers to learning. Because FRYSCs are based within the schools, every parent and child has the opportunity for services.

There are two divisions of FRYSC: Family Resource Centers, which serve children through age 12, and Youth Services Centers, which serve children age 12 and older. Each of the divisions functions to meet the mandated core components. The components for Family Resource Centers are: preschool child care for children two and three years of age, after school child day care, families in training, parent and child education, support and training for child day care providers, and health services or referrals to health services. The components for Youth Services Centers are: referrals to health and social services, employment counseling, training and placement, summer and part-time job development, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, and family crisis and mental health counseling (<http://cfc.state.ky.us/frysc>).

Each center develops its own programs to incorporate the components, and the program structure is established through needs assessments. Therefore, every center is unique in what it offers. Some centers act primarily as a resource and referral service by working with other

community agencies like health departments and doctor offices. Other centers incorporate parent education programs which may include group educational classes on budgeting, stress, puberty, health, parenting, and mock testing. Contingent upon the needs of the child and family, some centers offer home visiting programs and family-related activities like reading/literacy, school readiness, and expectant parent education. FRYSCs are presented through various means of communication including newsletters, brochures in community places, flyers, and by staff referrals. Some centers even provide incentives for participation such as transportation, baby bags, and baby showers.

## **B. Head Start**

Head Start originated in 1965 to “help break the cycle of poverty by providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs,” with “the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families” (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/>). Head Start programs are in place across the United States to serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and families. Head Start is a federal organization, but it is managed by local non-profit organizations. A major aspect of Head Start centers is the partnership with parents, where many parent involvement components are implemented. Classroom volunteering, social events, Father’s Night Out, advisory councils/committees, home visits, and input on activities and goals are just a few of the ways parents and families can be involved. Another aspect of Head Start is the implementation of parent education programs. Issues that are addressed at some centers are: parenting/child rearing, literacy, English language, health/nutrition, job training, money management, and aid with the GED. In addition, Head Start acts as a referral service to inform families of other community resources. Some of the other benefits and incentives to being

in a Head Start program are: free medical and dental care for children, transportation, screenings for children, and the availability of newsletters and parent handbooks.

### **C. Even Start**

Even Start, a statewide program, focuses on economically and educationally disadvantaged families with young children by “supporting efforts to create new strategies to improve and expand family literacy services” ([www.statewide-intiative.rmces.com/](http://www.statewide-intiative.rmces.com/)). With the desired outcome to engage family and community for improved educational success, several goals of Even Start include, “developing performance indicators, improving local evaluations, supporting professional development, and encouraging local programs to work more closely with families with school-age children and to base instruction on scientifically based reading research”([www.statewide-intiative.rmces.com/](http://www.statewide-intiative.rmces.com/)). Families typically become involved with Even Start when they are referred by other agencies and through word of mouth. Because family involvement is an aspect of the Even Start program, several involvement activities are implemented: home visits, translation of information, classroom volunteering, reading programs, Literacy Nights, and encouraging families to have lunch with their children. Parents are also provided educational services through Even Start, including topics such as parenting skills, child development, computer skills, and the GED. Counseling services are also available, as well as the use of guest speakers. Even Start includes newsletters and resource centers for parents, summer programs for children, and childcare during classes for GED.

### **D. Parent to Parent**

Serving families in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and functioning as the state chapter for Family Voices, Parent to Parent is devoted to “providing support to parents of children with special needs” (<http://www.kyp2p.org/>). More than 5,000 parents have been involved in Parent to

Parent in the 9 years since it was founded. Any family member who has a child (birth-age 21) with a disability or health concern can be served by the program because the desired outcome is that families are prepared to be the best advocates for their children. Parents and families become involved in Parent to Parent by referrals from state agencies, websites, list serves, and other parents. Parent to Parent takes place at sites such as hotels and provides several parent education components. A few examples include: advocacy training, parent to parent support, record keeping/notebook training, and Individualized Education Plan training. In addition to the support that parents provide each other, Parent to Parent incorporates information and referral services.

#### **E. GEAR UP KENTUCKY**

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP KY) was funded in 2000 with a 5-year grant and serves 29 counties. The program “encourages young people to stay in school, study hard, and take the right courses to go to college,” with the goal being to “increase the number of low-income middle-school students who enroll in and graduate from postsecondary institutions.” (<http://www.gearupky.org>). The program is set up for 7<sup>th</sup> graders to enter the program and continue into high school. GEAR UP increases college awareness, removes barriers, and encourages academic achievement. Each school has its own activities to involve the students and the families. Students have opportunities to visit college campuses, use a homework drop-in service, try out for performing groups, and both student and parent have possibilities to attend high school, college, and career workshops. A main component of GEAR UP KY is that two parents from each school are trained in parent leadership. These parents carry out a project in their school to increase parent involvement. All parents are invited to be involved through newsletters, school website, and flyers, but not all participate.

## **F. Dept. of Education, Division of Extended Services**

Under the Department of Education, the Division of Extended Services serves families who are income eligible, children who have a disability, developmental delay, speech-language challenge, or who have an Individualized Education Plan. The Division of Extended Services oversees, funds, and affiliates with many projects such as Even Start and Preschool programs in Kentucky. The desired outcome of these services is an increase in school readiness. To be in the programs offered, families have to be income eligible (receiving free/reduced meals or other federal assistance); however, some districts allow parents to pay to be in the program. For preschools, Friday is reserved for professional development and parents are also invited to visit on this day.

## **G. Parents as Teachers (PAT)**

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is an international program serving 800 children in 7 Kentucky counties. The service is available for all families from pregnancy through school entry. With the desired outcome of preparing children and families for school, Parents as Teachers “provides the information, support and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life” (<http://www.patnc.org>). Many of the program goals integrate the idea of empowering parents and the importance of a partnership between parents and schools. These goals are achieved as PAT supports personal visits, group meetings, and a resource network. Programs often refer families to services such as Head Start, First Steps, and childcare. Health screenings are also available to children involved in this program. Families can become involved in PAT as they hear about the program from other families, advertisements, and PAT’s website.

## **H. School Based Decision Making (SBDM)**

There are 2,000 School Based Decision Making (SBDM) groups in Kentucky, taking in 800 new parents a year. According to the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990, a decision making strategy is required, so SBDM serves “to create conditions at the school level that will help all students reach proficiency by 2014” (<http://www.kde.state.ky.us/KDE/Administrative+Resources/School+Based+Decision+Making>). SBDM is a way to promote local decision making, and families can become involved by being nominated by their school or PTA. Parents are trained to serve on decision making boards for the school. Specific trainings address issues such as laws, curriculum, and budget.

## **I. Health Access Nurturing Developing Services (HANDS)**

Health Access Nurturing Developing Services (HANDS) exist in 120 counties. All first-time parents are eligible to participate in this program. Doctors, health departments, and friends refer parents to the HANDS program, where the goals are “positive pregnancy outcomes, optimal child growth and development, safe/healthy homes for children, and families making decision that enhance long term independence” (<http://chs.ky.gov/publichealth/hands.htm>). As a qualified home visitor is joined with a parent, HANDS educates parents about safety and critical child development issues through one-on-one activities. This program also refers parents to other needed services and provides screenings for parental stressors.

## **J. Practical Parent Education (PPE)**

Practical Parent Education (PPE), which began in Texas in the 1980’s, now has over 140 member programs. PPE’s “sole agenda is to help families find their own most effective ways of functioning” by providing “curriculum, training and support for effective Parent Educators”. (<http://www.practicalparent.org/index.htm>). PPE is both home- and center-based, and anyone

who needs help and wants to be involved can join this organization. PPE works collaboratively with other agencies including FRYSCs and schools. Often, members learn of PPE by word of mouth from other members. PPE provides educational services to parents such as helping parents in attaining their GED and Parent Chat, where parents learn about various issues in parenting and child development. Parents also have opportunities to be involved by volunteering in the classroom.

#### **K. Office of Parent Leadership in Mental Health**

The Office of Parent Leadership in Mental Health serves thousands of individuals with the goal of helping parents and families of children with mental health issues. This program encourages all parents to know their rights and responsibilities. Through newsletters, support groups, and outreach activities, this program helps parents skills related to assertiveness, communication, and school laws. In addition, families are trained as liaisons. Mailings and e-mails are means for informing parents and families about the Office of Parent Leadership in Mental Health.

## Appendix B

### Phone Interview Protocol

#### I. Re-introduction of study and purpose of this interview.

Hi. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ from the Interdisciplinary Human Development Institute at the University of Kentucky. We are working with the Prichard Committee on a grant funded by the Kellogg Company that is focusing on improving communication and collaboration between families and schools. We are contacting providers in the state of Kentucky that were referred by \_\_\_\_\_ as having parent engagement programs. We are interested in finding out more information about the programs that you offer.

#### II. Permission to Audio Tape Call

In order to help me capture what you have to say, I would like your permission to audiotape this call. If you would like, I would be happy to send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to revise any of your statements that I may have captured incorrectly.

#### III. Interview Questions

We know from the literature that education is crucial in shaping the future of children. We also know that children benefit the most when they have the active support of both teachers and parents. These questions are designed to help us to better understand programs, like yours, that are currently available for families.

What types of programs do you offer that focus on parent education (i.e., GED, parenting classes)?

How long have you been running this program?

How many participants have been involved in the program?

Who does this program target?

How are participants recruited?

How long do participants remain in the program?

What is the desired outcome of this program?

Do you have any formal evaluations of this program? (i.e., completion rates, participant feedback)

What types of programs do you offer that focus on involving parents? (i.e., home visits, volunteer in classrooms)

Can you think of anything you would like to add that we haven't covered?

It would also be helpful for us to receive a copy of the curriculum or structure of any programs that you are currently implementing. Would you mind sending us any information that you have?

#### IV. Closure

Thank you for taking the time to let us know the kinds of programs that your facility is offering. Your input is very valuable to our understanding the working relationship between families and schools. Please feel free to contact me if you think of anything else you would like to add or if you have any questions for me.