

Massachusetts: State Initiative Profile



Overview

Massachusetts began participating in Strengthening Families™ in 2007 with strong leadership from the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) and the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). In-kind, financial and staffing resources from both agencies have contributed to a family service workforce that is more knowledgeable and prepared to embed the Strengthening Families Protective Factors and Key Strategies in its daily work.

Building Strengthening Families Practice on the Ground

Massachusetts' priorities are to ensure that all key partner sites receive Strengthening Families training, complete self-assessment surveys, develop plans to enhance their key strategies and have access to additional technical assistance to meet their goals. Training all levels of staff within state and local agencies about Strengthening Families is a priority and has helped directors, supervisors and direct care staff understand how this approach to working with families is relevant to their mission and work. In partnership with CTF, EEC has ensured that more of its funded program partners have received Strengthening Families training over the last year. CTF has embedded the Strengthening Families approach into all of its funded program strategies, and has hosted leadership forums, parenting education and support conferences and several other training events.

Recently, the Department of Children and Families funded four Family Resource Centers (FRCs) to offer an alternative response to families who come to the attention of the DCF, but who do not need protective services. CTF supported DCF to incorporate the Strengthening Families framework into this program. Each FRC site has also completed the Strengthening Families self-assessment and is working with CTF to develop work plans to enhance programs.

Key Aspects of the State's work

Policy / Systems Change

EEC has embedded aspects of Strengthening Families within several Request for Response (RFR) notices. For example, the Priority Populations RFR identifies the Strengthening Families Protective Factors as an overarching framework for contractors delivering high quality early care and education and family support services to priority populations (including homeless and teen parents). Protective Factors are also included as a training topic within the EEC's Educator and Provider Support Competitive Grant RFR for fiscal year 2011.

Strengthening Families is a research-based, cost-effective strategy to increase family stability, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect. It builds five protective factors:

Parental resilience

Social connections

Knowledge of parenting and child development

Concrete support in times of need

Social and emotional competence of children

Through the Strengthening Families Initiative, more than thirty states are shifting policy, funding and training to help programs working with children and families build protective factors with families. Many states are also using the Strengthening Families approach to integrate state prevention strategies, strengthen families in the child welfare system and engage parents and communities in building protective factors. For more information, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net

Nationally, Strengthening Families is coordinated by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and supported by a number of national partner organizations including:

The National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds

The BUILD Initiative

United Way Worldwide

Zero to Three

The FRIENDS National Resource Center



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2009 QUICK FACTS

State Coordinator:

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Trust Fund
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SF Investment:

Total: \$16,000

Direct Investment:

approximately \$10,000 in FY
10
Match: approximately \$6,000

Programs reached:

110 grantees

11 Family Resource Centers

Families reached:

Approximately 8,000

Professional Development:

850 professionals

Protective Factors used in

ECCS Planning:

Protective Factors used in

CBCAP RFP Process: Yes

Protective Factors integrated

into state QRIS: Yes

CCR&R Network in state

supporting program
implementation in EC sector:

Parent Partnerships

All 110 CFCE grantees are required to have community councils that include parent membership. In addition, grantees are required to offer a free, safe and accessible public space (e.g., family center) at which families can find information on community resources, access parenting education opportunities, improve their literacy skills and network and play with other children and families. CTF convened a Parent Partnership Leadership Team comprised of individuals from its Family Resource Centers programs to advise efforts to further develop meaningful activities with parent consumers in these programs. This work is ongoing.

Professional Development

EEC is working with CTF to provide trainer sessions on Strengthening Families. EEC purchased 70 copies of *Strengthening Families – A Guidebook for Early Childhood Programs* to be given to the participants along with electronic copies of the training presentation on disk to bring back to their communities. CTF has purchased nearly 300 copies of the past year and a half to conduct their Strengthening Families trainings. CTF also framed their annual View from All Sides parenting education and Family Support topics conference around the Strengthening Families Protective Factors. Nearly 650 participants were at the conference. CTF will continue to offer at least six more trainer activities in FY 2011. In large numbers, senior leadership from state and local organizations have attended training events such as the Strengthening Families Leadership Forums in 2008 and 2010 to learn ways to bring the Strengthening Families to their own agencies.

Evaluating Strengthening Families

CTF, EEC and DCF have been using the Strengthening Families Self Assessment tool to guide their evaluation work to date. CTF has also collected training evaluations from special forums and from training events held over the past year. CTF, EEC, and DCF programs will also be participating in the CSSPAIM Community Initiative in 2011 and 2012. Agencies have already begun work on this project.

Evolving Work

EEC is in the process of finalizing standards for the voluntary Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System which will be implemented in January 2011. The proposed QRIS standards require participating programs to complete the Strengthening Families self-assessment in order to achieve a quality rating beyond level two. As part of the roll-out of QRIS, EEC also proposes to include the Strengthening Families framework as a training topic for directors, teachers, family child care providers and assistants. Over the next two years, the Strengthening Families leaders will build the membership and capacity of their team to increase participation by parent consumers of services and more agency members across the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.