

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES MASSACHUSETTS: STATE PROFILE

### Infrastructure

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

### Parent Partnerships

All 107 Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grantees are required to have community councils that include parent membership. In addition, grantees are required to offer a free, developmentally appropriate and accessible public space (e.g., family center) where families can find information on community resources, access parenting education opportunities, improve their literacy skills and network and play with other children and families. The Children's Trust 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.

### Deepening Knowledge and Understanding

EEC is working with the Children's Trust to provide trainer sessions on Strengthening Families. Nearly 300 trainers have purchased copies of the training materials to conduct their own Strengthening Families trainings. The Children's Trust has also framed their annual "A View from All Sides" parenting education and family support topics conference around the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework. Nearly 650 participants attend the conference. The Children's Trust continues to offer trainer activities, and senior leaders from state and local organizations have attended training events to learn ways to bring Strengthening Families to their own agencies.

### Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families™ is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. It is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building 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

Using the Strengthening Families framework, more than 30 states are shifting policy and practice to help programs working with children and families focus on protective factors. States apply the Strengthening Families approach in early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and other child and family serving systems.

Nationally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) coordinates Strengthening Families and works with more than a dozen national partner organizations to create a new vision in which communities, families, institutions, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on protective and promotive factors
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families

For more information, visit  
[www.strengtheningfamilies.net](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net).

**Implementation Checklist**

Protective Factors used in Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems or other early childhood systems planning	✓
Protective Factors used in Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention RFP Process	✓
Protective Factors integrated into state Quality Rating and Improvement System	✓
Child Care Resource & Referral Network in state supporting program implementation	✓
Strengthening Families included in State Home Visiting Plan	✓
Strengthening Families is being implemented into child welfare system	✓

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**Shifting Practice, Policies and Systems**

Massachusetts' priorities are to ensure that all key partner sites receive Strengthening Families training, complete self-assessments, 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 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 the Children's Trust, EEC has ensured that more of its funded program partners have received Strengthening Families training. The Children's Trust 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.

The Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), implemented by EEC, requires participating early education and care programs to complete the Strengthening Families self-assessment in order to achieve a quality rating beyond level 2. In partnership with the Children's Trust, EEC provides access to training on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework in a variety of modalities, including in-person and online opportunities.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) funds ten family resource centers to offer an alternative response to families who come to the attention of DCF, but who do not need protective services. The Children's Trust supported DCF to incorporate the Strengthening Families framework into this program. Each family resource center has also completed the Strengthening Families self-assessment and is working with the Children's Trust to develop work plans to enhance programs.

EEC has embedded aspects of Strengthening Families within several requests for response notices. Most notably, EEC's Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grant includes the protective factors as a framework for working with

families. In addition, EEC's Priority Populations request for response identified 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 families and teen parents). EEC's Educator and Provider Support Renewal Grant Application for fiscal year 2013 included a requirement for grantees to collaborate to increase the number of educators who are trained in strengths-based family engagement practices such as Strengthening Families.

**Ensuring Accountability**

The Children's Trust, EEC and DCF have used the Strengthening Families self-assessment tool to guide their evaluation work. In fiscal year (FY) 13, EEC's Coordinated Family and Community Engagement grantees will again complete the Strengthening Families online self-assessment to reflect on their progress working with families since their original self-assessments in FY11. The aggregated data from the FY11 self-assessments informed training opportunities for the CFCE grantees in FY12. The "A View from All Sides" conference included training that responded to these results, providing sessions on topics such as involvement of and outreach to fathers, awareness of parenting practice across cultures and understanding the impact of trauma on children and families. The Children's Trust has also collected training evaluations from special forums and from training events held over the past year.

**Evolving Work**

Over the next two years, the Strengthening Families leaders in Massachusetts 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.

*Profile last updated: February 2014*