

State Approaches to Integrating Strengthening Families into Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

Introduction

Researchers, practitioners and policymakers agree that parents are critical partners in promoting children's development. Most nationally recognized quality standards for early care and education settings include some criteria related to parent and family engagement. Across the country, states are integrating these and related standards into their Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), yet there is a need for tools and resources to support effective daily practice within programs. The Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP) Strengthening Families[™] approach identifies what early care and education programs can do to support parents in their important role and to build strong relationships between parents and staff. At its core, Strengthening Families is about parent and family engagement.

In recent years, a number of states integrated the Center for the Study of Social Policy's (CSSP) Strengthening Families[™] approach into their QRIS designs because it offers:

- An intuitive framework for what families need and what programs can do to support them
- A broad range of concrete low- and no-cost actions that programs of all types can implement
- Free and easily accessible tools and resources to support implementation at the program, policy and systems levels

This issue brief seeks to demonstrate the advantages of using Strengthening Families, share information about implementation tools available from CSSP and its national partners and highlight state approaches to integrating Strengthening Families into QRIS.

About Strengthening Families

Strengthening Families is grounded in research, practice and implementation knowledge about what ALL families need, and what programs can do to build on family strengths, buffer risks and promote better outcomes. Through the Strengthening Families initiative, CSSP has identified five protective and promotive factors that research shows encourage optimal child development, support strong families and diminish the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

The five protective factors are:

- Parental Resilience
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Social Networks
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

More than 40 states are implementing Strengthening Families and more than 30 of these are actively part of the initiative's [national learning network](#). At the early childhood systems level, states are using Strengthening Families as a framework for comprehensive systems planning (bridging early care and education, children's health and mental health, family support and early intervention sectors), incorporating the protective factors and program strategies into workforce knowledge and competency frameworks and more recently, informing QRIS quality standards and criteria.

Through field research of exemplary early care and education programs, CSSP identified a number of small but significant changes to everyday practices that make a difference for children and families. They fall under the following [seven program strategies](#):

1. Facilitate friendships and mutual support
2. Strengthen parenting
3. Respond to family crises
4. Link families to services and opportunities
5. Facilitate children's social and emotional development
6. Respond to early warning signs of abuse and neglect
7. Value and support parents

A wealth of implementation tools, guidance, examples and experience from other states and training and professional development resources are available on the [Strengthening Families website](#) to support implementers at the state and local level.

About QRIS

A growing number of states are developing and implementing a QRIS to systemically assess, improve and communicate the level of quality offered in child care and early education programs. A QRIS is similar to a star-rating system for restaurants or hotels, whereby programs are recognized for meeting progressively higher levels of defined standards. The seminal [Stair Steps to Quality: A Guide for States and Communities Developing Quality Rating Systems for Early Care and Education](#), describes five essential elements of a QRIS:

1. **Standards** that are based on the foundation of compliance with the state's child care licensing regulations and include two or more levels, or tiers, of quality criteria above basic licensing requirements. Quality rating standards are based on early care and education research and on nationally recognized standards of quality for programs and practitioners.
2. **Accountability**, through assessment and monitoring for compliance with the specific criteria within the standards. QRIS use valid and reliable methods of assessment to monitor compliance with standards and assign quality ratings. These ratings provide a benchmark for measuring quality improvement.
3. **Program and practitioner outreach and support** to promote participation in the QRIS and provide technical assistance, training, mentoring and other supports to assist programs and practitioners to meet the standards and criteria.
4. **Financing incentives** that are linked to compliance with quality standards and may include, for example, quality bonus payments, tiered reimbursement rates, contracts, quality grants and wage supplements.
5. **Parent education** designed to ensure parents recognize and understand the value of a QRIS. Parent education includes the development of a quality rating indicator or symbol that parents can use as a consumer guide. These symbols (e.g., "five-star" or

“gold level”) differentiate between quality rating levels and are easily recognizable so that parents can make informed decisions over early care and education placements for their children.

In 2010, 25 states were operating, piloting or developing a QRIS. In 2011, the federal [Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge](#) (RTT-ELC) state grant competition raised the bar on state efforts to improve program quality across the range of early care and education settings, using the QRIS model as the primary mechanism for defining, supporting and rewarding quality improvement. Now nearly every state is somewhere in the QRIS design, implementation or operation process.

The Value of Strengthening Families to QRIS

Nearly 20 states have already - or are considering - integrating Strengthening Families into their QRIS design. Of the 22 states that selected to include family engagement as part of the proposed RTT-ELC state plan, 14 referred to Strengthening Families as the framework for developing family engagement standards. States see Strengthening Families as valuable to the design and implementation of quality standards related to parent, family and community engagement. Moreover the large number of states using Strengthening Families in their QRIS efforts provides an ongoing laboratory for peer learning and exchange.

Strengthening Families in QRIS Project
In 2008, the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (the Alliance) launched the Strengthening Families in QRIS project to engage stakeholders in Idaho, Pennsylvania and Tennessee to explore the potential of Strengthening Families to inform QRIS standards and tools as an effective strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect (while also promoting optimal child development.) The state action plans, results of a national survey and other resources are available on the Alliance’s [SF/QRIS Peer States Network](#) webpage.

The value of Strengthening Families to state QRIS quality standards lays in the fact that it:

- makes explicit the important front-line role that early care and education providers play in preventing child abuse and neglect
- draws attention to the importance of supporting parents in the development of their children’s social and emotional development
- offers very concrete examples of what programs and practitioners can do to authentically engage and partner with families

Based on the knowledge and experience of states and stakeholders participating in the Strengthening Families national initiative for the last 10 years, CSSP offers the following considerations for states interested in integrating Strengthening Families into their QRIS design.

✓ **Strengthening Families informs a comprehensive, concrete definition of family engagement**

The seven Strengthening Families program strategies identify the small but significant changes in every day practice that make a difference for families. They extend beyond traditional activities to an array of actions that: encourage trusting relationships between staff and parents, create a sense of community within the program, deepen parents’ capacity to support their children’s development and

empower parents to be active decision-makers and lifelong advocates on behalf of their children. The Strengthening Families program strategies are applicable to all settings, including center-based child care, family child care homes, school- or community-based pre-kindergarten, Head Start and Early Head Start. They also inform approaches to improving the quality of informal (license-exempt) family, friend and neighbor care.

✓ **Strengthening Families offers a flexible roadmap for programs to achieve family engagement outcomes**

The Strengthening Families approach, by its very design, offers a high degree of flexibility for deciding how the conceptual Protective Factors Framework and concrete program strategies inform quality standards and are reflected and measured across the levels, or tiers, of a rating system. States are taking a variety of approaches, depending on their existing administrative and support infrastructure and the needs of their programs (they are described further in the brief). Similarly, Strengthening Families offers programs flexibility to meet their families' needs within the scope of existing resources and capacity. The Strengthening Families program strategies encompass a broad range of low- and no-cost activities which many programs may already be implementing. There is no single "right way" to help families build protective factors. Strengthening Families offers a useful framework and guiding strategies that programs can adopt based on their unique assets and situations.

✓ **Strengthening Families aligns with nationally recognized indicators of quality and family engagement**

Strengthening Families incorporates the most commonly identified criteria and activities related to parent, family and community engagement among all of the national quality frameworks and assessment tools. Most state QRIS designs incorporate nationally recognized tools and measures of quality, such as the [Environmental Ratings Scales](#) (ERS) and the [Program Administration Scale](#) (PAS), both of which include items related to family engagement in some way. CSSP is engaged in efforts to demonstrate the alignment between Strengthening Families and [NAEYC's accreditation standards](#) as well as the [Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement \(PFCE\) Framework](#) (see sidebars). Future work will highlight alignment with other nationally recognized quality standards and measurement tools.

Strengthening Families and NAEYC Accreditation Standards

NAEYC and CSSP have partnered to align the seven Strengthening Families program strategies and the criteria associated with the 10 NAEYC accreditation standards related to supporting families. The organizations invited national experts, state administrators and program directors to participate in a survey to validate the crosswalk between the two sets of standards and criteria. Findings will be issued in 2013.

Strengthening Families / Head Start Working Group

CSSP is hosting a working group of state Strengthening Families leads, Head Start grantees, Head Start state collaboration directors and other partners to examine the intersections between Strengthening Families and the Head Start PFCE Framework. Findings from a comparative analysis will inform guidance and tools to support program-level understanding and implementation of best practices from both frameworks.

✓ **Strengthening Families provides a platform for linking QRIS to broader systems building efforts**

In most states, Strengthening Families is being [implemented broadly across multiple sectors](#) including early childhood, family support, child abuse and neglect prevention, child welfare and children's health and mental health. This provides a unique opportunity for QRIS efforts to be developed in the context of broad shared language around family support and engagement.

Tools to Support Strengthening Families Integration into QRIS

Strengthening Families is supported by a wealth of tools and resources that states can easily adopt and adapt into their QRIS systems. These tools can support programs to document current status, develop quality improvement plans and work their way up through successive levels, or tiers, of quality in a QRIS. Moreover, they provide an easy way for states to monitor program activity, identify areas for technical assistance and provide low- or no- cost training and support.

1. Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessment

CSSP compiled the broad range of activities identified in the initiative's foundational field research into a program self-assessment tool, organized by the seven Strengthening Families program strategies, by which programs can ascertain the current status of activities, services and program policies that support families to build protective factors. There are currently two versions of the tool, one for [center-based programs](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)) and the other for [family child care programs](#).

2. Strengthening Families Online Data System

More recently, CSSP partnered with Mosaic Network, Inc. to develop the [Strengthening Families Online Data System](#) that includes the self-assessment and other related tools which enable programs to use their findings to develop action plans for furthering Strengthening Families implementation. Specifically, the data system includes:

- An online version of the Strengthening Families self-assessment with a tool to help programs turn self-assessment results into simple action plans
- An online version of the [Protective Factors Survey](#) tool developed by the FRIENDS National Resource Center to reliably and validly measure changes in parental protective factors
- An online staff survey tool
- Pre-designed reports to help programs and states access data easily

The Strengthening Families Online Data System is built on Mosaic Network, Inc.'s GEMS™ platform, which is currently in use in more than 2,000 community-based organizations nationwide. GEMS provides ground-level agencies and funded partners alike with the ability to measure outcomes, generate reports, and make data-driven decisions based on their unique milestones, objectives and missions.

The online tools also enable state-level administrators to view aggregated data to identify trends and inform decisions about training, technical assistance and other forms of program support. More information is available in the CSSP fact sheet, [Using the Online Self-Assessment to Improve Practice](#).

3. The National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance) Online Protective Factors Training Courses

With support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and input from CSSP and state Strengthening Families leaders, the Alliance developed a series of [free online training courses](#) to support Strengthening Families implementation in multiple settings and programs including early care and education, community-based child abuse and neglect, home visiting, child welfare and other child and family service programs. Several states are exploring inclusion of the online course series into their professional development and training systems. In some cases, states are granting credit, continuing education units or professional development hours for the training. The no-cost course series is an easy fit with state QRIS training requirements.

Bringing the Protective Factors Framework To Life In Your Work – A Resource For Action

The Alliance’s [free online training curriculum](#) includes seven courses: an overview of the framework, one on each protective factor and a wrap-up “knowledge to action” session. Each course includes quizzes, activities and reflective questions. An online forum allows learners to interact with each other, ask questions about what they are learning and respond to others’ questions. Users can print a portfolio that includes their responses to all questions and an Individualized Action Plan. Each protective factor course links directly to the [Strengthening Families Online Data System](#).

State Approaches to Integrating Strengthening Families in QRIS

States are exploring the application of Strengthening Families to QRIS standards, accountability mechanisms and program support efforts. The examples below demonstrate that states have flexibility to decide how to incorporate Strengthening Families depending on the current status of QRIS design and implementation, availability of existing support infrastructure and understanding and support for Strengthening Families among critical stakeholders.

Beginning Entry Points: Strengthening Families Training & Self-Assessment Tools

Perhaps the easiest entry points for any state to integrate Strengthening Families into QRIS include:

- Placing no-cost items from the Strengthening Families self-assessment within the criteria for standards at the lower levels (or tiers) and adding additional items up the levels. This helps build providers' capacity and increases their familiarity with the self-assessment language and tools for use at the higher levels.
- Using the Strengthening Families self-assessment as an option for programs to use to demonstrate compliance with standards related to family engagement and/or child abuse and neglect prevention.
- Including Strengthening Families trainings as optional or required QRIS professional development criteria.

What it Looks Like

- ★ **Missouri** was an early pioneer state in QRIS design and was among the first states in CSSP’s Strengthening Families pilot initiative. Though never implemented statewide, Missouri’s [QRIS](#)

[pilot](#) incorporated items and language from the Strengthening Families self-assessment into criteria under the standards for Family Involvement and Business and Administrative Practices.

- ★ In **New York**, [QUALITYstarsNY](#) names the Strengthening Families self-assessment as an acceptable tool for program assessment of family responsive practices. Programs must document that they have completed the self-assessment and present the report and program improvement plan as evidence.
- ★ Under **New Hampshire** [Licensed Plus](#), completion of the Strengthening Families self-assessment and development of a program improvement plan are among the optional criteria for achieving a Licensed Plus rating. In addition, programs are required to send at least one employee to attend training on New Hampshire’s Early Learning Guidelines. *Recipe for Success: Strengthening Families and the Early Learning Guidelines*, developed by New Hampshire’s Child Development Bureau, is among the qualified training courses.
- ★ In **Arkansas**, [Better Beginnings](#) level two criteria require center administrators and primary caregiver of a family child care program to review CSSP’s Strengthening Families website and complete a [Strengthening Families webinar](#), available on the Better Beginnings website, or other similar training. At level three, center administrators or primary caregivers must use the Strengthening Families Online Data System to complete the self-assessment for three or more program strategies. Based on the self-assessment results, the facility or home must develop a Strengthening Families action plan (which can be generated through the Online Data System) and demonstrate that it has implemented at least one action step.

Deepening Integration as QRIS Evolves

Many states engage in continual improvement processes to revise and update their QRIS, which offers opportunities to try new approaches or pursue deeper integration of Strengthening Families as the QRIS evolves.

What it Looks Like

- ★ **Massachusetts** and **Washington State**, described in detail below, both added Strengthening Families into their QRIS after receiving feedback during pilot studies from stakeholders and programs already implementing Strengthening Families. In both states Strengthening Families is now the foundation for QRIS standards related to family and community engagement.
- ★ **Wisconsin** is poised to further integrate Strengthening Families into its QRIS design while expanding its quality support infrastructure under a federal [Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Phase 2](#) (RTT-ELC) grant. Currently, [Wisconsin YoungStar](#) incorporates Strengthening Families specifically to promote the prevention of child abuse and neglect. [Under the Health and Wellness standard](#), programs can earn one point if at least 50 percent of the lead teachers/director complete approved Strengthening Families training or similar prevention training (or have attained the Family Services Credential). The YoungStar [“Tips and Tools”](#) webpage includes a link to the Strengthening Families self-assessment as a resource. Though programs are not required to use the self-assessment, YoungStar technical consultants encourage and support programs to use the tool to inform program improvements. Under its RTT-ELC grant, Wisconsin will develop new QRIS family engagement standards and training requirements that will be aligned with the [Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework](#) and the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework. RTT-ELC will expand Wisconsin’s

capacity to provide staff and resources for training and implementation of approaches like Strengthening Families.

Comprehensive and Systemic Approaches

Four states offer examples of more comprehensive approaches to integrating Strengthening Families into multiple QRIS elements to support broad and deep implementation. **Idaho** and **Massachusetts** have achieved statewide QRIS implementation while **Georgia** and **Washington State** are just beginning their roll outs. Though the details differ in many ways, all four have integrated Strengthening Families into their QRIS standards and criteria. Idaho and Massachusetts, with their more fully developed program and practitioner outreach and support systems demonstrate how quality improvement infrastructure can support Strengthening Families implementation at scale within a QRIS. All four demonstrate that there are many options for building Strengthening Families into a QRIS.

What it Looks Like

★ **Idaho's [IdahoSTARS QRIS](#)** includes as one of three explicit goals to “reduce incidents of child abuse and neglect through implementation of Strengthening Families” (the other goals are to inform parent choices and increase the quality of child care). Strengthening Families is one of the eight QRIS quality standards categories for [child care centers](#) and [family home and group child care](#). All programs must use the Strengthening Families self-assessment tool to document implementation of the seven program strategies. Notably, to achieve tier three (out of five), a program must establish a Parent Work Group to conduct the self-assessment and (at tier four) use the results to create an action plan. Programs can earn between one and five points to achieve higher tiers based on the amount of [Strengthening Families training](#) completed by the director and staff. These trainings are connected to the statewide [professional development system](#) which enables automated tracking of training hours by QRIS participants. [The Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children \(AEYC\)](#) administers both the professional development system and the QRIS. To support programs, IdahoSTARS [mentor/coaches](#) and regional consultants offer technical assistance related to all of the QRIS quality standards. Some of the mentor/coaches are also certified Strengthening Families trainers. Finally, the IdahoSTARS website also houses [informational videos](#) explaining the requirements and documentation for each standard as well as guidance on [establishing parent work groups](#).

Strengthening Families Training

Idaho AEYC offers a portfolio of Strengthening Families training and professional development opportunities including:

- *Three levels of the [Strengthening Families Toolbox Training](#) (basic, intermediate and advanced)*
- *A [Strengthening Families Specialization](#) to recognize providers that have completed in-depth training, reflection and field experiences*

Idaho AEYC also offers [train-the-trainer events](#) in other states and has built the [National Network of Toolbox Trainers](#) linking certified trainers in nine other states including Arkansas, California, Georgia, New Jersey, South Carolina and Tennessee.

★ The [Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System](#) encompasses [five categories of standards](#) including Family and Community Engagement. Based on feedback from stakeholders during the pilot phase, QRIS designers incorporated Strengthening Families into the final Family

and Community Engagement standards. At level two program administrators must complete training on the Strengthening Families protective factors and use the Strengthening Families Online Data System to complete the self-assessment and develop a continuous improvement plan. Programs access the online tools directly through the [QRIS Program Manager \(QPM\)](#), the web-based application used to manage and facilitate the QRIS application and self-assessment process. The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care administers grants to both Wheelock College and to educator and provider support specialists to deliver training and technical assistance on Strengthening Families and other quality standards. (See, for example, [Module Four: Engaging Families and Communities](#) in Wheelock College's *Foundations of the Massachusetts QRIS* course.) In addition, the [Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund](#) provides Strengthening Families training for early education and care programs regardless of their participation in the QRIS.

- ★ [Quality Rated](#) is **Georgia's** newly launched QRIS pilot initiative. The [rating rubric](#) encompasses three levels of quality based on five categories of standards. Strengthening Families is a key structural element of the Family Partnership standards. Programs earn more points as more staff complete a two-hour *Strengthening Families Georgia* online training course or attend a state-approved *Strengthening Families Georgia* training session. A program can earn one point if it has conducted the Strengthening Families self-assessment within the past year and has developed a written improvement plan to address one strategy area of the program's choice. Two points are awarded if the program addresses three program strategy areas, and three points are awarded for addressing four or more strategy areas in the program improvement plan. As noted in the sidebar, Strengthening Families informed criteria related to promoting cultural and linguistic competency.

Supporting Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Under Georgia Quality Rated, programs can earn up to three points for meeting "Family Involvement/Support and Conferences" criteria within the Family Partnership standard. Specifically, points relate to:

- *policies and practices on inclusion, confidentiality of child records and encouragement of family involvement*
- *director and staff training on inclusion and cultural/linguistic competency*
- *opportunities for family conferences and formal structures for family input and support to the program (for example, through a family advisory committee/board)*

- ★ **Washington State's** [Early Achievers](#) system was developed with input and support from child care providers across the state. As described in the sidebar, Washington used the [Community Café](#) process to involve parents in the design of the state's early learning plan and QRIS design. Early Achievers allocates 10 points (out of 100) to programs for meeting [Family Engagement & Partnership standards](#) which are based on the Strengthening Families program strategies (with an eighth added related to health literacy.) To achieve level two the program director/owner must complete a six-course [professional training series](#) including a six-hour *QRIS Strengthening Families Training for Early Learning Professionals*. To move

Listening to Parents

With support from the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds, the Washington Council for Children and Families and the Washington Department of Early Learning (DEL) hosted a two day meeting with 16 parents using the Community Café process to hear about what they desire for their children in a high quality child care setting. The process is documented in [Parents and Child Care Providers in Partnership: Planting Seeds For Success](#). DEL used the results to inform elements of Early Achievers.

Washington used the [Community Café](#) process to involve parents in the design of the state's early learning plan and QRIS design. Early Achievers allocates 10 points (out of 100) to programs for meeting [Family Engagement & Partnership standards](#) which are based on the Strengthening Families program strategies (with an eighth added related to health literacy.) To achieve level two the program director/owner must complete a six-course [professional training series](#) including a six-hour *QRIS Strengthening Families Training for Early Learning Professionals*. To move

beyond level two, programs can earn one point each for completing a modified Strengthening Families self-assessment (which includes an additional section titled “Health Literacy”), using results to develop an action plan and providing evidence of continuous feedback and improvement. According to administrators at the Washington Department of Early Learning (DEL), the QRIS designers chose to embed Strengthening Families for the flexibility it offers programs to work meaningfully with families based on their unique needs. As DEL starts to collect facility level data, administrators will consider ways to support further implementation in programs.

Tips for Getting Started

To take the first steps to integrate Strengthening Families, state QRIS designers can:

- Reach out to their state Strengthening Families leadership team for more information about programs and communities implementing the approach
- Review the Strengthening Families resources, tools and self-assessment items
- Review other states' QRIS designs and standards and talk with other states about their decisions
- Request technical assistance from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), the QRIS National Learning Network or the National Child Care Center on Quality Improvement
- Engage parents along with providers in the process

To support QRIS design teams in this process, Strengthening Families leadership teams can:

- Share information about Strengthening Families with their state QRIS administrators and ask to participate in the QRIS design or revision process
- Share programs' experiences implementing Strengthening Families with the design team
- Encourage programs to communicate their support for Strengthening Families directly to the QRIS designers
- Contact CSSP and the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds for technical assistance

Conclusion

As CSSP's field study identified, exemplary programs are those that send a clear and consistent message that parent engagement is an essential quality component. Integration of Strengthening Families into QRIS is one example of how this message is echoing across the country. CSSP and its partners are committed to supporting states in this direction. Continuing areas of focus include:

- **Demonstrating alignment of Strengthening Families with nationally recognized quality assessment tools.** Beyond aligning Strengthening Families with NAEYC accreditation standards and the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework, CSSP will continue to explore alignment with other nationally recognized quality standards and measurement tools such as the Environmental Ratings Scales to document the

connection between efforts to help families build protective factors and recognized standards of high quality.

- **Using Strengthening Families to promote culturally and linguistically appropriate practice.** CSSP intentionally developed the Strengthening Families program strategies and self-assessment to support practices that respect and honor cultural and linguistic diversity among families. CSSP recently engaged in a process with national experts to review, validate and recommend enhanced language in the self-assessment to further support such practice. The next iteration of the self-assessment from CSSP will offer a valuable tool for states and programs alike in this important aspect of quality.
- **Validating Strengthening Families criteria in QRIS.** As more states implement a QRIS, interest in measuring the connection between quality standards, ratings levels and quality improvement is growing. RTT-ELC added additional momentum to this trend by including QRIS validation as a required activity for grantees. Heightened attention to QRIS validation offers an opportunity for states to include Strengthening Families within the scope of the standards it might measure and evaluate. CSSP encourages states pursue this to add to the knowledge base of effective practice to build protective factors.

As this work move forward, CSSP will continue to rely on creative state leaders to test new approaches to implementing Strengthening Families as a strategy to promote better outcomes for children and families.

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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 early care and education programs build these protective factors with the children and families they serve. Many states are also integrating the Strengthening Families approach into state prevention strategies, home visiting programs and child welfare 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 building 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 and families*

For more information, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net