



For Immediate Release: July 7, 2021
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New Report Examines How Ohio Can Empower Families in Shaping the Policies and Programs that Impact Their Children

Report Provides Framework and Recommendations to Engage Families in Policy Development

COLUMBUS, OH – Research shows that when parents and families are more engaged, children do better. Yet more often than not, families are left out of policy conversations and decisions that directly impact the health, development, and well-being of their children. A [new report by the Center for Family Voice at Groundwork Ohio](#) examines best practices to put families at the center of early childhood policy development and makes recommendations on how Ohio can better empower families to drive change and improve the healthy development of young children.

TODAY: The Center for Family Voice at Groundwork Ohio hosted a virtual event with state and national experts to discuss findings from the report. [Click here to watch a recording of the event.](#)

The report is the culmination of an extensive environmental scan across the state of Ohio and nation to explore best practices that successfully engage families in public services delivery to inform state and local programs, practices, and policy development. The report also provides a framework to elevate family voice to improve child outcomes and, ultimately, eliminate disparities in systems that serve pregnant women, young children, and their families.

“In Ohio, families often don’t have a seat at the table when it comes to the creation and implementation of policies and programs that directly impact the healthy development of their children. This leaves families to navigate systems that were not designed for them,” said **Lynanne Gutierrez, Assistant Director at Groundwork Ohio**. “The lived experiences of families make them uniquely qualified to be a partner in shaping early childhood policies. Our mission at the Center for Family Voice is to put families at the center of policy development so that Ohio’s child-serving systems respond to the needs of families.”

“Children are at the foundation of growing healthy, thriving communities, and having families involved in formation of the policies to improve the health of their children is fundamental,” said **Ami Cole, plan president at Molina Healthcare of Ohio**. “Molina is proud to support this

important report, and I am pleased to work with Groundwork on greater inclusion of families in our work to improve the health of Ohio's children."

As the Center's report details, family participation in early childhood policies and systems occurs on a continuum. This continuum ranges from involvement - for example, when a family is enrolled in and receives a service but does not have a voice in designing or influencing the delivery of that service - to empowerment, where the decision-making power rests in the hands of parents and families. The Center's goal is to push early childhood stakeholders to support and increase participation of parents and help families become equal partners in the policy and program decisions that impact their children.

The report also outlines principles for supporting and increasing participation of families in policy- and decision-making. These principles include challenging racism and structural inequities in Ohio's early childhood systems; building trust; honoring existing relationships between local organizations and families; respecting the expertise and experiences of families; and shifting the culture in early childhood systems to empower parents and provide families opportunities for active leadership.

Read the report: [Amplifying Family Voice to Advance Equitable Outcomes for Young Children](#)

About the Center for Family Voice at Groundwork Ohio: In January, [Groundwork Ohio announced a historic investment](#) by MolinaCares Accord to build a "center of excellence" dedicated to authentically engaging Ohio parents and families in the policies and practices that impact the healthy development of their children. The Center is being developed as an innovative response to the lack of authentic family voices in the development of policy and practices that deeply impact Ohio pregnant women, young children, and their families.

Unique to Ohio, the Center for Family Voice will be an ongoing, multi-year committed learning process focused on eliminating disparities in systems that serve young children and their families. Ultimately, the Center holds the opportunity of informing national work in this developing area of policy, engagement, and advocacy.

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Groundwork Ohio is a committed, nonpartisan public-policy research and advocacy organization formed in 2004 that champions high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age five, that lay a strong foundation for Ohio kids, families, and communities. Learn more about Groundwork Ohio at groundworkohio.org and connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).