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PARENT ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

A Guide to Using Data from the Early Development Instrument to Help Communities Improve Children's Health and Wellbeing



UCLA CENTER
FOR HEALTHIER CHILDREN,
FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES



THE SCIENCE FOR A BETTER START

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the partner sites who have shared their practices, lessons, and tools with the community of those implementing the Early Development Instrument (EDI) throughout the nation. This toolkit was informed by partner sites' feedback throughout the years since the US EDI efforts began in 2009 as we designed and co-facilitated sessions. We'd especially like to acknowledge the following sites for lending their lessons and examples of taking this information to community members: Oakland Starting Smart and Strong, City of Pasadena, Los Angeles Unified School District, Pomona Unified School District and Pomona's Promise, the Magnolia Community Initiative, and El Monte School District.

We'd also like to share our appreciation for First 5 Los Angeles, who supported the production of this toolkit.

For more information about the work of [Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems](#) at the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities, or the content of this publication, please visit the website at <https://healthychild.ucla.edu/> or contact Leila Espinosa: lespinosa@mednet.ucla.edu.

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit was developed for those engaged in conversations about the health and wellbeing of young children within their local neighborhoods and communities. Acknowledging that inequities exist in the systems that support early growth and learning calls us to examine the allocation, layout and quality of our resources and systems.

Having information and data about children’s wellbeing in every neighborhood can help reveal the inequities and opportunities in our systems. It can also be an opportunity to invite everyone in a community to engage in conversations with each other, with governments, with service agencies, and most importantly, with parents and families, about what’s working and what could be better in our communities.

The Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems team at the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities has been supporting communities in bringing this data to the table, collected through the Early Development Instrument, with sites across the nation for over a decade and learned how this data can be an engine for change. The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a community snapshot of children’s development, health and school readiness. It describes children’s well-being in five areas of development known to predict later success in school and in life: 1) Physical Health & Well-Being; 2) Social

Competence; 3) Emotional Maturity; 4) Language & Cognitive Skills; and 5) Communication Skills & General Knowledge. The EDI was developed by Dan Offord and Magdalena Janus at the [Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University in Canada](#). The UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities holds a license with McMaster University to implement the EDI within the US.

There are many ways children’s wellbeing and development data can help inform how we engage with parents. Many sites have created tools and conducted engagement sessions and infused EDI data for a variety of purposes along the spectrum of engagement, from educating parents on child development, encouraging positive parenting practices, obtaining input of the parent voice to understand the lived experience, encouraging them to be civically engaged and to include them at the decision-making table.

PARENTING KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS	PARENTING PRACTICE	CONSULTATION	COLLABORATE AND PARTNER	EMPOWER
<p>Improve parent knowledge to foster a better understanding about the importance of the early years, child development risks and protective factors, and age appropriate milestones.</p>	<p>Enhance positive parenting practices to support improved routines, and ability to identify and access child development and family support services.</p>	<p>Garner parent voice to help interpret and explain the story behind the outcomes in the EDI. Parents can be engaged to speak to the underlying systemic challenges and opportunities for service systems to address to improve the conditions for all children in neighborhoods and communities.</p>	<p>Empower parents to become more civically engaged by speaking with elected officials and participating in collective efforts to identify needs and strategies to improve conditions for all children in neighborhoods and communities.</p>	<p>Providing parents a seat at the decision-making table to choose, co-create and evaluate solutions, using data to help make informed decisions.</p>

While there are many possible ways the EDI data can be included to engage parents, this toolkit is intended to help you use the results of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to have conversations about the possible explanations of the results and root causes of the outcomes and identify possible strategies to improve conditions for all children. This process can inform the areas of opportunity for improving a community’s resources and re-designing the systems to support an environment that supports families and children’s learning and healthy development.

This toolkit is a work in progress and is intended to be simply a guide for how communities can begin this work. We are excited for you to use this toolkit to engage with families in contributing and sharing the story behind the EDI data.

GUIDANCE ON ENGAGING WITH FAMILIES

Start with an asset based approach.

This means starting off discussions with families with what's going well and celebrating what are the positive characteristics and experiences in the community.

The story of the data is best told and explained by families.

Central to the process of moving from understanding what the data is telling us to moving to solutions is individual agency and collective sense-making (Corrigan, 2014). Building agency helps people grow into their full potential as community leaders and change makers. As people research their own communities, develop ideas for change and speak out, they learn how to put principles of local democracy into practice, how to collaborate with others to identify concerns, how to develop recommendations, and how to prioritize actions. They create enduring change by engaging their local government and see those changes manifest as a result of their efforts.

Share data with humility; resist the urge to have all the answers

Community residents are the owners of the data. To share this data with humility means our role is to do more listening rather than telling, and allowing residents and parents to lead the investigation of the story behind the data. It also suggests valuing parents as the context experts of their neighborhoods and the authenticity of their experience. This work is premised on the belief that residents are the most knowledgeable about their own communities and can be the best solution generators. We encourage you to embrace the uncertainty of what the root causes and solutions are. Resist the urge to have the answers and instead allow those with the lived experience to explore the history and current conditions and opportunities in their community and be curious about how those may be impacting children's development.

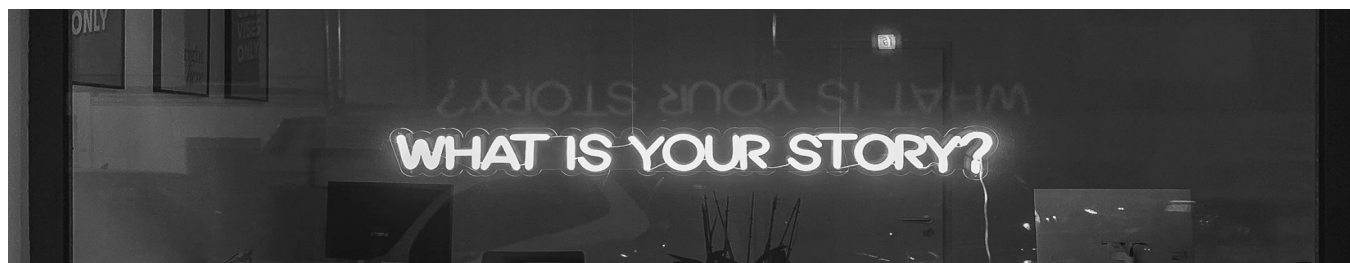


Photo by Etienne Girardet on Unsplash

Build equity into all aspects of the design.

Equity must be at the center of this work. Being equity focused accepts that where one lives and one's race/ethnicity often dictates access to resources and opportunities that impact healthy development. Operationalizing equity is one aspect of this work but also developing a culture that invites and cultivates equity is another aspect. Much of work of designing for equity is done at the forefront of designing this session, from the outreach strategies to the logistical considerations that enable the most equitable access to participation.

Note that designing equity into engagement may require more effort and resources than what is usually afforded. Be prepared to consider logistics that ensure equitable access to the session (i.e. transportation, translation, timing, child care, etc.).



GETTING STARTED

We have designed this parent engagement program as a single session with families. We acknowledge that in order to engage families and parents deeply in these types of conversations, a single session is often insufficient. However, in many cases, one opportunity is what is afforded by partners. Therefore, we have designed this to be conducted in one session which can be modified and adjusted according to the pieces of data that a partner is prepared to share with attendees. You may decide to adjust the timing, duration or conduct additional sessions in order to fully engage with the array of population level data that the community may have and wish to dive into.

While parents are the main audience for this toolkit, the session could also be adapted and modified for an array of audiences that can provide insight into the experiences of the community on-the-ground.

We hope you can utilize this toolkit to engage parents in a thoughtful and strategic way that helps elevate their voices, appreciates the knowledge and expertise they have, and harnesses their valuable input toward the possible solutions that can improve conditions for children in the local community.

This toolkit will help you:

- Identify approaches to success through group conversations
- Facilitate briefings and conversations about the EDI data
- Create space for your group to take action and share out your commitments to inspire others



Preparing for the Session

- Establish your goal and objective for the session.
- Come prepared for how you will respond to possible feedback and questions.
- Decide which pieces of data you want to focus on and share.
 - ⇒ *Are you interested in a specific domain or are you trying to understand the experiences within a specific neighborhood?*
- Send your invitations with purpose.
 - ⇒ *Think about which groups of parents you want to reach out to and why. Sometimes the*

organizational partner you're working with has an existing parent group. Consider whether that group of parents represents a certain demographic racially, socio-economically, or have an existing shared interest.

☐ Make sure you have a way to follow-up with those participating in the session.

Here is some sample language for a [letter or email](#) 📄 you can use to send out your invitations. Use the [Facilitator Worksheet](#) 📄 to help you prepare for your session.

Overview of the Parent Engagement Session

The agenda for this session is intended to facilitate a discussion that starts from a point of personal understanding of child and family experiences to reflections about what EDI outcomes may be telling us about systems and finally toward ideas for action. Thus, the session may be viewed as taking parents through 3 stages of reflection:



We have provided suggestions for timing for each stage and sub-stages of the agenda that can be conducted within a 2-hour timeframe. You may wish to adjust or amend the agenda and flow to meet your needs. Please refer to the supporting materials for tools that you can download and tailor for your use.

The following tools are provided to support you in your session:

- 📄 ☐ [Detailed Facilitator Agenda](#)
- 📄 ☐ [At-A-Glance Facilitator Agenda](#)
- 📄 ☐ [Participant Agenda](#)
- 📄 ☐ [PowerPoint](#)
- 📄 ☐ [Breakout Session Worksheets \(Template\)](#)

PARENT ENGAGEMENT SESSION OUTLINE

Stage 1 Parent Knowledge and Awareness of Children's Development and Supporting Systems

This portion of the agenda is intended to help families move from thinking about individual children and family characteristics and practices, to the community conditions and systems that can support children's development.



Overview of Agenda and Objectives – 5 minutes

Objective: Share the purpose of the meeting: To improve children's developmental outcomes in your community.

Icebreaker and Introductions – 5 minutes

Objective: Participants meet each other and share their hopes and dreams for children in your community.

The Kindergarten Ready Child, Family, Neighborhood and Community – 20 minutes

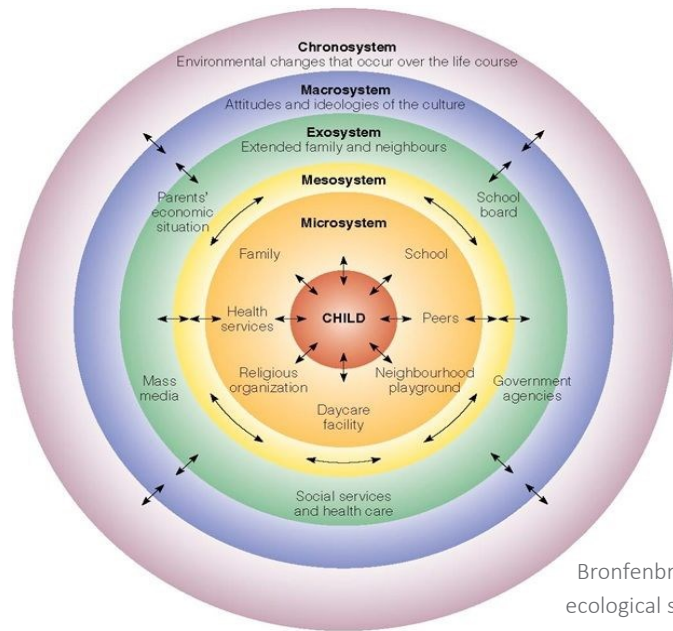
Objective: Participants discuss what makes a child ready for Kindergarten and what family, neighborhood and system supports and assets would need to be in place to support each child. Participants share the work product of their small group discussions.

Discussion prompts:

- *What skills and experiences would a well-prepared and healthy Kindergarten student arrive with on the first day of school?*
- *What does a family need in order to support the growth and learning of their young child from infancy to the first day of Kindergarten?*
- *What resources and supports would need to be in place within a community to help each child arrive ready on the first day of Kindergarten?*
- *What are the assets in your community that helped support you as a parent and prepare your child for school?*

The rationale behind our approach to this parenting toolkit is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and what we have learned from many sites around the country about how people typically react and

respond to new data about their children, neighborhood and community. The ecological model places children within the broader context of influences on their development. The individual child dynamically develops within a family that lives in a neighborhood nested with a broader community. Keeping this in mind, ask parents to reflect on their own experiences and expertise in child development within their family first and then on the neighborhood conditions and broader community systems that influence their child’s development.



Start With Parents Sharing Their Expertise

Honor the parents as the experts on their own child’s development and the experts on their neighborhoods. From there, you can move into the process of sharing population-level data with them about how all the young children in their community are doing. People typically need some time to process new data by thinking about what it means for them personally before asking them to reflect on the broader implications for their neighbors and community. The facilitation strategy outlined here includes a series of questions designed to move participants through a process of reflection from personal to community, honoring parents as experts with valuable insights about their community and as indispensable partners in building systems that are responsive to and supportive of families with young children.

Beginning your meeting by honoring parents’ expertise and knowledge about the child and their community will serve both as an effective icebreaker and a solid foundation for understanding the data to be presented and exploring the implications of the data for action. You might consider an icebreaker in groups of 2 or 3 to allow the introverts and those parents who are hesitant to speak in larger groups an opportunity to get comfortable, meet some of their peers and get into the topic by speaking about what they know best and love most - *their own child*.

Combine two small groups from the icebreaker together to form groups of 4-6 to discuss the prompts.

Also consider developing your own prompting questions to get input on any priority areas of your partner (district, coalition, collaborative group). Allowing parents to express their ideas in their own words can help increase buy-in and support for your local priorities by connecting with their experiences.

You can use the Breakout [Questions worksheet](#) as a guide for how you might label your easel pads for note-taking or a digital version on a whiteboard software like Google Jamboards, Miro or Zoom whiteboards to help you draft and capture reflections from your participants.

Facilitator tip

If the group is struggling to name something that covers all the domains of development, use prompting questions to get parents to articulate in their own words skills that fall into each of the five EDI domains:

- ☺ **Physical Health and Well-Being:** *What do kindergartens need to be able to do physically before they get to school? How about using crayons and pencils?*
- ☺ **Social Competence:** *Is there anything kids need to know about being with other children in a classroom before they arrive? Are there any skills that would help them navigate recess and games?*
- ☺ **Emotional Maturity:** *What skills would help kindergartens get along with their peers and resolve conflicts? What about making friends and helping others?*
- ☺ **Language and Cognitive Skills:** *Is there anything kids need to know about books, writing and numbers before Kindergarten?*
- ☺ **Communication Skills and General Knowledge:** *What will help kids be ready to let the teacher know what they need? How about interactions with their classmates?*



Oakland

Taking EDI to parent leaders

Oakland Starting Smart and Strong and Oakland Unified School District met with parent leaders from a local family resource center to learn about their work and built relationships with them before sharing EDI data. They engaged in conversations about families' personal stories and what they loved about where they live and work. In presenting EDI data, they gained insight from parents to shape how EDI data is presented to make it accessible.

Stage 2 EDI Data and Discussion of Root Causes

This portion of the agenda is intended to share the EDI outcomes and have parents reflect on what may be the contributing factors to the results.

How are children in the community doing? - 15 minutes

Objective: What is the Early Development Instrument (EDI)? Share its purpose and your community's data.

Making meaning of the data: Reflections on data, neighborhood assets and root causes. - 25 minutes

Objective: Participants reflect on the data, map community assets and discuss root causes.

Participants spend time reviewing maps.

Discussion prompts:

- *Find the results for your own neighborhood. What is interesting to you about this data and why?*
- *Map the community's early childhood assets.*
- *What do you think are the root causes and community conditions that may explain these outcomes?*

Before sharing the EDI data with families, it can be important to make some decisions about which data to focus on during the meeting. It is difficult to share all the data in one meeting and still have time for meaningful discussion and conversation, so focusing on one or two domains can help. Some communities choose to narrow the focus even further by zeroing in on specific subdomains based on the community's priorities and needs. For instance, some communities with a focus on Social and Emotional Skills might decide to highlight data from the subdomains of "Overall Competence with Peers" and "Approaches to Learning" from the Social Competence domain and "Prosocial and Helping Behaviors" from the Emotional Maturity domain.

Once you have made choices about the data you'd like to share from EDI, it can be helpful to test out slides/printouts with some parents before the meeting. This will help you adapt your slides to ensure that the data is presented in an accessible way that participants can understand and connect with their existing knowledge base.

Once you have refined your visuals and approach, you can enhance understanding by connecting the data you present to the language parents are using to describe child development. For instance, if parents emphasize how kids get along with each other, you can connect that specifically to key concepts in social and emotional development and acknowledge that the EDI measures exactly what the parents know is important about child development. Honoring their input and connecting the data to their existing knowledge base can



help to ensuring that parents connect with the data presented and react and respond to it with their own expertise.

If you intend to have participants engage with the maps during the next small group discussion section, it will be important to review at least one map with the entire group to orient participants to how to read the maps. Help them understand how their community is divided into neighborhoods or census tracts, and then share how the shading of each neighborhood reflects the data on young children who live there.

Providing each participant the opportunity to process what the data means for their child, their family and their neighborhood before being asked to consider broader implications can lead to a richer discussion in Stage 3. Jumping too quickly into discussing broader implications of the

data risks the conversation getting derailed by individual concerns as parents make sense of the data. These initial questions can give parents time to share their reactions before moving into the broader implications and action steps of the next section.

For the small breakout discussion, decide which domains of the EDI you want to share with the group. Consider printing out the data and maps for each group and have them ready to hand out.

The second part of this discussion section is intended to move groups into a conversation about root causes.

When you debrief the discussions, listen for key emerging themes about the historical root causes behind any areas of concerns in the data.

Here is a PowerPoint Template to help you get started with assembling your presentation.

Additional Resources:

- Visit the [American Evaluation Association blog on Data Visualizations and Reporting](#) for ideas and suggestions on presenting data to various audiences.
- You may wish to refer to the list of EDI domains and subdomains ([English](#) or [Spanish](#)) to provide more background information on specific domains of interest that you may be highlighting for your presentation.
- The Urban Institute team has developed a way to share data and findings with stakeholders through what is called a Data Walk. You can find more information about this method and download the report on their [website](#).

Facilitator Tip

- ☺ You may want to have additional facilitators available to help support those who need help with data questions or the maps.
- ☺ An alternative to printing out the data and maps for each participant is to print large, laminated version of the maps you intend to share and place them around the room.

Stage 3 What Action Can Be Taken

This last portion of the agenda is intended to guide participants through a discussion of the strengths and concerns they observe based on the data and to move toward ideas for taking action.

Café Discussions: Strengths and Concerns—10 min

Objective: Participants reflect on strengths and concerns.

Discussion Prompts:

- *What strengths do you see in the data? Why do you think your community has been successful supporting those strengths?*
- *What concerns you most about the data? What would need to be in place in order to address your concerns?*

Café Discussions: Moving to Action - 20 min

Objective: Participants move to a new table and review another group's strengths and concerns and prioritize their most urgent concerns and next steps. Groups identify community assets and strengths to build upon and the partnerships and resources needed to succeed.

Discussion Prompts:

- *What feels the most urgent to act upon after reviewing the data and identifying strengths and concerns?*
- *What steps can be taken to act on your priorities?*
- *What strengths can we build upon and what partnerships and resources will help us succeed?*

Large Group Share Out — 15 min

Next Steps — 5 min

The strengths, concerns and root causes articulated by parents in the previous conversation can lead into a robust discussion about the broader implications of the data and actions they believe will support young children. Starting with a strengths-based approach can shift the narrative to what **CAN** be done rather than dwelling on all the problems and challenges facing kids and families. Still, it is important to validate concerns and challenges families share.

For this section, we recommend using the World Café model. Participants will spend 5 minutes each on strengths and concerns. Then participants will change tables and spend 5 minutes reviewing the ideas from a previous group before prioritizing their concerns and identifying action steps. This allows some cross-pollination of ideas between groups to happen quickly and seamlessly as they rotate. If you have enough

volunteers, you can have a “café host” at each table quickly review and summarize what the previous group discussed.

This is a good time to share with the group how their input will be part of a larger process of community planning and action. Emphasize how much their input is needed and value, as they are the experts on their own children and neighborhoods!

Use approximately 20 minutes to allow the groups to rotate through the next series of questions about actions they’d prioritize and suggest. When discussing action steps, partnerships and resources needed for success, be sure that each group documents their discussion. These ideas will form the foundation for future discussions and actions.

If you decided to focus parents on particular domains of the EDI, consider tailoring domain-specific discussion questions. For example, what are the assets in your neighborhood that support this area of development?

Spend 15 minutes giving each group time to share the actions they are ready to take and the strengths they can build upon. List those actions, assets, and partnerships on the whiteboard or easel pad for everyone to review.

Finish by thanking the group for their input and share how you intend to use their feedback and ideas. Provide participants with pathways to become involved in your early childhood movement!

Facilitator Tip

- ☺ Participants can use markers to star the areas they are most concerned about or use dot stickers to vote on the ideas they’d like to act upon first.

ABOUT THE WORLD CAFÉ

The World Café model is built on the assumption that “people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges; that the answers we need are available to us; and that we are Wiser Together than we are alone.”

The World Café model uses seven design principles that you can review in detail at www.theworldcafe.com:

1. Set the Context
2. Create Hospitable Space
3. Explore Questions that Matter
4. Encourage Everyone’s Contribution
5. Connect Diverse Perspectives
6. Listen Together for Patterns and Insights
7. Share Collective Discoveries

This method uses “hosts” who focus on creating the space for everyone to contribute and be heard. If you don’t have enough volunteers to have a host at each table, participants can host themselves after a quick review of the design principles and norms for discussion.



Pasadena

Use of the World Café model

Pasadena used the World Café model to engage members of the community and stakeholders in conversations about the community conditions that contributed to their EDI results. They developed a hub of sites for parents and caregivers, service providers and early childhood advocates to come together in helping families access the supports they need.



Photo by Bernard Hermant on [Unsplash](#)

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Supporting materials, tools and templates referenced and linked in this toolkit can be found on the TECCS Groupsite (<https://teccs.groupsite.com/>).

CASE STUDIES

Sites implementing the EDI have approached sharing the data with families in a variety of ways and formats. Below are highlights of select sites who have taken the EDI data in conversations with residents.

City of Pasadena

In 2018, The City of Pasadena, along with its partners, the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD), and the UCLA Center for the Study of Healthy Families and Communities, held convenings with the fiscal support of First 5 LA to help present the results from their administration of the EDI in 2016-2017 with a wide variety of stakeholders groups including City and school district officials and staff, nonprofit service providers, and parents/caregivers of children aged 0-5 in the neighborhoods with the greatest EDI vulnerability. The convenings were intended to raise awareness regarding the need for increased focus on the 0-5 years, and to gather reactions, as well as gather input regarding possible community-based strategies to improve future EDI results.

While the plan proposed a series of three conversations with PUSD staff, it also included a plan for four conversations with parents of children 0-5 at local nonprofit agencies poised to be potential early childhood hub sites. A facilitator carried out the parent EDI conversations using the world cafe model. Parents received gift card incentives for their participation, and staff arranged for child care and refreshments for the events.

The conversations generated reactions from parents that ranged from surprise that many children citywide were not fully prepared for Kindergarten, to wondering about how the results might be received by the local school system to address them. Those attending were also motivated to learn more about how to effectively help their children. Parents and other stakeholders identified community conditions they felt contributed to the EDI results which included:

- Lack of quality time spent between parents and children
- Limited financial resources
- Lack of safety in the community and public parks
- Racial Discrimination/Immigration status
- Lack of Knowledge of Child Development



The City of Pasadena designated specific sites across the city, called [Growing Together PASadena](#), where locally networked parents and caregivers, service providers, and early childhood advocates would help foster the development of children ages 0-5 and supports families with tools and resources to thrive. These are coordinated by the [Office of the Young Child](#) and serve as locations for families with children ages zero to five to access services and the support they need to flourish, with a specific focus on school readiness.

For more information about the EDI Conversations held by the City of Pasadena, please go to their website: [EDI Conversations Reports - Office of the Young Child \(cityofpasadena.net\)](#)

Oakland Starting Smart and Strong

[Oakland Starting Smart and Strong](#) and Oakland Unified School District supported the collected of the EDI across Kindergarten classrooms in 2017 and 2020. After the 2020 collection of the EDI, the Oakland Starting Smart and Strong and Oakland Unified’s Early Childhood Education Department met with parent leaders from the San Antonio Family Resource Center to discuss their local Early Development Instrument (EDI) results and learn about their advocacy work. The parent leaders are advocates who use research and data for equitable change for their children and community.

In their meetings, they started out with building trust and relationships with these parent leaders. They engaged parent leaders in conversations to share their personal stories about their neighborhood, what they love about where they live and work. They discussed what is lost when early childhood systems fail to meet their community’s needs. OUSD and OSSS aimed to be supportive of their work and aimed to provide early childhood data to help tell their story and advocate for the solutions grounded in their lived experience.

Discussions around the draft data which included information from the interviews and quantitative data, provided as “[ECEcosystem](#)” [Zone Profiles](#), helped raise key questions regarding survey bias and the role of gentrification in their neighborhood. Feedback from the parents helped shape the way EDI results would be presented and framed to communities to focus on strengths and systems. Their feedback also gave insight to Oakland Starting Smart and Strong on how to make EDI results more accessible, leading to the development of a tutorial around their [EDI dashboard](#).

For more additional information on the process of their ECEcosystem profiles, read their blog [here](#).

