

June 2025

Our Vision:

Establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create thriving communities.

Overview

It is ambitious. Crucial. Future-facing, but built on decades of best practices. And it leverages the power of the family and education—the foundation for success and the launchpad for dreams.

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) has an ambitious vision for the next decade that builds upon the organization's legacy work and charts a new course. Moving beyond isolated programmatic endeavors, our vision seeks to accomplish meaningful, sustained change within communities by addressing root challenges within systems. To achieve this vision, NCFL is actively working to build a network of Family Learning Communities™ (FLCs) across the country.

Family Learning Communities are dependent upon coalitions of institutions, organizations, community members, and families who engage in deep, comprehensive effort to bring together a continuum of programs and resources—spanning birth through adulthood—in family literacy, family engagement, and family leadership. These intentional efforts will create learning opportunities, build capacity, and strengthen partnerships across our nation with and for children and families who are furthest from opportunity.

Our long-held and renewed commitment to creating opportunities for all guides our collaborative approach to co-designing responsive family learning experiences. Achieving meaningful learning outcomes and economic prosperity will only happen if learning experiences consider the changing needs of children and parenting adults today.

Family learning systems support multigenerational learning needs and ensure that learning is happening beyond the school walls for children and families, in service of educational success and economic opportunity. NCFL is working to support these efforts to spread and scale education solutions for families while deepening our work in communities nationwide. Through this approach, we will promote thriving communities where children and families feel valued, develop leadership skills, improve wellbeing, and achieve economic success through education. Alongside partners, we are focusing our efforts to demonstrate bold ideas that can positively shift family outcomes.

Join us

NCFL has created many on-ramps for new partners to join this effort. Several Family Learning Communities have already been created, and additional communities or funders are invited to reach out for more information. Email us at info@familieslearning.org or scan the QR code get started.



How family learning systems work

Family learning systems are community-developed systems that provide aligned, coordinated high-impact education practices serving the birth through adulthood continuum. These systems include clear points of integration of family-focused programming across sectors, ensuring families can easily gain access to learning experiences within the community.

Family learning systems will not (and should not) look the same in every community because the assets and resources available to individual communities will differ. However, communities engaged in building family learning systems will all implement distinctive programming focused on building skills to improve child, adult, and family outcomes. Drawing from a suite of opportunities, communities will engage in three critical elements:

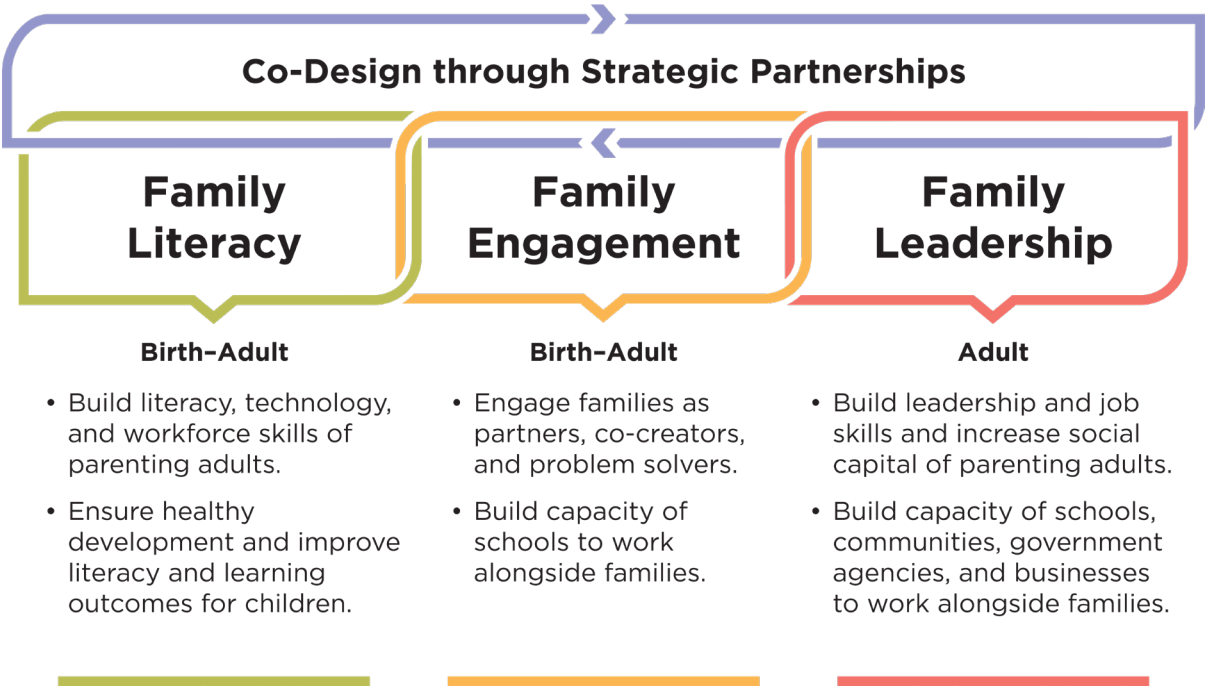
- 1. **Family literacy:** A model that addresses the multigenerational nature of literacy by integrating (1) interactive literacy activities between parent and child; (2) training in parenting activities; (3) parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency; (4) age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.
- 2. **Family engagement:** The partnership between families and practitioners aimed at empowering families throughout educational systems and building and enhancing the dual capacity of both parenting adults and education providers. Through these partnerships, families strengthen parental resilience, build social capital, access concrete support

services, and increase social and emotional competence in children.

- 3. **Family leadership:** Strategies and services that improve and enhance the leadership skills of parenting adults. These services are designed to support families in becoming better and more engaged advocates for themselves, their families, and their communities by making powerful, impactful changes on education issues alongside the systems that serve them.

NCFL’s efforts support building local capacity to ensure that the family learning system reduces barriers and duplication of services, bringing about equal access to learning opportunities that ensure all children and families have the opportunity to thrive. Although NCFL acknowledges and celebrates the countless opportunities for families that already exist within the community, our goal in working with and for parenting adults and children is to create greater alignment of, coordination with, and access to these opportunities while ensuring that family voices contribute to local solutions. Strong families are the building blocks of strong communities; this is the power of family learning systems explicitly designed to impact current and future generations.

NCFL Family Learning System



(NCFL, 2025)

Working with each community will look different and require varying levels of engagement. NCFL has developed a flexible set of criteria that will be used when considering potential Family Learning Communities™. These include:

- Existing partnerships and relationships (programmatic and funder-based)
- Geographic location
- Local family demographics
- Population size
- Community needs
- Willingness of local leadership to engage differently
- Existing community resources and infrastructure (informal or formal coalitions to lead the work)

Family learning opportunities

Upon the establishment of a new Family Learning Community—and depending on available funding and level of engagement needed—NCFL’s partnership will provide a range of services including, but not limited to:

- Capacity building for local leadership
- Support in creating strategic partnerships/coalitions for collective action
- Professional learning and technical assistance in support of implementing the primary elements of a family learning system (family literacy, family engagement, and family leadership)
- Assistance with identifying and developing institutional, local, state, and federal policy designed to center the needs of families within a community’s family learning system
- Community networking to share successes
- Expertise and resources to meet community needs through the Family Learning Community Collaborative
- Research and evaluation support to gauge progress towards community goals

Family Learning Community Collaborative (FLCC)

Our Family Learning Community Collaborative consists of national strategic partners that work together to strengthen learning efforts in local communities and provide support as a national network. This small group of reputable, innovative organizations have committed to bringing resources and assets to Family Learning Communities in support of local academic and economic goals. Based on community needs and priorities, Family Learning Communities will have the opportunity to explore mutually beneficial connections with FLCC partners, tapping resources and expertise that may not otherwise be accessible.

Networked communities: learning and sharing together

Building a supported network will ensure that learning and lessons from across all participating communities are captured and disseminated to support policy and best practices and to inform a national narrative about the importance of family learning systems as a movement. Bringing together a broad spectrum of stakeholders already engaged in programming or systems work with NCFL and select partners, the Family Learning Network provides communities with the opportunity to:

- Facilitate the exchange of best practices and resources to benefit children and families.
- Build and sustain relationships among similarly situated communities.
- Access family-focused professional development to enhance local and national impact.
- Enable collaboration and scaling of family learning policy and program innovations.

Building evidence for the field

Indicators of success are key to any well-designed initiative or movement. NCFL will select these indicators in collaboration with cross-sector partners, and they will be used to monitor and assess community conditions and the wellbeing of families.

The data gathered will include program-level outcomes (family literacy, family engagement, family leadership), accompanying individual-level outcomes (e.g., education outcomes and economic or workforce outcomes), and systems-level outcomes—such as the development of practices, policy enhancements, and sustainability of community coalitions for aligned and coordinated family programs.

Moving forward

Now, more than ever, NCFL's mission to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families and its vision for transformative work in communities are crucial levers for deep community engagement. Systems building is intense work and requires significant investment and support. However, drawing on our nearly four decades of work in family learning and education, we know that long-lasting, positive impact for families requires collaboration among multiple local entities. When schools, community-based organizations, government, libraries, and others come together to work with and alongside families in addressing issues they face, we reach critical mass in effecting positive change in the lives of families.

Building a Family Learning Community will assist local leaders in designing or enhancing a tailored agenda that supports families across a number of domains including education, economic opportunity, neighborhoods and infrastructure, justice and government, and public health.

It is important to note that our approach and work is grounded in equal opportunity and prioritizes the voices of children and families. We believe that those who are furthest from opportunity within the community must be included in developing solutions for the challenges they face and that systems must work for families—not the other way around. This commitment is not new; family voice has always been central to what we do.

As we take the next steps toward realizing our vision and writing a new narrative where families and communities work together to design solutions, it is our hope that communities, stakeholders, governmental entities, and education organizations come alongside us in this journey. This is a vision to enrich the lives of families across the nation following in the footsteps of NCFL's Founder, Sharon Darling. Our commitment to collaboration and co-design with each community means that every Family Learning Community will be built in response to the authentic needs and aspirations of its residents, which will provide boundless opportunity for partnership over the coming years. This next era builds on our legacy work of having multigenerational impact and changing the trajectory with families to achieve higher levels of education attainment and economic prosperity.

NCFL is a national nonprofit that has worked for more than 35 years to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. We believe education is a shared, nonpartisan responsibility and that collaboration among families, schools, and community members can lead to powerful learning experiences. NCFL's vision is to establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create thriving communities.

This is one of four briefs that document the need for and results of NCFL's core family learning system elements—family literacy, family engagement, and family leadership. To review the other briefs, please visit FamiliesLearning.org/Resources/Publications.

[1] A system is a group of interacting, interrelated, and interdependent components that form a complex and unified whole. A system's overall purpose or goal is achieved through the actions and interactions of its components. – Pegasus Communications, The Systems Thinker, as cited by Julia Coffman, A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives.