

# A Future Design for Equitable Communities: Building Family Learning Systems

January 2023



## National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) Vision:

By 2030, coordinated and aligned family learning systems are established in 60 communities, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes, thereby creating more equitable 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 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, NCFL's vision will drive work designed to support the establishment of coordinated and aligned family learning systems<sup>1</sup> in communities.

Family learning systems are dependent upon coalitions of institutions, organizations, community members, and families who engage in deep, comprehensive work bringing 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 farthest from opportunity.

Our long-held and renewed commitment to equity guides our quest to co-design responsive family learning systems with and alongside families and communities. Achieving more equitable learning outcomes and economic prosperity will only happen if learning experiences consider the changing needs of children and parenting adults, today.

We know that 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 intends to support these efforts collaboratively to spread and scale education solutions for families while deepening our work in 60 communities. These will promote equitable communities where children and families feel valued, gain social capital, and thrive in a just and fair society.

## Our Invitation: Join NCFL's 60x30 Vision

NCFL will create many on-ramps for communities to join this effort. Although NCFL has begun to identify some communities to serve as part of the inaugural cohort, communities and funders have contacted NCFL directly to express interest in participating, and we are seeking additional partnerships.

## How family learning systems work

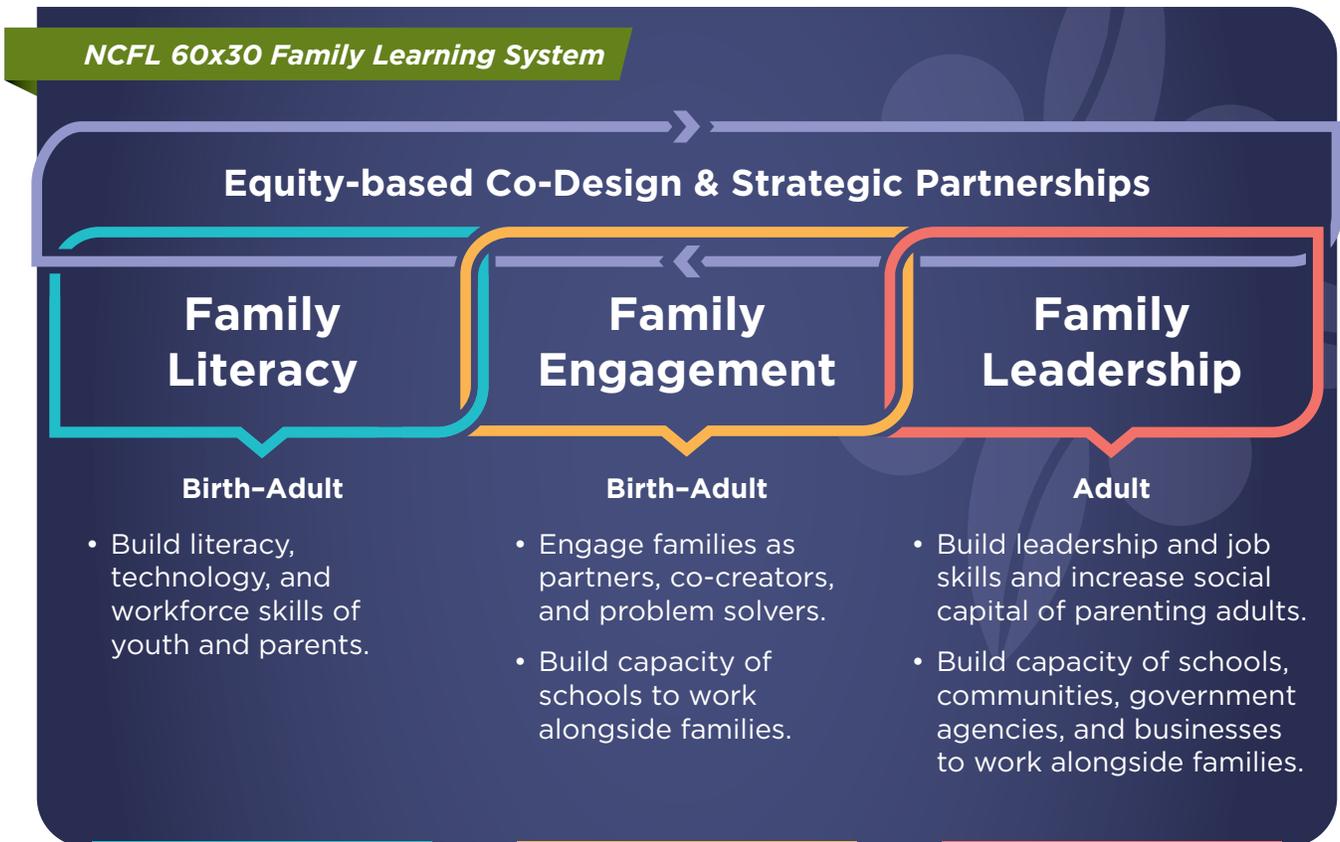
Family learning systems in NCFL's 60x30 Vision are community-developed systems<sup>[1]</sup> that provide aligned and coordinated high-impact, family-focused education practices serving the birth through adulthood continuum. These systems include clear points of integration of family-focused programming across sectors, creating greater access and opportunity for families to easily engage.

Although family learning systems will not (and should not) look the same in every community, each community in NCFL’s 60x30 Vision will include the following three critical elements:

1. **Family literacy:** A continuum of programs 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 children and families throughout educational systems and in communities. Through these partnerships, families develop 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 and are designed to support families in becoming better engaged advocates for themselves, their children, their families, and communities by making powerful, impactful changes on education issues alongside the systems that serve them.

NCFL’s effort will support local capacity-building to ensure that the family learning system reduces barriers as well as duplication of services and support, bringing about equitable learning opportunities that are coordinated and aligned within the community. Although NCFL acknowledges and celebrates the countless opportunities that exist in all communities for families, our goal in working with and for parenting adults and children is to create greater alignment, coordination, access, and opportunities that build spaces where children and families thrive and see greater intentionality for realizing equitable outcomes for themselves. This is the power of designing family learning systems with the aim of creating more equitable communities for all.



It is NCFL's belief that family learning systems should exist as part of a larger community ecosystem that provides the wraparound support that families living in historically under-resourced and marginalized communities need to thrive and reach their full potential.

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 communities. These include:

- existing partnerships and relationships (programmatic and funder-based)
- diversity in geographic location
- diversity in family demographics
- diversity in population size
- community needs
- community willingness to partner and participate
- existing community resources and infrastructure (informal or formal coalitions to lead the work)

### **60x30 family learning opportunities**

Once a community has joined the 60x30 Vision, and depending on available funding and level of engagement needed, NCFL will partner to provide a range of support including, but not limited to:

- support for local systems building and capacity building
- support for building strategic partnerships/coalitions
- professional learning and technical assistance around the primary elements (family literacy, family engagement, and family leadership) of a family learning system
- support for identifying and developing institutional, local, state, and federal policy designed to center the needs of families in a community's family learning system
- galvanizing expertise and resources of other national partners to meet community needs via the 60x30 family learning community collaborative (defined below)

### **Family Learning Community Collaborative**

The Family Learning Community Collaborative will consist of national strategic partners that will work together to strengthen efforts in local communities and provide support as a national network. A small group of reputable, innovative organizations have committed to bringing resources and assets to the communities to advance education and economic goals. These strategic partnerships will be mutually beneficial and create opportunities for tapping the expertise and resources available to support children and families across the country.

### **Learning and sharing together: advancing networked communities**

Building a supported network of 60 communities will ensure that learning and lessons from across all the communities are captured and disseminated to shape policy, practices, and to inform the national narrative about the importance of family learning systems as an agent for transformation.

The Family Learning Community Network will:

- build a collaborative community of practice serving as a hub of knowledge sharing, learning, and innovation to support effective family learning systems.
- ensure that communities are working and learning together to achieve greater impact and representation for all children and families toward multigenerational change.
- engage family and community partners as ambassadors for family literacy, family engagement, and family leadership efforts designed to improve child and adult learning outcomes.
- inform both widespread practice and policy at the institutional, local, state, and federal levels.

### **Indicators of a family learning system**

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

The data gathered will include program-level outcomes (family literacy, family engagement, family leadership) and accompanying individual-level outcomes (e.g., education outcomes and economic or workforce outcomes), as well as 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 equity. Systems-building is intense work and requires significant investment and support. However, drawing on NCFL’s more than three decades of work in family learning and education, we know that long-lasting, positive impact for families requires collaboration among multiple entities in a community. 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 system will assist communities in designing or enhancing a local agenda that supports families across a number of equity domains including education, economic

opportunity, neighborhoods and infrastructure, justice and government, and public health.

It is important to note that NCFL’s approach and work is grounded in equity and prioritizes the voices of children and families. We believe that those who are most impacted by issues in a community must be included in developing solutions for those issues. Our commitment to equity is not new; we have codified how equity is at the forefront of everything we do and ensured that families’ voices are always central to our efforts.

As we take the next steps toward realizing our vision and writing a new narrative where families and communities are centered in designing solutions, it is NCFL’s hope that communities, stakeholders, governmental entities, and education-committed organizations come alongside 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 system 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 Sharon’s legacy work of having multigenerational impact and changing the trajectory with families to achieve higher levels of education attainment and economic prosperity.

---

The National Center for Families Learning is a national nonprofit that supports family success and well-being through education. We believe education is a shared responsibility and collaboration among families, schools, and community members that leads to powerful learning experiences. Partnering with educators, literacy advocates, and communities, NCFL has worked for over 30 years to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. NCFL’s vision – 60x30 – is to establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities by 2030, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create more equitable communities. When parenting adults and children are engaged in learning together, the whole family benefits, contributing to a thriving, equitable community.

This is one of four briefs that document the need for and results of NCFL’s core initiatives surrounding family learning systems, family literacy, family engagement, and family leadership. To review the other briefs, please visit [FamiliesLearning.org/60x30](https://FamiliesLearning.org/60x30).

---

[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.*