
AMCS PARENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Thank you for speaking with us today. My name is [Interviewer 1] and this is my colleague [Interviewer 2]. We work for Mathematica, an independent social policy research firm. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation at the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, contracted with us to conduct a study about how states and communities coordinate early care and education, family economic security, and other health and human services to meet the needs of families and their children.

We invited you all here today because you participate in [State/local approach name]. We're here to learn about experience in [State/local approach name]. We are also interested in learning about some of the things that might make it hard or easy for you to participate in this State/local approach. Your input is invaluable to us.

- Before we start, I want to discuss the guidelines for today's discussion. Your participation today is voluntary. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can leave at any time. [Today's discussion will last about 60 minutes. You will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation in the focus group.]
- What you say in this room will be considered private to the extent provided by law. We are required by law to report any statements made about intentions to harm yourself or others. We will summarize what we talk about today to describe how parents think about [State/local approach name] generally. Nothing you say will ever be linked to your name or repeated back to [State/local approach name] staff. Also, nothing you say will affect the services you receive through [State/local approach name]. Please respect the privacy of others' comments and do not share what has been discussed today.
- We want to hear different opinions, so if the rest of the group feels one way and you feel differently, please speak up. That information is really important to us because everyone here probably has had different experiences. There are no wrong answers.
- Please be considerate of others people's opinions, even if you do not agree. Also, so we can focus on what people are saying, please turn off your cell phone ringers and try not to use them during the conversation.
- I would like to record our conversation today, but that is so we do not have to take as many notes and can give you our attention. If you have anything you would like to say that you would not like me to record, just let me know and I can stop the recorder. This recording will only be used by our research team to compile our notes, will be stored on a secure drive that only project team members have access, and destroyed upon the completion of this project.
- Do you have any questions before we start?
 - Please speak up if you have any concerns about the tape recording.
 - [If not; start recording.] Okay, I have now turned on the tape recorder.
 - **An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid Office of**

Management and Budget control number. The Office of Management and Budget number for this information collection is XXXX-XXXX and the expiration date is X/X/20XX.

- Through this study, we are interested in understanding how services are coordinated or integrated for children and families. When we talk about coordinating or integrating services, we mean providing families with high quality early childhood education, and simultaneously addressing additional family needs, like income supports, health and mental health services, job search and training, and other types of health and human services. We are here talking with people from [State/local approach name] because it coordinates or integrates services for children and families. Thank you for taking the time to candidly and thoughtfully talk with us today, we greatly appreciate your help.
- Let's start with introductions. What is your name and how long have you been involved with [State/local approach name]?

A. State/local approach overview and access

Next, let's discuss how you became involved with [State/local approach name].

- How did you find out about [State/local approach name]?
- How did State/local approach staff determine what you needed? [PROBE: Did you talk with them, did they give you a form or survey to complete?] What supports or services did you and your child(ren) need when you enrolled in [State/local approach name]?
 - Did you receive those supports or services? How were you connected to them? Did [State/local approach name] connect you to them?
 - Were there any additional supports or services you discovered you needed after enrolling in [State/local approach name]? Did you receive those supports or services? How were you connected to them? Did [State/local approach name] connect you to them?
- What goals are you trying to accomplish by participating in [State/local approach name]? [PROBE: Why did you enroll? What drew you to [State/local approach name]?
- How did you apply? What did you have to do? What information did you have to provide? Did you have to enroll in person or did you do it online?
- How easy was it to enroll in [State/local approach name]? What challenges did you face in applying to [State/local approach name]?
 - Did you sign up for a waitlist before you were enrolled? If so, how long did you wait for?
 - Did you look for other ECE options or other services while you waited?

B. Services

Now I'd like to learn about the services you receive and the activities you engage in.

- What supports and services do you receive through [State/local approach name]? [Interviewer note: Refer to handout listing the services provided by [State/local approach name] and its partners, ask participants to check off the services they receive]

- Where do you go to get these services from [State/local approach name]? How many people and organizations do you work with regularly when receiving those services?
- Who do you communicate with from [State/local approach name]? How often are you in contact with them?
- What makes it easy for you to get services from [State/local approach name]?
- What makes it difficult for you to get services from [State/local approach name]?
- Did [State/local approach name] help you set goals when you enrolled? Did you set goals for yourself, your child, and your family? How did they do that? What does the goal setting process look like?
- Do you have a regular time when you check in with [State/local approach name] staff about how you are doing and your progress in the State/local approach?
- During this regular time (if participants have a regular time), or at any other times, do State/local approach staff check in with you about progress toward your goals?
- How has [State/local approach name] increased your knowledge of the services that are available for your child? How has [State/local approach name] increased your knowledge of the services that are available for you and your family?
 - For example, are you more aware of the ECE services that are available than you were before you came to [State/local approach name]? What about job training or education services? Any other services that you became more aware of after joining [State/local approach name]?
- Are there services you wish you could get from this State/local approach but cannot, either because there are not enough openings, you're not eligible, or because this State/local approach doesn't offer those services? [Interviewer note: Use what is known about State/local approach services to probe, for example physical, mental and dental health; food and nutrition; substance use and addiction treatment; K–12 education; early care and education; and family economic security services, etc.]
 - Have you been able to find these services in your community, and did [State/local approach name] help you find them?

C. Data and data systems

Next I'd like to talk about how the [State/local approach name] keeps track of how you are doing.

- Do you complete any surveys or assessments as part of participating in [State/local approach name]? If so, when do you complete surveys or assessments?
- Do State/local approach staff share information with you about your child and/or your progress as you go through [State/local approach name]? [For example, information about your progress toward goals.] What do they share?
- Do you share information with State/local approach staff about your child's development or progress? What do you share?
- How do State/local approach staff use this information to help you make decisions about services or goals?

- Do State/local approach staff share any information with you about [State/local approach name]’s overall success? If so, what do they share?

D. State/local approach perceptions and impact

I’d like to talk a little more about what you think of this State/local approach.

- How has [State/local approach name] made a difference for you and your family? How have your children been affected? What changes in yourself or your children have you experienced?
 - What parts of [State/local approach name] have been best or most helpful for you and your children? In what ways?
 - Do you use [State/local approach name]’s early care and education (ECE) services for your children? What child care did you use prior to joining this State/local approach? How satisfied are you with the ECE your child(ren) receive(s)?
 - How satisfied are you with the other services your family receives? [Interviewer note: Ask about other types of services, as appropriate.]
- Were you able to access all of the services you needed? How have the services you received helped you reach your goals/meet your needs? Are there other services you do not receive that you would like to receive or that you need?
- Do you feel that State/local approach staff provided enough support and resources to help you meet or make progress toward your goals?
 - If yes, how did they do that?
 - If not, how could that have been improved?
- In what ways has [State/local approach name] met your expectations? Has your experience in [State/local approach name] been what you expected it to be? Please explain.
- What parts of [State/local approach name] could be improved to better help you and your children? In what ways?
- If you could make any changes to [State/local approach name], what would you change?
- Would you recommend participating in this State/local approach to another family? Why or why not?
- Is there anything we haven’t discussed that you would like to talk about?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas with us today. This discussion has been very helpful in learning more about [State/local approach name]. We appreciate your time.