

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT WEBINAR SERIES

Empowering Families Through Innovative Programs

JUNE 26, 2025





AGENDA

WELCOME

Introductions

Who We Are

Learning Objectives

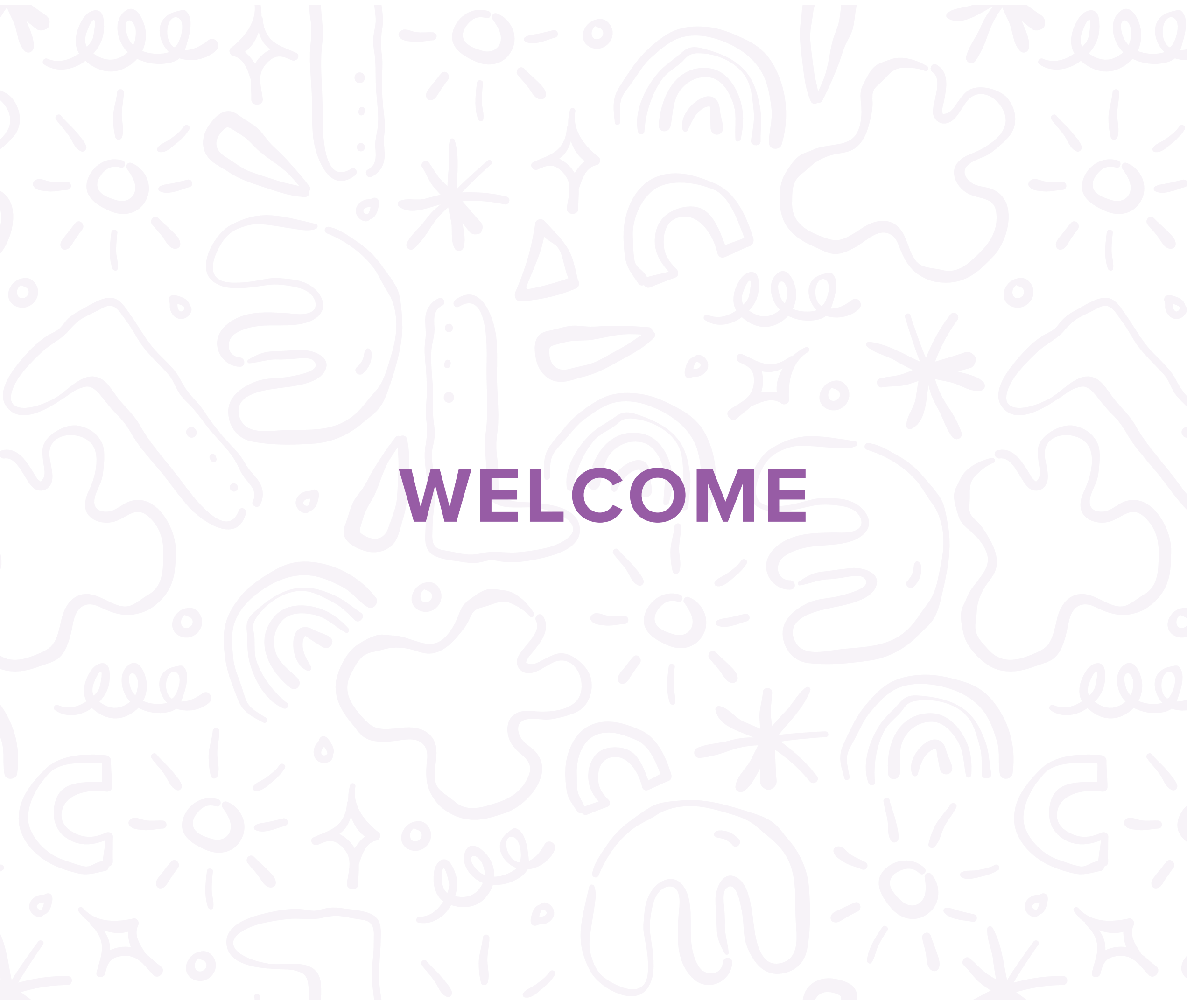
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT IAFC

Head Start & Early Head Start

Strengthening Connections

North Lawndale Community Connections

Q&A



WELCOME



INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Open the chat and share your:

- Name
- Role and organization
- What you hope to learn today

WHO WE ARE



Marquinta Thomas

Vice President of
Community Impact



Tasha Smith

Director of
Referrals & Outreach



Lakida Dillard

Parent Involvement
Coordinator



Rarzail Jones

Assistant Director of
Community Connections

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Learn about how IAFC builds trust with families navigating the justice system through trauma-informed case management and support.
- Learn about the importance of strategic partnerships with local communities to tackle challenges like chronic absenteeism and early learning access, specifically in North Lawndale.
- Learn about how IAFC embeds parent voice in decision-making through the nationally recognized Head Start PFCE Framework and Policy Council.
- Learn about how engaging parents as planning partners and decision makers at the program level can lead to overall program success.



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT IAFC

HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START

IAFC's Directly Operated Sites:

South Suburban Cook County Locations

Dolton

*729 Engle St.
Dolton, IL 60419*

Harvey South Holland

*16511 South Park Ave.
South Holland, IL 60473*

Chicago Heights

*202 S Halsted St. Lot C1
Chicago Heights, IL 60411*

Ford Heights

*1055 Berkeley Ave.
Ford Heights, IL 60411*

IAFC Chicago Heights Early Learning Center



IAFC Dolton Early Learning Center



IAFC Ford Heights Learning Center



IAFC Harvey-South Holland Learning Center



Partner Site: A Step Up



Partner Site: First Step





WHAT WE OFFER FAMILIES:

- Education and Child Development Services (ECD)
- Health & Mental Services Support (HEA)
- Family and Community Engagement (FCE)
- Transportation Services (Harvey South Holland Site)

Policy Council

Purpose & Composition

The purpose of the Policy Council is to participate in shared decision-making (as outlined in the Head Start Program Performance Standards) and to work with the Illinois Action for Children Board of Directors.

Officers of the Policy Council include a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary and community members elected annually. Officers may not serve more than five (5) years.

There are parent representatives for every site. Their duties include:

- Partaking in the staff interview process.
- Making decisions with the IAFC Board of Directors
- Advocating for the program
- Attending conferences and retreats related to Head Start

Policy Council in Action: Advocating in Springfield



Education and Child Development Services (ECD)

IAFC is a place where children matter the most. Our goal is for the children to be school ready at the end of their preschool program year. Teaching Strategies GOLD enables educators to focus on and measure the knowledge, skills, and behaviors most predictive of school success.

- The tool has a total of 38 objectives.
- The areas are:
 - Social-Emotional
 - Physical
 - Language
 - Cognitive
 - Literacy
 - Mathematics
 - Science and Technology
 - Arts

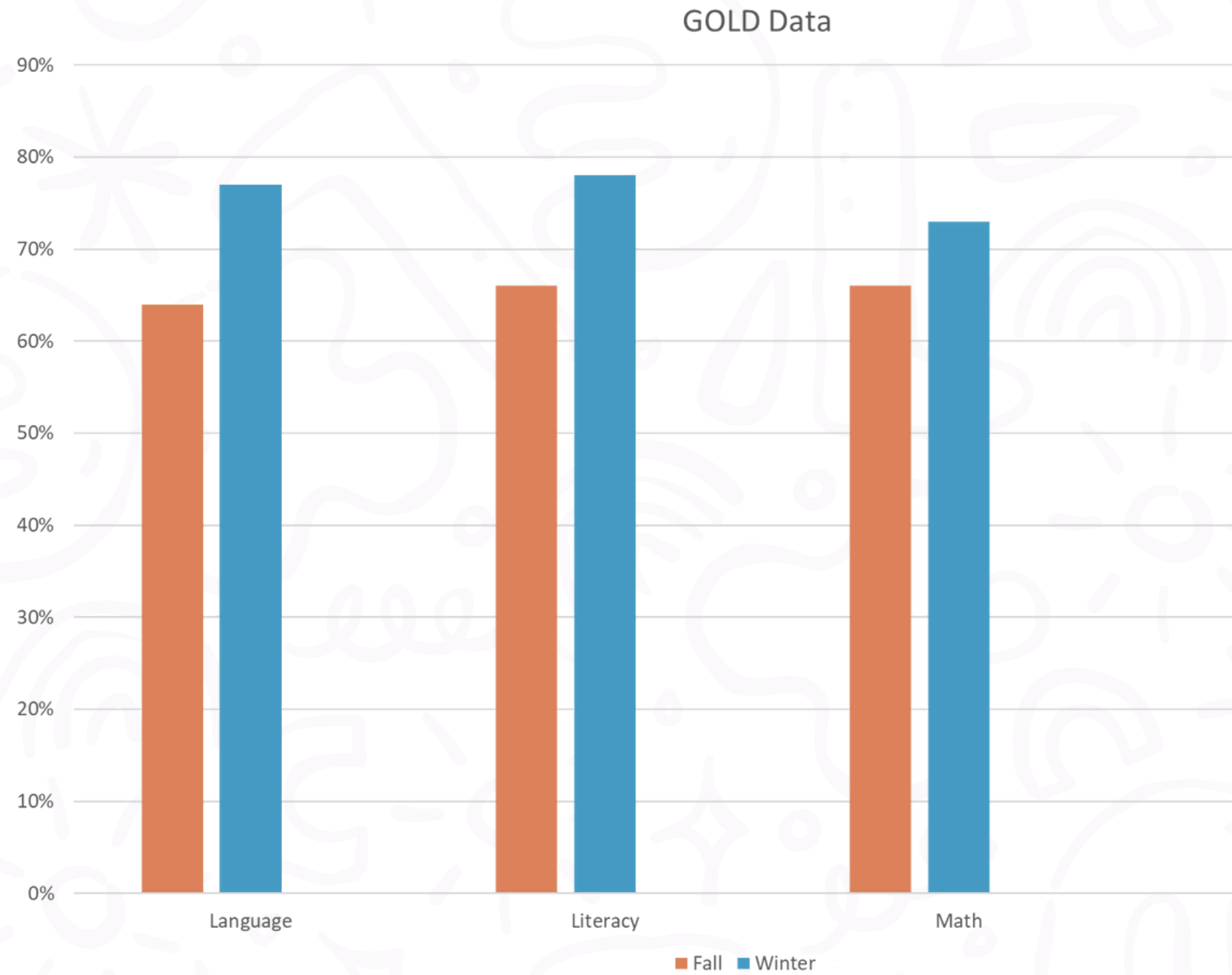
Therefore, we utilize an intentional process of assessment and evaluation three times during the program year. This data is aggregated and analyzed to inform IAFC of program successes, improvements, individual child improvement strategies and supports us to build our program professional development calendar.

Education Child Development Success

- Agency has a research-based curriculum: Creative Curriculum
- Agency has assessment tool GOLD
- Teaching Strategies GOLD data– not far from meeting our program goals
- Home based education services utilizing a parent researched based curriculum
- Data reviews that provide information for teachers to intentionally plan activities for child (individual and group)



Gold Assessment Data





Health Services: Nutrition

- Our agency serves children 2 healthy USDA recommended meals each day: Breakfast and Lunch (plus a healthy snack).
- Due to the guidelines from the CDC, IDPH, DCFS and IAFC internal policies our children practice family style meal settings with resources to help prepare and support all including the staff.
- The staff are trained to meet the CACFP meal pattern requirements to successfully serve meals family style with the children.
- The children are encouraged and supported to be independent, through self-regulation and their language development skills.
- We provide resources aggressively for food to our families, through offering information on food pantries and workshops with our Nutrition Consultant.
- We also, offer information on WIC services for all families.

Health Services: Mental Health

- Within the first 45 days of the program year the mental health consultant (MHC) conducts general classroom observations.
- Based on the observations the MHC collaborates with the director, teacher coach and the teacher to create a consultative plan. The consultative plan is to assist the teacher in determining what area of support the classroom teacher needs to create a healthy social emotional learning environment.
- The MHC provides support to the teacher by enhancing their practice, using relationship-based practices, strength based and capacity-based practices. Additionally, when a child has scored above the cut off on the ASQ-SE the child is referred to the mental health consultant for individual observation.
- Upon the results of the observation the MHC provides support in the form of consultation, strategies, materials and activities that foster social emotional development.
The MHC also provides support to families by offering guidance on understanding and addressing their child's social emotional needs.



Family and Community Engagement Services (FCE)

Successes:

- There has been a quorum at each policy meeting which consists of a parent representation from each of our sites.
- Family Engagement staff provides resources and referrals to families.
- Parents have given opportunities for professional development attending to NHSA and IHSA Conferences.
- Center based activities that engage the entire family.
- 2-way conversation at the sites between staff and families.

Enrolling Now!



Visit earlylearning.actforchildren.org



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT IAFC

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS



Portrait of Children & Families Affected by the Criminal Justice System

37,000+ children in Cook County have a parent in jail or incarcerated.

- Roughly 25% of children with an incarcerated parent in Cook County are under age 5.
- Most rapid brain development occurs during the first five years—experiences during this time shapes the brain and sets us on a life trajectory.
- Children affected by the prison system are exposed to historic, systemic racism, oppression, poverty and other traumas that may cause lifelong detrimental impacts
- **Each child is uniquely affected and requires individualized family and community support to better deal with the circumstances they are facing.**

Strengthening Connections Timeline

2021

The Illinois Early Learning Council designated children with jailed and incarcerated parents as a priority population.

May 2022

Illinois Action for Children hosted our first family engagement event with Cook County Sheriff's Office for Mother's Day.

June 2022

Illinois Action for Children hosted a Father's Day family engagement event.

July 2022

Illinois Action for Children was awarded the BUILD Prize from the Vivo Foundation.

Program Design

Understanding Systems and Barriers

Design the project with a ‘saturated approach’ by offering families separated and impacted by jail and incarceration with a myriad of referrals, resources, and individualized supports to help ensure they have the resources their children need to thrive and reach their full potential.

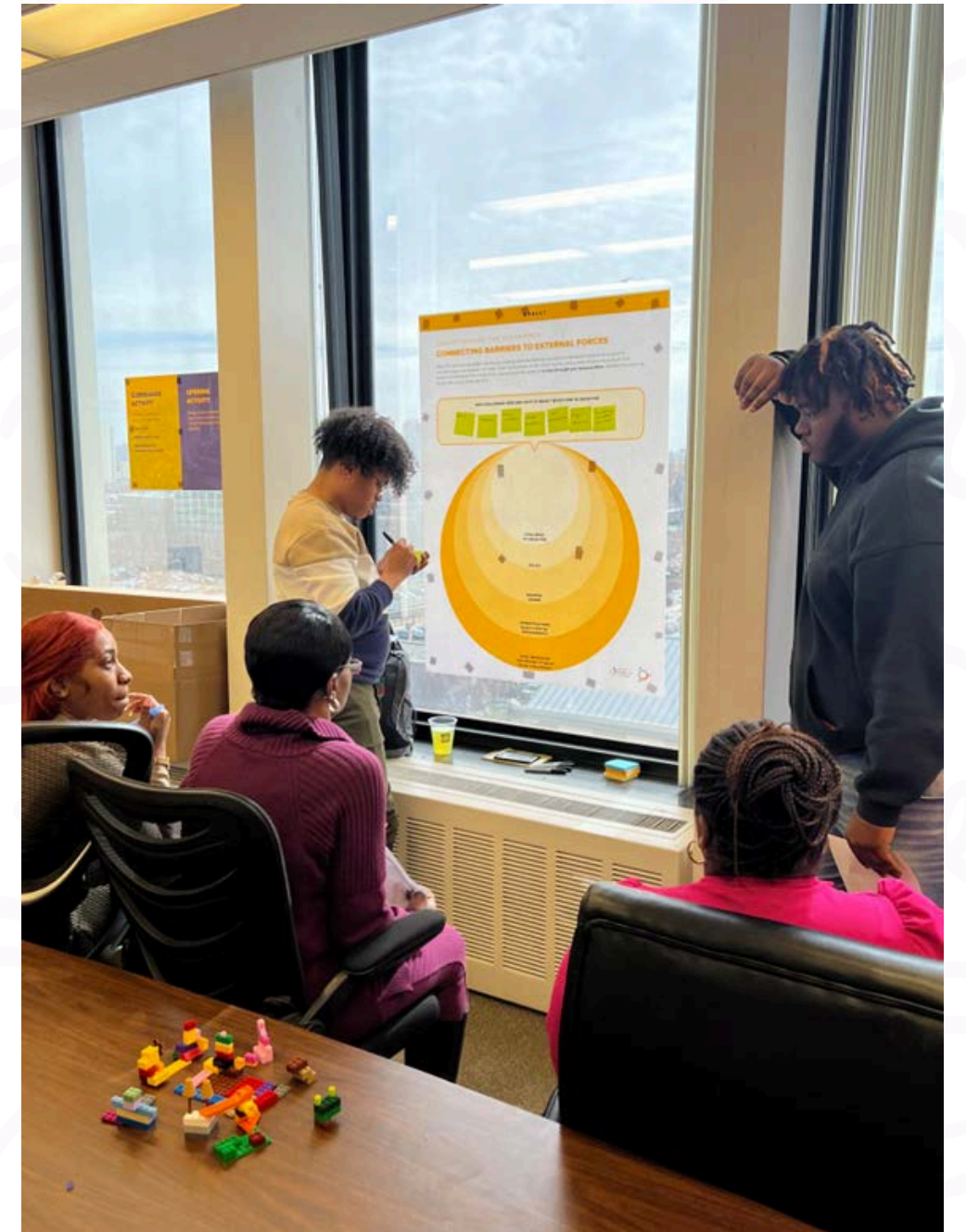
Integrate a human-centered design (HCD) process, which has been successfully used in other IAFC projects. Our plan is to engage families directly impacted by the carceral system and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the pilot program.

Program Design

Authentically Meeting Families' Needs

Partnered with ChiByDesign to host a series of workshops with families impacted by incarceration and other stakeholders to understand the conditions, policies, practices, and experiences that disconnect children and families from incarcerated parents.

Using the findings from the co-design process, we developed a case management system geared toward supporting caregivers and young children with an incarcerated parent.



Program Overview

- Program innovation expands on existing work supporting parents' early learning decisions and connecting them to resources that foster families' growth and development.
- Engages families and communities in designing and testing strategies/tools that strengthen relationships among families and children impacted by the prison system.
- Builds/continues partnerships with organizations that work with incarcerated individuals in Chicago and Cook County.

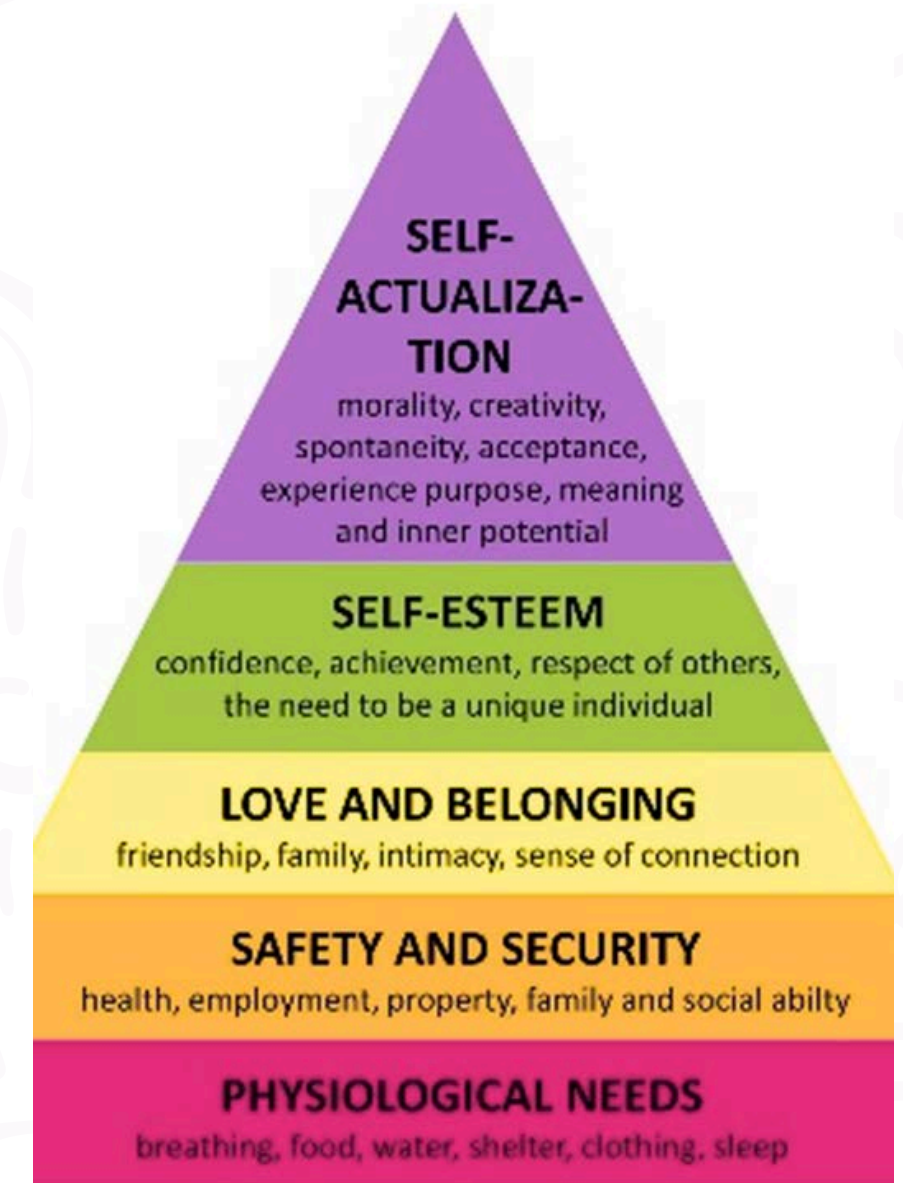


Guiding Principles

Our policies/procedures aim to ensure caseloads enable social workers to put children, young people, and their families at the center of their work by providing consistent, high-quality services which achieve positive outcomes.

We understand there are levels to triaging someone's traumatic situation. To be an effective change agent for clients, social workers gently assess client's physiological needs, food, shelter, clothing, etc.

Maslow Hierarchy of Needs is a theological model that indicates a pyramid affect to accomplishing life challenges. Before an individual can think of self-esteem, continuing education, & parenting skills, they must ensure the basic needs of a human's existence are sustained.



Trauma-Informed Case Management



- Clinical case management services
- Peer support groups
- Family events
- Family engagement

- Institutional collaboration
- Training
- Greater reach

Role of the Social Worker

Workload Assignment and Procedures

- All referrals will be allocated to a social worker by the Strengthening Connections Manager (SCM).
- All families are seen within 5 working days of assignment, or sooner at the discretion of the SCM. This includes the completion of the SC Intake Form.
- Once the SC Intake Form is completed, the SW will have 48 hours to complete a Family Engagement Plan (FEP).
- Once SW completes intake, they will schedule a Case Review with SCM to review and/or approve for all funds allocations and goal implementation.
- SW will then have it reviewed and signed by the client through DocuSign or Adobe or a manual signature.
- Thirty days from the creation and signed (by family and SW) FEP, the first goals should have an action. Rather that is an external/internal referral, or a Social Worker led goal, an action step should have taken place. If not, barriers have been thoroughly documented and an amended FEP, if necessary, is created.

Family Engagement Events

- Support quarterly family engagement events for mothers and fathers in collaboration with Cook County Sheriff's Office.
- Events offer families—particularly children—positive interaction and relationship-strengthening time with their jailed/incarcerated parent.
- A positive relationship with jailed/incarcerated parent is essential for children, regardless of their parent's eventual/current sentence.





FATHER CHILD DANCE

- Inspired by the Netflix documentary Daughters. Four young girls prepare for a special Daddy Daughter Dance with their incarcerated fathers, as part of a unique fatherhood program in a Washington, D.C. jail. [Daughters | Official Trailer | Netflix](#)
- We held a Father Child Dance at the CCSO. The theme for the evening was We Love You to the Moon and Back.
- The fathers participated in a workshop before the dance. The incarcerated father and the families were dressed up in dance attire. The 2-hour event was filled with dancing with a DJ, catered hot meal, games, picture taking and gifts. Each child received a teddy bear to remember the occasion.

Peer Support Groups

The purpose of our peer support group is to provide emotional, social, and practical support to people who share a common experience or challenge.

- It encourages self-advocacy and personal growth.
- Offers empathy, understanding, and a non-judgmental space.
- Reduces stigma and self-blame.

We engage our clients using Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) which is a type of cognitive-behavioral therapy that helps individuals manage intense emotions, develop coping skills, and improve interpersonal relationships. It focuses on teaching specific skills, including mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness, to help individuals build a "life worth living".

Peer Support Group Meetings

Client Designed

10 clients participated in a focus group to help design the structure and format of the meeting. We discussed time/day of the meeting, virtual or in person, topics and what they wanted to walk away with after each meeting.



Outcomes

- Quarterly SC client meetings are held virtually every 3rd Wednesday of the month.
- Some topics we have had in the past are: Mental Health 101 Workshop, What is PTSD?, and ACE's For All (Adverse Childhood Experiences).
- Each meeting more and more clients attend the focus group.
- The clients share freely about things that are going on with them and their families.
- One client even shared she has told us things her therapist do not know about.

Expand Partnerships & Referral Networks

Current Partnerships

- Legal Aid
- Illinois Department of Corrections
- Additional mental health supports and services
- Social Services Agencies
- Strengthen partnership with IDEC

Future Partnerships

- Trilogy Behavioral Health Services
 - Peer support groups
 - Substance abuse counseling
- Put Me In Sports Grant
- Prison Family Alliance
- Cook County Sherriff's Office
- Illinois Department of Corrections

2026-2027 Goals

1. Develop and Strengthen Relationships

- **Institutional:** Illinois Department of Corrections, Cook County Sheriff's Office
- **Partners:** Legal Aid, mental health, workforce development, Women's Dignity of Choice pilot

2. Engage and Support Families and Children

- Trauma-informed case management
- Peer support
- Jail/prison staff training
- Family events

3. Bring Program to Scale *(potential statewide reach)*



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT IAFC

NORTH LAWNDALE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

North Lawndale Community Connections

Programs:

- North Lawndale READS Chronic Absenteeism Initiative
- Parent University Chicago-West
- North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration

When families thrive, children soar!

Under the umbrella of Community Connections, these 4 programs work to create a sustainable, empowering environment where parents and community members are not only engaged, but also equipped to support every child's path to success.

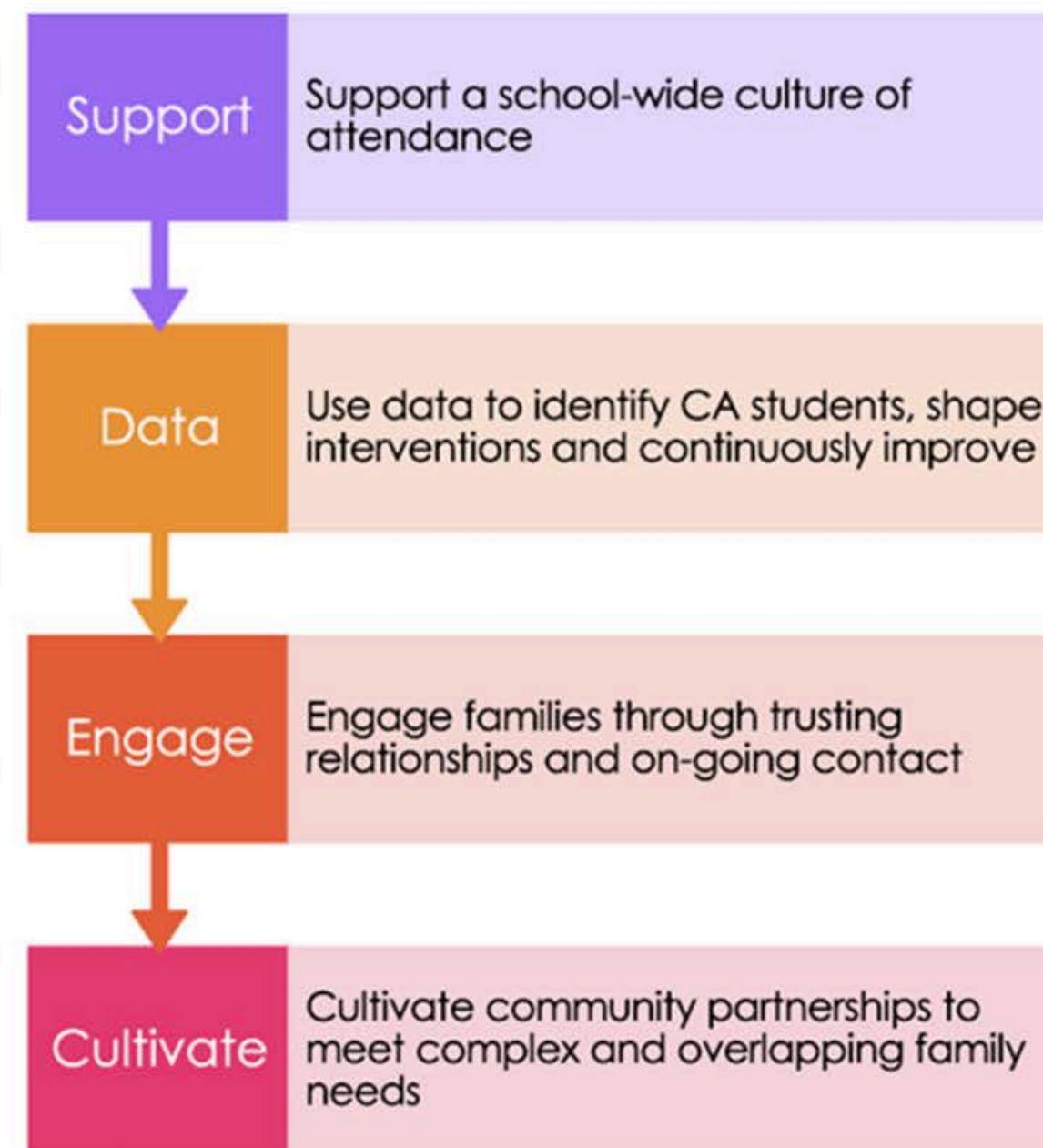
NL READS Chronic Absenteeism Initiative

Origin of North Lawndale READS Chronic Absenteeism Initiative

In 2015, the Steans Family Foundation invited IAFC to apply for its North Lawndale READS Initiative- a comprehensive effort to bridge the literacy gap for North Lawndale students by the 3rd grade.

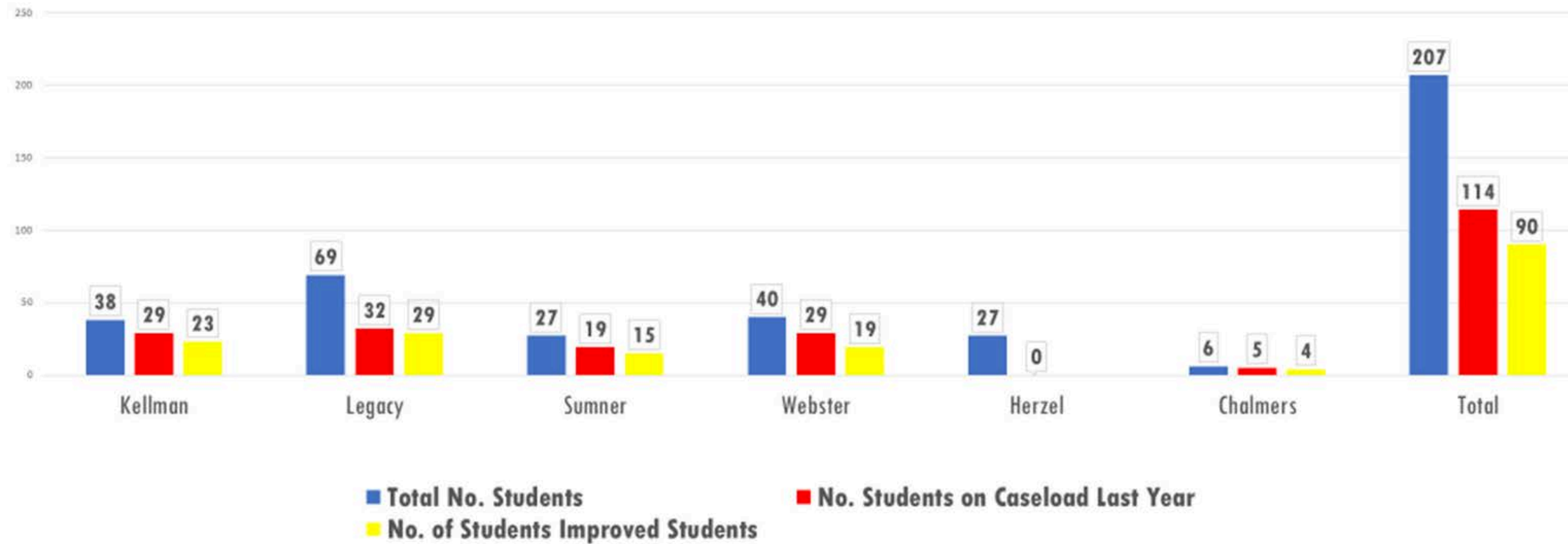
IAFC's Role

To reduce chronic absenteeism and improve attendance among Pre-K to 3rd grade students in 6 North Lawndale schools using a four-core strategy approach.



Student's 2-Year Attendance Comparison for SY24'25

IAFC Total CA Caseload Attendance Comparison for Students on the Caseload 2 years or more



3 Tier Attendance Approach for Supporting North Lawndale Schools

Tier 1: School-Wide Attendance Strategies Pre-K to 8th Grade	Tier 2: High-Level Pre-K to 3rd Grade School Connections	Tier 3: Intense Case Management Pre-K to 3rd Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attendance messaging• Hosting school-wide parent workshops• Engaging in school-wide events• Sharing community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing and joining attendance team• Receiving and assessing attendance data• Sharing monthly attendance activities• Attending grade level meetings monthly• Hosting monthly attendance mini celebrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intense case management for families• Quarterly nudge letters for students on caseload

Family Barriers & IAFC Supports

Family Barriers	IAFC Supports
Transportation/ Mobility Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide bus cards• Work closely with other parents to help develop carpool and build social capital
Illness/Chronic Illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help parents understand what constitutes “too sick” to go to school when children have an acute illness• Encourage parents to communicate with teachers and retrieve work that students can complete at home• For students with chronic illness, coordinate with the family and school to ensure that 504 medical plans are in place
Awareness of Missed Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide parents with an accurate physical print-out of students’ attendance records showing the number of missed school days of the amount of days• Provide parents with information about the impact of chronic absenteeism on the students’ academics and strategies to improve child’s attendance



Community Resources

- Cradles to Crayons
- Chicago Furniture Bank
- North Lawndale Employment Network
- The Encompassing Center
- Alice's Kids
- I am Able
- Lawndale Christian Health Center



Parent University Chicago-West

Building upon the proven framework of the Parent University in Savannah, Georgia, we present a dynamic, community-driven initiative focused on recognizing and nurturing the pivotal role of parents as integral partners in the educational process for both their individual growth and the collective advancement of their families.

Parent University Chicago-West (PUCW)

MISSION

Enhance parent education, engagement, and empowerment by creating inclusive spaces where families gain tools, knowledge, and confidence to support themselves and their children's academic and personal success.

Who the program serves:

Families on Chicago's West Side, particularly in North Lawndale

How the program operates:

- Quarterly, parent-led events that promote learning, leadership, and collaboration
- Quarterly parent committee planning meetings





- Steans Family Foundation Connections
- Replicates a well-regarded Parent University model conceived by Michael O’Neal in Savannah, Georgia
- IAFC RFP 2022

Parent University-Chicago West Engaged



- 483 - Caregivers
- 363 - Children aged 2-16
- 171- Community Resource Vendors
- 49 - Childcare Teachers
- 89 - Volunteers
- 10 - Parent University Events
- 10 -Parent Planning Committee Meetings
- Implemented 58 Workshops

Workshops Implemented

November 2022

- Zumba
- Stress Management
- Financial Tips for the Holidays
- Creative Play Activities for Families

March 2023

- Stress Management
- Self Defense
- Home- Buying
- Positive Discipline Strategies

July 2023

- Mindfulness/Meditation/Yoga
- Building your Village- How to do this when you are on your own?
- Healthy Eating Habits
- Grief and Loss
- Prevention and Intervention of Bullying- Dual Workshop with Parents and Children

October 2023

- Time Management
- Parental Stress Management
- Self-Care Massage
- ChampYon Taekwondo
- Supporting Children with Anxiety

February 2024

- Art Therapy
- Line Dancing
- Co- Parenting
- Stress Relief for Mental Clarity
- Effective Parent/ Child Communication
- Supporting your Child with Mental Health

September 2024

- Self Defense
- Impact of Journaling
- Parent-Child Relationships from Birth to 18
- Understanding Trauma Responses
- Work Life Balance
- Social Emotional Cues Awareness

June 2024

- Financial Literacy
- Chair Yoga
- Art Therapy
- Understanding Your Child's IEP
- How Social Media Can Impact Our Emotional and Physical Well-being
- Pursuing Entrepreneurship
- Teens V.S. Drugs

December 2024

- Supporting Children with Special Needs
- Art Therapy
- Music Therapy
- Restorative Justice
- Kickboxing Cardio
- New Year, New Dedications
- Financial Investments

March 2025

- Art Therapy
- Supporting Your Child with College Enrollment
- Double Dutch Aerobics
- Healthy Meal Prepping
- Parenting our Inner Child
- How Much is Too Much Screen Time
- Breathe

JUNE 2025

- Public Speaking
- Use your Words- Words Matter
- Protecting your Children Online
- Art Therapy
- What Stress can do to the Body
- Cardio Drumming

Inaugural Graduation

Parent University Chicago-West hosted its first graduation ceremony in February 2025.



Feedback from PUCW Parents

Sample questions from the survey:

- On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how likely are you to refer others?
- On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, do you feel more knowledgeable from attending any of the workshops?

We surveyed over 170 parents with **an average rating of 9.5** for all questions.



References

Parent University Chicago-West has been featured on **ABC Channel 7 News, NBC Channel 5 and CBS Channel 2**, highlighting the impact of our work in the community.

[Parent University- Chicago West: Empowering North Lawndale Parents Through Education and Community Resources | WGN-TV](#)

[Parent University Chicago West seeks to teach parents how to parent through Illinois Action for Children - ABC7 Chicago](#)

[Parent University teaches parents skills for harmonious life, including how to breathe, relax | CBS 2 News](#)

Additionally, we've been recognized in a powerful article by The Citizen Newspaper Group—a testament to the dedication of our families, partners, and team members.





North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration

Community Engagement

- 52+ community partners
- Ensure equitable access to high-quality early learning programs for families with children from birth to 8 years old.

Heightened Connectivity

- Meet monthly
- Monthly Newsletter
- Monthly Community Partner Presentations

Community Collaboration

- Innovative Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS).
- One-stop shop, streamlined process for NL families
- Connections to high-quality early learning programs and essential resources



How to Stay in Touch

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For more information on programs, visit actforchildren.org or click below.

IAFC Early Learning Programs

Strengthening Connections

**North Lawndale
Community Connections**

