

COMMUNITY CENTER FOR EDUCATION RESULTS

Aligned Partners Evaluation: Final Report

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About Education Northwest

Education Northwest is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping all children and youth reach their full potential. We partner with public, private, and community-based organizations to address educational inequities and improve student success. While most of our work centers on the Pacific Northwest, our evaluations, technical assistance, and research studies have a national impact and provide timely and actionable results.

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Introduction

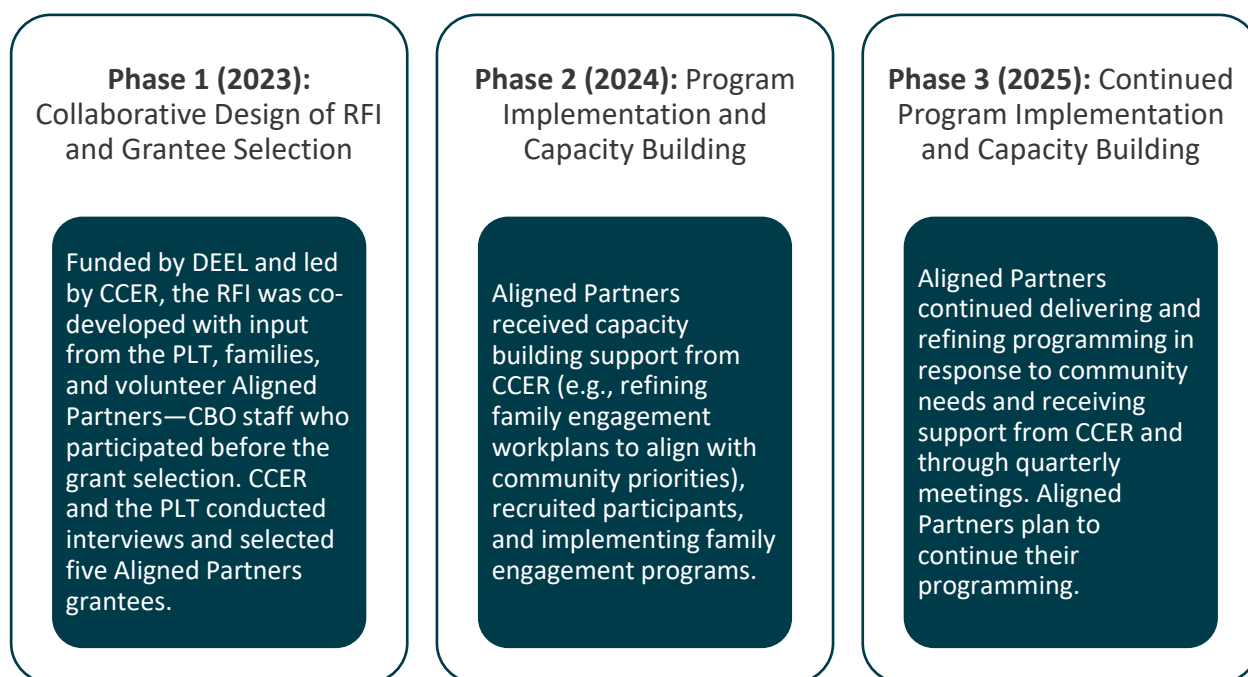
The Community Center for Education Results (CCER) partnered with Education Northwest (EDNW) to evaluate the City of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning's (DEEL) initiative to fund community-based organizations working with families in Seattle to advance educational equity through family engagement. The evaluation spans multiple phases of the initiative from the Request for Investment (RFI) development to the current phase, in which grantees actively engage with families through the grant. This report presents key findings from focus groups with Aligned Partners and family participants, offering valuable insights into staff member experiences, family outcomes, and strategies for strengthening community-based family engagement to advance educational equity.

Evaluation context

DEEL partnered with the CCER to launch an RFI process that distributed Family Support and Engagement funds community-based organizations (CBOs) in Seattle. These funds support family engagement programming for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and immigrant and refugee families.

The figure below provides an overview of key events of the Aligned Partners grant.

Figure 1. Phases of the DEEL initiative



Source: Education Northwest evaluation

CCER collaborated with the Road Map Project’s (RMP) Parent Leadership Team (PLT) to co-design the RFI, select grantees, and provide technical assistance on equitable family engagement practices. In spring 2023, CCER and the PLT led a family-centered, collaborative grantmaking process with volunteer Aligned Partners to identify priority areas for funding. Volunteer Aligned Partners refer to CBO staff members who provided input in the design of the RFI before the formal grant selection process. Through community conversations, the group elevated sharing data with families as a key strategy for fostering more equitable family-school partnerships. Additionally, the PLT was looking to fund organizations that operate in one or more of the City of Seattle’s DEEL Equitable Communities Initiative (ECI) focus areas:

Table 1. Equitable Communities Initiative focus areas and outcomes

Focus Area	Outcomes
Collective/ Collaborative	Create learning environments that foster peer learning and communications networks among families and school staff members.
Developmental	Empower and enable families to be confident, active, knowledgeable, and informed stakeholders in the transformation of their schools and neighborhoods.
Interactive	Provide formal and informal opportunities for families and school staff members to demonstrate skills and tools they have learned and receive feedback and coaching from each other, peers, and facilitators.
Learning	Enhance the capacity of BIPOC families and school staff members to collaborate to support student learning.
Relational	Foster a respectful and trusting relationship between home and school.

Source: City of Seattle Department of Education and Early Learning

In December 2023, five community-based organizations (CBOs), referenced in this report as Aligned Partners, were awarded grants to implement family engagement initiatives aligned with priorities identified through the collaborative grantmaking process. The priorities identified through the collaborative design of the RFI focused on:

- **Amplifying family voices** by sharing data with families, elevating leaders of color to positional authority, leveraging healthy community networks to bring families of color closer to decision making, hearing from community authentically, and leading from historical knowledge of local context
- **Meeting basic needs** by having a strong focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion; providing access to mental health resources; and connecting to service in schools

However, CCER shifted to focus more strongly on “sharing data with families” as a key priority for Aligned Partners, while continuing to advance other areas of work. In early 2024, CCER worked closely with each grantee to refine their program objectives and finalize work plans rooted in community-identified strategies.

Table 2. Overview of Aligned Partners (2024–25)

Aligned Partner	Focus population	Funded activities	ECI focus area(s)
East African Community Services	East African refugee and immigrant families in New Holly and SeaTac	Parent Leadership and Advocacy Institute: Weekly parent meetings, Town Halls with district representatives and professionals, and healing circles for immigrant parents with East African health practitioners.	• Learning
Open Doors for Multicultural Families	Students with IEPs and their parents/caregivers in Southeast and Southwest Seattle	Series of forums: 3-4 events annually, for students with IEPs and their parents/caregivers, on topics related to disabilities and student success.	• Learning • Relational
South King County Discipline Coalition	Families and youth of color in South King County; BIPOC families involved in school disciplinary efforts	5-Part Know Your Rights series: Families learn about their rights to navigate the educational discipline system. Topics covered include Individual Education Plan (IEP), 504-Disability Plan, Office of the Education Ombuds Attendance Policy, Appeals Process, and School Discipline.	• Learning
Villa Comunitaria	Low-income, immigrant Latine families who lack legal status in the USA or families have mixed immigration status that live in Seattle	Somos Familia (We are Family) series: Parents of students in grades 9 through 11 at Chief Sealth High School learned how to navigate the Seattle School system, support their children’s academic success, and be an advocate for their children. Families also learned about issues affecting students’ emotional health.	• Learning • Developmental
Washington State Parent Ambassadors	Head Start families, over 60% of whom are BIPOC, and alumni of the Parent Ambassador program who reside in the Roadmap region	Family Voice Power advocacy trainings: 5–7 session based on the Parent Ambassador Program curriculum to parents within the Seattle School District starting with the lowest income/most racially diverse elementary schools and build a small cadre of BIPOC parent/family leaders through a series of forums, coaching, and training.	• Developmental

Source: Education Northwest evaluation. ECI = Equitable Communities Initiative

To foster alignment and shared learning throughout the funding cycle, CCER and the PLT have convened Aligned Partner staff members in quarterly meetings. These gatherings provide a space for grantees to share progress updates, exchange insights, and receive ongoing support related to equitable family engagement practices.

Evaluation approach

EDNW worked closely with CCER to design an evaluation plan focused on understanding the experiences and outcomes of Aligned Partner staff members and families involved in community-based efforts to strengthen family-school partnerships.

The original evaluation timeline spanned from 2023 to 2024. In 2023, EDNW worked with CCER to co-develop an evaluation plan grounded in the needs and priorities of the DEEL initiative. The plan was guided by a multi-level empowerment framework and aimed to examine change across three levels:

- **Individual:** Aligned Partners experience benefits from participating in the collaborative design process, including mindset shifts, improved skills, and behavior changes
- **Programmatic:** Aligned Partners center family voice in the development and delivery of their family engagement programming, which can include adaptation to program implementation
- **Community:** Family participants experience benefits from their engagement in Aligned Partner programming, like new skills, increased confidence, or stronger relationships with educators

In spring 2024, the evaluation team intended to engage families and Aligned Partners in follow-up data collection, including follow-up focus groups, outcome surveys with families, to learn more about the program activities and outcomes. However, due to the time needed to recruit participants and launch programming, Aligned Partners postponed the data collection to spring 2025.

This report builds on previous learning and deliverables from the evaluation. In particular, it includes findings from a slide deck shared in November 2024, which summarized key individual-level takeaways from volunteer Aligned Partners who helped design the RFI for the Aligned Partner grant. Importantly, while some Aligned Partners organizations participated in the RFI design process (e.g., volunteer Aligned Partners), only a few were selected for the grant. However, we learned in the initial conversations with these partners that the experiences did not carry over, given that the staff members who participated were not involved in the family engagement programming that was eventually awarded or were engaged so minimally that it was not impactful. Two Aligned Partners participated in the collaborative design of the RFI and were eventually funded.

This evaluation focuses on the experiences of Aligned Partners and their family participants. A separate evaluation, led by CCER, focuses on the experiences of the RMP PLT.

The following questions guided the EDNW-led evaluation:

1. **Individual-level changes:** What are the experiences and outcomes of Aligned Partner staff member representatives who participate in the community conversations and collaborative processes to design the RFI?
2. **Programmatic-level changes:** How are the Aligned Partners using insights from families to inform the design and implementation of their training and services and address disparities for BIPOC and immigrant families?
3. **Community-level changes:** How are BIPOC and immigrant families and communities experiencing these trainings and services offered by Aligned Partners, and to what degree are these families and communities better off because of their participation?

Evaluation methods

The evaluation used multiple data sources to capture individual, programmatic, and community-level change.

Data collection methods included:

- **Artifact review:** Proposals and work plans submitted by the five Aligned Partners were reviewed to understand planned activities, priorities, and approaches to family engagement.
- **Focus groups with Aligned Partner staff members:** Cross-program focus groups were held with Aligned Partner staff members, including volunteer Aligned Partners who supported the development of the RFI. These discussions provided insight into the collaborative grantmaking process and perspectives of family input for family engagement programming.
- **Baseline and follow-up focus groups with Aligned Partner staff members:** Staff members from Aligned organizations participated in focus groups at the beginning and midpoint of the funding cycle. These sessions explored changes in beliefs, practices, and program design related to family engagement.
- **Focus groups with families:** Family members from each Aligned organization were invited to participate in focus groups to share their perspectives on the relevance, accessibility, and impact of engagement efforts.

Importantly, while several organizations participated in the RFI design process as volunteer Aligned Partners, only a few were ultimately selected for the grant. Early conversations with staff members revealed that the perspectives from the RFI design phase were not carried into implementation, as the staff members involved in developing the RFI were not the same individuals leading the funded programming. As a result, most awarded Aligned Partners were unable to speak to the RFI design experience.

For this reason, the evaluation draws from two distinct groups of Aligned Partners:

- **Volunteer Aligned Partners**, whose experiences during the RFI design process informed our understanding of individual-level changes, such as shifts in mindset and views on equity
- **Funded Aligned Partners**, whose implementation of family engagement programming informed our understanding of programmatic and community-level changes

The evaluation plan was intentionally adapted as part of a broader evaluation capacity-building effort, responding to real-time feedback from Aligned Partners. As Aligned Partner organizations required more time to recruit families into their programs, the timing and ownership of certain data collection activities shifted.

To support this transition, EDNW developed data collection tools that CCER and Aligned Partners could implement directly with families. These included monitoring reports and family surveys designed to capture information about participating families and early outcomes. EDNW also participated in one of the quarterly meetings to gather feedback from Aligned Partners on the data collection tools, helping ensure that the tools were accessible, aligned with program goals, and respectful of Aligned Partners' capacity. These adjustments reflect an intentional shift toward shared ownership of data and learning and helped ensure that data collection aligned with the pace of Aligned Partners program implementation.

The table below summarizes the focus group activities conducted as part of the evaluation.

Table 3. Focus group participants and sessions (2023–2025)

Group	Timeline	Number of sessions	Number of participants	Number of organizations
Volunteer Aligned Partners	Fall 2023	3	6	11
Aligned Partner (Baseline)	Spring 2024	5	14	5
Aligned Partner (Follow-up)	Spring 2025	5	10	5
Family Participants	Spring 2025	4	15	4

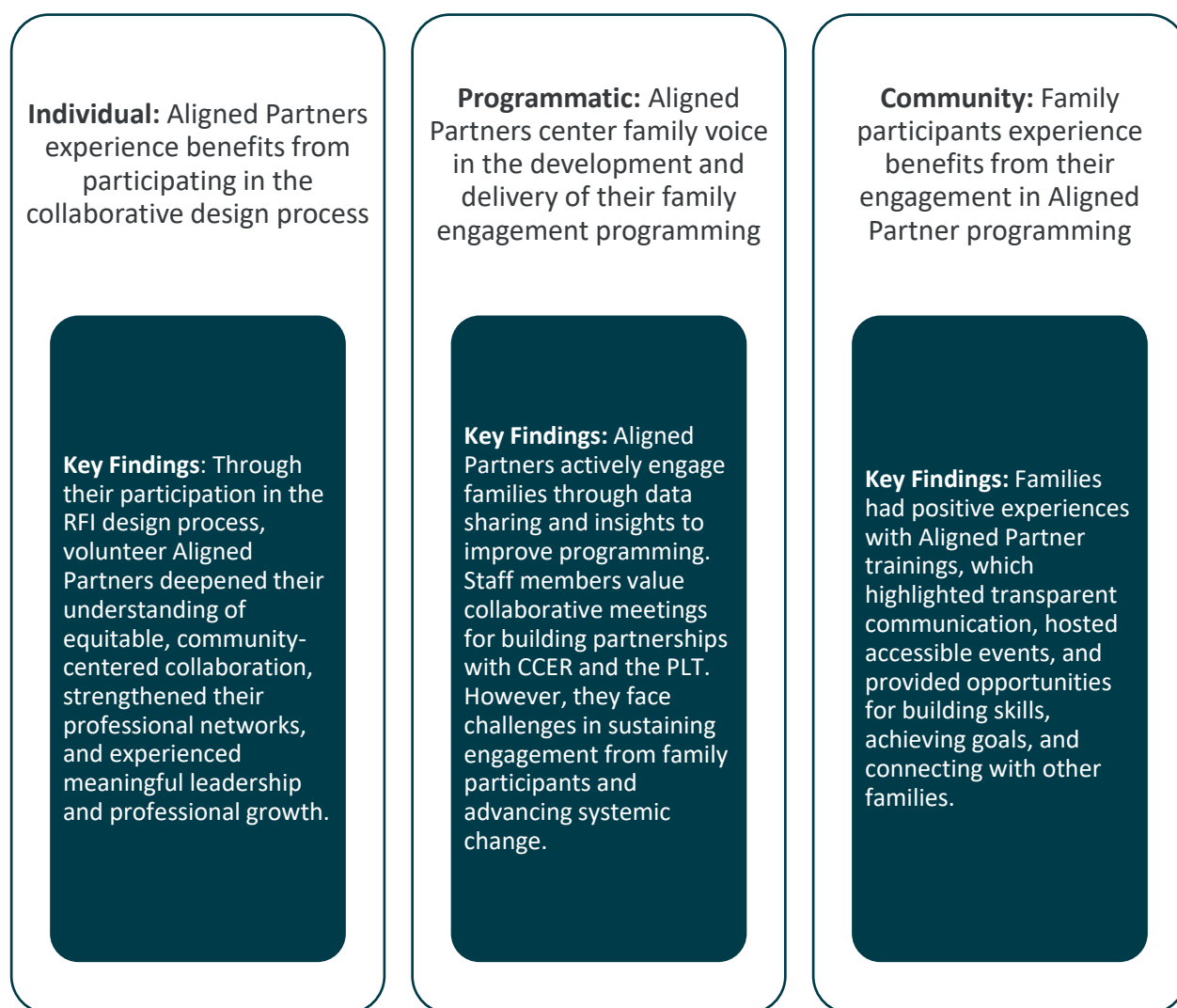
Source: Education Northwest

Evaluation Findings

This section presents overarching findings across all phases of the evaluation process, including the RFI design process and Aligned Partner program implementation across Aligned Partner organizations (see Table 2). The findings are organized by the three change levels, which are individual, programmatic, and community, and informed by multiple data sources, including document review, focus groups with Aligned Partner staff members, and family participants. While the main report focuses on common themes across the initiative, program-specific summaries with additional detail can be found in the appendix.

A high-level summary below provides a snapshot of key insights.

Figure 2. Key insights for individual, programmatic, and community-level changes



Source: Education Northwest evaluation

Individual-level findings: Volunteer Aligned Partners gained deep collaboration skills, stronger networks, and leadership growth through the RFI design process

Volunteer Aligned Partner staff members described their involvement in the collaborative RFI design process (Spring 2023) as a transformative professional experience. Through experiences of inclusive collaboration and authentic community engagement, volunteer Aligned Partners strengthened their capacity to lead in partnership with families.

Volunteer Aligned Partners gained a deeper understanding of equitable, community-centered collaboration with families. Aligned Partner staff members consistently emphasized the value of participating in a process that prioritized inclusion and equity from the start. CCER facilitators intentionally created a welcoming and respectful space that allowed participants to feel heard, supported, and safe to contribute their perspectives. This environment was significant for staff members who were not previously invited to participate in similar decision-making processes.

Staff members also noted that the collaborative approach embodied power sharing. That is, decisions were not top-down, but made collectively among Aligned Partner staff members, parent leaders, and facilitators. Many described the process as organic and evolving, which felt both refreshing and, at times, challenging. While some experienced initial discomfort with the lack of structure, they ultimately found the experience rewarding, appreciating the trust that was placed in them to co-create something meaningful. This style of collaboration, grounded in shared leadership, gave Aligned Partner staff members a deeper appreciation for what equitable, community-centered processes can look like in practice.

“At the very beginning we weren’t always sure where we were going, but the support in the room and the collaborative space drew us back. When you’re developing a truly authentic collaborative process, you may not have all the things to say, and that’s fine. The more we hung around, it became clear.”

- Aligned Partner who participated in the collaborative RFI design process

Volunteer Aligned Partners gained stronger networks and a commitment to community-led engagement. The design process offered Aligned Partner staff members a fundamentally different community engagement experience that centered on authentic collaboration rather than tokenistic input. Staff members frequently described their work with the PLT as a powerful learning moment, offering a new model for meaningfully including community

voice. Many shared that they had not previously participated in grantmaking processes where parents and families held leadership roles, and they found the experience deeply instructive.

In addition, the design process created space for building new relationships across organizations. Bringing together a diverse group of Aligned Partner staff members allowed participants to learn from peers, reflect on shared challenges, and consider the unique needs of smaller grassroots organizations. This exposure encouraged greater attention to accessibility, equity in participation, and collective responsibility. As a result, staff members left the process not only with stronger networks but also with a renewed commitment to designing family engagement efforts that are inclusive and community-led.

“[In the past] we would listen to a parent group or parent panel, but then it’s the educators or the people in charge who ultimately make the decision. And with Road Map, it was really the parents driving it. That was one of the things that was so impressive about working together.”

- Aligned Partner who participated in the collaborative RFI design process

Aligned Partners gained new leadership and professional growth. Participation in the RFI process contributed to Aligned Partner staff members’ professional growth. Many reported developing new facilitation and leadership skills by observing and learning from the facilitators’ strategies for engagement, consensus-building, and group reflection. These practices, like modeling inclusive language, setting clear group agreements, and building space for storytelling, are now being adapted for use within their own organizations.

“The takeaway was really what the facilitators modeled in terms of how to keep the group cohesive, how to keep the group honest with each other, and that it does take time and you need to offer each other grace when it takes longer or if what you had hoped to accomplish needs to change or that you need to take a pause. If I were to engage the community, I’d want to model it a lot on what I learned through this experience. It’s challenging work and I saw it done in a very effective way.”

- Aligned Partner who participated in the collaborative RFI design process

Staff members also deepened their understanding of relationship-based engagement strategies and the critical role of accessibility, including the need for translation and interpretation services. These learnings affirmed the importance of meeting families where they are and honoring language and cultural identities. For some participants, the experience had a longer-term impact, inspiring them to pursue new professional opportunities or leadership roles within their communities. By

contributing meaningfully to the design of a funding process, they gained confidence in their own expertise and a stronger sense of agency as community leaders.

Programmatic-level findings: Aligned Partners use family insights to improve programming but face challenges in sustaining engagement and systemic change

Aligned Partners were funded to provide direct services, education, and support to families throughout Seattle. While Aligned Partners differed in their content and focus populations, all five Aligned Partners provided workshops and training for families. As part of this grant, CCER held quarterly meetings with all Aligned Partners and the PLT, which focused on gathering, using, and sharing data.

Aligned Partners described using insights from families to inform the design and implementation of their training and services. While some Aligned Partners have always gathered feedback and shared data with families, other Aligned Partners described new ways in which they are collecting feedback from families, sharing data, and shifting their programming to align with community needs and priorities. Aligned Partners also described challenges they face, including capacity constraints and the limitations of one-time workshops. Overall, Aligned Partners report that the quarterly meetings facilitated by CCER and the PLT have been helpful. Still, some would like deeper collaboration and worry about the long-term sustainability of this work.

Aligned Partners gather and use family insights to ensure their programming is accessible and welcoming. Aligned Partners all reported that they gather and use feedback from families to inform their programming. Some partners have regular surveys asking families about what topics they would like covered in the workshops. Other partners check in with families informally to gather insights about how to design workshops.

Some Aligned Partners expressed that they are gathering and using family feedback in new and innovative ways. For example, one partner had not used surveys in the past and instead relied on informal feedback. Through their involvement with this grant and the full collective meetings, they are now regularly surveying families to have more systematic feedback. Some partners shared that their family participants don't always want to complete surveys, so they have developed creative, engaging ways to gather feedback (e.g., using Post-it notes to share highlights and areas for growth).

Another Aligned Partner shared that they are assembling a youth advisory board to complement their existing parent advisory board, and another shared that they are hiring family participants to

facilitate their trainings. Therefore, some Aligned Partners are moving beyond gathering family feedback and toward shared power and decision-making.

“When we have a gathering, it is asked of the community, what would you like to see? Are there any trainings that you can think of? And I think that’s really awesome because it shows that we do listen to the community.”

– Family member who participated in Aligned Partners programming

Based on feedback from families, Aligned Partners modified their trainings to meet the needs of families. For example, one partner shared that, recently, family priorities have shifted, and more families are interested in discussing immigration. Therefore, they have supplemented some of their curriculum and brought in guest speakers to ensure the content is relevant to families. Other partners have changed the timing or format of their workshops (e.g., virtual sessions, weekends) to accommodate changes in families’ schedules and holidays and to be more accessible. In another example, an Aligned Partner explained that while they originally had a PowerPoint presentation and a set plan for each training, they soon realized they needed to pivot and not share so much information at once.

“I realize you have to be patient. You can’t reach everything at once because you have to go at the pace of the parents that you’re serving.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

In general, Aligned Partners and families described their organizations as rooted in the needs and priorities of their community. While Aligned Partners’ methods of collecting feedback from families varied, they all described this as a priority.

Aligned Partners share information and make meaning of data with families.

Aligned Partners differ in how much they prioritize sharing data and what types of data they share with families. For some partners, supporting families in accessing and analyzing data is a fundamental aspect of their workshops. For other partners, they share information and data with families to support their advocacy efforts or ensure families understand the education system. Some Aligned Partners share facts about disproportionate discipline rates, inequities in graduation rates, and other statistics. Others share information about the education system in the United States and the rights that students and families have when navigating the special education process. These various forms of quantitative and qualitative data are shared with families to encourage them to advocate for their children and their community.

Partners also have different approaches to sharing data. For example, one partner described how, when sharing data, they emphasize storytelling and avoid sharing too many statistics, which could overwhelm participants.

“[Sharing data] is rooted a lot more in storytelling and just peer-to-peer sharing more so than it is academic data and numbers, because I think sometimes that can be a barrier.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Another partner discussed how they intentionally share data with families to avoid reinforcing deficit views of their community. If they are showing statistics, such as graduation rates, for example, they contextualize it to ensure that families understand the disparities reflect inequitable systems that need to change instead of student or family deficits. For all Aligned Partners, data are shared with families to support the goals of participants, which may include advocacy, navigating the IEP process, understanding the education system, and parenting.

Aligned Partners face challenges to sustained engagement and systemic change.

Aligned Partners described several challenges that they face. First, some staff members shared that their workshops on topics such as special education or leadership do not always meet the needs of families when participants have different expectations for the session or when they are in crisis. For example, some families may need individualized support with a specific issue with their children’s school. While a session about navigating the K-12 education system is generally helpful, some families may need more one-on-one support.

Another challenge some Aligned Partners recognized is the limitations of one-time workshops. While families can gain important information or skills, sustained engagement is needed to move from learning to action.

“It’s just a lot of new information, and I think a lot of learning is repetition. So just hearing something one time isn’t really enough to not only retain it but put it into practice. So, although everything was received positively and folks are engaged in that moment, it really is thinking about the follow through.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Aligned Partners also discussed how their organization’s limited capacity and staff member turnover can make sustaining this work challenging. Some partners developed plans for a series of workshops but then had changes in staff members and leadership, which forced them to adjust their plans. Finally, some partners also noted that, given the current political climate, many families

are not as comfortable attending in-person events. Partners described the importance of respecting families that are nervous about attending events. However, they noted that this climate has impacted their ability to reach families.

Aligned Partners appreciate the quarterly meetings facilitated by CCER, and many have developed partnerships from these meetings, but some request more opportunities for connection.

In general, staff members shared positive experiences with the quarterly meetings. Most shared that it was helpful to get together in person, and they appreciated the connections they have made with other Aligned Partners. Several partners shared that through this grant, they established or are in the process of establishing partnerships with other organizations. For example, Aligned Partners are co-hosting trainings or bringing in different Aligned Partners to present to their communities. Aligned Partners report that this is one of the most impactful parts of their engagement in this grant.

In addition, several partners expressed appreciation for the quarterly meetings and what they learned, especially about data.

“A lot of our families don’t want to do the surveys. And so, we learned in the collective how to uniquely capture that data in that space, make it fun, also letting families know how we’re using the data, why we’re using the data to hopefully get more people to participate in the surveys.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Some staff members shared that weekend meetings, while well-intentioned, often added strain by cutting into limited personal and family time. They expressed a need for more flexible, creative scheduling options to avoid burnout. Some partners expressed that they were not clear on the role of the PLT, and a few partners wondered if the PLT could have been more supportive with things such as helping with recruitment, volunteering at events, etc.

“How can this part of the [quarterly meetings with CCER and the PLT] support capacity more?”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Several Aligned Partners expressed a desire to learn more about what other Aligned Partners are doing throughout the year. Some requested more frequent communication from CCER, and others suggested a contact list, a shared Google Drive, or a calendar of all the workshops being held by Aligned Partners throughout the year.

“Even all the way through this project, I don’t have a very clear sense of what other people are doing.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

“Could there be a collective Aligned Partner calendar, and could we have a polls on what training and events are happening throughout the year? Could we support each other’s capacity within those events? And then could those volunteers maybe contribute to supporting the capacity of the events?”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Some Aligned Partners expressed concerns about the sustainability of the work, particularly as the current funding cycle is nearing its end. Staff members expressed a desire for longer-term funding to continue equity-focused, community-engaged work, especially during a time when equity-focused work is being threatened.

“With our current political landscape, certain community members feel like they have no value and are scared. Our work is needed more than ever.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Community-level findings: Families had positive experiences with Aligned Partner training and received support in building skills, achieving goals, and connecting with other families

In focus groups conducted with families from four of the five funded partner organizations in spring 2025, families who participated in Aligned Partner programming described the positive impact these workshops have had on their lives, including new skills, knowledge, and relationships that support them to meet their goals. Aligned Partners held workshops on topics such as Civics 101, knowing your rights related to school discipline, leadership, advocacy, navigating the IEP process, immigration, and understanding the education system in the United States.

Families shared positive experiences with the Aligned Partner workshops and appreciated transparent communication and accessible events. Family participants shared positive experiences of attending Aligned Partner trainings and workshops. Families described how clear communication, content in multiple languages, culturally welcoming environments, and accessible events (e.g., convenient location and time, transportation and childcare provided, etc.) enabled them to attend these events and build trust with Aligned Partners.

In particular, families shared that they have developed relationships with Aligned Partners because of consistent, timely, and transparent communication.

“[The Aligned Partner] shares everything with us. That’s how they gain my trust. Everything that’s going on, they let us know. And everything we need, they help us with. And that’s where the trust comes from, when somebody shares everything with you and what’s going on, and how’s your kids doing, and what they need to do or what they need, and how we can support them at home. So that’s why I have my trust in them.”

– Family member who participated in Aligned Partners programming

Aligned Partners and families described how welcoming, in-person environments that align with cultural norms can enhance family participation and comfort.

“Zoom, it’s nice, but culturally it’s better when they come in person. So that’s one thing how we adapt. You drink tea and you talk.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Families report increased knowledge and skills, which help them meet their

goals. Families who have participated in Aligned Partner workshops described how they learned more about the education system, special education, parenting, advocacy, and how to support their children. Families shared that they appreciate the content they learned at these workshops, which helped them meet their goals. Several family participants described attending multiple Aligned Partner events and workshops because they were so informative.

“I don’t like to miss any of them because each class is different. I learned something new in each class. There’s a lot of information, but there’s always something that we’re able to absorb so that we can be better parents.”

– Family member who participated in Aligned Partners programming

Some families described gaining confidence to advocate for their children with their children’s teacher. Families reported learning the tools and strategies to navigate difficult conversations. Through their involvement with Aligned Partners, some families feel more confident in leadership positions and pursuing educational and career opportunities.

“[The Aligned Partner has] given me the opportunity to be in a lot of different spaces that I normally wouldn’t be in. They made me feel confident. I have facilitated events, which I think is awesome. I have been given opportunities to be in a leadership position and/or building my leadership skills, especially in advocacy.”

– Family member who participated in Aligned Partners programming

Some family participants shared that they thought they would be learning things to support their children, but they ended up learning how to support their entire community. Families described sharing information they learned at Aligned Partner workshops with other parents and people in their network. In addition to trainings, some Aligned Partners also offer individualized support or referrals for families as they navigate issues at their children’s school.

“Just knowing that I have all these different resources and I want to say people behind me supporting me, it makes me feel like I can do this.”

– Family member who participated in Aligned Partners programming

While all the Aligned Partners provided training and support for parents and caregivers, a few also have programming for students. Family participants described how their children have benefited from the support from the Aligned Partner through tutoring and training so that students understand the education system, their rights, and how they can prepare for college and careers.

Families developed relationships with one another that helped support their goals. In addition to learning new information and skills, families also described building strong relationships through their engagement with Aligned Partners. Some families found a sense of community through their engagement with an Aligned Partner. Families valued hearing others’ stories, meeting like-minded people, and building relationships that contributed to emotional resilience and collective learning. One parent described the Aligned Partner and the community built there as a “second family” to them. These findings highlight the importance of trust and relationships for sustained engagement and community-level change.

“Some benefits are being able to find other people in the community. It’s been nice to be able to meet people in the community and be able to build community and find people that are like-minded and then also be able to hear other people’s experiences and things to look out for.”

– Family member who participated in Aligned Partners programming

Conclusion

Bright spots

Aligned partner staff members and family participants appreciated the support and vital services and trainings that were provided through the Aligned Partner grant. Families shared that they learned helpful information and skills, which have supported them in navigating the education system, advocating for their children, and achieving their goals. Furthermore, families described meaningful relationships that they have built with other families and with Aligned Partner staff members through their engagement with Aligned Partners. Aligned Partners appreciated the connections made through the collective, and many would like to deepen relationships and build solidarity across organizations to advance educational equity in the Seattle area.

Limitations

Due to delays in implementation and new developments regarding Aligned Partners' timeline of engagement with families, we shifted the data ownership of expected data collection, including a reporting template, family survey, family exit ticket, and technical memos to CCER and all Aligned Partners to support their capacity building. However, these data collection activities have not been completed or administered and are therefore not included in this report. Thus, the findings in this report are based on document reviews of Aligned Partners proposals and updated work plans as well as focus groups with Aligned Partners and family participants. Unfortunately, we are unable to draw from family survey data or reporting from Aligned Partners on the number of families served through their trainings.

Additionally, the current evaluation collected early outcomes and experiences that occurred during the initial stages of the grant process. That is, Aligned Partners were funded in 2024 and may continue to engage families for up to three years, past the point at which the current evaluation concludes (June 2025). Since Aligned Partners will continue to work with families after the evaluation period, important long-term impacts, ongoing challenges, and evolving relationships may not be captured, which could limit a full understanding of the impact of the DEEL initiative among Aligned Partners and families in Seattle.

Future considerations

Key considerations for CBOs working towards educational equity with BIPOC families. Staff members and families shared lessons learned and recommendations for Aligned Partner organizations:

- In-person and paper-based data collection methods often work better for gathering input from families, as assuming digital fluency can create barriers.
- In-person and virtual options tailored to the season and family preferences are essential for sustained engagement for participants.
- Families recommend expanding programming to include more families, and extending the timeline of programming so that families can participate for multiple years.
- Families recommend ensuring that all events are based on topics that are priorities for families and are accessible to diverse families (e.g., in multiple languages, at a convenient location and time, etc.).
- Aligned Partner staff members reflected on how building trust requires time, patience, transparent communication, and meeting families where they are. For instance, staff members may need to adapt day-to-day programming to address immediate concerns.
- Staff members acknowledged the need to more intentionally include youth in shaping programming. A key lesson was the importance of developing structures, such as a youth advisory board, to ensure that youth perspectives guide future priorities.
- Aligned Partner staff members also shared the importance of including family participants as facilitators.

“If it’s just service people talking to community members, it doesn’t always meet the mark. So, having that lived experience layered into the facilitation team, I think is important.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

Key considerations for CCER and future convening partners. Aligned Partners shared several suggestions for CCER that can be applied to future backbone partners.

- Aligned Partners expressed a desire for deeper collaboration across organizations and cultural groups to foster community learning, belonging, and exposure to different communities. Staff members suggested organizing joint events where families, not just staff members from multiple programs or cultures, come together to build community.
- Aligned Partners found the quarterly meetings beneficial and would like to continue those meetings to build collaborative opportunities. Some staff members see value in peer learning and would benefit from more opportunities to exchange strategies and successes beyond periodic meetings.

“It was good because you get a sense of, ‘I’m not the only one doing this work,’ you see other people doing it... ‘Hey, what do you do better than me? Maybe what I can do better than you.’ But it’d be nice if maybe out of that meeting continue more outside of that.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

- Some partners suggested that the quarterly meetings could be more targeted and action-focused. For example, a portion of the quarterly meetings could be focused on an advocacy action around a relevant topic that is a priority for families across the Aligned Partners.
- Build on the technical assistance provided during the quarterly meetings (e.g., street data workshop) by building evaluation and learning capacity within CBOs. That is, integrate capacity building of data collection and analysis skills among funded partners to promote ownership and actionable learning. Aligned Partners expressed a desire to collect and use mixed methods and stories from families.

Key considerations for DEEL in strengthening educational equity through CBO family focused programming. Aligned Partners shared several suggestions for DEEL regarding future funding opportunities. Additionally, EDNW drew from the evaluation findings to make recommendations as well.

- Continue to partner with a backbone organization to lead a community-centered process. As with CCER’s role in this initiative, the backbone organization can lead collaborative RFI development, support grantees, and facilitate shared learning spaces. Funding agencies should invest in organizations that have deep roots in the community and a track record of equity-focused facilitation.
- Aligned Partners noted that increased funding could support experiential learning opportunities for caregivers that could supplement existing training. These hands-on, real-world experiences would allow families to apply the knowledge and skills gained through workshops in more meaningful and practical ways. For example, community resource tours, such as visiting libraries or health centers, could increase families’ awareness of services and how to access them.
- Aligned Partners emphasized the importance of having a clear, shared purpose for the grant, particularly one focused on disrupting systemic inequities in the education system, such as those seen and experienced by families and staff members. Some recommended establishing a baseline level of understanding and alignment among all Aligned Partners about what needs to change to achieve equitable outcomes, supported by data that reflect those systemic challenges.

“If the goal of the Aligned Partners is to disrupt what’s happening with the Seattle Public Schools and how racist... underfunded, everything there needs to be regular data points talking about that.”

– Staff member from funded Aligned Partners who provided programming

- One partner suggested that CCER and DEEL consider ways to lessen the reporting burden for Aligned Partners (e.g., sharing updates through a meeting instead of a report). Overall, Aligned Partners appreciate the quarterly meetings, value the connections made, and are interested in ways to deepen relationships, engagement, and shared purpose.
- Design flexible funding structures that allow for community-led adaptations. Aligned Partners stressed the importance of reshaping programming to address families’ pressing concerns and challenges with school systems. Create opportunities and systems (e.g., biannual progress reports) for funded organizations to update their work plans as needed to meet the needs of their families while continuing to fulfil the overall mission of the funding initiative.

Implications for community-based family engagement work

Findings from this evaluation suggest that CBOs play an important role in supporting families to advocate for their children and engage with their children’s school. This aligns with research demonstrating the importance and impact of partnering with CBOs (Baldrige et al., 2017). This evaluation also points to several critical components of CBOs that enable them to effectively support families in meeting their goals and advancing community-level change. For example, CBOs should be flexible and accommodating to the needs and priorities of families that may shift over time. Ensuring that workshops and events are accessible and that the organization’s content and practices are culturally responsive is critical. In addition, relationships and trust are essential to equitable collaborations (Bryk, 2010; Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru, 2020) and CBO staff members should prioritize both. Lastly, while Aligned Partners and families described innovative ways in which they gather and use input from families, research suggests that organizations should not just ask for feedback from families, but also provide authentic opportunities for shared power and decision-making (Ishimaru, 2020).

CBOs provide critical and culturally relevant services, support, and community for families as they navigate the educational system and advocate for their children. Family participants described the transformative impact that their engagement with Aligned Partners had on them, their families, and their communities. In a time when equity-focused initiatives and programs are being threatened, support for BIPOC-led and community-rooted CBOs is even more critical.

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Appendix A. Aligned Partner Organizational Profiles

This appendix includes profiles of the five funded Aligned Partner organizations: East African Community Services, Open Door Multicultural Families, South King County Discipline Coalition, Villa Comunitaria, and Washington Parent Ambassadors.

Each profile highlights how the organization designed and implemented its family engagement programming, with attention to how family input influenced activities and services. The profiles also summarize:

- How staff members shared data with families and how families used this information
- Reported family outcomes, such as stronger relationships with other families and school staff members
- Family-identified best practices, including clear, consistent, and accessible communication
- Challenges and family recommendations for improvement programming, if any
- Lessons learned by staff members during program implementation

These profiles provide deeper insight into how each organization incorporated family-centered principles into organizational practices and services, and what emerged from those efforts.

East African Community Services

East African Community Services (EACS) supports East African refugee and immigrant families in New Holly and SeaTac. Through its Parent Leadership and Advocacy Institute, the organization offers weekly parent meetings, Town Halls with district leaders and professionals, and healing circles led by East African health practitioners to support immigrant parents' advocacy and well-being.

Parents receive coaching, training, and resources to stay engaged in their children's education. Parents from East African Community Services (EACS) are supported through trainings on advocacy, child development, special education, and navigating school systems. EACS staff members coach parents to be active participants in their children's education and connect them to tools like apps to monitor their children's grades. Parents regularly attend monthly meetings to learn about educational topics, receive resources such as food and supplies, and build community. These meetings provide a space to share concerns and feel supported. Staff members regularly bring in school district officials, including enrollment directors and teachers, to speak with families.

“[EACS staff members] train us on how to advocate for our children, how to reach teachers... apply for scholarships...”

– EACS family member who participated in programming

Families feel safe sharing feedback, and staff members respond by adjusting programs to meet their needs.

Families feel comfortable voicing their needs and concerns, and according to families, EACS program staff members are responsive often making specific changes to programming, staffing, or support services based on family input. Families feel safe sharing personal stories, feedback, and suggestions, and staff members are seen as approachable and caring. EACS staff members make changes to program timing and format in response to cultural or seasonal needs, such as during Ramadan or winter months, to ensure accessibility and sustained family engagement. Families had no recommendations for EACS staff members or the program, noting their concerns are addressed promptly and they feel comfortable sharing issues with staff members as soon as they arise.

“[EACS staff members] promised: Families are the number one voice. Families are always welcomed. We hear their voices.”

– EACS family member who participated in programming

Staff members use culturally responsive approaches to collect and share data with families.

Surveys and formal data tools are made accessible and culturally responsive by offering translations and ensuring language alignment, helping families fully understand and participate in data collection efforts. To support these efforts, EACS staff members gather meaningful input through conversations and informal interactions, which are more effective than traditional methods such as paperwork and surveys for this community. The data is used to identify needs, inform programming decisions, and shape services that reflect the lived experiences and priorities of the community. EACS staff members emphasize clarity and relevance when sharing data with families by often break down complex information, such as statistics, in ways that are understandable. This provides the opportunity for families to reflect on and act based on the information.

“But when we break it down and we speak to them about how you get to that number, what it’s comprised of... And then we also use our language skills for [our families] to actually understand it in their language, it makes [the information] more personal. Then it’s not just a number or statistics in English. And then we can get to what we can do about it.”

– EACS staff member who provided programming

Families report strong peer connections and greater school involvement. EACS

families describe building meaningful peer relationships through program opportunities to connect with other parents, which has led to friendships, community engagement, and mutual support in parenting. Program spaces have fostered peer-to-peer learning and empowerment, with more experienced parents supporting others to navigate school systems and advocate for their children. Parents are becoming more involved and vocal advocates in school and district-level activities, participating in conferences, committees, and school board meetings.

“Some of [the parents] tell me, ‘I went to a school conference meeting... before I didn’t because [I believed] the teacher is always right.’”

– EACS staff member who provided programming

EACS builds family commitment through clear communication, bilingual content, and culturally welcoming environments.

Staff members at EACS have built trust with families by providing consistent, timely, and transparent communication help, which builds strong commitment from families. Other factors that support sustained engagement include delivering content in both English and Somali, ensuring that all parents can participate and understand important information. Adapting formats and creating welcoming, in-person environments that align with cultural norms enhances family participation and comfort.

“Zoom is nice, it’s great, but culturally it is better when [families] come in person. There is more engagement. They drink tea and talk, that’s what we do outside of the program, so we bring it into this space.”

– EACS staff member who provided programming

Staff members learned that building trust with families takes time and flexibility.

Lessons learned from staff members include recognizing that building trust requires time, patience, and meeting families where they are. For instance, staff members may need to adapt day-to-day programming to address immediate concerns. Additionally, assuming digital fluency can create barriers, so in-person and paper-based data collection methods often work better for gathering input. Finally, offering both in-person and virtual options tailored to the season and family preferences is essential for sustained engagement.

“[We learned] that we needed to do the feedback surveys in person with paper, instead of relying on online surveys for our families. We made assumptions about how tech-savvy they were, and so finding alternatives was not that difficult. Also making sure we have programs scheduled in person during the warmer months because families are usually out of the country in the colder months. Also, they are more uplifted and full of energy [during the warmer months].”

– EACS staff member who provided programming

Open Doors for Multicultural Families

Open Doors for Multicultural Families (ODMF) engages and partners with culturally and linguistically diverse individuals with developmental or intellectual disabilities, along with their families, using a cultural brokerage model to navigate services, provide specialized programming, and advocate for system change.

Families receive support to navigate the special education process. As part of the DEEL-funded Aligned Partner grant, ODMF offered a series of three workshops for a cohort of families to navigate the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process. The first workshop covered the history of special education, and the second workshop focused on how to advocate for a child with an IEP, including attending IEP meetings, developing goals, and discussing services. The third workshop addressed the specific needs and questions of families who have participated in the series of workshops. Every workshop includes childcare, food, and interpretation.

We spoke with staff members from Open Doors for Multicultural Families, but due to capacity constraints, we were unable to speak with family participants from ODMF. Therefore, we share the perspectives of staff members but do not have any findings from family members.

Families inform some workshops. While staff members determined the content of the first two workshops was determined before they began, the topics of the third session were decided by the family participants. ODMF gathers feedback and input from families participating in the three-part workshop series and seeks out guest speakers or content experts to share information with families about relevant topics related to special education and disability rights.

“That third session is really targeted to their [caregivers’] interests. And so, this past series we saw that families really wanted to understand employment services and what does it look like for a child with a disability to move from the education system into employment. So, we brought in some guest speakers from that service.”

– ODMF staff member who provided programming

ODMF shares data with families but recommend a person-centered approach.

While ODMF trainings provide families with a lot of information, ODMF staff members discussed some of the challenges with collecting, sharing, and interpreting data with families. For example, they shared that post-event surveys can be challenging when families are already overwhelmed by the amount of information from the session. Staff members shared that when families are in crisis or dealing with a very challenging situation with a child with a disability, being presented with state-level data or being asked to complete a survey can be a challenge.

“There are so many layers of complexities with what [parents] bring to the sessions that I think if we take that systemic approach versus a community approach and just start shooting off numbers and outcomes and it puts them into a fight or flight response and they’re not always able to receive or visualize the success for their scenario. And so, we try to really make it rooted in the people.”

– ODMF staff member who provided programming

To address some of these challenges, ODMF adopts a universal-design-for-learning approach, a person-centered approach, and grounds all data in a clear understanding of the “why” (e.g., why is this information or data important, and how will knowing it help you to support your children).

Staff members shared that families received relevant information about the IEP process. While we did not speak to family participants directly, ODMF staff members shared that through their workshop series, families learned how to better navigate the IEP process, which can be incredibly challenging, especially for multilingual families. ODMF staff members shared that they endeavor to provide accessible information for families in their home language so that caregivers can advocate for children with disabilities.

Staff members emphasized the importance of ensuring events and content are accessible. ODMF staff members shared that having multilingual facilitators and ensuring that all trainings are accessible to families by providing food and childcare is essential. Staff members also emphasized the importance of scaffolding information, especially when supporting families in

navigating the complex IEP process. For example, instead of relying only on text, ODMF staff members explained that they attempt to use visuals and stories to share information.

The limited capacity of Aligned Partners and other organizations is a challenge.

Staff members noted that one challenge to collaboration is the limited capacity of community-based organizations and schools, given funding constraints and the significant needs in various communities. For example, ODMF staff members shared that they originally intended to hold events at schools to meet families where they are. However, staff members found that school partners were unable to recruit families, so they expanded their outreach to recruit additional families.

“We thought in the last year, embedding in schools was going to be the best way to get people to engage and to show up. But the capacity of schools to recruit and bring in families was actually really limited.”

– ODMF staff member who provided programming

Staff members spoke to the Importance of location and including those with lived experience in trainings.

We were unable to speak with any family participants from ODMF. However, staff members shared some lessons they learned. First, the location of the workshop is important. In some cases, it may be most effective to hold training sessions at schools where families send their children. In other cases, a community center, or another space where families come together may be a better option. Additionally, some families prefer virtual or hybrid training options. ODMF staff members also shared the importance of including families and those with the lived experience of having a disability or having a child with a disability as organizers and facilitators of workshops.

“[We are] working to embed parents as part of the education team and also self-advocates with lived experience and disability as part of the education team as well. Because we find that if...it’s just service people talking to community members, it doesn’t always meet the mark. So, having that lived experience layered into the facilitation team, I think is important.”

– ODMF staff member who provided programming

South King County Discipline Coalition

South King County Discipline Coalition (SKCDC) serves BIPOC families and youth in South King County who are involved in school disciplinary processes. Their five-part Know Your Rights series

educates families on navigating the educational discipline system, covering topics such as IEPs, 504 Plans, attendance policies, the appeals process, and the role of the Office of the Education Ombuds.

Families received training on school discipline processes and learned to advocate for their children's rights.

Both families and staff members from South King County Discipline Coalition highlighted the value of Know Your Rights trainings as a core component of the program. These sessions empowered families and youth with critical information on school discipline, special education services (e.g., 504/IEP), and the appeals process, emphasizing the importance of informed advocacy. Participants described activities focused on civic engagement and political literacy, such as voting education, election panels, and trainings encouraging community members to get involved in school decision-making.

“We’ve done the knowing your rights when it comes to... like if you’re trying to fight a suspension or an expulsion, the steps that are taken and what your rights are in the timeline.”

– SKCDC family member who participated in programming

New training topics were delivered based on the interests of family participants.

Families emphasized that SKCDC regularly invites community input on programming. Feedback is gathered during meetings and in informal conversations, showing a consistent effort to co-create content based on participants’ needs and interests. Similarly, staff members shared that direct feedback from families and partners led to meaningful changes in programming. Notably, the addition of the advocacy day training and a shift toward intergenerational learning were driven by community input about gaps in applying knowledge in real-life situations. SKCDC adapted how they collect feedback in response to participation patterns. For example, when families were not completing surveys, staff members shifted to small group discussions to encourage verbal input and a deeper dialogue.

“We had to learn from our families, a lot of our families don’t want to do the surveys. And so, we learned... how to uniquely capture that data in that space, make it fun, also letting families know how we’re using the data.”

– SKCDC staff member who provided programming

While disciplinary data were shared with families, SKCDC staff members underscored the need to support this information sharing with advocacy training.

Staff members emphasized that sharing discipline and demographic data helped families realize their experiences were not isolated. This awareness fostered solidarity and strengthened

parents' sense of urgency and capacity to advocate for systemic change. Staff members reflected on the importance of challenging the norms regarding who is allowed to analyze and act on data. They aimed to equip families, particularly BIPOC families, with both data and historical context to reclaim their voice in educational advocacy.

“We share disciplinary data from OSPI and Road Map Project. [Families] have an eye-opening experience, [when they see these statistics] and they realize that their experiences are not their own. In reality, what [they] are experiencing, other people are experiencing the same thing. But we’re still fighting against the system. That’s where the advocacy training helps. [Families can] bring this up to [their] school board or support the school district when [they’re] looking at the data and the numbers.”

– SKCDC staff member who provided programming

Families gained leadership skills and built partnerships with other parents.

Families described gaining the confidence to advocate for their children in school settings, often with the support and encouragement of SKCDC staff members. They were equipped with tools and strategies to effectively navigate difficult conversations and advocate for their children's needs. Families shared that participation in coalition activities helped them grow personally and professionally, including taking on leadership roles, speaking publicly, and applying for positions they previously thought were out of reach. Families found a sense of belonging and support through the coalition. They valued hearing others' stories, meeting like-minded people, and building relationships that contributed to emotional resilience and collective learning.

“The coalition has given me the opportunity to be in a lot of different spaces that I normally wouldn’t be in. They made me feel confident. I have facilitated events, which I think is awesome. I have been given the opportunities to be in a leadership position and/or building my leadership skills, especially in advocacy.”

– SKCDC family member who participated in programming

Accessible communication and culturally safe environments were key to building trust and engagement.

Families emphasized the importance of accessible communication strategies that included printed materials, digital updates, and word-of-mouth outreach. Partners noted that creating culturally responsive and emotionally safe environments was foundational for participation. Trust and authentic engagement grew when families felt welcomed, seen, and respected. Furthermore, success was linked to being able to adapt program activities based on community feedback. Staff members shared how they adjusted their plans (e.g., adding

advocacy components) in response to what families requested, which is an approach supported by flexible grant structures. Finally, SKCDC staff members shared that the collective meeting with other Aligned Partners were beneficial for learning about how others serve their communities and gathering ideas for data collection strategies.

“I love that the grant supports you being able to pivot... that was really supportive.”

– SKCDC staff member who provided programming

Families want financial and healthcare rights education; staff members emphasize the importance of youth leadership advisory structures. Families recommend providing financial education, especially focused on practical skills (e.g., budgeting, savings, navigating systems) and building generational wealth. Families expressed a need for more education about healthcare rights, including how to advocate for themselves within medical systems, especially when they feel mistreated. These requests were made in hopes of addressing equity and empowerment issues faced by BIPOC families.

As for staff members, they acknowledged the need to more intentionally include youth in shaping programming. They recognized that while youth are the reason for the coalition’s work, they had not always been positioned as leaders. A key lesson was the importance of developing structures, like a youth advisory board, to ensure youth perspectives guide future priorities.

“The thing that I want to change the most is [how we engage] youth. Youth are the nucleus of our work—why we all came together. Why aren’t they also being that guiding ship where we need to go and the support that they see is needed as well?”

– SKCDC staff member who provided programming

Villa Comunitaria

Villa Comunitaria supports students and families in Seattle’s South Park neighborhood, Southwest Seattle, and surrounding areas. Villa Comunitaria offers workshops in Spanish and primarily works with Latinx immigrant families. Their programs help families navigating the complexities of the United States’ immigration, housing, health, education, and legal systems so that they can thrive and prosper.

Villa Comunitaria developed their Somos Familia (“We Are Family”) program to address the needs of families that directly affect academic success, system navigation, and parent empowerment. The multiple barriers faced by youth and their families have contributed to Latino students having some

of the lowest graduation rates in South Seattle schools, currently at 66%. Participants gain valuable insights from experts on how to support their teens in graduating successfully and pursuing college or alternative career paths. Through the program, they also build meaningful connections with other parents, teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, and the broader school network. Somos Familia provides a welcoming space to explore the Seattle school system and learn effective strategies for advocating on behalf of their children.

Families and students attend workshops on topics including mental health, college and career readiness, and leadership. As part of the DEEL-funded Aligned Partners grant, Villa Comunitaria offered a series of trainings and workshops for a cohort of families and students on topics including mental health, college and career readiness, and leadership. Sessions were held primarily in Spanish, as all Villa Comunitaria staff members are fluent in both English and Spanish. Villa Comunitaria reaches out to family participants through phone calls, flyers at their focus high school, and through word of mouth.

“[Participants] learn tools, knowledge, or resources on how to navigate this educational system ... we provide resources and workshops where they learn skills like public speaking, how to work in a group, teamwork, collaboration. The outcome or the expected outcome was they can identify a problem in the school system and address that problem or express their community needs with a team project.”

– Villa Comunitaria staff member who provided programming

Family feedback informs trainings. Villa Comunitaria staff members and families described the organization as flexible and responsive to the needs of families. For example, staff members shared that in addition to their usual workshop topics, they also offer case management, referrals to other organizations, and trainings on topics that are most relevant to families based on what is happening at that time. Families share their priorities through a survey administered regularly by Villa Comunitaria, as well as through individual and group check-ins.

“They [Villa Comunitaria] asked us personally if we were interested in certain topics that they can find for us and find a professional in that field to come and speak to us. Many of us parents raised our hands, and we were able to offer a few ideas. I remember some of the parents said that they wanted to learn more about drug addiction, how to help the youth with drug addiction.”

– Villa Comunitaria family member who participated in programming

“Whatever is happening, we were trying to address it as an organization and as a community...we have a WhatsApp group, so [parents] are always constantly being invited to other events.”

– Villa Comunitaria staff member who provided programming

Data are shared with families to support advocacy and action. Villa Comunitaria staff members explained that they regularly share data with families, but they are thoughtful about how it is messaged. Staff members described how, when they share data on graduation rates of Latinx students, they frame it in a way that encourages families to take action and acknowledges that it is an inequitable system that has produced these outcomes, not the fault of students or their families.

“We tried to let them know we need to do something to change these metrics. This is an inequity because maybe there are many people that are capable in the Latinx BIPOC community, but [the schools] don’t identify those families. We need to change those metrics, and we need to do something about advocating the system or advocating the district to change because the system is not working for the BIPOC families.”

– Villa Comunitaria staff member who provided programming

Families discussed specific examples of when they were exposed to new data or information. For example, one family participant shared that through a Villa Comunitaria training, they learned about the grading system in the United States because it differs from the grading system in their home country.

Families report that they learn about parenting and how to navigate the education system. Families described how, through Villa Comunitaria, they learned more about parenting, how to advocate for their children, and how to navigate the education system. Families shared that they appreciate the content they learn at these workshops, as it has helped them meet their goals. Several family participants described attending many Villa Comunitaria events and workshops because they found them to be so informative.

“I don’t like to miss any of them because each class is different. I learned something new in each class. There’s a lot of information, but there’s always something that we’re able to absorb so that we can be better parents.”

– Villa Comunitaria family member who participated in programming

Accessibility and communication are essential. Villa Comunitaria staff members and families shared a few aspects of their programming that are critical to their success. First, the sessions are in Spanish at a high school where many family participants send their children. Villa Comunitaria offers childcare and food to families, making the workshops more accessible. Families and staff members also described the importance of strong communication. Families shared that they appreciate receiving a personal phone call from Villa Comunitaria with an invitation to an event. Staff members also described active WhatsApp groups where they share reminders and information. Lastly, the content is relevant, so families are motivated to attend.

Meeting different family needs can be a challenge. Staff members shared that one challenge they face is that each participant has different needs or desires from the workshops. While Villa Comunitaria attempts to tailor trainings to meet a diversity of needs, some families have specific requests that cannot be addressed through the group sessions. Staff members shared that some families want immediate solutions to the challenges they face, and their workshops are not always able to provide that.

Families recommend that Villa Comunitaria expand their focus to include additional schools and families. Families shared several recommendations for Villa Comunitaria. First, some families suggested that Villa Comunitaria expand the focus of trainings and workshops to include elementary and middle school families, as they felt that waiting until students are in high school may be too late. Furthermore, some families recommended that Villa Comunitaria attempt to engage more fathers in their work to challenge the idea that supporting children is primarily a mother's role. When reflecting on their work, Villa Comunitaria staff members shared that they recommend organizations start by addressing the needs of families, rather than beginning training with an already established curriculum. They also discussed how important it is to tailor recruitment and workshops for students instead of following the same strategies used for caregivers.

Washington State Parent Ambassadors

The Washington State Parent Ambassadors program is a yearlong parent advocacy and leadership training program for parents of children in Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and childcare locations across the state. As part of the Aligned Partners grant, Parent Ambassadors transitioned from a yearlong program to implementing additional general advocacy trainings to parents from several different communities in Seattle, including other Aligned Partners.

Families attended trainings to learn state and federal legislation and advocacy. As part of the DEEL-funded Aligned Partners grant, Washington State Parent Ambassadors offered

five trainings for families on topics including civics 101, storytelling, and K-12 education advocacy. Prior to offering these trainings, Parent Ambassadors met with over 10 community-based organizations and educational leaders in the Seattle area to better understand the landscape, needs, and priorities of the local educational community. While Parent Ambassadors work with families from across the state, they have not previously worked solely in the Seattle area. The workshops offered by Parent Ambassadors were collaborative events with various partners, some of whom are other Aligned Partners. For the next phase of this grant, Parent Ambassadors are planning to continue creating a cohort model with families who have previously attended one of their other Seattle-area trainings and expressed interest in continuing their advocacy journey.

For this evaluation, we spoke with alums and family participants from the Parent Ambassadors program in general; however, we did not talk with any families who participated in trainings funded by the Aligned Partner grant. Therefore, we discuss the findings from the family focus group to gain a general understanding of the Parent Ambassadors program. However, some findings may not apply to this specific grant opportunity.

Parent Ambassadors regularly gather input from families and modify their workshops. In general, family participants shared that families play a significant role in determining the focus of the yearlong Parent Ambassadors program. As one parent described it, the program is “mostly parent driven.”

“They kind of guide us as parents, but they also put a lot of emphasis on what the parents want.”

– WA Parent Ambassadors family member who participated in programming

Parent Ambassadors regularly gather feedback from families using pre- and post-surveys. For the trainings funded through the Aligned Partners grant, staff members shared that they consulted with their partners to determine what topics were most of interest to that community.

“We would tailor it to, first of all what that community would be interested in hearing, but also what was relevant in the world during that time...it’s been different for every single organization just based on what our partner for that training was interested in receiving for their community.”

– WA Parent Ambassadors staff member who provided programming

Sharing data is an important element of advocacy training. Parent Ambassador trainings typically focus on advocacy. As part of this, they often share data with families and discuss how to use data in advocacy work.

“They actually taught us how to look in data...we look at the data, how the money is being spent, and who the money is being spent for, and the demographics in which our centers are serving with data. They teach us how to read data.”

– WA Parent Ambassadors family member who participated in programming

When discussing the trainings that were part of this grant, staff members shared that it can be challenging when too much information is shared, especially if it is a one-off training and not part of a series or cohort model.

Families in the yearlong program report a significant effect, but the effect of one-time training is unclear. The families who participated in the focus group all participated in a yearlong parent advocacy and leadership training program. Parents described how they learned advocacy skills that have supported them to advocate not only for their children, but for their entire community.

“I feel more confident and comfortable talking with... I guess they’re considered people of power, authority, the teachers and stuff that we’re coming into contact with, or staff members at the school, I definitely feel more confident in speaking like, ‘Hey, no, I know that that’s not right. I know that you can service an IEP a different way. I know that.’”

– WA Parent Ambassadors family member who participated in programming

Some participants described how the program changed the trajectory of their lives and benefitted their families.

“[Parent Ambassadors] has given me an avenue to be able to go to school, to finish school, get my bachelor’s, all the things that I don’t know that I would’ve maybe gone as hard and passionate for if I hadn’t had already that passion lit up inside of me when I started the program.”

– WA Parent Ambassadors family member who participated in programming

These examples illustrate the power of the yearlong advocacy and leadership training offered through Parent Ambassadors. However, as Parent Ambassadors staff members noted, the individual workshops are unlikely to yield the same outcomes as those achieved through sustained engagement and relationship-building.

Partnerships and relationships support implementation. Parent Ambassadors staff members shared that their trainings are successful when they have developed strong partnerships and when the training topics are relevant for participants. At these trainings, Parent Ambassadors always provide interpretation and other support to ensure the workshops are accessible to families. For their yearlong program, the relationships they build with families are critical to their success.

“It’s just those relationships that you build...It’s not just these random people that I meet from a program, they’re like family. And then every cohort that goes on from the second, third, fourth, we all still keep in contact, we all still talk. The parents that I’ve coordinated, I still keep in contact with them.”

– WA Parent Ambassadors family member who participated in programming

Staff members shared that one of the main benefits of the Aligned Partners grant was the connections they made with other Aligned Partners as they were able to collaboratively host workshops for families with other Aligned Partners.

Programming was limited by one-time training. The main challenge that staff members noted is that one-time trainings are not systemic enough to have the type of impact that they desire. Parent Ambassadors share a lot of information at their trainings, but without sustained engagement, they are unsure how effective this is or if it will lead to action or advocacy efforts.

“It’s just a lot of new ...So just hearing something one time isn’t really enough to not only retain it but put it into practice. So, although everything was received positively and folks are engaged in that moment, it really is thinking about the follow through and how we are going to make sure we follow through, but also how motivated parents are to follow through, too.”

– WA Parent Ambassadors staff member who provided programming

Staff members also shared that it is challenging when you’re new to a community and only supporting with one training. These workshops require some level of trust, and for one-off trainings, it can be challenging to take the time needed for introductions and trust-building.

Families recommend expanding the yearlong program so more families have an opportunity to share their story. Families offered a few recommendations for Parent Ambassadors. First, families suggested that the yearlong program expand to K-12, or transition to a two-yearlong program. One parent shared that after the first year, families are confident and ready to engage in advocacy work. However, since the program ends in one year, some participants struggle to find other advocacy opportunities in their community.

“I learned so much with Parent Ambassadors. And then when our year was over, and I was like, okay, well what am I going to do now?”

– WA Parent Ambassadors family member who participated in programing

Some families suggested that Parent Ambassadors expand their sources for public speaking and certain advocacy actions. One parent noted some people are frequently tapped to testify or speak publicly about a specific topic, and that they believe the participants should be more varied.