

Supporting Family Advocacy

Yvette Dominguez: Hello, everybody, and welcome to our session on Supporting Family Advocacy. We're so excited to have you join us today. For today in Supporting Family Advocacy, we do have some quick learning objectives. In this session, we are going to explore family advocacy from the lens of a family leader. We're also going to review how the PFCE framework, or the Parent Family Community Engagement framework, supports family advocacy. We're also going to identify strategies that can support components of advocacy and learning and everyday practice. Now that we've reviewed our session objectives, let's turn it over to my wonderful co-presenter Brandi on what family advocacy looks like.

Brandi Black Thacker: Thank you so much, Yvette. We're absolutely thrilled to be with you guys today. And thank you, again for coming to visit with us during this portion of your agenda. We want to get you fully acclimated to the folks that you're going to have the true honor to hear from today. And you're already met the one and only Yvette Dominguez. I want to say a proper hello as well. My name is Brandi Black Thacker. I'm the director of Development and TTA strategy for the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.

And more importantly, we have two very distinguished guests with us today that we absolutely can't wait for you to meet. And on the screen, you'll see their pictures and their official titles. But I want to start off with a conversation with both Denise and Michelle. And Denise, we'll begin with you. As you offer everybody your name and title and role, I wonder what drew you into this advocacy space? If you can tell us a little bit about what brings you to this moment right here today as you say hello, that would be wonderful.

Denise Bouyer: Yes, thank you, Brandi. Hello, everyone and good afternoon. And thank you for attending this session. And as Brandi said, my name is Denise Bouyer. I'm the director of the Inclusive Child Care Project with SPAN. And what brought me to this journey is my daughter, my beautiful daughter, Kyla. She has Down syndrome, and she has opened up a whole new world for me that I have yet to explore. How about you, Michelle?

Michelle Lewis: Thanks, Denise. And I'm also excited to be here with you today. My name is Michelle Lewis. I'm the executive director of the Parent Information Center in New Hampshire. And I'm the parent of two children, one who has a disability. I was working with the Parent Information Center in another capacity when my daughter was born. And we say that she was born blue, floppy, and not breathing. And she knows this. It's not a joke, but we kind of made it that way. And I was propelled into a world that I never expected to be in, in all truthfulness.

My journey started there. There in the NICU at a top children's hospital, at her bedside, my husband and I really just trying to support her. And how I ended up here did start in the NICU by the fact that we had doctors rounding about her, but not by her bedside. And they were at a table like the next part over. And I quickly realized that that is not the way things were going to work for us and for our family. I went over to the table scared and just said, "Hey, you're talking about our daughter. Can we be a part of it." And that's actually how I ended up here today.

Obviously, a lot has happened since then. She's almost 18. But I'm excited to share with you our experience or my experience and where I'm coming from in our family advocacy journey. Thank you.

Brandi: Denise and Michelle, thank you so much for giving us the gift of your stories. And I know we're going to hear a lot more about those as we travel forward. And I resonate in so many ways with what you've offered too. My son is 9 years old and also has a disability. And even I was saying earlier as we were preparing that I have been so inspired by your journeys, and I also really am grateful that we get to bring forward each of our voices today in service of the work that we get to do every day across the country in Head Start. And with all of that, I want to focus our attention on the next slide with this quote.

I'm going to offer it out loud for each of you to consider. And our colleagues out in the audience as well, I want to ask you what comes to mind when you see this. And Denise and Michelle, as we get some chat, you guys are welcome to enter in some thoughts in the Q&A widget. We'd love to hear from you. We are relationship people, by the way. We love to get to interact with you virtually, in person any way we can. We just want to hear what this quote inspires for you. Feel free to put that in the chat. And Denise and Michelle, I know you have thoughts about this too. What comes to mind when you read this?

Denise: When I read this, I think about the journey I have with my own daughter. Because similar to Michelle, my daughter had some medical concerns and had some issues that I had to navigate. And not knowing, being a new mom and not knowing how to navigate those concerns that she had, I tried to put the best face forward for my daughter. When I see this quote, behind every child is someone who believes in himself, there's a parent who believed first.

Despite seeing my daughter in the NICU, and at times with tubes in her, I believe that she had a better future than what was happening in the moment. As I fought with the school district, I believed that she could do better. And she had an opportunity to advance over all of our expectations. And today, with almost 24 years later, because my daughter is older – she's 24 – I see the beautiful, confident young lady that she turned out to be. There are certain things that you can't teach children, that children learn by observing and just your supporting them. I truly believe my daughter is who she is with all the confidence she has, because I believed first. And Michelle, what was your experience?

Michelle: Yeah, Denise, it's funny, we were as a family having dinner last night, and we actually were talking about this quote. Not exactly this quote, but my daughter is 17 looking at colleges. And we were talking about what her self-advocacy is. And continually the teachers and the principal of the high school are saying, "Bella, I can't believe what a strong self-advocate you are." And I think about that, and she said to us last night, "You showed me how to do that. Like you taught us how to do that." And that was so powerful to hear coming from her because we did believe in her. But we also taught her how to speak up for herself and share her dreams and share her challenges and share her strengths. And it has been sometimes a roller coaster ride for me as a parent of a teenager. But I wouldn't have it any other way. Yeah.

Brandi: Thank you so much for those reflections, Denise, and Michelle. And I have to say we have a couple of colleagues that are weighing in in their Q&A widgets as well. Tammy brings forward, "We have to be the voice of our children." And what I love about this quote is not only how it resonates with me as a mama, as a human being, as a parent, but also the honor that we get every single day within our Head Start communities across the country, to serve in a capacity that believes in others. And truly, we make strides because we have each other, and we stay connected.

And Denise and Michelle, I know we talked about this before, but this Head Start community has mobilized in ways that I cannot even describe. Not only just in the core of what we've done for over 50 years, but in this time of pandemic, it's been incredible to watch and see how they've heightened and strengthened their role as the heartbeats of our communities. I wanted to bring that parallel forward so that we can not only celebrate both of you and the impact that you've had, certainly in your families and outwardly, but the opportunity that we each have to make that same kind of impact each day as well.

Yvette: Brandi, can I add just a quick comment from our friend Rhonda?

Brandi: Please do.

Yvette: She says, "This is a powerful statement. My child was in the NICU as well. And doctors said one thing, but I believed as a parent, my child could adjust like every other child, that she could do whatever she could. And she's 22 years old today." And for me, that resonates really, really well because I'm a preemie too. I was born at 27 weeks. Rhonda, I really agree with your sentiments there. And I know that my parents do as well. Go ahead, Brandi.

Brandi: Thank you, Yvette. Please feel free to insert the voices of our colleagues anytime that you want to. That's why we're here. I appreciate that. And thank you, Rhonda. And one of the things that we're doing today in service of this conversation is truly like sitting across the coffee table. We really want to create that space, even virtually, maybe especially virtually, to talk a little bit about each of our journeys, and yet also to offer our stories in hopes of inspiring others, but also in hope of hope.

And now, my little one – these guys have grown up youngins. That's what we say back home. Mine is only 9. To have the gift of interacting with these two women has been just that, a gift. Because I can see the impact not only that I can have, but when we surround him with community and those who love him through wherever he is, all things are possible.

I want to start with some questions, Denise and Michelle, just so that we can bring forward some of what we know about your trajectory, and specifically, how this advocacy piece can come forward. And not only the expertise that you bring into this conversation, but certainly what we can do with the expertise of our little ones guiding us along the way too.

I'll start with you again, Denise. I wonder, as you think about where you've been and what benchmarks or mile markers along your advocacy journey have occurred, what do you think has

supported that the most? What are some things that you would say that really stand out for you?

Denise: Well, I can truthfully say the thing that stands out for me was the support I got from other family members; the supports I got from peer families, as well as information that was brought to me. Because when my daughter was born, I had no idea how to navigate the systems to get her care. I had no idea what to expect of her disabilities, because I traveled in a world where I didn't see a lot of people with disabilities. And just connecting with other families – it turns out, I was in a NICU with another mom whose son was Down syndrome as well. And we started chatting, and she started sharing information up to me that just opened my eyes about early intervention and about supports and about service coordinators who can help with her development. And all of that was just blowing my mind because I was like, wow, wow. And it made me hungry to learn a little bit more.

And then I also found that there was a big communication gap. Because number one, I was feeling a little insecure being a new mom and just having this responsibility of raising this child, that I really had to do a lot of self-study and learn about IDEA, learn about the Individuals with Disabilities Act so that I know what type of supports that were there for my daughter. I had to learn about early intervention and what assessment and eligibility, what all of those terms met. And then at the same time, I was also navigating the medical jargon, trying to understand some of the language around my child's disability and what that meant and how to counter that.

Just having that support and learning that I wasn't the only mom. I felt like, "Oh my god, I'm the only person with a child with a disability." And I found it was a whole new world of loving, caring people who had information and that they were willing to share. That really helped a lot, because for someone like myself who had no knowledge about what to do, how to proceed, and feeling very afraid that I had this little African American little girl who was also now disabled, how am I going to support her? They gave me the courage and the strength to go on and do what I can do.

And the agency that I work for now, SPAN Parent Advocacy Network, most people know them throughout the country. They're one of the leading parent advocacy networks in the world. Who would have thought I would have landed with them? And they've taught me so much about being confident in myself, building confidence in my daughter, and just being able to be a good parent for my child. I know Michelle, you had some similar experiences, and we talked about this. But what else to add to your journey?

Michelle: I think for me, I am a question asker by nature. In fact, I'm pretty sure I drive people crazy a lot of times in my professional role as well as my parent role, but it is who I am. And I brought that to any role I've had with my daughter, and I actually appreciate professionals asking me questions as well. And that's a really key piece for me that helped draw me out when my daughter was in early intervention.

And I've worked with – though my daughter never – we were never in the Head Start program, I know working with Head Start, both Early Head Start, home visitors as well as Head Start, the

partnerships that the home visitors and teachers have in Head Start is critical. Because they help families and draw families out to find their voice. I happened to have a voice. I didn't always know where or when to use it. By that partnership with either early intervention with some of the providers we've had, and then the school district, it was really helpful. I would ask the questions. I also never took no for an answer. I took no as a challenge, and not in an adversarial way, not in an aggressive way. But when we didn't know the answer, or the team of people I was working with didn't know, I almost took that as a challenge.

A challenge to say, "OK, we can't not understand why she is struggling with some of her reading or with some of the some of the physical stuff going on. Like we've got to find the answer." Or at least, let me rephrase. We needed to find the support. I found that by working with the people around me, by them asking me questions and by me asking them questions, we really could work together.

I think the other thing I would say is, and I do this in my work with families all the time, and now I find myself asking this question is, what is my role? If I'm invited to something like, what's my role in these meetings? What's my role like with my daughter during the early intervention evaluation? What was my role on the school team and my responsibilities? Because I very much believe in the power of family and professional partnerships. And I also was asking about the role. For me, these things all helped support my advocacy journey, and who I am now and actually ultimately who my daughter is now.

Denise: Yes, yes.

Brandi: Denise, I find myself making the same noises. It's almost like a fist pound moment because what I hear from you guys, two things that are connected, similar and yet unique. One is the connection to community – that I'm not alone feeling that we've articulated a couple of ways now. And then, Michelle, what you're saying in terms of I'm a question asker. I'm going to come forth with my wonderings. And I love what you said about, "Watch me work, honey." You hit that roadblock, and you're in that place where it feels insurmountable, that you have the inspiration in your baby to keep going – they're grown now. But to keep going and to find ways around to also not only keep that pathway open, but it sounds like model for your kids.

One of the things too that I'm very curious about to get into for this audience in particular, is what you guys would recommend for programs. I mean, you have some highlights in your remarks about those relationships that are necessary with our expert colleagues in our Head Start programs. What kinds of things would you offer for programs to do in their support of family advocacy? What advice do you have, Denise?

Denise: Well, one thing is to make them feel welcome and make them feel comfortable. Because you can see Michelle and I are vastly different. Whereas she is – she has questions about the services and her child's development. But at the time, I just felt so ill equipped that I didn't even know the right questions to ask. And that is really, really important. When I was looking at surgeons to do my daughter's heart surgery, and I just didn't know the questions to

ask. The one question that came to me was, "If this was your child, what would you suggest I do? What would you do? That was very helpful."

For Head Start, working with families who have children who have special needs and disabilities, make your parents feel comfortable. Don't make assumptions about this parent, because this parent may be displaying characteristics that you think are not conducive to being engaged or supportive or wanting to know more about the development of their child.

And also, I ask you to use simple language. Don't use jargon, because some families may not understand what a particular term means as it relates to their child's development or acquiring various services. And lastly, find simple ways to engage that family. Engage that parent so that they do feel welcomed, and they do feel comfortable enough to open up and share some of their most intimate feelings about their child's development, about their growth, and maybe some other information that they need. I mean, what do you think, Michelle?

Michelle: It's funny, I was reflecting on Denise, both you and Brandi's comments. And I was thinking to myself, definitely don't make assumptions. I still remember when I was – again, our family was in early intervention. And we were in a process of something going on at the state level. And I asked my provider like, "Hey, am I going to be involved with that?" And she's like, "Oh, I didn't really think you'd want to be." And I'm like, wait a minute. I like the don't make assumptions. The thought of just offering opportunities to families.

The other thing I'd say is much as I said I'm a questioner, I don't ask for help well. I will support my staff, I will support my children, I will offer up help. But I don't always ask for it well. One of the most important things that I think you can do is also offer help, just to ask the question or ask, how can I help you? Would you like some help with that, those types of things.

I also think that strong relationship, I think Brandi talked about it, the relationship that you develop with a family, that trusting partnership. They are going to look to you. I know when I have been working with Head Start families as they transition into the school, I always am talking with them about using their voice. Because they express to me that they're scared to go into the school, because it's going to be so very different. And I would say, please, please if I can offer anything is to help them feel comfortable, write things down, to prep to go into a school transition meeting or those types of things, because I think it's critical.

And then what you can do to actually help reduce some of the barriers. Families don't always know what they need. I know that I didn't always know what I needed. Helping them identify what might be possible or what's out there is really important. Those are just some general recommendations that I would have.

Brandi: Denise and Michelle, thank you for this richness. And I have to give one more thing a voice before we transition over to Yvette, because I know she's going to take us down a little bit of a dialogue here into anchoring more specifically in some of our Head Start work. But here's what I would humbly submit.

I believe in Head Start, we are really good at all of the things that have been described to this point. And I also worry that the connections that are created through what feel like some of these simple acts that you both have just described, through really listening, really making those connections, offering the help – Michelle, it's like you were in my head from just this morning. I'm like, wow, I'm really good at mobilizing for others, but sometimes I need help of my own accord. And I'm not great at asking for it. But what does that look and sound like? And for this community, I wonder if some of this confirmation, especially right now in this moment, when we're all carrying so much and our reserves are low, that this kind of connection with each other and the reminder that the simple ways of being with each other may not feel simple to someone else. It may be the biggest lifeline that you can offer.

And I can say now with true authenticity, as a mom for Colton boy, there's a lot of isolation that happens. When you get to make these connections for families of children that have special considerations, it is truly, truly a big deal. I'll say it like I want to. Since I feel comfortable, and I around my family here.

All right. Denise, Michelle, thank you so much for that. Yvette, I know we need to turn to you now to anchor us in something that we all know and love. You love it, you know it, you have it memorized, the Head Start PFCE framework. What do you want to tell us about it today, Yvette?

Yvette: Sure. This is really our roadmap. And thank you, Brandi and Denise and Michelle, for your expertise and your perspectives on this. But this is how we build that capacity. Like Brandi said, we do this, we do this in our sleep, we know how to support children and families in our Early Head Start, Head Start programs. But the PFCE framework is that roadmap to sort those successful outcomes for children and families. And guess what? Relationships matter. Those two arrows on our screen, and everything that we do, like we said, in our program starts with those positive relationships. And this is not only the basis of our work with children, families, and staff and within our communities, but it's the basis of our advocacy.

Those relationships are based on that mutual trust and respect. And families who have that strong relationship with us, as disability managers, family service coordinators, and teachers, they feel welcomed into our programs. Our families feel respected, and they feel cared for. And guess what? They can share their ideas and concerns with us and have that joint partnership. In our programs, we advocate for children and families. And as we advocate for them, families also advocate with us. They take on those leadership roles through policy council, parent committees, governing boards, and so much more. And they participate in our decision making. They participate in our policy development, organization, activities within our communities, and in our states to improve our children's safety, health, and development and those learning experiences.

Through that spirit, we always invite that spirit of collaboration within our group initiatives and within our settings. Let's go into a little bit of those program foundations within our yellow column. And this really contains our supports and systems to support our processes and policies on how programs can provide services to all families. And our program leadership with

our professional development opportunities to staff on inclusive practices, diagnosis, encouraging advocacy, and supports through staff knowledge, skills, and practices provide that high quality-services for families. And we can also collect data that drives families' interests and needs. We can support those improvement services in partnership with our local education agencies or Part C programs and practices to achieve our goals together.

The next piece is our pink column, that program impact areas. This is really looking at our high-quality environments for children, families, and within our communities. These high-quality environments support and promote that children's learning and development through teaching and learning, and families share that knowledge about their child. And I heard earlier, Denise and Michelle talking about that, about their questioning, their feeling heard, feeling listened to. Through this information gathering that we do as staff and those partnerships that we engage with families, we can build those connections with not only our families, but also with our community partners, and support our families' strengths and needs.

The last piece to this within our framework is those outcomes. That family outcome in our blue column, as well as our purple column within child outcomes. And this is that two generational approach of our systems and high-quality services. We want to make sure that we partner and empower families to reach their goals and needs, and that we become those cheerleaders and guides on the side when families need it. Once we have those outcomes that we have here, one of them is our families as advocates and leaders. And this is exactly what we're talking about today.

With families and advocates and leaders, parents and families advocate for their children to take on leadership roles in Head Start and Early Head Starts. They participate, like we said, in that decision making, that policy and that organizing activities to support the development of their children and those learning experiences. We want to make sure that we support that. And this is our roadmap to that.

Going into that coordinated approach. We want to make sure that within our systems, with our program leadership coordinators and staff, that we all work together to support this approach with children and families, and within our Head Start Performance Standards. It says it right there within 1302.101, supporting that approach, especially with children with disabilities and their families. As programs, we enact those procedures. We support that timely information with Part C and Part B providers. And we prioritize that family advocacy, leadership and program goals, values, and policies.

You might be thinking, what can we do to help families and us as programs work together and work stronger? We can prioritize those relationships between staff and families. We can provide opportunities for collaboration, offer that communication and leadership and training for our families and professionals together. That joint approach. And provide that clear background of information before meetings to help families participate and feel prepared, and create those opportunities for programs to meet with families, to meet with their IEP and IFSP teams regularly. That logistical support, making sure that everybody's on the same page. And

also maybe even create ground rules and meeting norms to support that engagement, and that everybody is heard.

But I do have a question for you. And you're welcome to put this in the chat. And later on, we will have a little bit of space for Q&A. But what are some of those ways that you have created that coordinated approach in your program for families and children with disabilities? Think that over, but let's move into knowledge and communication is key. Let's look at those programs impact areas.

Families need to know the rules of the game in order to play. They need to make those informed decisions that support children and families' learning and development. And families need information about their program's expectations, legal rights, and responsibilities. And Denise and Michelle talked about that earlier within their discussion with Brandi, of accessing that information and looking for those supports for their children and partnering with the people that supported them through this process.

We want to make sure that like families, that program staff also need that specific knowledge, skills, and actions to promote that family advocacy and leadership. Making sure that everybody around within that team has that support. We want to also go into that not every family's ready to be a leader or advocate. We need to meet families where they are to support their thoughts, feelings, and circumstances.

Keep that in mind. But recognize and respect that every parent, every family has abilities and has so many leadership experiences. With that, I want to turn it over to our friends again, with Denise and Michelle, and think about what are some strategies that have helped you become the advocate you are today? Denise, do you have any suggestions? Or Michelle, one of the two.

Michelle: Hi, Michelle. I can definitely jump in. I've shared a little bit about this already. And I echo a lot of the pieces that you all have been talking about in relation to the relationship building and meeting families where they're at and offering those opportunities. I think it's really important in the role that you all play in really helping families and even the children that you're working with to find their voice. I think that one of the things – it's ironic, somebody put in the question and answers, what are services for adults with disabilities who aren't able to care for themselves, or something along that line.

I think what I wanted to say – and I promise I'm tying it to your question – is that I think what we do now and how we support families and children with disabilities now is extremely important. We can help them find their voice as family members and help the children that we work with find their voice, regardless of their age. When you move to adulthood, every state is different, but all states have supports for adults with disabilities. Ours in New Hampshire is through the Area Agency system.

Another probably well-kept secret sometimes, but is definitely – I know, in New Hampshire, we're seeing more and more – is that parent centers across the country of which I'm a federally funded parent center, and so is SPAN in New Jersey. But each parent center has one – I'm sorry,

each state has at least one parent center, some have multiples. And then there are also Community Parent Resources. And we support families and youth up to age 26 – the youth up to age 26. We do a lot of work around youth self-advocacy, young adult self-advocacy. In fact, I just shared with you all previously that this Saturday, we just hosted a conference around supported decision making, and actually talked about starting really young and moving forward with that. I just wanted to share.

There also is your developmental disability system. Depending on the state that you're in, you can look into that. But there are resources out there. And those were two that I wanted to highlight. But again, what you do right now is building that foundation for what will happen for families and youth finding their voice.

Yvette: Yeah, that's great. Yes, definitely. Denise, I think I heard you.

Denise: Yeah, I apologize. I had the microphone on mute, because I tend to agree loudly sometimes if I hear something. I will totally agree with Michelle. I think some of the strategies that have helped me is learning as much as I possibly can about the resources that are available. And I agree with Michelle, is helping to identify those state resources that are being funneled through your local community organizations. And also what helped me is seeing my child as a child, and not as carrying her disability, as they say. But looking at her and thinking that, OK, she has some communication deficits. Maybe we need to explore other ways for her to communicate. Or she had some mobility issues, we'll think about ways that we can help her to be more mobile. What are supports that we can put in place?

Thinking more in terms of what everyday supports could help your child to be the best that they can possibly be and have them integrated into the community. Not just going to disability specific groups or organizations, but also making headways in your community. Be an advocate to support inclusion within your community on all levels. Even in a school district, sometimes schools will want to put children in self-contained placements or into placements where they are like disability or like needs. But actually they can be involved in the general education classroom on their level, meeting the requirements of that classroom at their level, not necessarily the same level as everyone else.

Because we know that social emotional development is what will help make our children supported and give them the foundation and the confidence to be productive, self-esteem – boost their self-esteem, just make them a well-rounded person. Making sure that they are around people who care about them, who support them, nondisabled peers, teachers, all of that helps to fulfill their emotional needs.

And stepping outside of yourself to help someone else. Offering to be there to tell your story, tell your story so someone else will learn from it. Whenever we conduct workshops, we are mindful just like Yvette and Brandi, bring in the parent voice. Because as professionals, we can tell you the services, we can tell you the programs, we can tell you about certain things, but when you actually hear from a parent who's used it, who's tried it, and tested it and shown that it is working, it is supporting, it speaks volumes. Finding ways that you can help families to be

more supportive of other families. Sometimes it takes the focus off of themselves and allows them to be able to grow into a parent leader.

Brandi: Definitely. I love that parent to parent power.

Denise: Exactly. Exactly.

Brandi: And I appreciate your verbal confirmations on that.

Denise: Yes.

Brandi: I resemble those. Yvette, I know you want to tell us a little bit about the benefits of advocacy here.

Yvette: Yes.

Brandi: Because I can't believe how quickly this time has flown we've spent together. And then what I'll do is wrap it up with one quick question for both Denise and Michelle. We're going to ask you to give us in one sentence that I'm preparing you here, what is your greatest achievement to date as an advocate for your family? Let me let that linger with you two for a second, Yvette, as you tell us about the benefits. And then we'll come back to our esteemed colleagues.

Yvette: Sure. Let's talk a little bit about those benefits that Brandi alluded to. To make sure that we end this session right, we want to close with those benefits of advocacy. And when families have that voice and encourage their advocacy skills at our meetings, policies, practices, everyone benefits. What does this look like for children? Families act as advocates and leaders when they are choosing an early childhood program. Families can also use their advocacy skills to develop Head Start and Early Head Start and be a positive influence in their children's learning experiences through their education. And families who are involved in advocacy and leadership activities, they serve as an important role model to their children. How about for families? Families involved in advocacy and leadership activities can experience personal growth.

For example, they may develop or reinforce the ability to express their concerns constructively, create and implement those plans and further refine other skills. And many become more confident and are able to give back to the programs that supported them. Those opportunities for families to develop in their leadership and advocacy skills can contribute to career advancement. For instance, that could be continuing their education, becoming staff for our programs, right, or for community programs, or improve their financial stability for their families over time. Again, supporting that role model piece. And we benefit as programs too in supporting families. We want to make sure that we work with everybody to have access and knowledge and information for everybody. With that, let me turn it back over to Brandi, and let's go with that question that she asked.

Brandi: All right, Yvette. I'm so excited about these answers. And as we acknowledge what you said, I want to bring forward the voices of one of our colleagues out in the audience too, Scotty. I know you offered this a little bit ago, that I think it's important for us to bring forward here – and I share his sentiment, which is, I wish some of our community partners out in the big wide world shared our Head Start philosophy that parents – y'all know the words, right? Parents are their first and most important teachers. I feel like this was born of us. And we want our families to feel not only invited and accepted, but as equal partners at our table.

And again, if I can inspire you guys to walk away from this session feeling any kind of puffed up, I hope to, because I really believe that we do this better than anybody else. And I know our mission is to help our colleagues not only within the construct of our programs, but outside. As families leave us and transition out into the community, that they experienced that same level of reverence and connection that we hope to inspire. I promised, Denise and Michelle, to come back to you. It's going to have to be about your 30-second version. I know that's tough. But what is your greatest achievement? Leave us with your inspiration.

Denise: Well, my greatest achievement is having been able to affect policy, procedures and practices that help support all children to be included, and help parents to be engaged.
Michelle?

Michelle: Mine is personal. It really is about watching my daughter grow into her own self-advocate. It has been so powerful for me to see her say what she needs support with and also what her strengths are. And I couldn't have scripted it better to watch that happen. That really is my greatest achievement.

Yvette: And ladies, just so you know, in our Q&A, we got an amen. You are preaching it. Yes, thank you so much, so much. And we could keep on going, right, with this discussion. But we are running a little bit out of time, right. But we want to leave you all with today's discussion with some resources on the PFCE framework, on how to support families as advocates and leaders and so much more. Make sure to look at this within your research widget, and also continue the discussion with us on MyPeers. And if you're not on MyPeers, please join our discussions and our social network to support, brainstorm and exchange those ideas with other colleagues and with us on this topic and so much more.

But I want to thank you all from the bottom of our hearts for you all to be with us today. Thank you, Michelle and Denise for your expertise.