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Rhetoric is not Reality: How Policymakers, Professionals and Parents Define Parental Engagement

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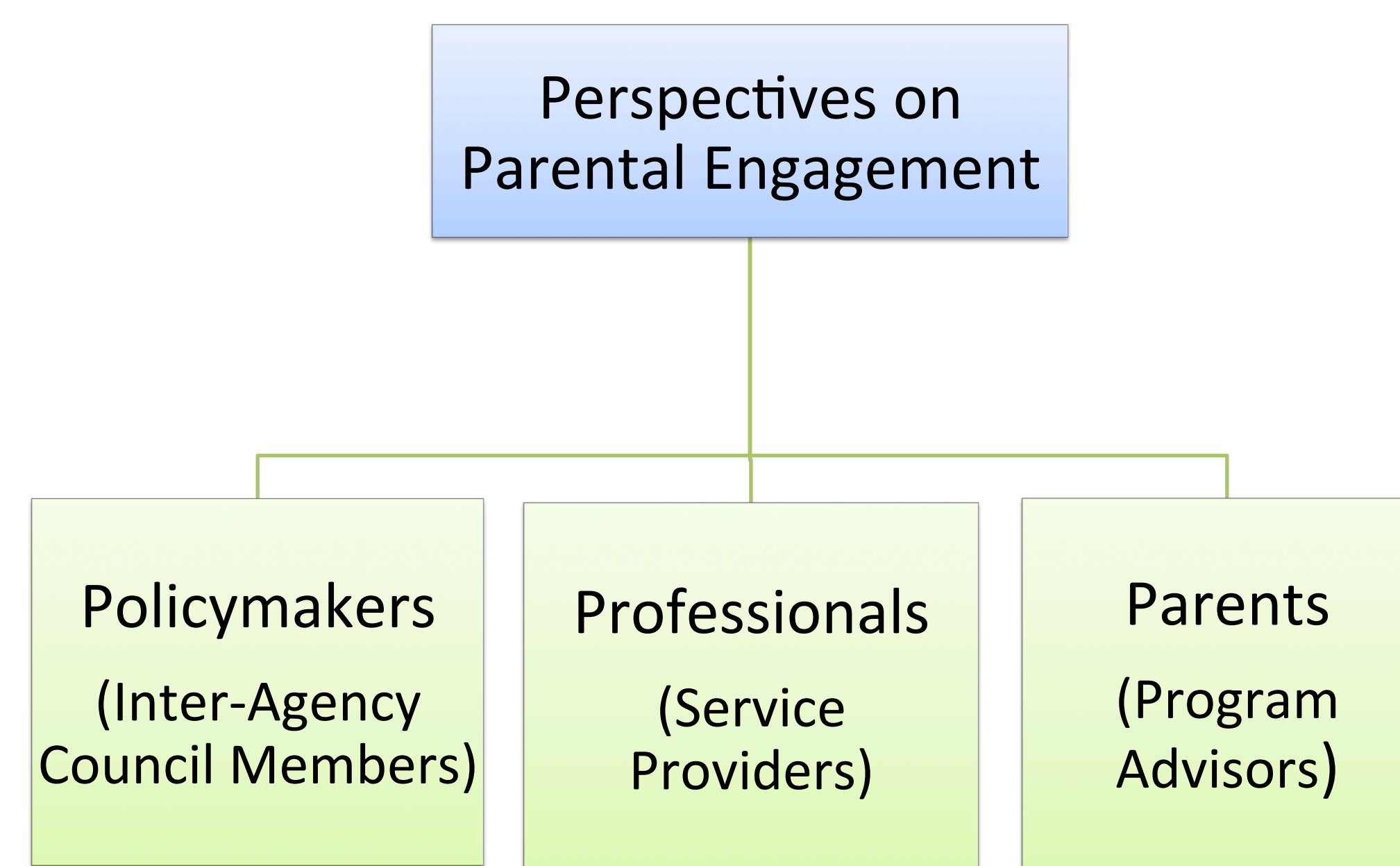


Abstract

A new Connecticut pilot program for low-income families has attempted to actively engage parents in the planning and decision process to provide a holistic approach to comprehensive workforce services. This study analyzes perceptions of parental engagement gathered from interviews with policymakers, professionals and parents. Results show that in this program policymakers, professionals, and parents agree that parental engagement was a deliberate action to incorporate parent voice and create parent leaders for long-term success of the program. Policymakers and professionals disagreed on the level of leadership and amount of training necessary for successful parental engagement. Recommendations include aligning expectations and definitions across stakeholders to increase the likelihood of successful parental engagement in the future.

Research Question

How is parental engagement defined by three groups of people (policymakers, professionals, and parents) involved in the 2gen planning and decision process and how do they explain why it matters to them?



Alignment

Policymakers, professionals and parents **agree** that parental engagement:

- Occurs when explicit request for participation is evident and a “seat at the table” is provided
- Requires trust and respect for opinions of parents
- Takes into account perspectives of the user and therefore is a smart investment
- Considers parents as valuable “storytellers” of their own lives that contributes to the overall value of programming

Misalignment

Policymakers, professionals and parents **disagree** on:

- Level of leadership and decision making parents should have
- Whether parents should hold *paid positions* within programs
- The level of training parents need to be decision-makers

Policy Recommendations

Create a **clear set of expectations** for policymakers, professionals and parents surrounding their roles for fostering and maintaining parental engagement

Currently there are different expectations:

“Parents are actually part of the team responsible. That changes everything, because the team itself has to take account of the voices of all its members.”

-Policymaker

“As you are going through the process of developing a theory of change and a logic model, and program components it is important to get input from parents, but it is also important I think for people who have been trained to then take that input, give it credence, and add it to the implementation.”

-Professional

“I feel like they may not take the parent seriously, so to speak. I feel like the parents may be heard but their voices may not be taken into full consideration. That may be one of the challenges. And one of the highlights, if they really grasp it, in concept that it should allow parents to highlight issues.”

-Parent

Provide Parents **specialized training**

- Policymakers and Professionals already have experiences and training working in government, but low-income parents need a better understanding of how to participate in a complex system

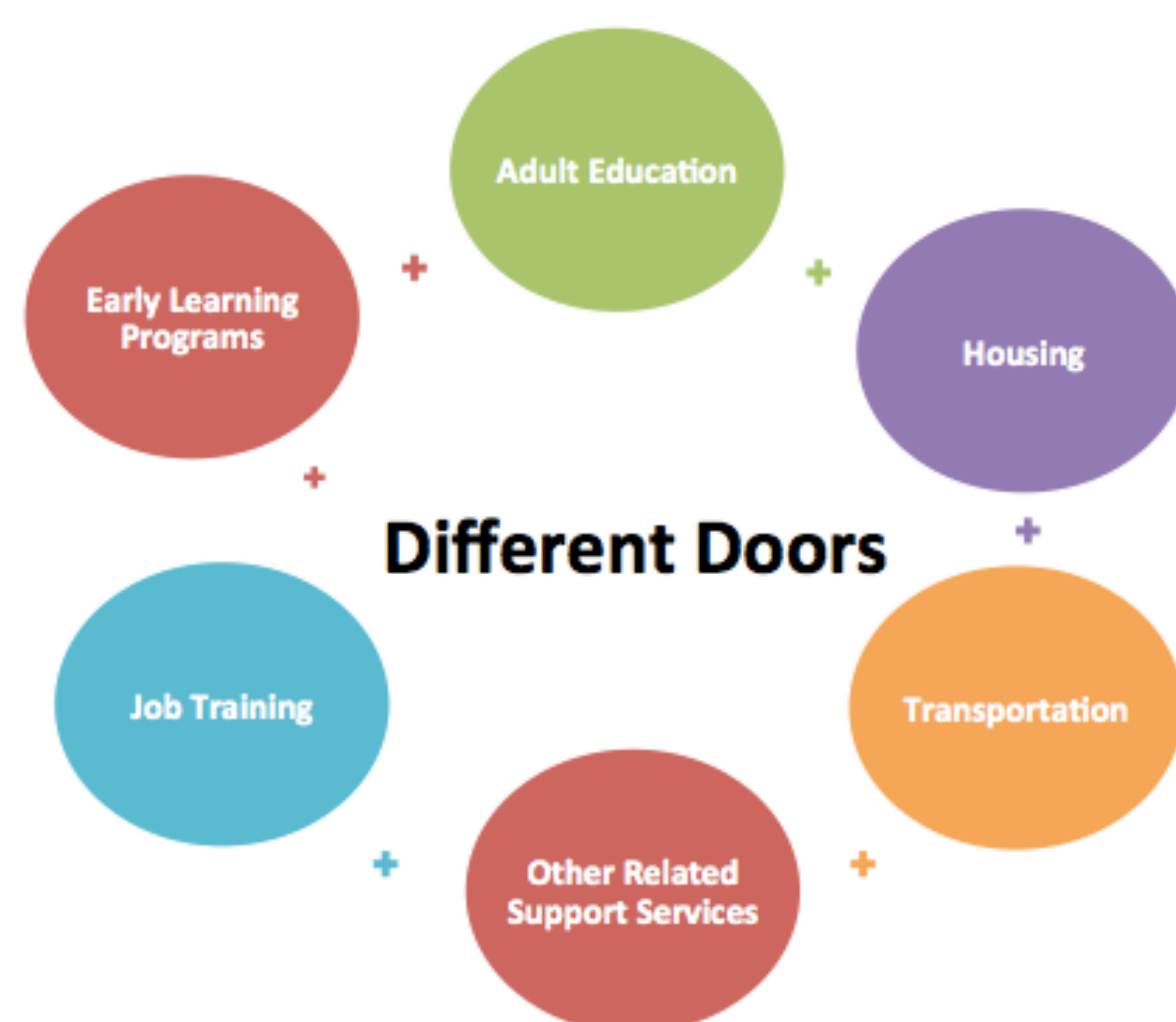
Build upon **existing structures** at the local level that foster parental engagement

- Utilize schools, libraries and other established places in the community that have experienced staff and accessible facilities to promote parental engagement

Continuously **check-in** with parents:

- Commit time, resources and constant evaluation of parental engagement strategies from the perspective of parents

Connecticut’s Innovative Pilot-2gen: Solving the Separate Silos Problem

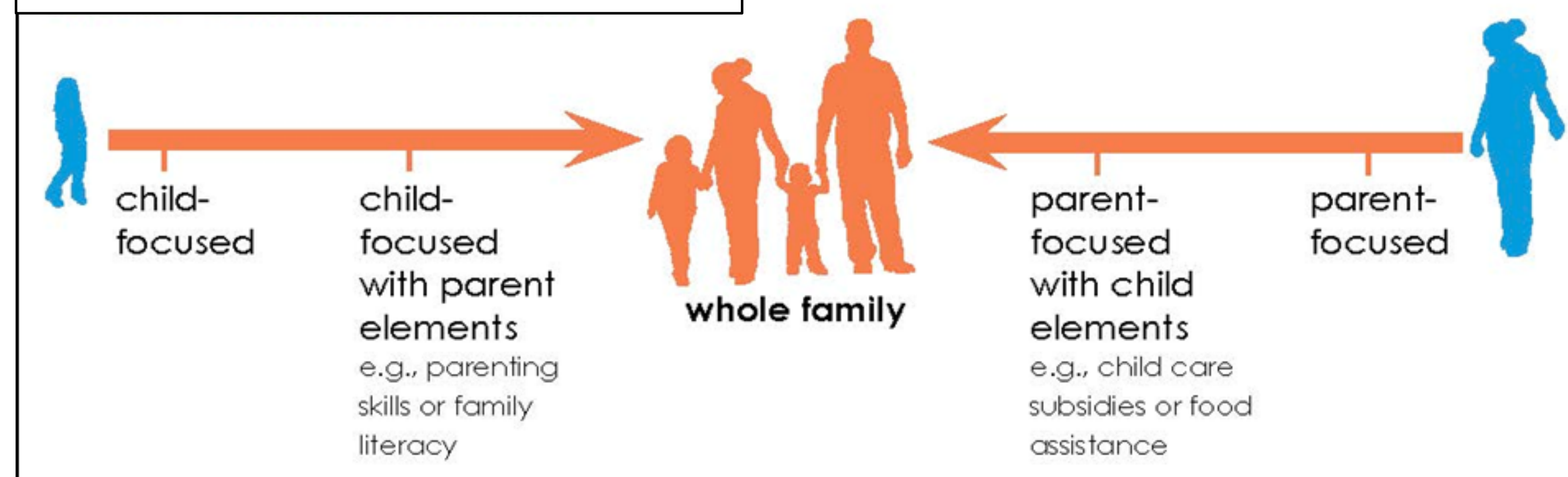


Low-income families face a challenging array of issues:

- Providing quality childcare for children
- Receiving job training and adult education
- Maintaining stable housing and food

Programs serving low-income families operated in silos. Connecticut's new 2gen initiative, looks to holistically serve the needs of two generations using an integrated approach.

The Two Generation Framework



Acknowledgement

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