

## Toward a Transformative Research and Practice Agenda for Racial Equity in Family Engagement

2015–2016 Family Leadership Design Collaborative White Paper

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# INTRODUCTION

*This project began with a forthright question. Amidst racism, historical trauma, poverty, unstable neighborhoods, and systemic inequities in education, what will it take for nondominant students, families, and their communities to thrive?*

The Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC) is a national network of scholars, practitioners, and family and community leaders who seek to center racial equity in family engagement by catalyzing an expansive national research agenda and developing “next” (beyond current “best”) practices, measures and tools. We envision family and community wellbeing and educational justice as core aims in work that begins from nondominant family and community ecologies, creates ongoing transformative possibilities, and builds solidarities towards collective action for racial equity, from early childhood to secondary education. We mobilize inter-disciplinary and experiential forms of expertise and approach families and communities — particularly those marginalized by race, class, language, or immigrant status — as learning experts, co-designers, collaborators, and fellow leaders in the work. The first phase of this multi-year effort is focused on building this strategic network, co-creating a shared agenda, and seeding new possibilities for transformative shifts in family engagement.

## WHO IS THE FLDC?

Supported by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Family Leadership Design Collaborative is an interdisciplinary group of over 40 accomplished researchers, scholars, educational

practitioners, and family and community leaders. The majority of FLDC members are from communities of color spanning 16 states as well as the District of Columbia (though a number are focused nationally), and bring a broad range of individual and collective community, professional, and research expertise. Guided by a leadership team of 11 individuals representing a variety of fields and roles, the FLDC membership includes scholars based at colleges and universities, practitioners from early childhood and K-12 school systems, and leaders from community organizations, national networks, and technical assistance organizations. Many Collaborative members currently hold responsibilities across these domains, and most have had experience in multiple contexts over the course of their personal and professional lives. (See Appendix A for a full list of FLDC Collaborative members and their institutions.)

## FLDC PROCESSES

All of the discussions and collective work of the FLDC are part of a participatory design-based research (PDR) process in which the dialogues, tensions, themes, decisions, and designs become data in the form of recordings and transcriptions. We systematically analyze and use these data to guide next steps in the research, build new knowledge, and improve

both practice and theory (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). Design-based research (DBR) is an iterative research methodology from the learning sciences used to develop and implement innovations in real educational contexts (Barab & Squire, 2004). In this case, we are using DBR with the FLDC members as co-designers (participants) to articulate an emerging framework and research agenda that positions families and communities—particularly from marginalized communities—as central, collective agents in redesigning educational systems toward equity. Drawing on equity-focused design research approaches, we move beyond “how do” questions that describe current practices, processes, and inequitable systems toward “how can” questions that seek to identify and enact transformative possibilities for change.

### FOCUS & AIM OF THIS REPORT

At the 2014 White House Symposium for Transformative Family Engagement, philanthropists, policymakers, scholars, and practitioners came together to expand the conversation about the role of parents, caregivers, and families in achieving educational equity. Across the range of insights and experiences in strengths-based approaches to family engagement, a broad consensus emerged about the need for an equity-focused agenda that positions low-income parents and families, particularly from nondominant communities, as fellow leaders in transforming schools and educational systems. The purpose of this report is to share an emerging framework and synthesis of expertise to articulate that new agenda. The research consistent with this agenda seeks to shift policy and practice towards more equitable forms of collaboration between families, communities, schools, and educational organizations.

The Family Leadership Design Collaborative was intentionally designed to be different from the usual expert convening and synthesis. In the conventional approach, a select group of “expert” academics share their knowledge about a target group of people (for instance, young children or low-income families) or issue based on their own research, and their presentations are synthesized into a report that then gets disseminated to policymakers, funders, and practitioners, in the hope that it will inform future efforts. Although such efforts have produced important understandings and broad-scale policy initiatives, the research-practice gap remains largely intact, leaving many to decry that so little educational research impacts policy and practice.

The FLDC emerged amidst a groundswell of calls for changing the conventional relationship between research and practice (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Gutierrez, 2014). This effort joins a host of others in the field in working to create new relationships, resources, mechanisms, and questions in collaboration with families, communities, and educators (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). We seek to move from research and practice *on* families (based on a tradition of pathologizing them as part of the problem) to research and practice *with* families, that builds from their knowledge, experiences, and priorities for change. Thus, the FLDC includes scholars, family and community leaders and educational practitioners, and we seek to build long-term relationships and networks that leverage the multiple forms of expertise in the Collaborative, across disciplines, racial/cultural communities, lived experiences, geographies, histories, and epistemologies.

This report emerged from the data gleaned through discussions between FLDC members

about the challenges and possibilities for racial equity in family engagement. These conversations took place during a series of intensive convenings in September and December 2015 as well as January and February 2016. We sought, in our conversations and our analyses, to embrace the inherent contradictions and tensions as generative opportunities to expand our collective understandings and vision of transformative possibilities.

We begin with a brief overview of the context and convergences in the field of education that provided fertile ground in which the FLDC has taken root. We then describe the core principles and objectives that anchor our collective work, then go on to describe the strategic openings, or “aperturas,” that provide substantive focus and opportunities for change in the FLDC work. We conclude by describing the Community Design Circles we are using to “groundtruth” our emerging principles and shape the next phase of the work.

## CONTEXTS & CONVERGENCES IN THE FIELD

### POLICY CONTEXTS

The recent adoption of the Common Core State Standards in 40 states and 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that led to the formal adoption of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are part of the sweeping policy changes afoot in national education policy. These shifts are happening amidst social and political justice movements that challenge decades of violence and oppression against African-Americans — as in the #blacklivesmatter movement — efforts to afford legal status and citizenship to immigrants from all over the world, and an escalation in the fight to protect rights to free speech, legal marriage, and economic stability. These efforts do not happen in isolation, but rather are a constellation of convergences that have the potential to add up to transformative changes in movement building to ensure necessary human and civil rights in our country.

In education specifically, contentious relations between districts and charter schools, the proliferation of market-based education reforms, anti-affirmative action sentiments, and high-stakes accountability systems have created an environment in which we are in danger of being defined by our divisions rather than our solidarities. As we are challenging the K-12 system to be more equitable and reflective of cultural ways of knowing, we must also look at how we are preparing young children (birth through pre-kindergarten) to enter that system and by what “measures” we determine their “readiness.” Through convergences between local, state and national policies and broader social justice movements, we have the opportunity to redefine what educational justice looks like for students and families and open a dialogue about the aims of public education that prioritizes the wellness of children and families across communities and contexts.

## PARENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES IN EDUCATION

Decades of research point to a positive association between a variety of parental roles in education and student achievement and educational success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson; Jeynes 2005; 2007; 2015; and many others). Although debate rages on about which particular behaviors help or hinder academic success, most quantitative studies focus on the narrow, normative forms of parent-school “partnerships” (Ishimaru et al., 2013), and research about bicultural and other families of color suggests that the well-intentioned implementation of conventional deficit-based models can actually foster disengagement (Dyrness, 2010; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Olivos, 2006). Given this dynamic, the impact of families on their children’s school success, learning, and education is likely greatly underestimated.

*“Everybody’s definition is different to what parent engagement is, so that’s the key. If we go around the table and we ask what that is, I guarantee you we’ll up come up with different mindset [about] what parent engagement is. Always what people label parent engagement is - from a superintendent or a principal or a teacher - it’s different than what the parents actually think parent engagement is.” (Mary Johnson, Parent U-Turn, FLDC Leadership Team)*

And yet, as the quote above suggests, there is little agreement in the field as to what, exactly, constitutes parent or family engagement. We acknowledge that interrogating what we mean by parent or family engagement is not a new conversation. The FLDC builds on decades of work in the field to critique and expand

the narrow, prescriptive conceptions “parent involvement” and “family engagement” that persist in research, policy, and practice. As Ms. Johnson suggests, these conceptions are often at odds with families’ own lived understandings. Thus, we work to begin our conversations with parent and family understandings, priorities and perspectives.

## EMERGING SHIFTS IN THE FIELD

We also argue that there are key shifts unfolding in different fields within education that represent convergences and opportunities that have not existed before. The field of family-school partnerships is only one domain of scholarship and practice with regards to the role of families and communities in education, and the conversation about racial equity has only just begun to emerge in that context. (Our literature review on school-based engagement and racial equity will be published in 2017). Bringing other disciplines and fields into the conversation — community organizing, educational leadership, family learning, learning sciences, informal learning, culture/learning/development, politics of education reform, early childhood education, and anthropology of education — broadens the possibilities for envisioning families and communities as central actors in equitable student learning and development. The following represent key shifts represented by the FLDC that we see as promising movement towards catalyzing transformative change in the field:

1. From a focus on schools alone to recognizing that learning happens in families and communities;
2. From recognizing only white normative involvement (PTA and bake sales, two biological parents) to a multiplicity of

- familial structures (e.g., grandparents, aunts, nonbiological guardians), cultural practices and forms of engagement with families and communities;
3. From building parent efficacy to fostering the capacity of families and educators to work together, particularly in low-income contexts of racial, cultural, linguistic, and other diversity.
  4. From “fixing” nondominant parents to interrupting systems of inequity and explicitly addressing issues of race, class, language, power, and privilege in the ways families and communities interact with educational institutions and systems.
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## FLDC CORE PRINCIPLES & OBJECTIVES

Over the course of our convenings, the FLDC has evolved the following core principles and objectives to center racial equity in family engagement policy, practice, and research. These principles represent a fundamentally different starting place from the typical school-based family engagement approach. The default approach in schools tends to focus on narrower aims of individualistic academic achievement, driven exclusively by policymakers’ and educators’ agendas and expertise. These conventional ways of engaging families tend to disregard issues of race, power, class, language and history even as they enact theories of change focused on “fixing” marginalized parents and communities. These efforts align with prevailing racialized narratives about low-income parents and families of color that implicitly blame them for their children’s academic struggles. Though well-meaning, the dominant mode of engagement emphasizes “training” parents to become, in a sense, compliance officers who ensure their children do their homework, attend school, behave in accordance with school expectations, and enroll in enrichment or other

supplemental learning programs to improve their achievement, as measured by standardized assessments. In other words, the logic goes: If nondominant parents simply adhere to what professionals and schools say is best for their children, we will close long-standing racial and socioeconomic achievement and opportunity “gaps.”

As discussed above, this theory of change has not only fallen short of achieving its aim, a growing literature suggests that it can actually exacerbate racial and other inequities. “Best practice” efforts focused primarily on removing barriers to accessing the same outmoded, school-centric activities and events (e.g., by translating information into different languages or providing childcare and transportation to school events) also fall short. They do little to shift the underlying assumptions and opportunities for engagement. Further, they do little to disrupt the policies, practices, and daily interactions that systematically structure marginalization and disengagement for nondominant students, their families and communities — if not reinforce the status quo.

To move beyond critique, then, the FLDC core principles seek to light the way towards transformative aims and theories of change. We begin from the premise that families and communities possess vital knowledge and expertise, not only about their own individual children but also about their communities, their histories, and systemic educational inequities in and out of schools. Such knowledge and expertise are not simply “assets” we can and should appreciate. They are vital to build with and from in our efforts to transform our schools and broader educational systems towards educational justice.

### *Cultivating Family & Community Wellbeing & Educational Justice*

- We aim for whole, healthy children (within healthy families & communities) who know/practice their culture, understand power, and can determine their own future.
- We engage relational, communal, and collective understandings as central to ensuring the wellbeing of children & families
- Community well-being and educational justice are inseparable and must be engaged as such.
- We seek to foster a more just democracy in which institutions, policy, and practice support children, families, and communities in thriving.

### *Beginning With Family & Community Ecologies*

- We build from and with the knowledge, priorities, and agendas of nondominant families & communities (and our histories of resistance and transformation) rather than the agenda and priorities of schools or other institutions.

- We recognize a diversity of familial relations that include children, youth, and adults, including and beyond parents, as well as their cultural ecologies and repertoires of practice.
- We encompass racial, ethnic and other communities that are dynamic and historically informed with both relational and geographic dimensions.
- We approach education as a domain of learning and development that intersects and goes beyond the institution of schooling.

### *Creating On-Going Transformative Possibilities*

- We recognize that historically inflected accumulations of power shape current contexts and challenges, particularly for families and communities of color.
- We aim to design new possibilities that transform the historical and ongoing asymmetric power relationships between communities and schools that are central to the reproduction of racial and other inequities.
- We engage in transdisciplinary pursuits that draw upon critical race theories, decolonizing frameworks, sociological theories, democratic theories, and theories of learning, culture, and development.
- We work to identify, name, and evolve new language towards educational justice.

### *Building Solidarity Towards Collective Action*

- We intentionally ask “how can” questions to envision and act beyond our existing systems and structures and move beyond “how do” questions that seek only to understand inequity.
- We recognize the need for multi-directional daily and systemic acts of educa-

tional justice by those with normative power and privilege as well as those without.

- We enact and actively build solidarity within and across disciplines and communities (across geographies and histories)
- We build alliances and networks to link education to other systemic inequities.

### ANIMATING THE PRINCIPLES

In moving towards enacting these principles, we intentionally seek to identify “next” — as opposed to “best” — practices that might promote community wellness and educational justice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

To make the principles more concrete and contextualized, FLDC members have begun a series of short videos to elaborate on the Core Principles and illuminate promising “next practices” from collaborative members. Collaborative members have begun to share transformative practices that are locally rooted in their personal and professional ecologies. These brief (about 10 minute) videos share what community wellness and educational justice means in their context and what “next” practices they see emerging. These videos are informing how we operationalize the next phases of work and will soon be available on the FLDC website for dissemination throughout the field.

## APERTURAS: STRATEGIC OPENINGS FOR CHANGE

### WHAT ARE “APERTURAS?”

Born out of critical pedagogy, the term “aperturas” is a Spanish word that emerged to describe the convergence of personal, political and social phenomena that brings a group of people together to create transformational change with and for students, families, and communities. The Family Leadership Design Collaborative uses this word to convey the current “openings” in the field and our collective agency in shaping these opportunities towards transformative ends. These strategic openings represent different entry points for new research and intervention that reconfigure nondominant families and communities in racial equity, as articulated in the core principles.

### SITUATING OUR WORK WITHIN KEY APERTURAS

At the FLDC December 2015 convening, we used the term aperturas to describe the convergences and opportunities envisioned across the collaborative as they relate to the role of families and communities in achieving educational justice and community wellness. The four aperturas below emerged from our dialogues and collective sensemaking to date. Each apertura below frames the opportunities and problems of practice that are emerging in our political, economic, and social contexts. Additionally, Collaborative members discussed potential collective actions, tools and strategies to address each unique apertura as well as some broader tools/strategies that

cut across them. These aperturas are intended to help identify individual and collective opportunities to transform the field and shape the future directions of the Family Leadership Design Collaborative. We also recognize that new aperturas are always emerging, and it is our hope to explore convergences in our work past, present, and future. FLDC members are currently writing research briefs to synthesize the research literature in each of the four aperturas below.

### **APERTURA 1: TEACHER AND FORMAL LEADER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND PRACTICE**

#### *Openings and Opportunities*

A number of converging dynamics represent key opportunities to address the need for preservice and inservice teachers and formal leaders to work more closely with families and work in communities that may be socio-economically and/or racially different from their own. The United States Department of Education's Dual Capacity Building Framework is an example of a policy lever that acknowledges the two-way relationship between families and schools in supporting student success. New partnerships have emerged between university-based educator preparation programs and community leaders to prepare early childhood educators, new teachers and formal leaders and build inservice teacher capacity to engage with families. In addition, there are new standards for formal leaders to lead for equity and cultural responsiveness. These efforts provide new orientations to power and the opportunity to reshape relationships between teachers, formal leaders, families and communities.

These opportunities emerge from a context in which university-based teacher and formal leader preparation programs have historically

problematic orientations to power, relationship building, and families' ways of knowing. This limits opportunities for families and educators to interact, learn from one another, and/or explore issues of race, power and decolonization. In addition, the faculty in many teacher and leader preparation programs do not reflect families' diverse socioeconomic, cultural, racial and linguistic communities and in many cases the admission and certification requirements for early childhood educator, teacher and formal leader preparation programs run the risk of perpetuating existing inequities in the labor force.

#### *Collective Design Challenges*

- How can families/communities be centrally engaged in preparing new teachers and providing professional development for in-service teachers?
- How can understanding and engaging families and communities' ways of knowing be a central learning objective in the preparation of educators and formal leaders?
- How can we re-imagine and design new policies/relationships and necessary supports so that families are sustainably and equitably involved in teacher/principal preparation and ongoing professional learning?
- What are important differences in strategies to achieve such relationships and learning at the school level vs. classroom level?

#### *Potential Tools/Strategies*

- Capture and utilize stories of educator preparation programs and/or districts from around the country that are engaging families in the training of teachers and formal leaders.
- Create and utilize practitioner-focused

resources that highlight the ways in which educators can identify and lift up families' and communities ways of knowing.

- Develop practices and systems that make home visits and deeper practices such as shadowing families routine for educators.
- Design and maintain transformative spaces for collective reflection, dialogue and learning between teachers, formal leaders and families.

## APERTURA 2: RACIAL EQUITY INITIATIVES

### *Openings and Opportunities*

There are promising efforts around the country to build cross-community solidarities and capacity among education leaders to deepen their awareness, knowledge, and abilities to address issues of race and equity across the birth to career continuum. By coordinating agencies, organizations, and institutions towards education across the lifespan, these solidarities seek to eliminate institutionalized inequities and long-term disparities in individual's academic achievement, community wellness and self-determination. These initiatives focus on creating opportunities and access to rich engagement in learning that leads to academic achievement and whole child well-being from infancy through adulthood, while continuously innovating so that pathways to success do not become static or based in middle-class, white, norms and practices. Examples of multi-agency efforts building solidarity include: racial equity initiatives taking place in schools and districts, particularly those focused on boys of color, coalitions focused on halting the school to prison pipeline, cross-sector partnerships such as collective impact and cradle to career partnerships and organizing efforts led by unions, parent organizing groups and social workers.

While there are many isolated examples of multi-agency solidarities in the United States and abroad, a look at the historical trend of these collaborations highlights the ways in which building and maintaining equitable and transformative solidarity can be unsustainable. This can be because people tend to revert to norms and practices that reinforce the status quo or because of the personal and professional toll it can take on people to advance racial equity within and across systems and/or communities. Additionally, pressures to support individual students, families, and communities in a political and economic moment may constrain possibilities for transformative imagining and collective action. There remain many opportunities to support boundary-spanning individuals and organizations and to leverage our collective resources and efforts to approach education equity in broader, more equity-conscious ways that build solidarities across communities and re-situate power in relations between organizations, systems and communities. In building solidarities, we must also deepen understandings of the trajectories and particularities of communities' histories.

### *Collective Design Challenges:*

- How can we support/expand racial equity initiatives that strengthen and promote collective solidarities?
- How can we move beyond individuals' and their organizations' knowledge and competencies to ongoing processes for systems change?
- How can we engage individuals across roles (e.g., teachers, families, social workers, school-based leaders) in transformative practice and solidarities towards racial equity?
- How can we effectively work across organizations and traditionally-defined systems

(districts, nonprofits/CBOs, public health orgs, other institutions) towards racial equity? What are key practices and policies that sustain such forms of work?

- How do we move beyond individual expectations for leaders to be “super human” and account for the health and well-being of leaders?

#### *Potential Tools/Strategies:*

- Create authentic rubrics for engagement at different levels of the system that support racial equity.
- Create tools for inquiry cycles and power mapping education (beyond schools) that help support the development of collective solidarities.
- Identify and utilize new forms of data related to outcomes that are reflective of new convergences across fields.

### **APERTURA 3: FAMILY AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

#### *Openings and Opportunities*

There is a growing recognition of the strengths and ways of knowing that students, families and communities engage in. This recognition creates openings to fundamentally transform the role that families and youth play in the current education system through new forms of power sharing and collective decision making between students, families, and schools. Already, students, families and communities are mobilizing at the local, state and federal levels to make sure their voices are heard and to advocate for policies and practices that promote students and families’ success and well-being. For example, students and families in California are working with school and district leaders to make decisions about school budget priorities and allocations through the implementation of the Local

Control Funding Formula. There is a growing community of researchers who are reframing deficit-perspectives of families and students to focus scholarship on the strengths and power of racially, culturally, socioeconomically and linguistically diverse families and students bring to the table.

Intergenerational tensions and divides within communities are a part of the context in which opportunities emerge to transform the role of families and youth in our current education system. Communities are dynamic and layered in places where relationships are built and broken across and within a multiplicity of identities. Acknowledging and creating spaces for intergenerational mobilization through youth and family leadership can drastically improve relations within and between communities, families, and educators while supporting community wellness as a whole.

#### *Collective Design Challenges*

- How can we conduct research that allows us to understand whether we are actually affecting systems level change through the family empowerment strategies we employ?
- How can we address and systematically improve upon ongoing challenges in the field encountered in implementing various solutions/strategies?
- How can we identify and utilize strategies for mutual transformation of teachers and families?
- How can we increase families’ access to and impacts on institutions?

#### *Potential Tools/Strategies*

- Develop technologies or social media to enable families to exchange ideas and resources, especially about combatting lateral violence within and between

- marginalized communities.
- Publish digital “cases” or photovoice reports highlighting parent empowerment stories and strategies.
- Co-design and study — with families — educational environments that are multi-generational and intergenerational.

## APERTURA 4: LEARNING ACROSS CONTEXTS

### *Openings and Opportunities*

Over the past 15 years there has been a significant increase in research and programming focused on learning across contexts and creating openings for broader forms of family engagement towards racial equity. This means attending to learning in places beyond schools like after-school programs, museums, and in community life wherein programs often aspire to a wide range of learning opportunities including: developing social skills and leadership, resourcing interest driven learning opportunities, strengthening communities, improving academic achievement, and much more. Though often very different from schools, these spaces are important contexts in which educators, youth, and families interact. This growing network of programs and activities represents an important opportunity to reimagine the context of learning and family engagement that is deeper and more nuanced than traditional unidirectional, school-based program participation. Indeed, these learning spaces could be effective leadership development and relationship building spaces as well.

While children and families constantly navigate informal and formal learning environments in their daily lives, “high quality” informal learning environments are often construed as resource-rich after-school programs and institutional settings such

as zoos and museums. While energy and scholarship should be devoted to developing culturally appropriate and rich materials and engagement strategies for communities of color in and with these settings, it is also critical to acknowledge and build up spaces and programs that account for communities’ varied and dynamic ways of knowing. This includes a depth of scholarship that expands current conceptualizations of rich learning and knowing as well as funding streams to support these dynamic programs.

### *Collective Design Challenges*

- How can we identify informal learning spaces and programs engaged in racial equity and supporting children, youth, and families’ learning?
- How can we identify and engage e informal learning educators as experts and contributors to racial equity through funding, expansive evaluations, and educational networks?
- How can we advocate for a more integrated paradigm of learning across contexts that focused on racial equity?

### *Potential Tools/Strategies*

- Publish educational resources from informal learning spaces alongside formal learning curricula
- Connect formal and informal educators and programs in reciprocal relationships around learning, wellness, and tool/practice sharing
- Bring educators from informal learning contexts into teacher education programs as instructional partners.

## OVERARCHING TOOLS/STRATEGIES

The opportunities highlighted above speak to specific openings in the field to promote

shared decision-making, restructured power relationships and greater capacities to address issues of race and equity between students, families, communities and schools. To realize transformative change within these aperturas, we identified these tools and resources to facilitate shared learning and collective action.

### *Collective Design Challenges*

- How can we seek input from a representative group of constituents to design and implement federal, state and local education policies towards racial equity?
- How can we explore opportunities to bridge the divide between districts and charter schools in ways that impact racial equity?
- How can we create alliances across education organizing and organizing around economic justice and immigrant rights, and confront inequality to holistically

address racial equity and children's, families', and communities' needs?

### *Potential Tools/Strategies*

- Develop communication materials that break down complex policies that impact public education and translate these communications into multiple languages.
- Create spaces where families and communities can help shape public policy and provide implementation support.
- Leverage social media, op eds and other media to elevate the voices of families and communities in public discourse about the goals, aims and purposes of public education.
- Develop a framework of indicators/ measures of family engagement and empowerment, along with studies that support and demonstrate how to measure them.

## **NEXT STEPS: COMMUNITY DESIGN CIRCLES**

In the summer of 2016, the FLDC moved into a new phase of collective empirical work focused on transformative family engagement. We are working to bring evidence from the field into conversation with the literature to expand beyond our current knowledge base. To do so, collaborative members are facilitating working groups or conversations that expand our understanding of the opportunities in the field through a series of dialogues with families and community leaders from a range of geographies, racial/cultural communities, and perspectives on formal education systems. These in-depth conversations — or design circles — will articulate the opportu-

nities for transformative change in a given context and/or develop strategies, tools, processes, or practices to bring about that change. The design circles will ground and validate the emerging FLDC agenda in the stories, experience and expertise of families in different communities through at least three sessions over time with the same families to enable ongoing, reciprocal partnerships between researchers, practitioners, and community members. This work will lead to a series of reports and papers that deepen the transformative research and action agenda for the future.

## WHAT ARE DESIGN CIRCLES?

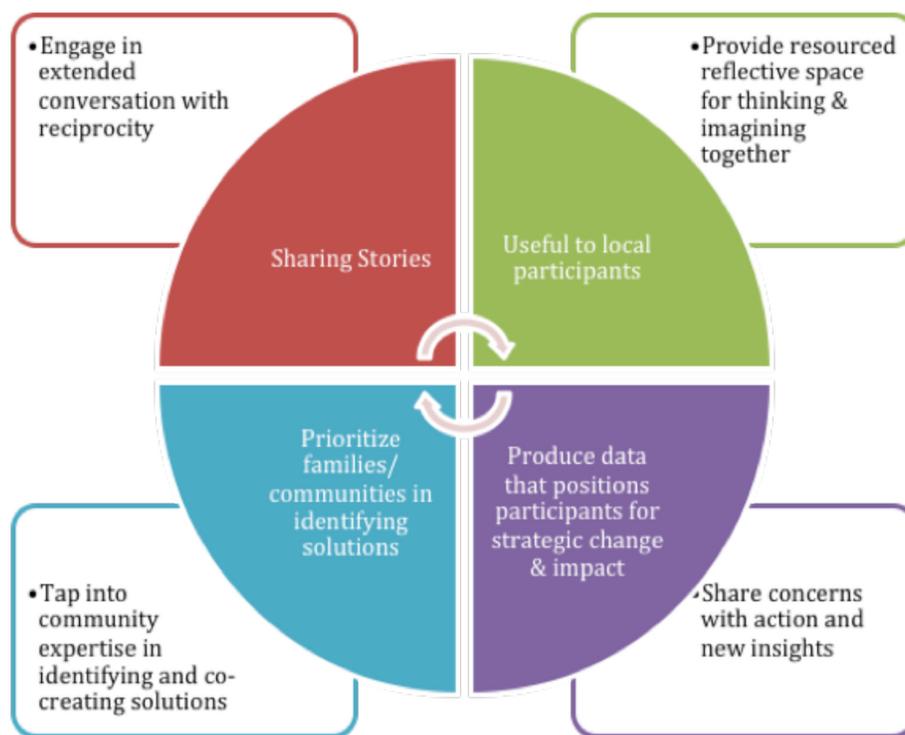
Facilitated by collaborative members in their own local communities, design circles are a way of honoring community leadership and perspectives by creating space for conversations that are focused on co-designing solutions rather than only on voicing and naming challenges (Bang et al., 2010). Design circles are in-depth, reciprocal working groups or focus groups that aim to engage stories, experiences, and expertise within our communities in order to catalyze action within a particular context. They represent both community engagement and data collection and are a methodological innovation on traditional focus groups. Although the exact format and details will vary by context, the circles contrast with traditional research focus groups that have often exploited family and community traumas for research purposes

without prioritizing community agency to contribute to active solutions. FLDC members are co-leading the on-the-ground work of designing and facilitating a design circle with families, community members, and sometimes educators focused on co-designing strategic actions or tools, as determined by each group.

The FLDC Design Circles are topically-focused within key aperturas, or opportunities for transformative change towards community wellness and educational justice. We are currently launching two or more design circles in each of the FLDC strategic openings:

- Teacher and Formal Leader Professional Learning and Practice
- Racial Equity Initiatives
- Family and Youth Leadership
- Learning Across Contexts (understanding education beyond schools)

### FLDC DESIGN CIRCLE PROCESS



## WHERE ARE THE DESIGN CIRCLES?

The community design circles represent a broad range of FLDC members, geographies, communities, and substantive focus. Below, sites are listed by apertura. See Appendix A for full list of members involved.

### *Teacher and leader preparation and professional learning*

Los Angeles, CA  
Salt Lake City, UT  
Salem, OR  
Southfield, MI

### *Racial equity initiatives*

Greenville, MS  
Seattle, WA

### *Family and youth leadership*

Detroit, MI  
Central Falls, RI  
Lincoln, NE

### *Learning across contexts*

Chicago, IL  
Seattle, WA

After facilitating their design circles, FLDC members will conduct subsequent analyses and draft white papers or manuscripts on the circles that we will share at our “bridge” convening in February 2017. At that time we will synthesize across design circles and aperturas to further align and elaborate the FLDC core principles and research agenda as well as launch the final phase of the FLDC project. The final phase will be a collaborative, in-depth, site-based work in three communities to co-design new practices, policies, and measures consistent with transformative family engagement.

In sum, through the development and enactment of this research agenda, the Family Leadership Design Collaborative seeks to catalyze an ongoing, strategic network of family and community leaders, researchers and educational practitioners who center nondominant families and communities in efforts to realize community wellness and educational justice. We offer these principles and processes as a foundation for collective efforts to synthesize and co-design research and practice that fosters reciprocal, relational, and collective work with families in the pursuit of racial equity in education.

## APPENDIX A

### Family Leadership Design Collaborative Members

<b>482Forward</b> , MI
<b>Vianna Alcantara</b> , Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University
<b>Aloha Center of Chicago</b> , IL
<b>The American Indian OIC</b> , MN
<b>Megan Bang</b> , University of Washington, Seattle
<b>Amber Banks Grubb</b> , University of Washington, Seattle
<b>Filiberto Barajas-López</b> , University of Washington, Seattle
<b>Barbara Blackdeer-MacKenzie</b> , Wisconsin Indian Education Association
<b>Bryan Brayboy</b> , Arizona State University
<b>Joanna Brown</b> , Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Chicago, IL
<b>Central Falls School District</b> , RI
<b>Jondou Chen</b> , University of Washington, Seattle
<b>Chicago Persian School</b> , IL
<b>Chief Sealth International High School Race &amp; Equity Team</b> , WA
<b>Maisie Chin</b> , CADRE, South Los Angeles, CA
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