

Parenting Education Credentialing Study Committee

Cormier, DeBord, Jones

In the summer of 2009, House Bill 1308 was passed in North Carolina which proposed developing a study commission to review current practices in parenting education and provide recommendations to promote high quality parenting education that is widely accessible and enhances parents' child-rearing confidence and ability.

HISTORY

Support and education should be available for all families in the state of North Carolina. The degree of support and the type of education is based in good educational practices and based on individual family needs. Applying a broad "one size fits all" approach has proven to be ineffective in changing parent behaviors. Instead, parenting education in North Carolina should be available on a continual basis and offered in multiple forms to meet the diverse family and cultural needs of the parenting population. The changes in family demographics and increasing needs of family members (stressful economy, children's health issues that include mental health, complicated access to services) make parenting education critical. Parent educators are often called upon to fill service gaps and support families augment special services for families, as a response to inappropriate parent interactions with children, to meet mandated court orders, and to provide education to families who face an overwhelming array of choices about best practices with children.

Parenting education has been identified as a prevention method that addresses multiple social problems such as child abuse, juvenile crime, and teen pregnancy. Parenting education practices are not standardized and may vary in methods. One model of a parent educator can be a person

who helps teach parents skills and provide tools the parent can use to be a more effective parent/caretaker. The second model of parent educator comes in the form of a Family Partner. This model uses peer parents to work closely with individual families to support and train the family in navigating multiple child systems and services that can be overwhelming and confusing. Typically, Family Partners are parents or caretakers who share lived experiences with the families they mentor. Both models have been identified as effective methods to respond to increase risk of family stress that often results in increase involvement in services such as mental health, juvenile justice and social services.

Increasingly, schools, communities, social agencies, court systems and other service organizations refer parents for parenting education, yet referral is not an easy task. Locating knowledgeable parenting educators, particularly in rural areas is difficult. Often those who are asked to offer parenting education lack expertise in delivering services and education to diverse parent audiences. Additional resources and professional support mechanisms for accessing information to assure the delivery of parenting education to meet both broad and specific parent needs is necessary. Currently there is not a cohesive parenting education delivery system in North Carolina. Parenting education, instead, is often sponsored by an array of community agencies, religious organizations, courts, public and private schools, mental health, public health, family organizations including Smart Start partnerships, Department of Social Services, Cooperative Extension, hospitals, senior centers, Family Resource Centers, Head Starts, businesses and employers, professional affiliate groups (NAEYC, NCFR), Department of Public Instruction, the Family Support Network, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalitions, United Ways, YMCA/YWCAs, System of Care programs, private agencies and therapists, PTAs, child

care programs, preschools, colleges and universities, and various civic groups.

Even with this vast array of service providers, all parenting education programs are not accessible by all parents and quality varies between programs. Currently there are not standards related to level of experience; both personal and professional, education or trainings for hiring personnel to become parent educators. Having multiple organizations delivering parenting education is not an overwhelming concern; however the lack of a professional support structure, common research base, verification of authentic personal family experience or accessible teaching and resource materials presents a great concern in meeting the growing need for high quality parenting education in North Carolina. Whether the model of parent educator is the more traditional parent teacher model called Parent Educator, or the model of a peer support navigator called Family Partner, it is felt that this important field needs to ensure quality outreach and some sense of fidelity with the approach that is used to help and support families in need. Consequently advocates of both approaches have begun to see the importance of developing guidelines and an educational process that assures individuals who want to join this growing service field have a standardized professional development trajectory (identifiable career ladder) that guarantees best practices incorporating evidence-based programs that promote the highest quality of parent-child interaction when working with families. These standards must be met whether a Parent Educator is a paid practitioner or if a Parent Educator volunteers their services for an organization.

In the spirit of promoting best practices in this field NCPEN and NC Families United have come together to advance the conversation regarding a standardized credentialing process that can take into account both important forms of parenting education.

MODELS AND DEFINITIONS

Parent Educator – Model 1

In 1992, a team of Extension family life and human development specialists, with the national program staff at the USDA led a national effort to develop a model of “what” to teach parents in parent education programs. The model, called the National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM) set forth six categories of priority parenting practices to be learned by parents and taught by parenting educators (Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, and Myers-Walls, 1994).

NEPEM’s six categories of priority practices for parents – Care for Self, Understand, Guide, Nurture, Motivate, and Advocate – guided Extension specialists, educators, and community partners in the development of parent education programs, educational materials, and evaluation instruments which resulted in significant contributions to the national parenting education resource base. [An overview of the NEPEM can be found online.](#)

In 2000, an Extension team comprised of state family and human development specialists and staff, and the national program leader for family life and human development met for the purpose of outlining the critical skills and practices of parenting educators. After considerable discussion, this team proposed that the NEPEM’s “priority practices for parents” be melded with a set of

“priority processes for parenting educators” to form a new structure – the National Extension Parenting Education Framework (DeBord).

It was the team’s position that when used in tandem, the six “content” practices for parents and the six “process” practices for educators – Grow, Frame, Develop, Embrace, Educate, and Build – would allow parenting educators to work more effectively with parents on behalf of children.

Family Partner – Model 2

Since January 2008, North Carolina Families United, NFFCMH has facilitated *Family Partner Development* meetings. All Family Partners who have participated in NC System of Care trainings across the state and who work within the values and principles of the System of Care philosophy were invited to participate in the development meetings. One of the outcomes was agreement that a credentialing system was needed to further elevate the work of family partners. In order to ensure consistency and validation of the profession statewide, a recommended job description was developed and adopted by attendees for those who support parents .

It should be noted that Family Partner Coordinator and Family Partner or Family Partner Trainer are defined as a caregiver/parent of someone who has received services (mental health, schools, etc.) and therefore has firsthand experience navigating the systems involved in delivering services. The family attendees recognize the legitimacy and value of many individuals who have not had firsthand experience within their own personal lives who are working with families and advocating for families in a similar fashion. However, in order to emphasize the belief that firsthand family experience is best practices in helping other families navigate similar systems, to serve such identified families, family partner criteria should apply. Additionally, it is proposed

that exploration of and recognition of the multiple titles of individuals serving families be explored; among those, Family Partner Coordinator, Family Partner, Family Partner Trainer, Family Advocate, Family Support Partner, Family Life Educator, and Parent Educator. A distinction should indeed be made along this continuum of family serving professionals and volunteers. See Figure 1, which identifies and overlapping areas of these diverse definitions of Parent Educator and Family Partner.

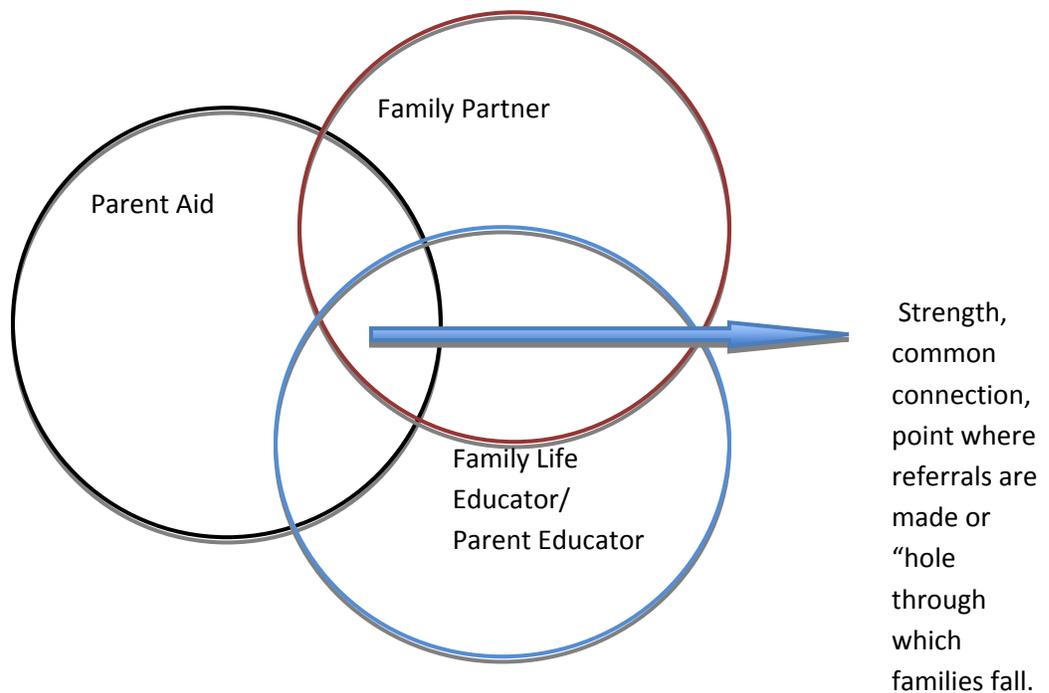
STUDY COMMITTEE'S TASKS

- To review the current practices of various Parenting Programs and the training of Parent Educators in the various programs.
- To review credentialing system in North Carolina and other states (including NCPEN and NC Families United) in hopes of adopting one unified credentialing system.
- To decide if a combination of the two Parent Educator models can fit into one credentialing process or two concurrent credentialing processes.
- To recommend to the Joint Legislators, a process for credentialing Parent Educators in the state of North Carolina that will ensure the highest quality of Parenting Education encompassing both models, the traditional model of parent educators referred to as Parent Educators and the peer support model of parent educators referred to as Family Partners.
- To develop a House Bill that will endorse the (new) credentialing process/processes.
- To address parent educator core competencies, levels of specialization, identify available programs, propose the development of a parent educator registry, define standards for serving special needs populations, explore funding sources, and identify available training opportunities to raise the quality of outreach and education for all families

GOAL OF STUDY COMMITTEE

To guarantee the highest quality skills of a Parent Educator/Family Partner that embrace the values and principles of both models as best practices. In order to enhance parents' ability and confidence to improve child-rearing knowledge, skills and ability to navigate the child and family serving systems and promote services for families that are unduplicated and adhere to families' unique needs.

Figure 1. Common ground identified between models. Developed 8-09 joint committee.



References:

- DeBord, K., Bower, D., Goddard, H.W., Kirby, J., Kobbe, A.M., Myers-Walls, J.A., Mulroy, M., Ozretich, R.A. (2002). *National Extension Parenting Educators' Framework*. Retrieved August 19, 2009 from: <http://www1.cyfernet.org/ncsu_fcs/NEPEF/NEPEF.pdf>.
- Smith, C. Cudaback, D. Goddard, W. & Myers-Walls, J. (1994). The National Extension Parent Education Model. Retrieved 9-1-2009 <<http://www.k-state.edu/wwparent/nepem/>>.
- Cormier,G., Solomon, P., (2007) North Carolina Families United Newsletter. State Endorsed Definition vol.81.