

BUILDING SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR PIRC TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND LEADERSHIP CENTERS



In the 2006–2011 funding cycle, the National Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) program is embarking on a new era. PIRCs are now strategically positioned to be statewide and national leaders that initiate, promote, and leverage parental involvement efforts. They are ready to create new opportunities for a bigger, broader vision of parental involvement from children’s birth through adolescence, across the many settings in which children and families live and learn, and in all communities across the country.

In 2006–2007, PIRCs began this strategic shift by focusing on alignment between the federal PIRC legislation, their individual activities and efforts, and methods for conducting and utilizing evaluation for continuous improvement. The 2007–2008 funding year is a critical time for PIRCs to build on this work by focusing on a strategic approach to becoming quality centers, which have statewide leadership and collaboration with Title I and other partners as their focus. In this role, PIRCs will not only implement their own quality programs but also serve as the go-to organizations in their states to help build the capacity of other parental involvement efforts through effective strategy, vision, and leadership.

Essential to this next phase of leadership is defining—and then demonstrating—what it means to be a high-quality PIRC Technical Assistance and Leadership Center. The National PIRC Coordination Center and U.S. Department of Education (USDE) have worked with the PIRCs to develop a quality framework that represents all the aspects of what a PIRC does to be effective, at both the systems-building and the programmatic levels. *The Quality Framework for PIRC Technical Assistance and Leadership Centers* (from here on referred to as “the quality framework”) is the culmination of nine months of discussions and planning about how to create a shared vision for the PIRC program.

Why a quality framework?

The overarching purpose of the quality framework is to help PIRCs move beyond the individual programs that many are now implementing to a more systemic

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and strategic approach that can build sustainability for PIRCs—a key goal of the PIRC program. The framework also addresses another key need of the PIRC program: to have a set of common goals and strategies that PIRCs can use to describe their work, both internally and externally. Ultimately, this framework responds to a call from PIRCs to synthesize and organize the PIRCs’ purposes, assurances, and priorities to clarify expectations; and to give guidance on what it takes to be effective.

How was the quality framework developed?

The quality framework has its roots in four main data sources:

- 1) *The PIRC statute.* The Coordination Center conducted a content analysis of the PIRC legislation to pull out key themes and related requirements for PIRCs (see Figure 3 for a table depicting this mapping).
- 2) *USDE priorities and goals.* The Coordination Center held meetings and phone calls with USDE staff to discuss priorities within both the department and Congress that affect PIRC sustainability.
- 3) *Research on nonprofit effectiveness and sustainability.* The Coordination Center conducted a literature review and leveraged other learning to uncover the common components of effective nonprofits, particularly those working in the youth-serving and family-strengthening fields.
- 4) *PIRC input.* At the 2008 regional institutes, the Coordination Center asked for PIRC director and evaluator feedback about the utility, content, and structure of the quality framework. The input is reflected in this brief and has been recorded to guide future technical assistance from the Coordination Center.

How can your PIRC use the quality framework?

As part of the shift in focus of the 2006–2011 cycle, PIRCs have asked strategic questions such as: “What is statewide impact?” and “How do I assess whether my partnerships have been effective?” In order to answer these questions, the Coordination Center and USDE felt that the PIRC program needed a document that helped lay the foundation for a shared understanding of what a high-quality PIRC needs in order to be effective and sustainable. This framework helps address these questions and will also drive future technical assistance and tools that will provide more detailed strategies and suggestions.

Although this quality framework is not a checklist or how-to manual, it can help PIRCs in a number of ways. First, PIRCs can use it to clarify and organize all of the legislative and PIRC program priorities. The quality framework can help PIRC staff think cohesively about how to plan for, meet, and exceed legislative requirements. Second, this framework can help PIRCs

define, understand, and share what quality looks like. In this way, it can give PIRCs broad areas on which they can set goals and objectives for internal assessment and share lessons learned with colleagues.

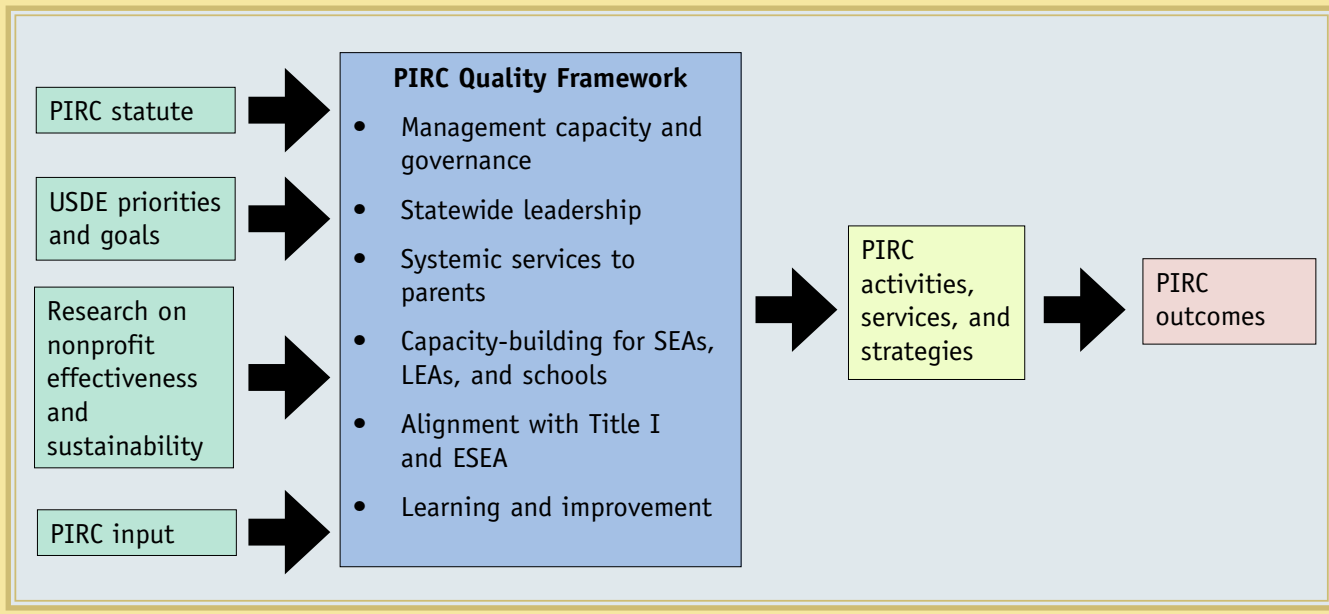
Finally, PIRCs can use the quality framework to communicate effectively about their success by using a common language, rooted in research and practice, about what PIRCs do to affect change for parental involvement at multiple levels (individual, school-based, statewide, etc.).

What is the quality framework?

More than anything, the quality framework is a new way of organizing much of what PIRCs already know and do. It is a strategic and comprehensive approach for each PIRC and the PIRC program as a whole, as well as a tool that includes multiple dimensions of PIRC sustainability. In this sense, then, the quality framework considers the different developmental stages of all of the PIRCs and hones in on what is and should be common across them. The quality framework is

Figure 1: PIRCs will build a statewide infrastructure for parental involvement

The quality framework provides important input for helping PIRCs meet the USDE goal of building a statewide infrastructure for parental involvement. It can also help PIRCs decide on activities and strategies that will help them reach PIRC outcomes, such as increased student achievement. Figure 1 shows how the quality framework fits into a plan that will help PIRCs sustain themselves over time.



also a tool that the Coordination Center will use to ground its technical assistance in the future to help PIRCs think about practical strategies and approaches and grow to be high-quality centers committed to continuous learning and improvement.

The quality framework is organized into six main categories that are based on a set of guiding principles that cut across all PIRC efforts (for example, promoting parental involvement from birth through adolescence). Although the six categories are not mutually exclusive, they are designed to provide a clear overview and organization for PIRCs' many important responsibilities. As such, the categories are intended to help PIRCs think strategically about their work, rather than providing a checklist of practices in which PIRCs engage. The six categories are: Management Capacity and Governance; Statewide Leadership; Systemic Services to Parents; Capacity-Building for State Education Agencies (SEAs), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and Schools; Alignment with Title I and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); and Learning and Improvement.

As evident in Figure 2, the quality framework, like the PIRC legislation, includes both systemwide strategies, such as statewide leadership, and programmatic

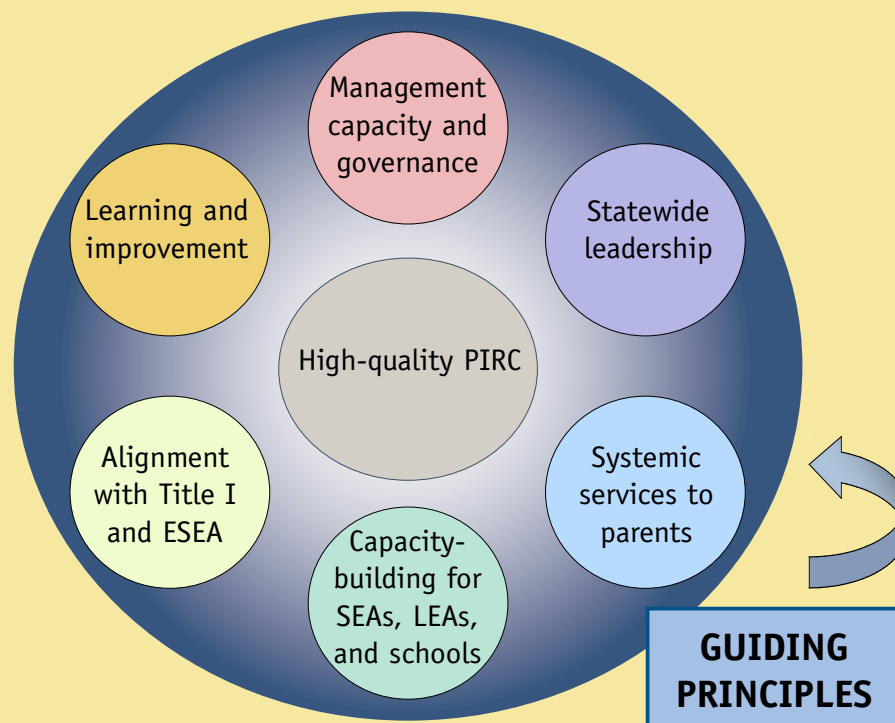
strategies, such as providing systemic services to parents. PIRCs are required to be both systems-level leaders who coordinate efforts and high-quality program providers who offer services to parents and schools.

In the description of the quality framework, each category of the framework is described briefly, followed by a set of core elements that fall under the category.

Guiding principles

All PIRCs share a set of beliefs about how to promote and support parental involvement. As a parental involvement "think tank," each PIRC is charged with fostering a sense of urgency about parental involvement. This includes promoting parental involvement for families of children and youth from birth through adolescence. All PIRCs also engage in extensive partnerships to build the capacity and awareness of the field. At the heart of PIRCs' work is also a commitment to serve high-need populations, including limited English proficiency (LEP), low-income, minority, and Title I parents. In doing this, PIRCs use inclusive and culturally responsive outreach. Finally, PIRCs use research-based principles and practices to guide their work and make the case for parental involvement at the state and local levels.

Figure 2: Framework for quality PIRC technical assistance and leadership centers



Framework categories

1) Management capacity and governance

Organizational management is a key component of a well-functioning center and includes both how PIRCs build internal capacity and how they govern effectively. This category helps foster systemic change and lays the foundation for all of the other categories in the quality framework. Quality PIRCs do the following:

- Utilize expertise from and leverage the state PIRC board and advisory committees
- Understand and comply with legislative and contractual requirements
- Build staff capacity to fulfill all PIRC roles and responsibilities
- Engage in active internal and external communication and networking
- Operate a center of sufficient quality, size, and scope to ensure that parents and other stakeholders are being served

2) Statewide leadership

Being a statewide leader is key to being able to create a system that can scale and sustain parental involvement efforts over time. PIRCs use their statewide leadership to make an impact on parental involvement across the state. Quality PIRCs do the following:

- Promote and maintain high visibility of the PIRC and of parental involvement across the state
- Build collaborative relationships with state-level agencies, offices, and organizations in order to promote parental involvement
- Coordinate and leverage federal, state, and local parental involvement efforts, events, and policies
- Network to integrate PIRC services and expertise with other organizations that support student learning
- Act as an accessible statewide resource for information about parental involvement resources

3) Systemic services to parents

One of the primary PIRC goals is to reach parents across the state to promote effective and meaningful parental involvement strategies. To achieve this goal, PIRC service delivery should focus on building parent capacity through a systemic approach to technical assistance, which moves beyond one-time workshops to sustained, in-depth, meaningful approaches. Quality PIRCs do the following:

- Provide comprehensive technical assistance and training to parents of children in early childhood programs
- Provide comprehensive technical assistance and training to parents of children in elementary and secondary school
- Focus on serving low-income, minority, and LEP parents and utilizing creative strategies to reach them
- Utilize a service delivery model that reaches parents across the state to help them understand the importance of and effective strategies for parental involvement
- Disseminate timely and accurate information to parents through such means as a parent hotline, Web site, e-mail list, and so on

4) Capacity-building for SEAs, LEAs, and schools

In addition to providing direct and indirect services to parents, PIRCs intentionally connect with educational systems to promote effective parental involvement strategies. As with services to parents, this work should be systemic and sustained. Partnership building and collaboration are central to this work. Quality PIRCs do the following:

- Help the SEA, LEAs, and schools build and strengthen policies and practices for parental involvement
- Provide technical assistance and training to educators and administrators on the importance of and effective strategies for parental involvement
- Build relationships with the SEA and other statewide agencies that support student learning
- Operate school-based or school-linked centers that build capacity of education systems and parents

5) Alignment with Title I and ESEA

One of the key levers PIRCs use to promote parental involvement is federal legislation in Section 1118 and elsewhere in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In addition to honing in on schools receiving Title I funds, PIRCs coordinate their efforts with the federal legislation to effect parental involvement across the state. Quality PIRCs do the following:

- Collaborate with state, district, and school Title I leaders to coordinate ESEA efforts

- Provide technical assistance to SEAs, districts, and schools on implementing Title I parental involvement provisions
- Offer deep and meaningful professional development and technical assistance to Title I schools and districts
- Provide technical assistance to parents on Title I, school choice, supplemental educational services (SES), and state and local report cards

- Align evaluation with activities, desired outcomes, and federal legislation
- Use evaluation results to inform, refine, and improve PIRC services and strategies
- Share evaluation results and lessons learned with key stakeholders
- Participate in learning communities that share and build knowledge with other PIRCs, parent-focused organizations, and other national and state stakeholders

6) Learning and improvement

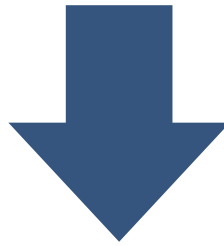
Just as management capacity and governance support the other elements of this quality framework, a process of learning and improvement is also a core component of making PIRCs effective. This includes not only evaluating PIRC efforts but also using the evaluation information for internal and external learning purposes. Quality PIRCs do the following:

Figure 3: Crosswalk of the PIRC purposes, assurances, priorities, and outcomes with the PIRC quality framework

| | | Management capacity and governance | Statewide leadership | Systemic services to parents | Capacity-building for SEAs, LEAs, and schools | Alignment with Title I and ESEA | Learning and improvement |
|----------------|---|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| PURPOSE | 1) Provide leadership, technical assistance, and financial support to nonprofits and LEAs to implement parental involvement | X | X | | X | X | X |
| | 2) Strengthen partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, and other school personnel | X | | X | X | | X |
| | 3) Strengthen the relationship between parents and their child’s school | X | | X | X | | X |
| | 4) Further the developmental progress of children | X | X | X | X | | X |
| | 5) Coordinate PIRC activities with those of section 1118 and other parts of ESEA | X | | | X | X | X |
| | 6) Provide a comprehensive approach through coordination and integration of services | X | X | X | X | X | X |

| | Management capacity and governance | Statewide leadership | Systemic services to parents | Capacity-building for SEAs, LEAs, and schools | Alignment with Title I and ESEA | Learning and improvement |
|--------------------------|---|----------------------|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A S S U R A N C E | 1) Have a board of directors or represent parent interests | X | | | | X |
| | 2) Have a special advisory committee | X | | X | | X |
| | 3) Use 50% of funds to serve disadvantaged families | X | | X | X | X |
| | 4) Operate a center of sufficient size, scope, and quality | X | | | | X |
| | 5) Serve both urban and rural areas | X | X | | | X |
| | 6) Meet unique training, information, and support needs of parents from elementary and secondary schools | X | | X | | X |
| | 7) Have the capacity and expertise for effective training, information, and support | X | | | | X |
| | 8) Network with LEAs, schools, parents, Parent Training and Information Centers (PTICs), clearinghouses, and other organizations and agencies | X | X | | X | X |
| | 9) Focus on low-income, minority, and LEP parents of children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools | X | | X | | X |
| | 10) Use at least 30% of the funds for early childhood parent education programs | X | | X | | X |
| | 11) Help parents understand standards and measures of student and school achievement | X | | X | | X |
| | 12) Work with state agencies and local educational agencies | X | X | | X | X |
| | 13) Identify and coordinate federal, state, and local services and programs that support student learning | X | X | | | X |
| | 14) Work with and foster partnerships with agencies that support student learning | X | X | | X | X |

| | | Management capacity and governance | Statewide leadership | Systemic services to parents | Capacity-building for SEAs, LEAs, and schools | Alignment with Title I and ESEA | Learning and improvement |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| P R I O R I T Y | Early childhood parent education | X | | X | | | X |
| | Statewide impact of PIRC services | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Understanding state and local report cards and opportunities for public school choice and SES | X | | X | X | X | X |
| | Technical assistance in the implementation of LEA and school parental involvement policy under Section 1118 | X | | | X | X | X |



| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| O U T C O M E | Improving home-school communication | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Increasing student academic achievement | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Increasing school academic achievement | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Improving parental involvement in school planning, review, and improvement | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Increasing school readiness | X | X | X | X | X | X |

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