

Rooted in families...

Since 1965, First Start Partnerships for Children & Families has been rooted on the principle that families are essential partners in their children's education and that they should help to decide how First Start's services can most benefit their own and other families in the community.



Parent Committees

All First Start families are automatically members of their hub's Parent Committee. Through membership on the committee, families can:

- ◆ Help staff learn about the strengths, interests, and needs of our children and families.
- ◆ Advise staff in developing and implementing local program policies, activities, and services.
- ◆ Plan, conduct, and participate in informal as well as formal programs and activities for parents and staff.
- ◆ Participate in the recruitment and screening of Head Start and Early Head Start employees within established guidelines.

Policy Council

The Policy Council is a group of parents and community members who help to make decisions about their program. At least 51% of the parents must have children enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start. Through the Policy Council, parents can:

- ◆ Have a voice in decisions about how the program spends money, what children do in their classrooms, and how the program works with community partners.
- ◆ Help to establish and monitor progress toward goals for program services related to education, health, nutrition, and family and community engagement.
- ◆ Participate in First Start's annual self-assessment and monitor results and data to help identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

Joining the Policy Council

Parents have many reasons for joining the Policy Council. Sometimes staff may ask if they are interested. Other times, parents might want to join after being on a parent committee. Let's explore how to make the decision to join the Policy Council.

Scenario

Yesterday, when Richie dropped off his daughter Celine at her classroom, Sandra, a family advocate, asked if he would like to serve on the program's Policy Council.

When he asked why, Sandra answered, "You seem to be very involved in your daughter's life. I wondered if you might be interested. Also, it would be great to have a father on the Council. You could help all of the children in the program. Think about it. Let me know next week."

Richie is flattered by the offer but a little confused. He has heard about the Policy Council. He doesn't know much about it. He isn't sure what he can offer. Richie feels nervous. He has a lot of questions to ask Sandra.

Like Richie, many parents have questions about joining the Policy Council. See some common questions below.

- ◆ **Why are you asking me to consider joining the Policy Council? What can I offer?**

The Policy Council represents parents' voices and perspectives to guide decisions about First Start's programs. Policy Council welcomes parents and family members from all backgrounds and family structures. They may be mothers and fathers of all ages, grandparents, foster or adoptive parents, or other important adults in a child's life. You are being asked because you are the most important teacher in your child's life. We value your ideas about how to best serve all the children in our program.

- ◆ **What do I need to know before I join?**

What's most important is that you want to help First Start to provide a positive learning experience for your child and other children. Once you are elected, you will receive training about how the Policy Council works. Some things that the group may discuss in Policy Council meetings are decisions about program policy, budgets, center activities, and hiring staff.

- ◆ **When and where do the meetings take place?**

Policy Council typically meets monthly. The meetings are scheduled for a date and time that is convenient for the Council members. Child care, meals or refreshments, and translation services are offered. Be sure to let First Start know about anything you need to make it easier for you to attend the meetings.