

Project HOPE Evaluation and Documentation Findings

May 22, 2020



The overarching goal of Project HOPE is to transform low-opportunity communities into high-opportunity communities and to achieve this by promoting the optimal health and well-being of young children, families, and communities; shifting or realigning aspects of systems to increase access to opportunities; and engaging community members and creating feedback loops to ensure that the lived experiences of intended beneficiaries inform state actions to address and reduce racial, ethnic, geographic, and economic inequities.

From November 2019 through April 2020, the BUILD Initiative worked with state and community leaders in Alabama, California, Minnesota, and New Jersey to advance a set of core elements that are designed to promote health and racial equity. The core elements are as follows:

1. Reinforce and utilize the **cross-sector team** to advance the state's north star and goals.
2. Document and prepare **qualitative and quantitative data** to identify focus communities, and ensure data and the voices of beneficiaries inform all stages of the work.
3. Define and develop the process for **beneficiary voice visits** and create a **continuous feedback loop** between the communities and state.
4. Frame and confirm the **cross-sector equity challenge as a focus for increasing access to opportunities** based on data and cross-sector mutual interest for a shared target population.
5. **Identify multiple cross-sector mechanisms to modify policy, practices, or funding** related to universal state goals to improve access and quality of services to a targeted population.
6. **Select at least one mechanism to shift resources** to increase access to opportunities and improve outcomes for young children, their families, and communities.

RACIAL & ECONOMIC EQUITY

- Increasing opportunities for children and adults who care for very young children of color and in poverty.
- Removing barriers to those opportunities that support optimal growth and development.
- Ensuring resources, burdens, and rewards are distributed in ways that remove and do not exacerbate inequities so that those with the greatest challenges are adequately maintained and not further disadvantaged.
- Ensuring mechanisms are in place to determine who is advantaged and disadvantaged by initiatives, policies, and programs designed to advance equity and dismantle inequities.

It is important to note that this work is not linear and that these elements all build upon each other. If they are accelerated, strengthened, and sustained over time, our theory is that the combined and sustained effect of these elements will help to bring about more equitable access to supports, services, and opportunities for specific populations of children and families in selected communities.

These elements were introduced to state teams to give leaders space and time to develop and integrate them into their current roles, responsibilities, authority, and influence.

Setting the Context

This summary offers themes and lessons emerging from BUILD evaluation surveys and

interviews conducted by Wilder Research, as well as diarists’ real-time documentation of state and local leaders’ work on each of the core elements.

Wilder Research conducted an initial survey with state and community leaders in spring 2019, followed by mid-point interviews in October 2019. Fifty leaders across the four states responded to the final survey in March 2020. Leaders were asked to reflect on their individual and state abilities and capacity aligned to the core elements over this time period.

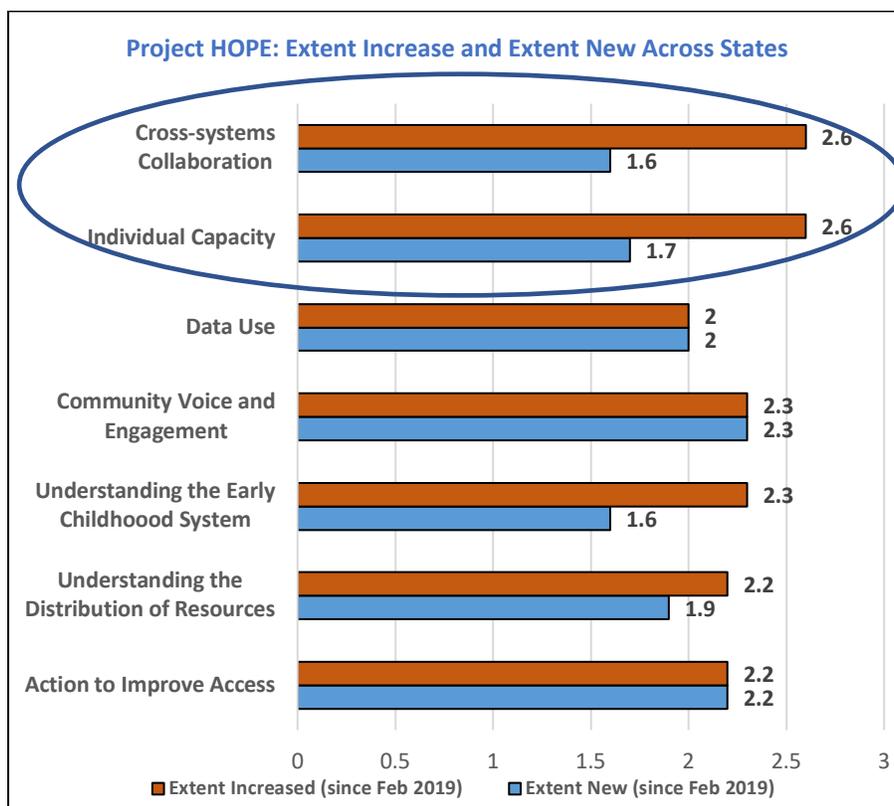
Core Element 1: Reinforce and utilize the cross-sector team to advance the state’s north star and goals.

THE WHY

The complexity of the state early childhood system can be daunting. It is driven by multiple funding streams, policies, and regulations. The government’s work is siloed and divided across various departments and divisions. Racial disparities in access to high-quality early childhood programs and services across these departments and divisions are endemic.

Project HOPE states were asked to select or create, reinforce, and utilize a cross-sector team representing the early childhood system. Leaders in the cross-sector team bring varying perspectives when listening to communities and determining how to tackle challenges. In addition, leaders’ differing expertise, experiences, and resources can contribute to the enactment of changes that will shift access to opportunities. Equity is achieved through multiple departments, divisions, and programs recognizing families’ own efficacy and the whole child nested in a family and community approach.

EVALUATION FINDINGS



Participants reported the most change in cross-systems collaboration and individual capacity. In particular, the most significant changes were seen in:

- Individual understanding of how inequities perpetuated in systems and institutions impact children, families, and communities.
- Individual promotion of tailoring resources to families and communities with historical and current disparities in opportunities and outcomes.
- The state working collaboratively across institutions to develop targeted actions to promote equitable early childhood systems.

These findings advanced how participants responded during the initial survey, as most respondents indicated they or their states were doing this work before. In the midpoint interviews, respondents reported that Project HOPE was building on pre-existing teams yet providing opportunities for stakeholders to work collaboratively.

DOCUMENTATION FINDINGS

Regarding the first core element, the following two themes were identified by the diarists as common across the four states.

1. Working in cross-sector teams helps provide state leaders with opportunities to craft the solutions needed to increase access to opportunities.

“Establishing a cross-sector team took us a little while. It needs to be acknowledged a lot of team building had to happen first.”



“We have come to realize the importance of our north star and the ability to say, ‘This is bigger than us.’”



“State leaders must continue to scale up their work in partnerships with focus communities to tackle disparities in multiple systems, including TANF and child welfare. We do not want to have to tell [families and communities] that this is outside our scope or that it is too complex.”



“We started by asking, ‘How does this benefit children, families, and communities?’ Now we’re trying to include the question, ‘How have we included tribes?’ If we don’t stop and ask, it doesn’t get included. Hopefully, it will become part of our thinking in the future but for now, we have to ask ourselves, ‘Are they at the table? Are they included?’”

2. A broad cross-sector team helps ensure sustainability, momentum, and shared problem solving.

Having multiple leaders from across systems, not in reporting relationships to one another, but working as peers at similar levels of engagement, helps ensure sustainability during transitions and turnover. When leaders from multiple agencies are benefiting mutually, they are able to step in and step out of the work without a loss of momentum.

“We have built a very big network and the possibilities seem to be endless...our partners think of us as they are planning now rather than...after initiatives have begun. We have more visibility in the state and nationwide. We have been included in policy planning and in informing committees and conversations.”

Core Element 2: Document and prepare qualitative and quantitative data to identify focus communities, and ensure data and the voices of beneficiaries inform all stages of the work.

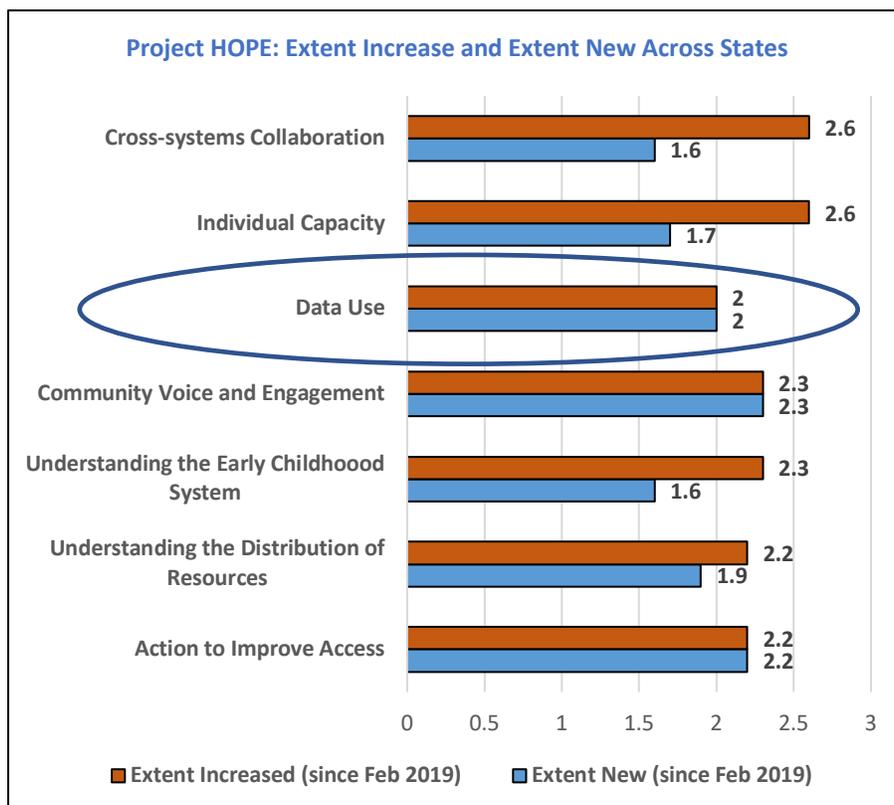
THE WHY

The well-being of children and families is measured by data reflecting the whole child, families, and the communities in which they live. Data from multiple systems (early care and education, health and mental health, family support, early intervention, housing, economic support, poverty, community opportunity, etc.) at the state, county, community, and family levels provide a multi-level and multi-system view needed as a first step in guiding systems change. Data disaggregated by race and ethnicity is needed to make inequities and disparities visible and to further support the development of equitable systems.

Project HOPE states were asked to select and analyze quantitative data to identify the differential access to opportunities for young children, their families, and communities across the state. They were then asked to identify one to three communities on which to focus their work based on persistent disparities. Once communities were identified, state leaders collected qualitative data through beneficiary voice visits to increase understanding of what the numbers meant. The states selected the following communities, which represent rural and urban communities, tribal nations, and include predominantly African American communities:

- Alabama: Macon and Montgomery Counties
- California: Karuk Tribe
- Minnesota: White Earth Nation and Northside Achievement Zone
- New Jersey: Atlantic City and Bridgeton

EVALUATION FINDINGS



Participants reported less change in data use (mean of 2.0 out of 3.0), largely because states were using data prior to Project HOPE. In particular, the most significant changes were seen in the use of qualitative and quantitative data to identify root causes of disparities. A new activity, however, yielded new information: in interviews seeking input from community members on the effectiveness of program implementation, strategies, or initiatives, respondents noted that BUILD helps states disaggregate data in new ways and identify additional data needs.

DOCUMENTATION FINDINGS

Regarding the second core element, the following two themes were identified by the diarists as common across the four states.

1. **Combining quantitative and qualitative data provided state leaders with an opportunity to understand the hopes and dream of families and analyze access to and effectiveness of programs, services, and initiatives.** State leaders began to understand challenges and root causes preventing child and family well-being. Data disaggregated by race and place also helped highlight where state and local leaders could tailor strategies to improve access for specific populations.

“For me it is not about the data we know ... but where the gaps in service are because we are not providing collectively and is there a chance to fill those....”



“I feel like we have all this data that tells this picture and it is one we have seen 100 times over ... it is systemic and somewhere in there we have decided it is okay that black women die and okay that their babies die ... we step over it ... the story telling has fallen on deaf ears.”



“That really hit home with all of us. It is true. We are desensitized [to the data]. How do we stop doing that? Let’s think together about what each [leader] contributes to a population’s success.”

2. **Listening without the need to intervene creates space for problem solving.** Setting up beneficiary voice site visits with a clear protocol – especially asking leaders to listen first and fix later – helped leaders stay open to new or different solutions. Beneficiary quotes and captured themes – not “solving” problems with particular programs - opened up space for leaders to discern root causes and find shared interests in problem solving.

“What is it that we want to do as a result of getting all that data and knowing root causes? ...I would like in my lifetime to check something off. What do we want to achieve after all that work? Now that we know that there is a childcare issue, we know it is not always about a center or a subsidy but can we come up with a pilot – involving Head Start, or (childcare) licensing – to address immediate need.”



“There is a deeper sharing and conversations about cultural contexts, traditional learning and practices, tribal sovereignty, government-to-government relationships, and the need to address inequities that still exist in the state and contribute to the resource and child care deserts for tribes, as well as the lack of local alignment with county services.”

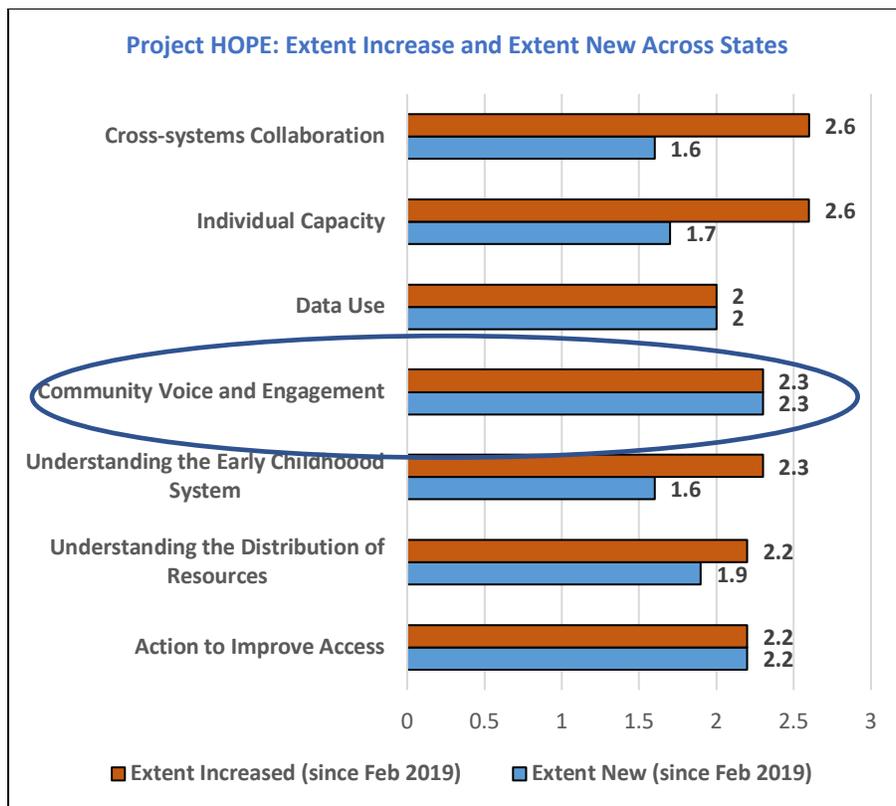
Core Element 3: Define and develop the process for beneficiary voice visits and create a continuous feedback loop between the communities and state.

THE WHY

When leaders listen to children, families, and communities, they increase their understanding of families' lived experiences. Leaders are often interested in what families want for their children and communities and what they need to benefit fully. However, when state policy and practice are put in place, they often play out in unexpected ways. When leaders listen to the experiences of families and workforce members, they can learn what changes and clarifications for policies, practices, or procedures are needed. Leaders can improve guidance about service delivery implementation so that the results are more closely aligned to their initial intent. These efforts may improve availability and access to high-quality program and services.

Project HOPE states were asked to build the capacity to conduct beneficiary voice visits to listen and learn from families. These visits then shifted into: ongoing feedback loops to ensure that solutions are both designed with input of the communities and intended to reduce inequities by increasing access and improving outcomes; and more than one leader at the state level making shifts in policy, practice, and/or investment that can be linked to specific qualitative and quantitative data.

EVALUATION FINDINGS



Participants reported change in community voice (mean of 2.3 out of 3.0). The development of ongoing feedback loops with communities/families was rated as a newer action, as states were doing this only scarcely or not at all in prior to Project HOPE. In the midpoint interviews, respondents highlighted the beneficiary voice process as being the most helpful of the Project HOPE activities.

DOCUMENTATION FINDINGS

Regarding the third core element, the following two themes were identified by the diarists as common across the four states.

1. **Planning and organizing beneficiary voice visits and beginning work to establish state-community connections gave state leaders opportunities to "go deep" in places and have the responsibility to respond accordingly.**

"It was an eye opener for us to see it [local services] wasn't happening."



"We started with Race-to-the-Top, and folks are continuing that, but now the work is to create a system, a feedback loop, and it is still a failing ... it was not developed fully. We need to create that loop. If folks tell us stuff and we do nothing about it, then what is the point? We know some of the places we all fund are very vocal, but maybe we are too slow to get back to them."



*"... we cannot listen if we are not there. We need to look at funding things outside of the traditional five or six cities. We do it because the data is there, funding is there, but it is just pockets of the issue.
You have to be there to listen."*

2. **Beneficiary voice visits helped leaders understand local conditions and the intersections across sectors, such as early care and education, economic development, health, workforce development, and other programs.**

"We need to follow up. Medicaid is paying for care coordination and they are supposed to be asking questions about development. Referrals are part of the screenings and standards of practice are in place. Medicaid audits periodically to show that they are doing what they are supposed to do."



"We need to keep working on how to do things with tribes rather than for the tribes. Is there a better way for us to bring this work into the feedback loop?"



"We discovered many of the issues were local-level issues. We realized we needed to be inviting local-level partners. It was great to be working with the state on policy and also to start relationship-building at the local level."



"I heard we spend a lot in these areas, but families aren't feeling the efforts. We can't go back without grantee partners. They need to know we are doing the work. We need to know what is going on the ground. We do not get the chance to do a deep dive [in a community] ... so we have to go back and we have to make sure partners are accountable, our grantees are connected with each other, and all our grantees are working together."

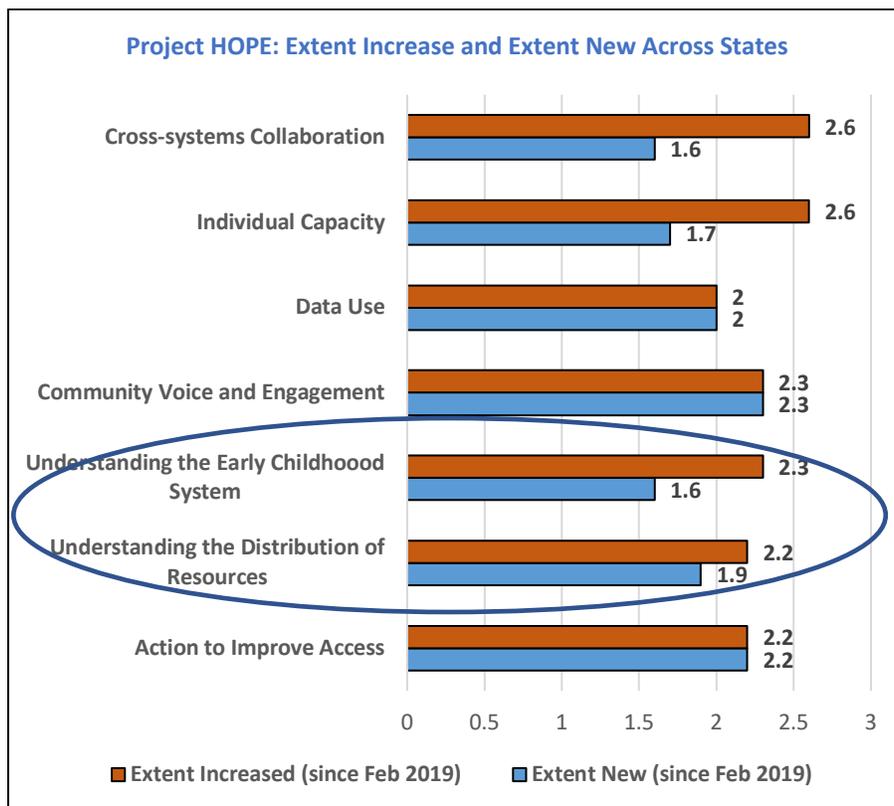
Core Element 4: Frame and confirm the cross-sector equity challenge as a focus for increasing access to opportunities based on data and cross-sector mutual interest for a shared target population.

THE WHY

State leaders have authority, responsibility, and influence over programs, services, and initiatives. They can work with other departments, programs, and divisions that benefit children and their families to interpret policy, modify policy, establish practice within the workforce through skills, knowledge, and abilities and determine the need for additional programs and services that support families in meeting their goals for their children. Furthermore, as state leaders often make the decisions about rules, regulations, policies, and practices, an opportunity exists at each of these decision points to tailor distribution systems, programs, services, and initiatives to meet the needs of these families and children, thereby reducing inequities.

Project HOPE states were asked to frame and confirm the cross-sector equity challenge after completing the initial beneficiary voice visits with the communities that increased leaders' understanding of the root causes of poor outcomes and disparities, and how tailoring can address opportunities and challenges, and improve child and family well-being.

EVALUATION FINDINGS



Participants reported change in their states' **understanding of the early childhood system** and of the **distribution of funds** (mean of 2.2 and 2.3 out of 3.0), including changes in understanding the impact of federal funding streams, and having a shared value to target resources to communities with disparities. Respondents largely felt their states had this capacity when responding to the initial survey; thus, it was

not completely new. Newest to the states, however, was an understanding of how historical and current contexts of policies and services impacts the distribution of funds. In the midpoint interviews, respondents reported that Project HOPE helped stakeholders see gaps, alignments, and overlaps in services and funding resources.

DOCUMENTATION FINDINGS

Regarding the fourth core element, the following theme was identified by the diarists as common across the four states:

State leaders can take new action or examine previous efforts they thought were working within the scope of their own roles, responsibilities, influence, and authority by:

- Targeting the work based on data and re-setting the decision-making process with more beneficiary voice.
- Sharing analysis of challenges and opportunities to increase access.
- Recognizing what it takes for broader, institutional change.

"As we have been together in HOPE work, we have learned that there is a strong desire to understand how we move to action on equity. Our equity challenge was developing a common language, concept and framework, and moving that into real system change."



"The issue with [social service] employees ... they are overworked, they have to hit numbers/quotas and process a certain number of applications and the culture in this city is not where it needs to be to get the job done."



"You cannot just do customer service training with all that baggage."

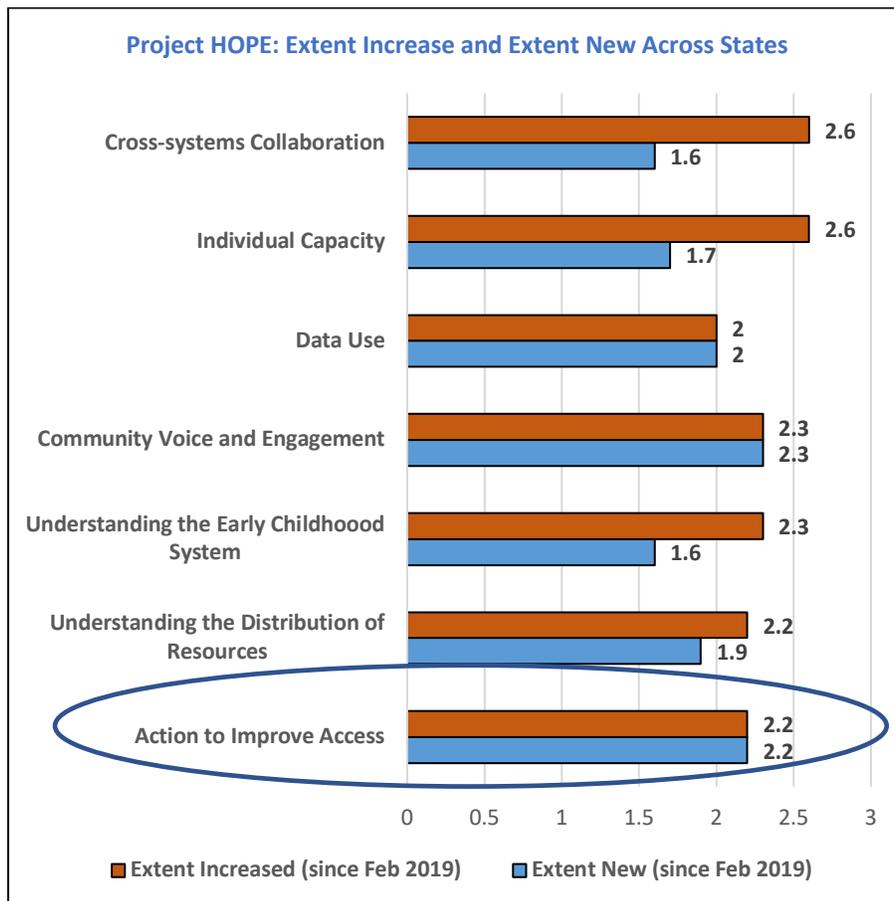
Core Element 5: Identify multiple cross-sector mechanisms to modify policy, practices, or funding related to universal state goals to improve access and quality of services to a targeted population.

THE WHY

In early childhood systems, racial disparities in access to high-quality early childhood programs and services - including home visiting, health, nutrition, mental health, libraries, after-school programs, safe housing, and other supports associated with child outcomes and family well-being – are endemic. As early childhood systems are a means by which to distribute resources, these actions should be tailored to communities or groups of families and children who experience disparities and inequities to ensure they can take advantage of state resources.

Project HOPE states were asked to identify multiple mechanisms for addressing what they heard from the community, using the cross sector team and quantitative data to tailor solutions within existing programs, policies and practices that will increase access to opportunity in the selected communities.

EVALUATION FINDINGS



Participants reported some change in their states' **action to improve access** (mean of 2.2 out of 3.0), through tailored policies and practices to eliminate disparities in outcomes and access. Though the extent of change since the initial survey was lower relative to other items, respondents indicated that these were largely new actions.

DOCUMENTATION FINDINGS

Regarding the fifth core element, the following three themes were identified by the diarists as common across the four states:

1. It takes time to change policies.

“Change takes time and a lot of time is required to do this work. It takes time to understand the issues, barriers, concerns, and strengths and use that understanding to change systems, policies, and practices. To change policy we have to know what bills are coming up so we can work toward change in three to five years when the bill comes up.”



“Planning is easier than implementing.”

2. State leaders have increased confidence in their capacity as individuals with authority to have an impact compared to their confidence in the capacity of institutions to do the same.

According to the survey of state leaders, there was high individual change in:

“Understanding individual authority and influences in these systems and where you can make an impact” (2.5 out of 3.0).

This is compared to 2.2 out of 3.0 when asked about changes to institutions, policies, and practice.

3. Taking action and making policy change is an iterative process, not a one-time event.

“When there are changes in state policy and contracts, we still have to bring other people along. It is important to do the work necessary to create understanding in the interpreting of policy revisions and ensure that new policy language ends up in all future RFAs, contracts, etc.”



“Change requires shifts in mental models and organizational cultures.”



“We have to use aligned funding at the state and county level to get it to providers to further the work. If we want a systematic and cross-sector approach to addressing poverty and equity, we cannot do it one program at a time. ”