The Working Poor Families Project and Two Generation (2 Gen) Strategies

The specific focus of the Working Poor Families Project (WPFP) provides the opportunity for another lens on the topic of 2 Gen strategies. Because WPFP works on strengthening state policies that help parents build their family income through skills training, education, employment, and work supports, our perspective and approach on 2 Gen strategies emanates from focusing on state systems and policies that serve parents. Thus, WPFP enters the 2 Gen work from the standpoint of first looking at parent-focused systems and then considering the potential connections and benefits for children and the state systems serving them.

In approaching 2 Gen strategies from this perspective, WPFP suggests a theory of change that “in working to improve the economic potential and well-being of parents, actions can also be taken to enhance their children’s personal, social, and educational development, thereby breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty”. This can be done with both short- and long-term strategies that increase the likelihood of children becoming economically self-sufficient as future adults and parents. Such approaches can encompass direct interventions with parents and children or parent actions that indirectly generate benefits for their children.

Key Elements of the WPFP Approach to 2 Gen State Policy Work:

- Starts with parent (or adult) state systems such as postsecondary education, adult basic education, TANF, tax and employment law, etc. to ensure that the breadwinners of the family can increase their income and have the opportunity to achieve economic security.
- Focuses on strengthening state policies within these adult-focused systems and on key elements affecting family success such as education and skills training, work supports, quality jobs, income enhancements, child care, health care, as well as, career counseling and personal coaching.
- Increases awareness and responsiveness within adult-focused state systems of the needs and possibilities of serving parents and their children either directly or thru state-level policy change.
- Focuses on state policies within specific systems that can provide or bring together services and resources to address the needs of both parents and children collectively.
- Focuses on families below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Overall, WPFP can work to facilitate its state partner efforts to advance constructive 2 Gen strategies and policies that address the full spectrum of needs required for low-income families to achieve economic success.