

# Elevating Parent Voice

## AS A DRIVER OF SYSTEMS CHANGE



### Overview

This case study examines how a backbone organization can build and sustain a parent-led coalition that strengthens feedback loops, builds parent leadership, and begins to influence system-level decisions.

### The Challenge: Parent Voice Was Not Structurally Integrated Into Decision-Making

Prior to the coalition's formation, parent input was typically gathered through surveys, listening sessions, or school-based engagement activities. While valuable, these approaches did not consistently position parents as partners in identifying problems, analyzing root causes, or shaping solutions. This created a gap between family experience and system decision-making.



Recognizing this gap, SEI launched the **Summit County Parent Coalition** in 2023 as part of its cradle-to-career strategy to strengthen continuous improvement and ensure systems respond to family needs.

### Building the Coalition: Investing in Parent Leadership Infrastructure



The Summit County Parent Coalition was designed as more than an engagement group—it was built as a leadership body.

Parents participate in:

- ▶ **Leadership development and advocacy training**
- ▶ **Data analysis and interpretation of parent survey results**
- ▶ **Root cause analysis to identify system barriers**
- ▶ **Strategy development to address priority issues**

Coalition members also receive stipends and ongoing facilitation support, reducing participation barriers and strengthening sustainability. This structure enables parents to move from sharing experiences to actively shaping improvement efforts.

### Parent-Led Improvement in Action

Beginning in 2025, coalition members engaged in a structured improvement process grounded in data and lived experience.

Parents reviewed findings from the **Summit County Parent Voice Survey**, which included more than **600 responses** from families across the county. This process positioned parents not only as participants- but as partners in systems improvement.

**600**  
survey  
responses



## Early Systems Impact: Parent Voice Informing Leadership Decisions

Parent leadership is already beginning to influence system-level conversations and relationships. For example:



### FORMAL PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

- ▶ The Mayor's Office established a **formal liaison** to maintain ongoing communication
- ▶ The coalition gained recognition as a **trusted parent voice body**

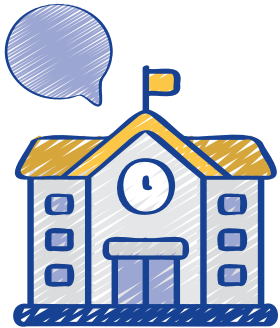
This created a new pathway for parent insight to inform community leadership discussions.

### GROWING INTEGRATION INTO EDUCATION SYSTEM CONVERSATIONS

The coalition has also been invited to:

- ▶ Partner with school districts on **parent engagement initiatives**
- ▶ **Share parent insights** with education and community leaders
- ▶ Participate in **decision-maker roundtables**

These early shifts represent important steps toward integrating parent voice into system improvement.



## Lessons Learned: What It Takes to Sustain Authentic Parent Leadership

Summit County's experience highlights key lessons for communities seeking to strengthen parent voice:

- 1 **Parent Leadership Requires Intentional Infrastructure**
- 2 **Data and Lived Experience Are Stronger Together**
- 3 **Relationships with Decision-Makers Must Be Built Over Time**
- 4 **Systems Change Is a Long-Term Investment**

### Looking Ahead

The Summit County Parent Coalition continues to expand its leadership and influence.

As the coalition grows, it represents an important step toward ensuring families are not only heard - but positioned as partners in shaping education systems.

### Why This Matters

Backbone organizations play a critical role in aligning partners and supporting system improvement.

Summit County's experience demonstrates that when parent leadership is supported through intentional infrastructure, families can play a powerful role in strengthening systems and improving outcomes for children.

