

# Whole Child Growth

## Community Research Agenda



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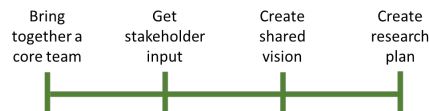
## Our Team

### Our Purpose

**Healthy growth and well-being are critically important to all communities.** Healthy behaviors like eating choices and physical activity and early experiences can promote lifelong well-being. Doctors and researchers also often measure body weight as an easy marker of growth, especially in research that compares the impact of two or more programs or policies (“comparative effectiveness research” or CER). But focusing narrowly on body weight can have negatively impact children’s self-image and mental health. Centering *whole-child growth* will better promote health and well-being in our communities.

We want to **improve the way we study whole child growth.** Traditional research approaches often miss voices from communities of color. We chose a community-engaged approach that **centered local communities of color** to make sure this work was inclusive. We invited individuals from community-based organizations who directly serve children and families of color to partner with others working in healthcare and research and formed a Core Team.

Our Core Team worked to first **understand how parents and caregivers think about whole child growth.** Then, we asked healthcare professionals and researchers to add their perspectives. This led to our “Shared Vision.” We then created a plan for researching whole child growth which is presented in the pages below. This framework and plan to study and improve whole child growth (our “Shared Work”) includes ideas for future.

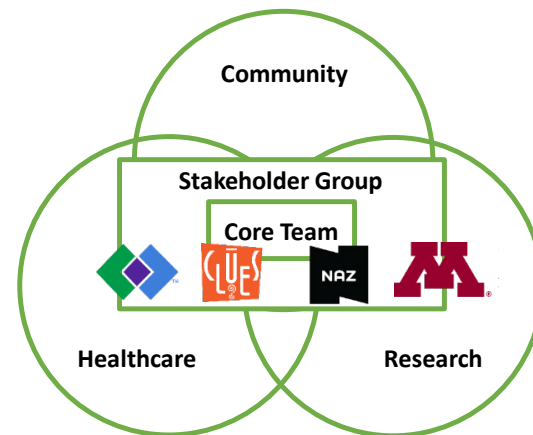


We hope this work **provides an opportunity for community to engage in research that centers families** and grounds the work in culture, justice, and access to trustworthy care. We also hope that researchers and healthcare professionals use this research agenda to reflect on the unintended consequences of a focus on body weight and join us in developing improved ways to study and improve whole child growth.

### Our Approach

We convened a Core Team with members from community-led organizations Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) and the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), and healthcare and research organizations the University of Minnesota and HealthPartners. Our Core Team met regularly from Spring 2023 – Spring 2024 and engaged a broader Stakeholder Group of 25 parents and 13 healthcare professionals and researchers to learn about CER and **share their voices in the development of our research agenda** during a Fall and Spring meeting series.

While we planned and carried out our Shared Work, we embodied the PCORI Engagement Principles of Reciprocal Relationships, Co-Learning Partnerships, and Transparency, Honesty, and Trust. These were foundational to developing “Shared Norms” for our time together including **a commitment to curiosity, listening to one another, and creating safe and brave space together.** We also evaluated the quality of our engagement work throughout the process using tools like surveys to gather feedback and make real-time improvements. This approach allowed us to create an agenda to guide the way we will do CER and other types of research together going forward. For more information on our approach, check out our full report [here](#).



Our Shared Vision  
for  
**Whole Child Growth**



Healthy eating, activity & early experiences support young people as they grow in a thriving, healthy community.





# Whole Child Growth

**Eating, activity & early experiences support young people as they grow in a thriving, healthy community.**

time outside • time in community • less electronics • vegetables and fruit • nutrition • feeding • affordable choices • sleep • enjoyable exercise • defined by each family • considering body, mind, and spirit

**Together as community, healthcare, and research, our work will help children grow up to...**

...be heard • be leaders • have responsibility • have pride in culture  
• be respected for ideas • be honored for individuality and identities

**Valued & Respected**

**Mind & Body Wellness**

...have self-love • have self-esteem • have balance • have energy • have healthy brain development • have growth mindsets • be curious • be sure of selves culturally • have strong, flexible and capable mind and body • have movement skills • have brain and body developmental • be able to handle mental and physical stressors • have physical, mental and emotional health • be free from disease • have a quality life

...have healthy communication • show forgiveness • share resources • playing together • respect elders • have trusted, enjoyable relationships • have secure attachment • be part of a family unit

**Connected to One Another**

**Knowledgeable & Prepared**

...have real-world skills • know their culture • know their traditions • be ready for school • pursue happiness and personal goals

...have stable housing • have cleanliness • have affordable quality childcare  
• have safe schools • have safe parks • have financial security

**Have Safety & Stability**

**Rooted by supportive parents & families with access to trustworthy care. Grounded in culture & justice.**

love • attention • guidance without judgment • role models • fathers • less stressed mothers and families celebrating children • raising kids through culture • feel deep respect from systems for cultural beliefs and practices • just health system design and community-led solutions • affordable quality childcare and education  
• affordable quality healthcare • culture and community intertwined in care • healthy environment







*"If you understand me culturally, you have my attention."*

## Our Shared Work

### A Whole Child Growth Research Framework

Our Core Team, with input from our Stakeholder Group, brainstormed and prioritized research questions to study and improve whole child growth. Our final Whole Child Growth Research Framework is pictured below. A key takeaway from our work is how much children and families are impacted by their community and broader society. Another key finding is the role of culture and norms in shaping actions at the child, family, and community levels. These **dynamic research ideas are organized and guided by our Whole Child Growth Research Framework**, adapted from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) Research Framework, and aligned with our Shared Vision.

Whole Child Growth	Child 	Family 	Community 	Society 
Actions	Health Behaviors, Preferences	Family Interactions, Parent Beliefs, Preferences	Community, School, Healthcare Interactions	Local, State, National, Policies
Environment	Personal Environment	Home Environment	Community, School, Healthcare Environment	Social Structure
Culture	Cultural Identity	Family Norms	Community, Cultural Norms	Societal Norms

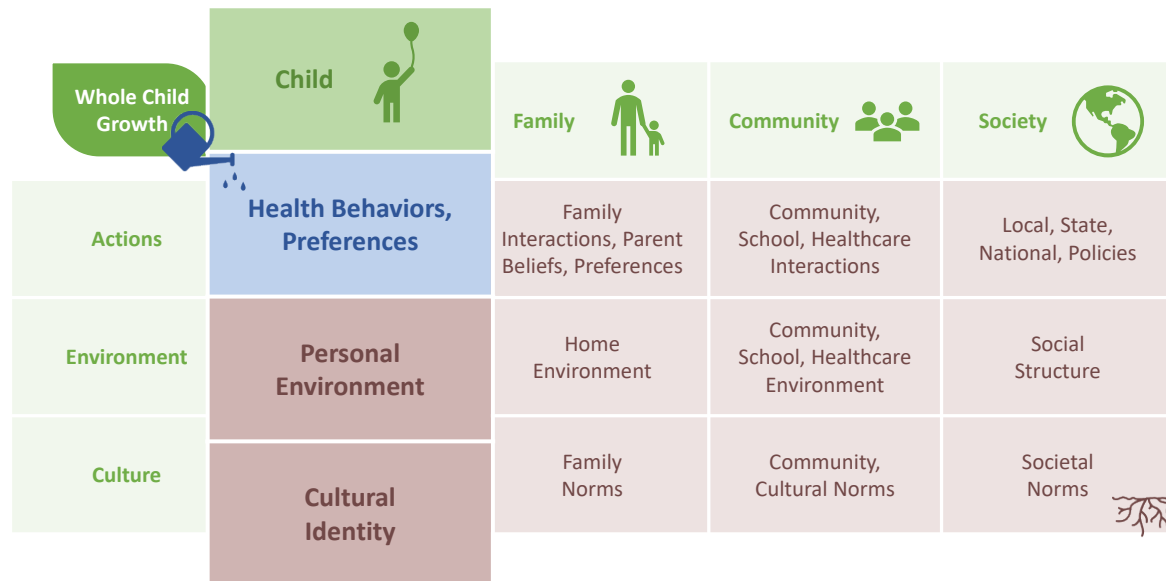
Adapted from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) [National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities \(NIMHD\) Research Framework](#)

Our research questions, organized by the Research Framework, are listed below. “Priority Research Questions” were selected by the Core Team and Stakeholder Group. As you **review these lists of research questions, we invite you to consider the following:**



- Which research question would you most want to answer?
- Where does this research question fall within our Research Framework? (In other words, which cell best describes the focus of your research question?)
- How is your research question impacted by other factors in the Research Framework (In other words, do the other cells in the grid impact this research question?)
- How might these factors change the way you design your study? (For example, if you are studying child health behaviors, what might you want to understand about children’s cultural identity or community environment?)

## Child-Centered Research Topics



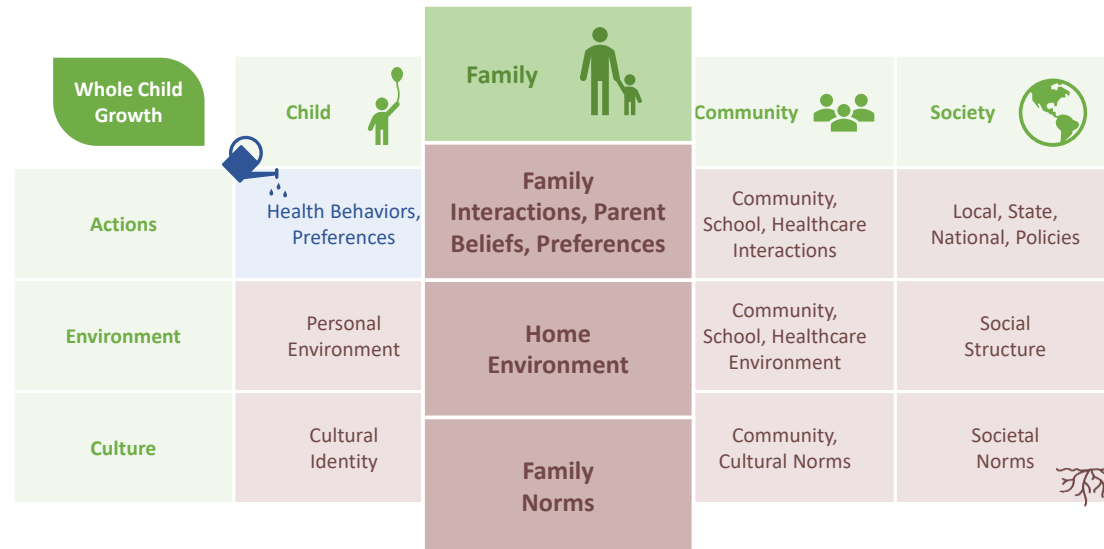
### Priority Child-Centered Research Questions

- How is whole child growth best measured?
- How does improving one whole child growth outcome improve others? How does physical health support emotional health? How does emotional health support other whole child growth leaves?
- How do different approaches to supporting a child's cultural identity compare in their impact on whole child growth?

### Other Child-Centered Research Questions

- How does improving whole child growth lead to long-term well-being?
- What child actions and preferences lead to whole child growth? Does spending time in nature support whole child growth? Does teaching children inclusivity lead to whole child growth? Does teaching self-awareness lead to whole child growth?
- How do eating patterns and screen or electronics use impact whole child growth?
- How does giving children access to healthy choices and activities improve whole child growth?

## Family-Centered Research Topics



### Priority Family-Centered Research Questions

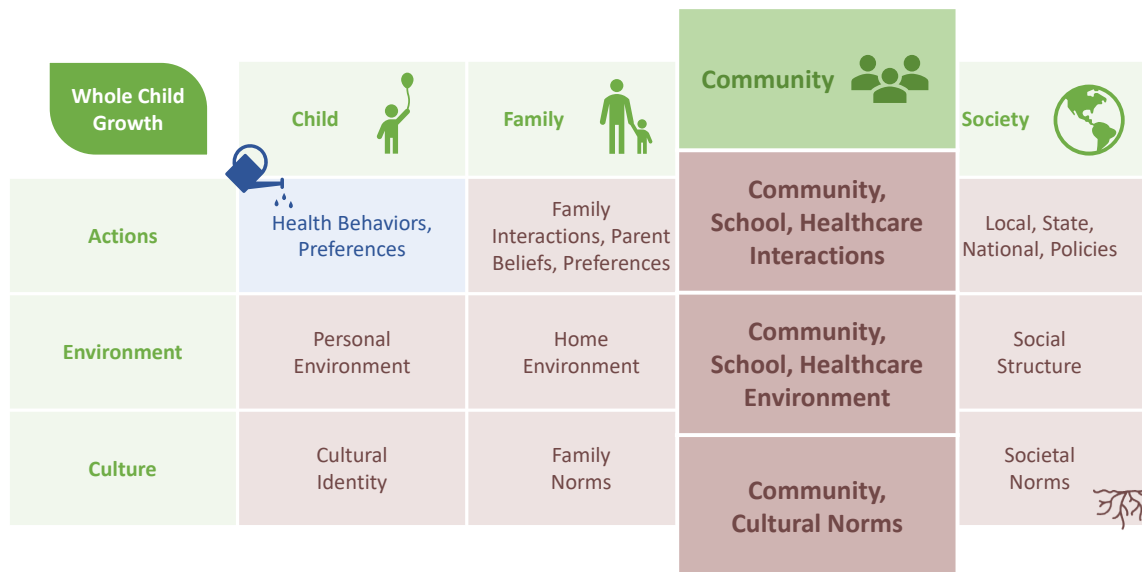
- How do different programs that support parent well-being compare in improving whole child growth?
- How does offering free parent advocate programs improve whole child growth?
- What can be done in the home environment to help children feel safe, secure, loved, honored, and valued?
- What ancestral or cultural parenting practices improve whole child growth?

### Other Family-Centered Research Questions

- How do you measure whole family growth or well-being? How are family and child well-being and growth interconnected?
- How do adult learning programs improve family well-being and whole child growth?
- How does spending dedicated family time with children improve whole child growth?
- What is the impact of early parent feeding practices on whole child growth?
- What parent and family practices, actions, preferences, home environment or norms lead to whole child growth?
- What can families do to connect with schools and community to improve whole child growth? How can families best advocate for their children in schools to support mental and emotional health early on?
- How can families best engage with healthcare to support whole child growth? Does a family choosing to use doulas or midwives impact early whole child growth?
- How can programming for families best be designed to improve whole child growth? How can parents be supported to limit use of screens and electronics in the home?
- What is the impact of current, local programs for families on whole child growth? What programs have been effective elsewhere and what impact would they have locally? Which of these programs are more successful than others? What would the impact of these programs be if they were implemented elsewhere?
- What strategies can be used to grow and sustain successful programs?



## Community-Centered Research Topics



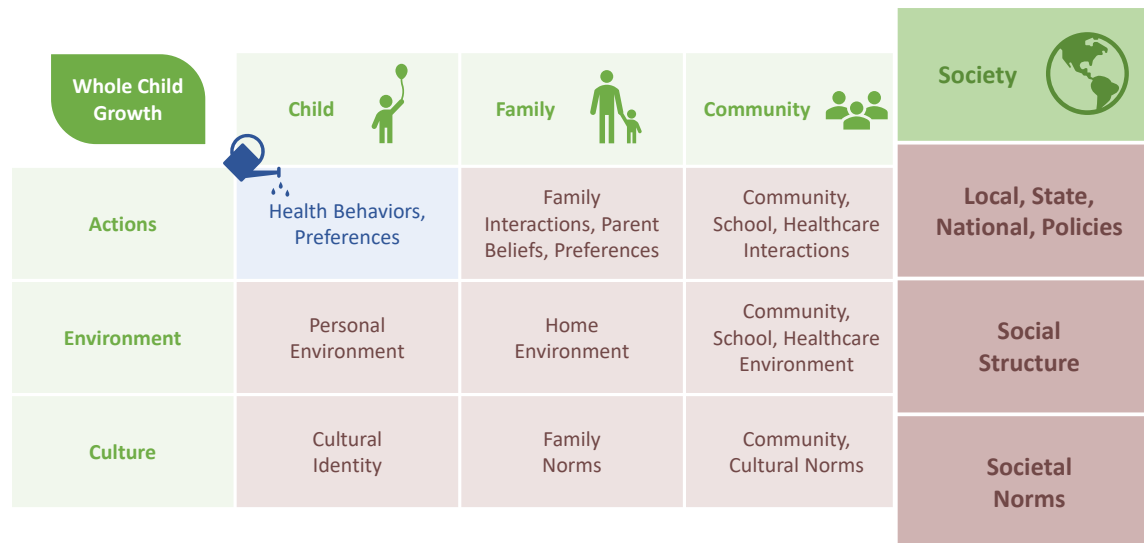
### Priority Community-Centered Research Questions

- How do programs to create safe community spaces compare in improving whole child growth?
- How do healthcare practices and policies that value culture lead to increased trust in healthcare systems?
- What programs or policies improve inclusivity, prevent bullying, and improve access to mental and emotional support in schools?

### Other Community-Centered Research Questions

- How do smaller school class sizes improve whole child growth? What can parents and society do to increase staff in schools?
- How does improving local access to food choices improve whole child growth?
- How can community sectors (e.g., healthcare, education) support one another to improve whole child growth? How can collaborations between school and family support emotion well-being?
- What community actions, environments, and cultural norms improve whole child growth? Does limiting personal electronics use in schools improve whole child growth?
- How does education for healthcare professional on culturally supportive, trauma-responsive care improve trust in healthcare?
- How can community programs or initiatives best be designed to improve whole child growth?
- What is the impact of current, local community programs or initiatives on whole child growth? What programs or initiatives have been effective elsewhere and what impact would they have locally? Which of these programs or initiatives are more successful than others? What would the impact of these programs or initiatives be if they were implemented elsewhere?
- What strategies can be used to grow and sustain successful programs and initiatives?
- How do peer affirmations and relationships lead to better whole child growth?

## Society-Level Research Topics



### Priority Society-Level Research Questions

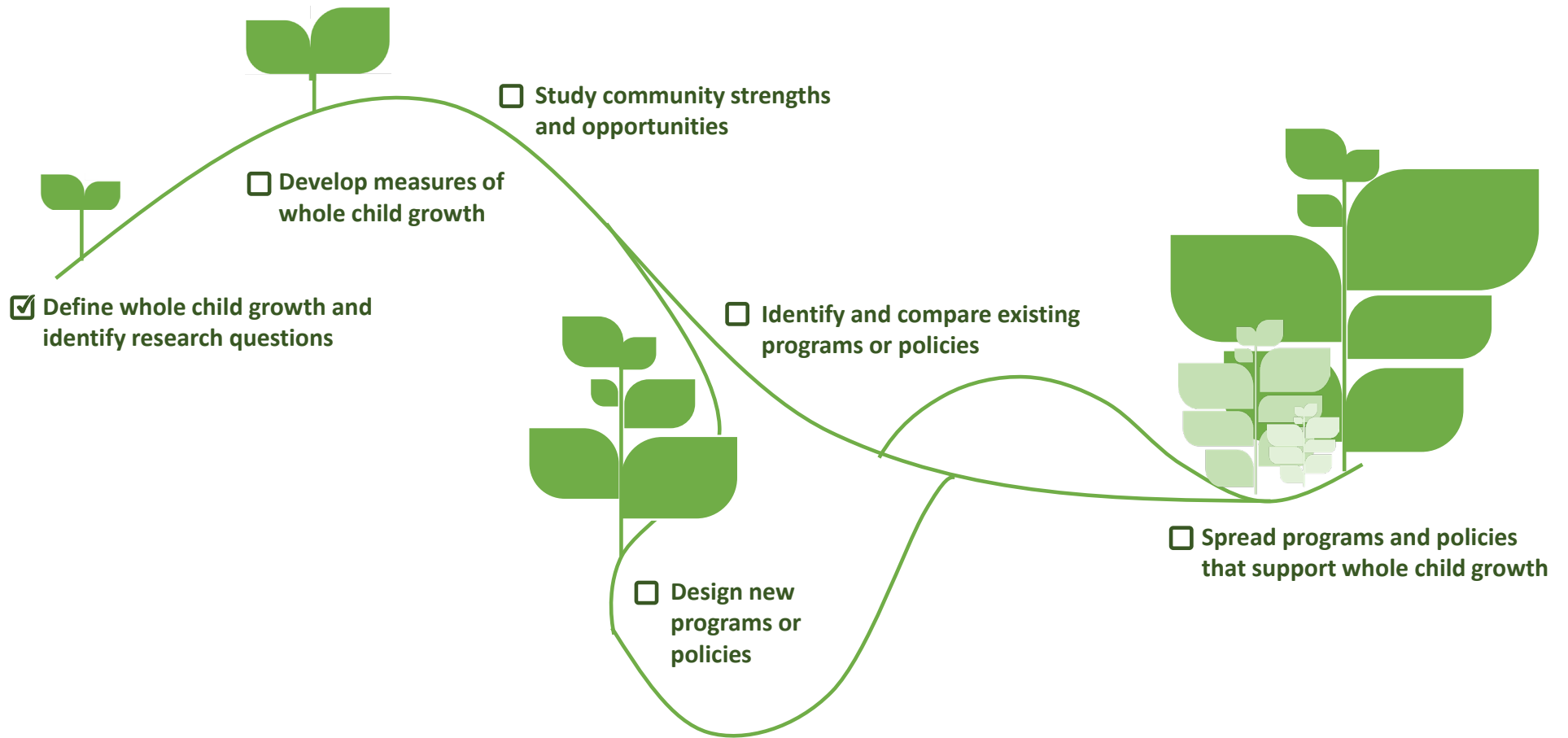
- How do successful affordable housing policies or initiatives compare in improving whole child growth?
- How can guaranteed basic income policies be better implemented and do they improve whole child growth?

### Other Society-Level Research Questions

- How do policies to improve access to healthcare improve whole child growth?
- How do food access policies improve whole child growth?
- How can policies best be designed to improve whole child growth?
- What is the impact of current, local policies on whole child growth? What policies have been effective elsewhere and what impact would they have locally? Which policies are more successful than others? What would the impact of successful policies be if they were implemented elsewhere?
- What strategies can be used to implement and sustain successful policies?

## A Roadmap for Future Research

We acknowledge that future research likely a winding path with various turns and detours. Throughout our future work we feel it is critical to allow for changes in course guided by community feedback and priorities. Still, we have outlined these recommend steps in the following order to support community-centered whole child growth.



## Closing Thoughts from Our Team

“Providing the space for the community voice in the research process leads to effective and meaningful community growth.” – Norma Carrera-Perez, CLUES

“How does one measure love, care, growth, culture and how do those metrics help us give our children the best possible start to a lifetime of health and wellness? In an unprecedented collaborative effort, the Core Team delved into this question and many others, bringing together community members, medical professionals, and health and wellness advocates. It was a pleasure to work with each stakeholder in an effort to better understand and optimize future research in service of our little ones.” – Alex Palacios, CLUES

“As a NAZ parent and creator of the Mothers HEALth Program, dedicated to empowering mothers through, partnering with PCORI has been a profoundly validating and enlightening experience. Collaborating with local community organizations, healthcare providers, and researchers, we successfully developed a unified agenda for researching child growth. This partnership has significantly strengthened our mission, demonstrating the remarkable impact of collective effort in advancing whole child growth.” – Keshia Caldwell, NAZ

“As I'd sensed before this project in my partnership work, this has confirmed that the only way to work towards justice in whole child growth (and other) work with community, is to center community voice and perspective as the first step. This is such an important reminder and insight to know, center and let drive our work together.” – Thia Bryan, HealthPartners

“Our community-engaged work has challenged me and helped me grow in ways I never expected. This different approach to research has helped me see my own biases and has given me tools to take them into account in support of better ways to study and improve whole child growth.” – Meghan JaKa, HealthPartners Institute

“Cross-sector collaboration that centers the voices of our community members is essential to developing programs that work for our youngest community members.” – Maren Henderson, HealthPartners Institute

“Being part of the Whole Child Growth Team was an incredible opportunity. I got to be part of conversations and have access to key information to inform systems. The facilitators did an amazing job by fostering a place where all of us could come in as authentic representations of ourselves. The diversity at all levels of the group provided great perspectives and ways to fully understand or learn the many facets of this type of work. Thank you for the respect, and professionalism and how intentional it was made. The whole team...were great to work with.” – Camila Mercado Michelli, CLUES



“The opportunity to partner with local community organizations, partners, health care providers, and researchers has been unique and beneficial. Being able to draw parallels between the way research happens and what supports Whole Child Growth can provide us many insights to better our communities.” – Arielle Handevitd, NAZ

“Centering the voices of community members is critical for making meaningful change to enhance child and family well-being. Doing so through our cross-sector collaboration generated innovative and promising ideas for improving whole child growth and development that will be exciting to pursue in the coming years.” – Nancy Sherwood, University of Minnesota

“Improving the health and well-being of children in today's challenging world requires innovation, creativity, and hope. Having the opportunity to partner with community organizations, healthcare providers and research offered a glimpse into what the future of impactful, generational change could be, and it certainly looks bright.” – Corinne Brown-Robinson, HealthPartners