

CLAUDETTE FETTE: I am Claudette Fette. I represent probably not officially a lot of different organizations but more officially the Statewide Family Network in Texas, which is the Texas Federation of Families. As a family member I also belong to the American Occupational Therapy Association. It is an entity that supports collaboration across levels of scale from local to national and across organizations horizontally as well, and facilitates our being able to build relationship in the context of doing work together.

The Federation of Families is about supporting families and family voice across all. So on one level, I participate in the Family Schools Community Partnerships Practice Group and so very much our mission within that practice group is to make sure that family voice is present across all of the practice groups within the community of practice as well as making sure that we are pulling voice from families just generally. I am trying to think if I am answering that question... and then for the Federation of Families, the other direction. For the Federation of Families having that connection and that network empowers me to bring information on collaboration back to the State of Texas. It is not always received. That is an ongoing issue. That is something that continue in various different forums on the state and local level to keep bringing and saying, "Here is another idea and I would love to get Texas involved in the work and will work on that," hopefully not till I die. Hopefully I will succeed before then but that is an ongoing issue. But it empowers, it gives me something to bring to that group to try to pull them in to this idea of working collaboratively which is kind of difficult because they do not really understand it. We have a very hierarchical system in our state that makes that challenging. You have to give up, it feels I am afraid to them, like they are going to have to give up some power. The relationships and the ability to, one, through those relationships have insight because I am in a state that has problems. Through those relationships to see areas where some of the philosophies and education and children's mental health are working and how that works and to have relationships to use almost in a mentoring capacity to be able to, "okay, how could that translate," where we are. And also to bring our experience because it is very different than in those areas where it is succeeding and be part of that and to have the companionship. There is a certain amount of "my heroes are here, you know, so I can come and go, wow." They are remarkable people with remarkable amounts of knowledge that I can drain [laughter] and bring back or attempt to bring back and keep my own energy level going.

It is hard when you are functioning in a state that is so low functioning to keep going and it is encouraging and feeds my spirit, I guess, to continue that. To come at that national level and have those connections as well and to feel like I am engaging in meaningful work. There is also a lot of work that we have done that is useful and it is useful to families in Texas and families in any other state. As part of the Community of Practice, oh, I guess, a year ago, a little over a year ago, the National Coordinating Committee for Schools Health and Safety came and asked for a definition of family engagement. Because we are the group that I participate most heavily in is the Family Schools Community Practice Group. Partnerships Practice Group. They sent that to us because we are the family participation group and we said we can't really give you that definition either as a leadership team so we put it out through the shared work site as a series of discussion questions and had thirty families from across the country respond to that and got huge a database that we then had a hard time pulling back down into one succinct kind of answer for them. But we pulled that all together, nonetheless, and created a - used qualitative analysis - and because various members of that practice group participate in various national meetings it was a combination of conf—through a combination of conference calls, face to face meetings at various different conferences that we were at in various different configurations of family members that are part of that group. We were able to do the qualitative analysis and just finished a journal article that hopefully will be published. It's being, it's going through peer review.

Looking specifically through that kind of critically and pulling all that information from families in very diverse from Hawaii to New York, Chicago to Texas. You know? And what it looks like across all

of those families and finding that, you know, the barriers to family engagement were not real different. The things that supported family engagement were not real different. Pulling all of that together in a very inclusive fashion to kind of begin to articulate from a family voice. What are the ways that a model that would begin to look at what are the ways you support family engagement and what are the things that tear it down.

I think it had hit a developmental place before I came to it. There was a level of maturity when I arrived at the scene anyway but I was there at the beginning of the Community of Practice that I participate in and maturity that I have seen there are probably more of a focus on outcomes. More of a focus on the participation needing to mean something and a demand for that so that if it is not then then how do we make it. Then is it not meeting a need and what is the need and what do we need to be addressing? Having a little bit more press for product, you know, for creating something as a group which I think is useful because not so much just because of the product. The products are good but the products create the venue for us to build those relationships nationally and I think that is extremely important.

On a couple of different levels I really see value just in the process that I have learned through my participation in the Communities of Practice. I would like to see at a number of levels of scale - Texas is huge and it is really hard to coordinate across a state with our diversity in terms of just geographic barriers and then cultural diversity across our state. I see Community of Practice as a way to bridge that and I will continue to advocate for that on a state and even local levels of scale. That is a way to bridge all of our schedules and demands and just the travel that it takes otherwise to pull people together regularly to work together. So I see having learned that process as extremely valuable on the ground for kids and families and systems. I think the same kind of being able to come together and work on collaborative solutions. What happens now we have very top down kind of processing. In many instances depending on which system you are talking about they tend to be very siloed in Texas. They do not really—in name, there are a couple of venues in which they come together but it is a meeting and then once they come apart there really is not real work that is shared. I think it is a way to develop that actual real work that they can do together so that... what happens now, there is very little stakeholder involvement in how systems are set up and how things happen. That implementation lacks a lot of the understanding of the problem that you get when you get multiple stakeholders in from the beginning. I would like to see us be able to utilize some of those technologies to do a better job.

We have some other issues in Texas in education specifically around very strong local control in our school districts that it is another kind of challenge as well but there has to be some state and federal leadership and guidance in order to have some consistent leeway to address prevalent issues that happen across all of those districts even though the districts do have strong local control. They still want to do what is best for kids and families.

We do not have a state shared work initiative necessarily. It is something that the Federation of Families has been advocating for a long time and will continue to advocate. I also am a member of the American Occupational Therapy Association and the Texas Occupational Therapy Association. Whereas, I have done a better job of disseminating this information through family organizations I have not done as much of that with the occupational therapy crowd. We were talking about that this morning and that is probably something we need to do is try to disseminate that to state and local because there are newsletters and so forth there we could access and see if we could recruit some more national level, not national level, some more local level and state level folks into that work.

MODERATOR: What is the relationship between the national and the state?

CLAUDETTE FETTE: It is a good relationship. We have talked to them. We were at a conference a couple of weeks ago and talked to the national director of the Federation of Families at length and she sent somebody.

MODERATOR: Yea, so in the past they had not?

CLAUDETTE FETTE: No, they had not and I do not know if that had anything to do with us or if we were a piece of many people who have talked to her. The Federation has not been difficult. The Federation has bought in entirely. At the state, the Texas Federation of Families. That is easy. That is just sharing the knowledge. It is then using that to try and leverage other partners that is a bigger challenge in Texas. Not getting it across the Federation. That is easy. That is just going back and saying, "Ooh, I learned this stuff. This is cool. Let me show you." This is where it is and that is easy. That is not a challenge. The bigger challenge is all of those other silos and moving across all of that. I have not been as active in the partnership as whole as I have in the Community of Practice. So to differentiate that a little bit. I have been involved in the Community of Practice and specifically my practice group more than the IDEA Partnership level but that I think would be useful strategy.

Now, on a personal level, I am working on my dissertation and I intend to use the Community of Practice for my expert pool for that as well. I have planned that in there because I have access.