



Birth-to-Third Grade Continuity Project: Looking Back Moving Forward

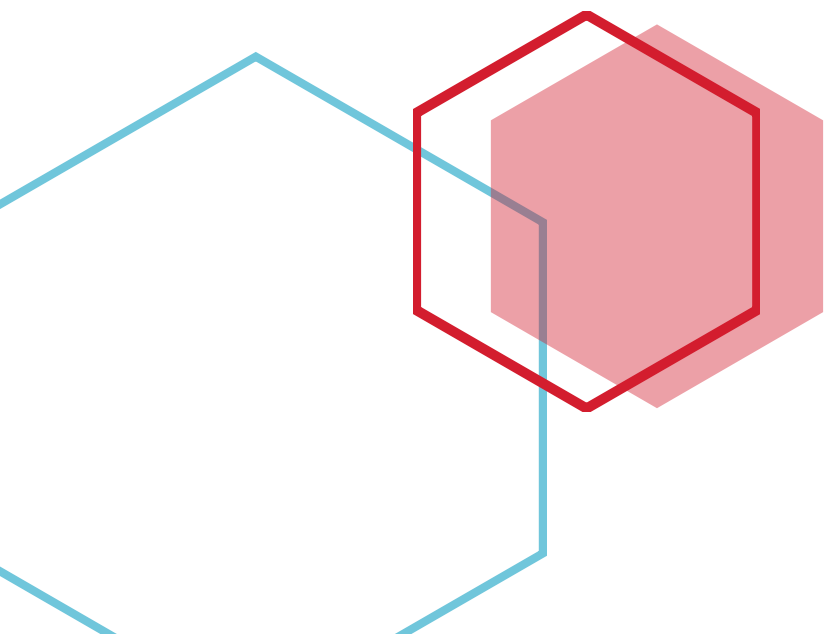
REFLECTING ON THE FIRST FOUR YEARS

January 2019

PREPARED FOR THE ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
BY THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION POLICY AT ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report represents the efforts and collaborative accomplishments of four years of work at the state level and in communities throughout Illinois by early childhood stakeholders. These stakeholders include a range of perspectives – programs, schools, community collaborations, state agencies, higher education, and advocacy. Using a selection of case studies from communities that received Preschool Development Grant – Expansion (PDG-E) funding and technical assistance to develop and implement birth-to-third grade alignment strategies, the report provides reflections and insight from the work undertaken. We hope that this analysis can help to encourage the next iteration of innovation in birth-to-third grade alignment efforts as well as to help those states and communities just embarking on this journey.

Illinois has long been a leader in early care and education. Over the last few decades, Illinois has increased funding to expand access to early childhood programs, implement high standards, and build an infrastructure to support early care and education programs. In the continuous effort to grow and improve, birth-to-third grade alignment has been identified by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) as one of the state's current priorities. In 2013, Illinois embarked on this work with support from the National Governor's Association (NGA), holding the first state-wide birth-to-third grade symposium, creating a series of case studies, and beginning work to validate the Danielson Framework for Teaching in PreK-3 classrooms.

In 2015, the federal PDG-E funding allowed the State to partner with Illinois State University (ISU) to establish and implement a comprehensive system of supports for the birth-to-third grade alignment, the Birth-to-Third Grade (B-3) Continuity Project. The B-3 Continuity Project launched with seven communities that received comprehensive supports from ISU supported by this funding. In the subsequent years, the project has grown and is now providing access to varying levels of support through an annual conference, webinars, and technical assistance to over seventy communities throughout Illinois.

KEY FINDINGS

- Adequate early care and education funding provides legitimacy for preschool education in the eyes of kindergarten through high school (K-12) administrators.
- B-3 strategies must be responsive to community context.
- Stable funding over time is necessary to support this work.
- Stakeholder commitment over time is key to sustaining momentum.
- A shared body of data helps to clarify community needs and make the case for needed services.
- As with all systems building work, solid relationships form the foundation for change.
- Serving the most at-risk children and families, as opposed to serving a universal or less at-risk population, requires a different approach, additional staff competencies, and sets of services.
- Because of a lack of integration and coordination at the state level, communities and individual programs bear the burden of managing multiple, sometimes conflicting and redundant, requirements and procedures.

Birth-to-third grade alignment requires multiple systems and stakeholders to come into correct relative position to support a coherent educational experience from birth through age eight. Creating an aligned birth to age eight educational system requires changes on the part of both ECE and K-12 systems. Willingness to change and partner across systems requires understanding and building of mutual respect and trust.

Illinois' work has focused comprehensively on birth-to-third grade alignment as opposed to just aligning curriculum and improving transitions within a single school. Ambitiously, Illinois has adopted the following eight core elements for B-3 alignment:

"We are making progress. Funding moved us faster and forced us to do some things. We have increased awareness of B-3 strategies with elementary and middle school administrators. We are pushing for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in Kindergarten and 1st grade. Our Family Liaisons have created a strong foundation of family engagement practices."

Sandra Warner, Early Learning Center Principal,
West Chicago District 33



This report is comprehensive but structured to assist readers in identifying and pulling out key pieces that are relevant to them. In addition to more detailed background and context, readers will find:

- A summary of high level key findings drawn from the case studies through individual analysis as well as structured group conversations among community leaders.
- More in-depth information on the birth-to-third grade alignment strategies with real life examples from the participating communities.
- The complete set of five community case studies.
- A synthesis of a 2018 conference session where community leaders reflect on and answer questions about their B-3 alignment work.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

WHY BIRTH-TO-THIRD GRADE ALIGNMENT MATTERS

The concept of a “birth through third grade continuum” has caught the attention of education policy makers and been a focus of efforts to close the “opportunity gap” over the past several years. This movement is powerful and important because it is solidly rooted in the science of early childhood development and the reality of the need to address our fragmented systems of early learning and education.

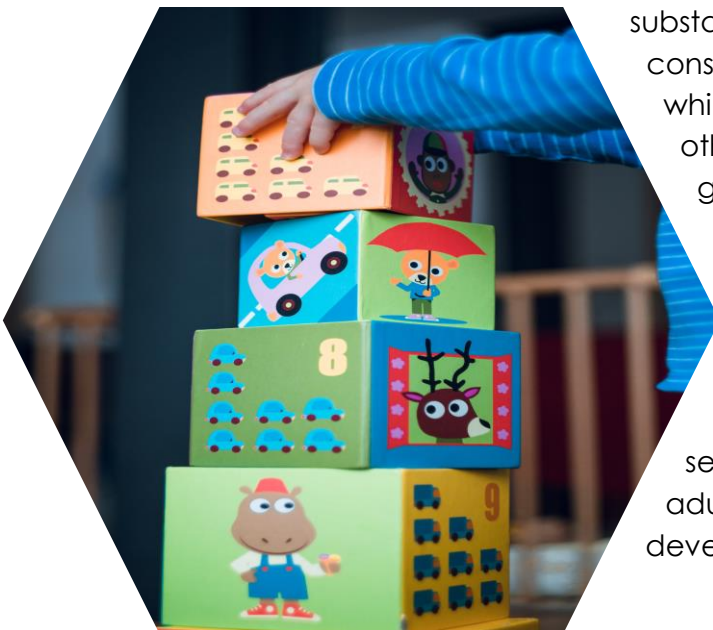
Children are learning from the moment they are born. The learning that takes place in early years of life is rapid and profound, and forms the foundation for all learning that follows. This rapid period of development and learning offers a window of opportunity to support children in a healthy start to learning and development. Unfortunately, our current system of public education does not offer universal access to early learning services beginning at birth, yet our public-school system will eventually be responsible for, and held accountable for, how children are doing in school. We have two completely different systems, one of which can be described as a non-system for supporting learning and healthy development of children birth through age eight.

HOW AND WHY CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE EARLY YEARS MATTER

Early Childhood Education (ECE) and K-12 communities share a focus on 3rd grade as it marks a significant shift in expectations for children related to learning. Children are expected to use all the foundational skills they have developed in their early years of life to be more independent learners and to be able to demonstrate acquisition of knowledge and skills through the use of standardized testing. The developmental period from birth to age eight is marked by specific characteristics that impact how children learn and therefore help inform a coherent approach to education in the early years. Learning is highly episodic and

interrelated and developmental timetables vary substantially. There is a wide range that constitutes “typical” development. For example, while some children read in prekindergarten others don’t read proficiently until second grade, which is within the normal range of development. Additionally, demonstration of acquisition of skills and knowledge is very unstable and may vary from day-to-day. During this period, children:

- Learn best in a relational, social setting and require consistent, responsive adult relationships to support learning and development.



- Have been found to perform better in school when their parents or primary caregivers are included in their education.
- Have been found to perform better in school when their teachers are well versed in early childhood development.
- Are developing skills and capacities that are the building blocks for executive functioning (EF) skills, including self-regulation, working memory and cognitive flexibility. Executive function skills enable children to engage in complex interactions with peers and teachers and manage conflicts to set the stage for active participation in classroom learning.
- Are learning to read and developing the ability to use language to express their emotions and abstract thoughts and experiences. Children at this age thrive in language-rich environments and those who are exposed to a broad vocabulary and asked reflective questions have better cognitive outcomes and an easier time learning to read.
- Experience harmful stress during “high-stakes assessments” and are unreliable test-takers¹.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ALIGNED

Birth-to-third grade alignment requires multiple systems and stakeholders “to come into correct relative position²” to support a coherent educational experience from birth through age eight. Creating an aligned birth through age eight educational system requires changes on the part of both ECE and K-12 systems. Willingness to change and partner across systems requires understanding building to mutual respect and trust.

Communities typically have a range of options to support families with young children including home-visiting services, public preschool, private preschool and childcare. It is in the interest of all of these stakeholders to work together to support the success of our children. Using a community level birth through age eight approach can help provide all partners with a framework for strategy and action. As communities, we can come together to develop policies and systems to foster healthy development and learning at birth while continually scaffolding learning gains made at all points along the continuum and across all developmental domains³.

Approaches to Learning and Self-Regulation (ATL-REG)

Social and Emotional Development (SED)

Language and Literacy Development (LLD)

Cognition: Math (COG:MATH)

Physical Development (PD)

¹ Stevens, G. G., & DeBord, K. (2001). Issues of assessment in testing children under age eight. *The Forum for Family and Consumer Issues*, 6(2).

² [Alignment def. (Merriam Webster) - 1: to get or fall into line, 2: to be in or come into precise adjustment or correct relative position.]

³ https://www.isbe.net/Pages/KIDS_5_Domains_of_Readiness.aspx

Many efforts to forge better connections take a programmatic focus, ensuring that standards, curricula, and assessments clearly articulate a developmentally appropriate continuum of expectations from year-to-year for the learning and development of children. These connections help to provide a line of sight forward and backwards to inform instruction. At the same time, addressing a comprehensive and integrated approach to children's development across domains requires that attention is paid to health and important social emotional and executive function skills that profoundly influence success in school and life. It also requires strong partnerships with families; connections to other systems of support (early intervention, health and nutrition programs, adult education programs), especially for more vulnerable families; and careful attention to transitions. Part of the challenge in creating a more aligned system is the multiple "sub-systems" involved. Education agencies themselves are complex. Achieving better connections into the ECE field requires working across additional bureaucracies and funding streams.

HISTORY OF BIRTH-TO-THIRD GRADE EFFORTS IN ILLINOIS

Illinois has long been a leader in early care and education. Over the last few decades Illinois has increased funding to expand access to early childhood programs, implement high standards, and build an infrastructure to support early care and education programs. In the continuous effort to grow and improve, Illinois is currently focused on the following priorities:

Prioritizing high need communities & serving children from priority populations

Ensuring children are ready for kindergarten – assessment of children using KIDS and sharing of data across the age continuum and partners

Encouraging/supporting community collaborations

Building Birth-to-Third Grade Continuums of high quality services

As a developing area of interest, in 2013 Illinois submitted a proposal and was selected to participate in the National Governors Association's Birth to Third Grade Policy Academy. The two primary goals of the initiative were to build awareness and commitment for birth through third grade reform and to improve birth to third grade educator effectiveness. Within these goals, a few of the major accomplishments of the project included:

- **Convening the Governor's Birth – 3rd Grade Symposium:** The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD) hosted this Symposium in April 2014. Over 160 principals, superintendents, program directors, other school administrators, teachers and advocates registered for the event from across the state. A national expert was brought in to provide a keynote presentation and offered a workshop along with sessions led by ISBE staff, university researchers, and other educational experts from across the state. The event was well received and broadened interest in the birth through third grade continuum.
- **Case Studies:** Recognizing that communities learn from and are motivated by the integrative work being done in other towns and districts, case studies of four

communities, West Chicago, Elgin, Oak Park, and Urbana, were developed in 2015. The case studies documented how districts have made strides in identifying and building elements leading to a more aligned continuum of birth to third grade education and services. The case studies capture lessons learned and concrete steps taken.

- **PreK-3 Danielson Validation Study:** As part of this project, Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University (ISU) staff conducted a validation study of the Danielson Framework for Teaching in PreK-3rd grade classrooms. The purpose of the study was to ensure that the Framework provided valid and reliable data for use in high-stakes teacher performance evaluation systems and to promote the professional learning of early childhood teachers. A summary of the study's research findings can be found at the [project website](http://isucsep.org/about/research-foundation/) (<http://isucsep.org/about/research-foundation/>).

In 2015, the State of Illinois partnered with CSEP to establish and implement a comprehensive system of supports for the birth-to-third grade alignment funded through the federal Preschool Development Grant – Expansion (PDG-E) – the [Birth-to-Third Grade \(B-3\) Continuity Project](#). The initial PDG funding allowed for more than 3,000 additional full-day, comprehensive preschool slots for the most at-risk children in Illinois. In addition to funding program slots, the grant provided infrastructure to increase the quality of programming and support grantees. This infrastructure included program support specialists to provide technical assistance (TA) and program requirements included instructional coaches in each of the Preschool Expansion communities, among other enhancements.

The B-3 Continuity Project launched with an open invitation for Preschool Expansion communities to apply as participants in an inaugural B-3 cohort. Seven communities - Rockford, Dolton, Metro East, McLean County, Elgin, North Chicago, and Chicago - were selected and participated in an initial summer institute to begin developing work plans for their communities to move towards ambitious and achievable B-3 alignment goals over the following two years. In the last quarter of 2015, CSEP hired a B-3 Continuity Director to lead these efforts. The director worked directly with communities to help connect communities with supports as they implemented their work plans.



To promote B-3 strategies across the state during the year, the B-3 Continuity Director serves on or collaborates with several different statewide committees; including the P-20 Network's B-3 team, the State of Illinois Kindergarten Transitions Committee, the Community Systems

Development-Sub Committee of the Illinois Early Learning Council, and the full Illinois Early Learning Council. Members of the B-3 leadership team also attend and present at relevant conferences. In 2016, additional communities received PDG-E funding and 13 communities became a part of the project. A team was assembled to support these communities. The team consisted of four members with a variety of skill sets and various levels of expertise in areas including community systems development, K-3 classrooms, professional development, early childhood experience and research, and state policy. The team worked closely to support individual community alignment progress and to determine what additional supports could be provided to move the alignment work forward. Involved communities then participated in the second invitation only summer institute.

In addition to working closely with the Preschool Expansion communities, the Director and Project Team developed a conceptual model to provide the appropriate level of TA to communities, developed and curated a series of resources for communities, made site visits, facilitated peer-to-peer support and connections, and developed and hosted a number of content specific webinars to support birth-to-third grade alignment efforts.

For fiscal year 2017, the summer institute was renamed as the B-3 Continuity Conference and was offered to all Preschool Expansion communities as well as state funded, expansion communities. All seven of the original communities, as well as six additional communities attended the 2017 B-3 Continuity Conference – the additional communities were Aurora, Carpentersville, Decatur, Riverdale, West Chicago and Wheaton/ Warrenville. Through the conference and start of the school year, each community collaborated to develop a work plan to establish B-3 alignment goals.

The work of the project continues to be focused in three key areas:

1. Establishment of a State-Level Team

A team has been utilized to plan and implement a clear strategy in support of Illinois' goals, as indicated in our PDG-E proposal. This team convenes on a regular basis to assess progress and plan next steps.

2. B-3 Continuity Conferences

Summer Conferences, now open to both Preschool Expansion communities and other state funded communities, have three primary goals:

- Support and expand knowledge of developmentally appropriate educational practices across the Birth-to-Third Grade Continuum with a focus on developmentally appropriate practices.
- Enhance both, early childhood educators' and community members' understanding of the structure and culture of elementary schools, as well as elementary school educators' understanding of the structure and culture of early childhood education and community support systems. Work to increase alignment

within and across communities and school districts to best support children and families. Organize various presenters and panels to provide information about transitioning through the programs and agencies.

- Assist participants with understanding state efforts to define and support the local creation of coherent local pathways from infant toddler programs to prekindergarten programs and into the early elementary grades in their communities.

A [comprehensive self-assessment tool](#) was developed by the project team and is also available as an additional support for community-level planning. This tool is highlighted and utilized at the B-3 Continuity Conferences as well as available online.

3. Supports for Communities

The state-level team continues to provide supports to Preschool Expansion communities to assist them in developing local stakeholder groups to lead this work and begin prioritizing goals and tasks. Communities were encouraged to look broadly at their existing collaborations and systems and identify potential stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach to B-3 alignment at the community level, engaging the school district, community-based and private early learning centers, Head Start grantees, social service agencies, philanthropy groups and other key entities.

As a part of Illinois' system of State supports to communities, the birth-to-third grade alignment project is designed to provide individualized support to communities in meeting their specific needs and goals. Beyond the conferences described above, communities have received individual site visits from the team. These visits have three primary goals:

- Assisting communities in identifying stakeholders to be a part of their B-3 team.
- Learning more about the existing collaborations in the community and determining whether one of these collaborations is an appropriate "home" for the B-3 community work.
- Supporting communities in assessing current alignment efforts and progress, identifying primary areas of need, and establishing a plan to move forward.

After these site visits are completed, communities receive continued support from the State of Illinois in the form of technical assistance, access to relevant resources, regional meetings, support facilitating community meetings, connection to national experts, webinars on B-3 alignment components and peer exchanges.

Other forms of support are provided as needed to the extent that resources permit. Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), ISU, and GOECD are committed to ensuring that communities are successful in implementing significant and sustainable alignment activities in one of Illinois' eight core elements for B-3 alignment:

B-3 Alignment Strategies



Community Partnerships: to strengthen education, supports and services for children and families from early childhood programs into early elementary settings



Comprehensive Services: including assistance in obtaining health, mental health, dental services, nutrition services, education, and linkages to other community services



Family Engagement & Parent Leadership: schools and engaged families partner in children's formal education such as school-parent communication about school programs and students' progress, involving parents in school decision-making and school-community collaborations



Supported Transitions: increase access to early childhood programs and smooth transitions that focus on the continuum provided to each child and sustain gains into the early grades



Joint Professional Development: to ensure highly-effective teaching staff whose professional development is aligned from birth-to-third grade and is grounded in child development and effective instructional practices



Whole-child Focused, Aligned Curriculum and Instruction: to represent a coherent system with shared expectations for student growth and a focus on both academic and social-emotional skills, and support a wide range of development, and are reflective of children's families and cultures and firmly rooted in the science of child development



Aligned Assessments: sharing assessment practices and data across the full, early childhood continuum with particular focus on the implementation of the KIDS



Data-driven Improvement: using meaningful child-based assessments and program data to drive instruction, identify achievement gaps, allocate resources, and determine areas for professional development

EXPANDING EFFORTS TO FOCUS ON BIRTH-TO-THIRD GRADE ALIGNMENT

In 2017, ISBE released a new competition for all funds supporting state funded preschool (Preschool for All and Preschool for All Expansion), and birth to age three services (Prevention Initiative) through the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG). Programs receiving new funds would begin services for the 2018-2019 school year. A new requirement was included for all of these programs funded through the ECBG to be aligned within a birth-to-third grade continuum of services.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a case study methodology. The state-level B-3 Continuity Project team selected communities that had received initial PDG-E funding in 2015 and were identified as having multiple B-3 strategies at an emerging or well-developed stage of implementation. Once communities were selected, the leadership team also developed a template for information to be collected on each community. Communities were then solicited for participation. All communities that were solicited participated in the case study report.

Primary program contacts for the Preschool Expansion communities' funding were interviewed in each community. On occasion, additional community partners were also interviewed (e.g. a family educator or community collaboration representative). In addition to information from conducted interviews, publicly available data and data included in reports to the ISBE were reviewed.

Gathered information was compiled into case studies. The case studies were then reviewed for themes and exemplary examples across them. Exemplary examples are utilized throughout the report to highlight efforts in Illinois regarding the eight birth-to-third-grade strategies being used. When needed, follow-up communications were made to further explore these exemplary examples.

While areas of improvement are touched upon in some sections of the case studies, this report was not evaluative in nature. Further, many of the initial Preschool Expansion communities beyond the communities selected are doing significant birth-to-third grade alignment work. While not included in a full case-study a few examples from additional communities were also reviewed for the report.

Data collection took place over the 2017-2018 school year, and finalized in the spring of 2018. Given that alignment work is continually moving and programs make decisions and modifications in response to conditions and funding, some discrepancies may be found between included case studies and work happening at the release of this report.

BIRTH-TO-THIRD GRADE SUCCESS FACTORS: KEY FINDINGS

While community systems development, and to some extent, birth-to-third grade (B-3) alignment, have been areas of interest for some time in Illinois, the funding and support for B-3 alignment that came with the federal PDG-E has served as a catalyst for a “big leap” in this area for state agencies, communities, and schools. The initial communities, that engaged in this work and are represented in this report, were pioneers in getting deeply engaged in B-3 systems development. They attempted new and innovative approaches, brought together groups that were not previously working together, and sometimes had to let go of previous systems and practices to try new things. These communities offer many important lessons for the state and for other communities who are engaging in B-3 alignment work.

“We are making progress. Funding moved us faster and forced us to do some things. We have increased awareness of B-3 strategies with elementary and middle school administrators. We are pushing for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in Kindergarten and 1st grade. Our Family Liaisons have created a strong foundation of family engagement practices.”

Sandra Warner, Early Learning Center Principal, West Chicago District 33

While specific strategies and examples are provided in the following sections by B-3 alignment strategies, eight common themes became apparent across the communities. These themes arose as lessons learned, consistent barriers, or important components of the B-3 work.

Key Findings

Adequate early care and education funding provides legitimacy for preschool education in the eyes of kindergarten through high school (K-12) administrators. The accountability that comes with funding has forced school administrators to pay more attention to preschool education. It also engenders greater ownership of what happens to children in their communities before they show up in kindergarten. Given that the fields of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and K-12 have developed in their own silo, some tensions do arise in terms of the push down of K-12 practices into ECE and/or the push up of ECE practices into K-12. With ECE taken more seriously, many programs were able to adopt more developmentally appropriate practices in K-2.

B-3 strategies must be responsive to community context. The flexibility to apply and adapt different strategies is extremely important. All communities are unique and effective strategies are context specific. Programs must also be responsive to changing community needs. This work is not suited to a one-size-fits-all approach.

Stable funding over time is necessary to support this work. Because of the long-term nature and slow pace of systems change, B-3 alignment must be adequately supported over years. The way ECE is currently funded in Illinois is challenging in that funding levels can and do change, sometimes substantially, from one year to the next making long-term planning and implementation difficult.

Commitment over time is key to sustaining momentum. This work takes time. Those communities that had existing collaborations in place and work underway were better positioned to move the B-3 Continuity work forward. Additionally, the work moves in waves and must be attended to over time. Setting and “resetting” the stage can be helpful to maintaining commitment and momentum. Community systems where individual programs are committed to and engaged with one another must be in place to do this.

Shared data helps clarify community needs and make the case for needed services. When data is combined across programs, agencies, and schools, it gives a more accurate picture of what is going on in a community and is more compelling and persuasive. This can be challenging to do as each entity has separate data systems – separate systems even exist within individual organizations.

As with all systems-building work, **building relationships is at the heart and foundation of accomplishing change.** Within communities, bringing individuals together from different parts of the system – 0-3 years, preschool, K-3 home visiting, childcare – facilitated improved understanding of one another's perspectives and practices that ultimately incited change. Additionally, bringing community leaders together to develop relationships, learn from, and support one another was immensely helpful. Community leaders cited the peer relationships developed through this project helpful for getting new ideas and brainstorming solutions to their challenges.

Serving the most at-risk children and families requires a different approach and sets of services than serving a universal or less at-risk population. The Preschool Expansion model is a holistic approach to providing comprehensive services to meet the needs of an entirely at-risk population of students. K-12 teachers are not always accustomed to working with a population of students and families that all require more intensive support and provision of services outside of the scope they are familiar with (e.g. home visits and trauma-informed services). This requires hiring staff with different types of skills and dispositions to get the right fit. For some communities this necessitated different interviewing and hiring practices.

Key systems challenges remain because of **communities having to manage and attempt to align and integrate programs governed by different regulatory entities** including different funding streams and state agencies and departments, unions, etc. Because of this lack of integration and coordination at the state level, communities bear the burden of managing multiple, sometimes conflicting and redundant requirements and procedures.

The communities highlighted in this report have made great strides in creating and cultivating continuity for children and families from birth-to-third grade. The following section highlights specific strategies and accomplishments of these communities.

BIRTH-TO-THIRD GRADE STRATEGIES IN ACTION

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND B-3 STRUCTURES

GOAL: TO STRENGTHEN EDUCATION, SUPPORTS, AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS INTO EARLY ELEMENTARY SETTINGS

Identifying or establishing a collaborative (cross-organizational and cross-sector) “home” or structure for Birth-to-Third Grade continuity efforts is a critical first step in this work. This requires a committed core group of stakeholders that are intentional about the work. The commitments of each sector and individuals involved, and the processes through which to accomplish shared goals. This core group (a board or committee) formalizes decision-making roles and responsibilities among partners and prioritize and B-3 efforts.

Participating in a collaborative requires the recognition that there is work to be done that cannot be accomplished by a single individual or organization, and that others in the community have a stake in the process and outcomes and have something valuable to contribute. In addition to getting buy-in of key stakeholders, activities center on the following critical components:



CRITICAL COMPONENTS:

- **Governance Structure** Establish and support collaborative (cross-organizational and cross-sector) board or committee that formalizes decision-making roles and responsibilities among partners and prioritizes B-3 efforts.
- **Strategic Plans** Develop, share, and regularly update a strategic plan for the B-3 work that reflects shared commitment to improving outcomes for children.
- **Funding & Support** Generate, reallocate, leverage, connect, and/or blend public and private funds to ensure that collaborative B-3 efforts are adequately funded to ensure effective implementation.
- **Communication** Establish and maintain mechanisms for communication and information sharing among community partners including but not limited to regular updates, reports on progress made by the collaboration, opportunities for reflection and feedback.

While structure and processes must be established to meaningfully engage in Birth-to-Third Grade Continuity work, it is also important to note that these structures and processes must

be attended to over time to ensure that they remain responsive to community needs, that they are effective, and that stakeholders are still on the same page (bought into the same shared vision). This is sometimes referred to as “setting and re-setting the stage.”

CRITICAL COMPONENTS IN ACTIONⁱ

STRATEGY	COMMUNITY	EXAMPLES
Governance Structure	Rockford	A strong collective impact organization (Alignment Rockford), works in support of existing school district goals. The Education Services department is responsible for B-3 alignment within the district. The district’s early childhood Executive Director attends meetings of both of these structures to ensure continuity and promote alignment of their efforts.
Strategic Plans	West Chicago	A newly established B-3 Continuity committee exists within the community collaborative (WeGo Together for Kids). To establish a district plan, district administrators, teaching staff, and community members undertook a strategic planning process together.
Funding & Support	McLean	Three years into the Preschool Expansion program, the district was able to establish a position of Early Childhood Coordinator to focus on collaboration and alignment throughout the community rather than in a single building or program.

ⁱ Note that more in-depth information about community examples can be found within the appendix case studies.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

- A Title I, LEA (Local Education Agency) or school may use its Title I funds to support a district-operated preschool program, a school-operated preschool program, or for coordination with other preschool programs, based on the needs of its eligible students and the most effective use of those funds. In addition, if an LEA chooses to provide preschool services using Title I funds, the district must "support, coordinate, and integrate services provided under (Title I) with other early childhood education programs". (Sec 1112 and Sec. 1113)
- Districts must, regardless if they elect to use Title I resources to support early learning initiatives, undertake activities that increase coordination with Head Start and other early childhood education programs, contributing to increased continuity of learning. LEA's must develop agreements with early childhood programs for:

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- Developing and implementing a systematic procedure for receiving records of preschool children
- Establishing channels of communication between school staff and their counterparts to facilitate coordination
- Conducting meetings involving parents, kindergarten or elementary school teachers, and Head Start teachers to discuss developmental and other needs of children
- Organizing and participating in joint transition-related training of school, Head Start, and where appropriate, other early childhood education program staff
- Linking the educational services provided by the LEA with those provided by Head Start agencies

ESSA Sections: 1111(a)(1)(B); 1114(a)(1) (3); 1119(a); 1119(b) and Non-Regulatory Guidance

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

GOAL: PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, DENTAL SERVICES, NUTRITION SERVICES AND EDUCATION, AND LINKAGES TO OTHER COMMUNITY SERVICES

Children and families that will benefit most from comprehensive early childhood programs and family support are frequently those with multiple and/or complicated needs. Early childhood programs do not need to provide these important ancillary services. However, they must be able to help families identify needs and meaningfully connect families to the full array of services when appropriate. This is best done not on an individual program-by-program basis but in the context of a community collaboration as to build efficiencies.



CRITICAL COMPONENTS:

- Referral and Follow-up Process and Structure:** Establish a structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities (i.e. maintaining complete directory of services, making referrals, and following-up on referrals) for both individuals within participating organizations and organizations within the community.
- Data:** Information on available services in the community and documentation when there are unmet needs that are not currently addressed in the community, as well as the extent to which referrals are successful and families are able to access needed services is key to measuring the success of the collaborative and can also help make the case for additional services or funding.
- Dedicated Staff:** To successfully support families in identifying and accessing needed services, programs, and make them feel welcome. Further, communities must have dedicated staff to fulfill all the critical components identified above. For example, programs will have to hire staff to work intensively with families but communities may want

“Another challenge has been responding to the significant needs of children that we are putting in our Preschool Expansion classrooms. We worked really hard to find those children that are most in need of our services, and because we have done that, they have come with lots of needs.”

Peggy Ondera, Director of Early Learning Initiatives, Elgin U-46

to pool resources to have a community level individual responsible for maintaining up-to-date information on resources, collecting, and analyzing data on referrals and needed services.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS IN ACTIONⁱ

STRATEGY	COMMUNITY	EXAMPLES
Referral & Follow-up Process and Structure	West Chicago	Their full-service community schools model provides for comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, their family members, and community members. Teams use a common intake form to track and ensure continuity of services. The district is currently working on a database to house information on provision of services that will be included in their online data system.
Dedicated Staff	McLean	Since implementing Preschool Expansion, the district has dramatically increased roles devoted to family engagement that start in preschool, and connect students into kindergarten and through the early grades. Social workers in Title I buildings focus on family support and collaborate with family educators to track students between programs and systems.

ⁱ Note that more in-depth information about community examples can be found within the appendix case studies.

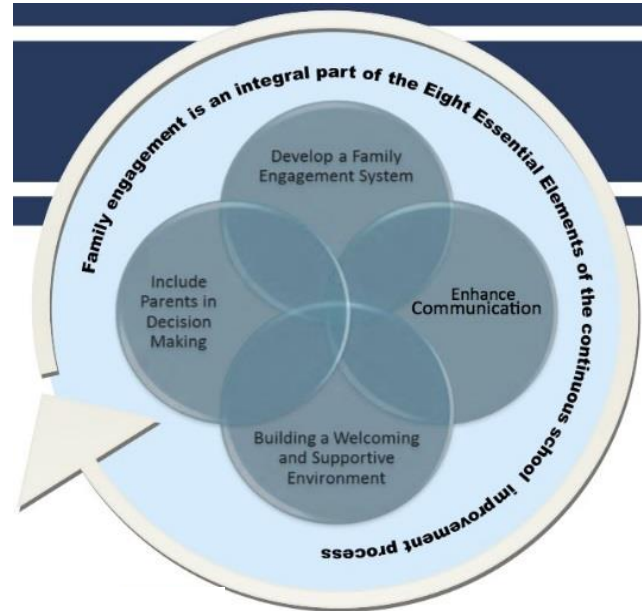
CONNECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

Schools serving very large numbers of low-income students (greater than 40%) may be designated as a “school wide” Title I program. Such schools must have a “comprehensive” plan describing how these resources will be used for the schools’ students. These plans must describe strategies for meeting the school’s needs, including addressing the needs of all children in the school, particularly those at greatest risk for not meeting state standards. This step may include supporting “counseling, school-based mental health programs, specialized instructional support services, mentoring services, and other strategies to improve students’ skills outside the academic subject areas.” Schools operating school wide programs have significant spending flexibility and may co-mingle federal funds with state and local resources (Sec. 1114).

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT & PARENT LEADERSHIP

GOAL: SCHOOLS ENGAGE FAMILIES TO PARTNER IN CHILDREN'S FORMAL EDUCATION THROUGH STRATEGIES SUCH AS SCHOOL-PARENT COMMUNICATION ABOUT SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND STUDENTS' PROGRESS, AS WELL AS INVOLVING PARENTS IN SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING AND SCHOOL-COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

The research is very clear. Children whose parents are involved and engaged in their education do better in school.⁴ Parents are the experts when it comes to their own children and should be engaged from a strengths-based perspective to help understand individual child and family needs as well to inform school policies and procedures. Parent expertise should be leveraged to create school environments that are welcoming and supportive and policies and procedures that are responsive to local family and community needs.



Illinois State Board of Education Family Engagement

CRITICAL COMPONENTS:

- Culturally sensitive and appropriate communications:** Educators must recognize the importance of parents in the education process (parents as experts, 2-way communication), and sensitivity to family culture and language. Environments must be safe and feel welcoming.
- Information, education and resources that are responsive to parent needs:** Education opportunities and resources need to be those that are determined by parents to be important and of value.
- Family engagement and outreach should be performed at a systems level:** Parents should be engaged in decision-making regarding school and community level approaches, policies, and initiatives.

"We had some collaborative work going on, but Preschool Expansion helped focus and shined a flashlight on certain things. We had started working on alignment within district, but the program made us look at outside service providers. Our system is like a plate of spaghetti – you could keep pulling strings but it never makes sense – if we cannot figure it out how can families? This process sparked a community of practice among case managers from social service providers."

Kim Nelson, Executive Director of Early Childhood, Rockford Public Schools

⁴ Illinois State Board of Education. (2015). *Family Engagement Framework*. www.isbe.net/pages/family-engagement-frapmework-guide.aspx

CRITICAL COMPONENTS IN ACTIONⁱ

STRATEGY	COMMUNITY	EXAMPLES
Culturally sensitive communications	West Chicago	The district partners with local non-profit to provide interpretation, translation, interpreter training and consultation to meet the needs of the area's fast-growing immigrant population. The district also has a Bilingual Parents Advisory Council to ensure representation and promote leadership of immigrant parents.
Responsive to parent needs	Rockford	After years of teachers conducting home visits early in the school year, the district heeded their Parent Advisory Council's advice to start over the summer with family support specialists, followed by home visits with teachers later -- once they have gotten to know students and their families. Parents indicated that they would rather meet their children's teachers at open houses held at the beginning of each school year.

ⁱ Note that more in-depth information about community examples can be found within the appendix case studies.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

If school districts receive any Title I funding, they must undertake activities that increase coordination with early childhood education programs, even if they don't fund early learning services or initiatives with Title I. This includes, for example, developing and implementing a systemic procedure for receiving records, establishing channels of communication, conducting meetings with families and other programs, and organizing and participating in training related to the transition to elementary school (Sec. 1112).

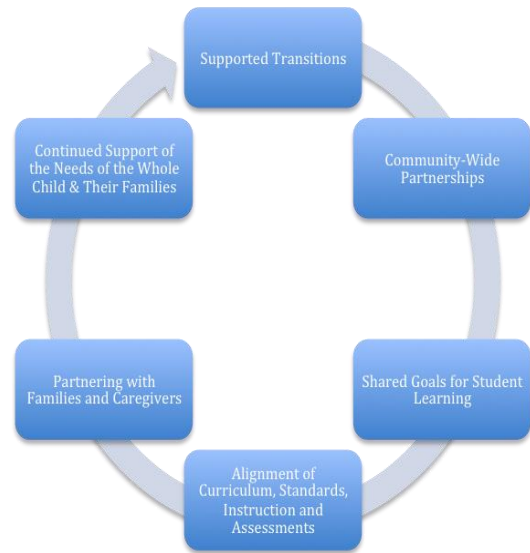
Title I Family Engagement Funds may be used for joint professional development that includes early childhood educators. Title I specifically authorizes spending focused on promoting family and parental engagement. Eligible funding uses include supporting schools and nonprofit organizations in providing professional development for district and school staff about parent and family engagement. The professional development may be provided jointly to "teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals, early childhood educators, and parents and family members" (Sec. 1116).

SUPPORTED TRANSITIONS

GOAL: INCREASE ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND SMOOTH TRANSITIONS THAT FOCUS ON THE CONTINUUM PROVIDED TO EACH CHILD AND SUSTAIN GAINS INTO EARLY GRADES

Between birth and age eight, children experience many significant educational transitions. There are three primary types of transitions: 1) transitions between activities in a given setting, 2) transitions between different settings throughout the same day, and 3) transitions between programs and schools over months and years.

Transitions can be challenging and stressful for young children but offer a substantial opportunity for growth and skill building. Parents, educators, and the community should be on the same page about expectations for transitions and the range of settings where children will be cared for and educated. When parents and children are well aware of transitions it can help equip them to prepare for and adapt to changes.



CRITICAL COMPONENTS:

- **Community-wide partnerships** allow B-3 teachers and leaders in school-based and community-based settings to plan for and develop policies and procedures that facilitate smooth, supported transitions across programs and settings and from one age/grade level to the next.
- **A shared understanding of child development** and goals for growth and learning. These will manifest in aligned standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices as well as consistent communications with families.
- **Policies and procedures, that protect student privacy, to share information** about students and families. An openness to collaborate with educators across the B-3 grade span and in different settings (e.g. school-based, community-based).
- **Engagement of families/caregivers in the transition process** as the changes in settings affect them as well. Families need to be informed of classroom expectations and practices, policies and procedures, and how they can continue to be a partner in their children's schooling.
- **Transition supports that focus on the needs of the whole child and their families** to include not only academic supports but also coordination and continuation of supports that

students and families receive in their prior education setting (e.g. GED classes, social service referrals, health services).

CRITICAL COMPONENTS IN ACTIONⁱ

STRATEGY	COMMUNITY	EXAMPLES
Community-wide partnerships	Carpentersville, Elgin and Rockford	In addition to their local collaborations, these communities make sure their highly mobile families do not slip through the cracks by communicating regularly across their geographically large but adjacent towns and cities. These relationships have been strengthened through their active participation in the B-3 professional development opportunities. Rockford staff plans to conduct visits in Elgin to observe developmentally appropriate practice in an effort to strengthen buy-in among their colleagues and leadership.
Transition supports for the whole child and their family	Elgin	The district has two full-time transition facilitators, one for families of birth to three years old, and another for preschool into kindergarten and the early grades. Family engagement staff provide additional layers of support. A Pipeline Committee ensures warm hand-offs and tracks children and families between programs and community services.

ⁱ Note that more in-depth information about community examples can be found within the appendix case studies.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

Processes and procedures to support transitions

If school districts receive any Title I funding, they must undertake activities that increase coordination with early childhood education programs, even if they don't fund early learning services or initiatives with Title I. This includes, for example, developing and implementing a systemic procedure for receiving records, establishing channels of communication, conducting meetings with families and other programs, and organizing and participating in training related to the transition to elementary school (Sec. 1112).

Addressing transition in the comprehensive plan

Schools serving very large numbers of low-income students (greater than 40%) may be designated as a "school wide" Title I program. Such schools must have a "comprehensive"

plan describing how these resources will be used for the schools' students. These plans must describe strategies for meeting the school's needs, including addressing the needs of all children in the school, particularly those at greatest risk for not meeting state standards. This step may include supporting "strategies for assisting preschool children in the transition from early childhood education programs to local elementary school programs...." Schools operating school wide programs have significant spending flexibility and may comingle federal funds with state and local resources (Sec. 1114).

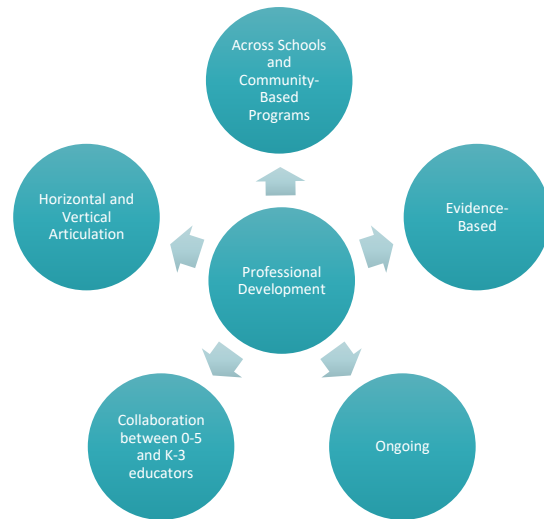
Addressing transition for Title I eligible students

Targeted program funds may be used to deliver early learning services to Title I eligible students. Such programs must determine which students will be served, including describing how the program will be coordinated with the regular education program. This description may include services to assist preschool children in the transition from early childhood education programs to elementary school (Sec. 1115).

JOINT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GOAL: TO ENSURE HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHING STAFF WHOSE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD) IS ALIGNED FROM BIRTH-TO-THIRD GRADE AND IS GROUNDED IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Children learn in the context of trusted, meaningful relationships with the adults around them. The key to quality in early childhood education is in the interactions between adults and children. Children rely on these adults to make meaning of the world. Close relationships with caring attentive adults give children the security and stability that they need to grow and learn. Because these interactions are so important, those who work with young children must be highly knowledgeable about child development and skilled at facilitating intentional and explicit interactions to support learning and development. Additionally, adults must be skilled at creating learning environments and implementing curriculum. A teacher's ability to implement curriculum is more important than the type of curriculum being used. Adults who understand early childhood development—and know how to interact with young children in a sensitive and responsive manner—can develop supportive and affirming relationships with young learners and provide the stimulating, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities that are essential to high-quality early childhood education.



CRITICAL COMPONENTS:

- **Shared opportunities** for professional development should be built across schools and community-based programs. Professional development (PD) opportunities should be **jointly planned** so that preschool (0-5) educators learn with their early elementary (K-3) colleagues within and across schools and community-based settings. There should be PD opportunities that include educators learning together within age/grade level (horizontal) or across ages/grade levels (vertical).
- Professional development should be **rooted in a shared understanding of child development and the competencies** needed to support our youngest children. Educators should focus on engaging in evidence-based PD practices in induction and ongoing reflective supervision to support implementation of learning.
- **A range of modalities** may need to be used to reach all educators including using technology or other resources if face-to-face PD activities are not possible due to scheduling, distance, or funding challenges.

- **Leadership training** is essential to ensure that school and community-based leaders are able to cultivate and maintain an organizational culture and context that supports ongoing learning.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS IN ACTIONⁱ

STRATEGY	COMMUNITY	EXAMPLES
Shared opportunities	McLean	Instructional coaches bridge multiple grades and provide continuity in expectations and supports. The district has a task force charged with aligning professional development practices and to promote the importance of the CLASS observational tool. They also have weekly late start days so teachers have consistent and protected time for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
Range of modalities	Rockford	The district trained all early learning staff in trauma-informed practices and participated in a community-wide conversation about trauma with 100+ local service providers and collaboration members. They regularly include their local Head Start staff in professional development opportunities. Training on authentic assessment and developmentally appropriate practice will now be a part of all new teachers' orientation.

ⁱ Note that more in-depth information about community examples can be found within the appendix case studies.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

Title II Professional Development Formula Funds

Title II authorizes substantial funds for improving the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other school leaders; increasing the number of teachers, principals, and other school leaders who are effective in improving student academic achievement in schools; and providing low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

Professional development funds may be used for early learning capacity building for ECE educators and elementary educators. States and districts may use this program for a variety of professional development and other activities, including providing early learning focused professional development. ESSA specifies that states and districts may use Title II formula funds for the following:

- States may support training teachers, principals, other school leaders, paraprofessionals, early childhood education program directors, and other early

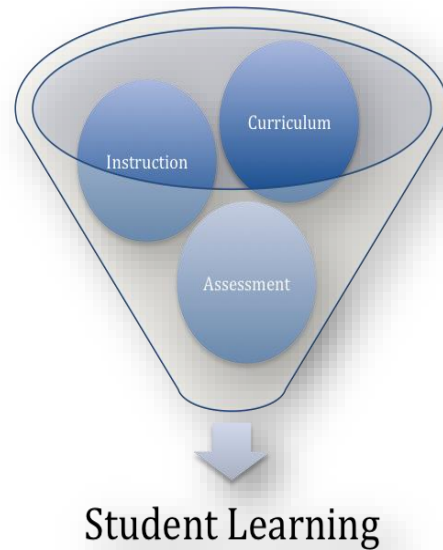
childhood education program providers to participate in joint efforts to address the transition to elementary school, including issues related to school readiness (Sec. 2101).

- Districts may provide programs to increase the knowledge base of teachers, principals, or other school leaders on instruction in the early grades and on strategies to measure whether young children are progressing.
- Districts may provide programs designed to increase the ability of principals or other school leaders to support teachers, teacher leaders, early childhood educators, and other professionals to meet the needs of students through age eight which may include providing joint professional learning and planning activities for school staff and educators in preschool programs that address the transition to elementary school.

ALIGNED CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENTS

GOAL: TO CREATE A COHERENT SYSTEM WITH SHARED EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT GROWTH, DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION, AND MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT.

The period from birth to age eight is a unique developmental period as discussed. Children learn rapidly, episodically, and their brains are forming the foundation for all learning to follow. Therefore, supporting education and development in these years requires a unique approach as well. Comprehensive, developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction tailored to the way young children learn best, in the context of relationships, through play and authentic assessment, is imperative.



CRITICAL COMPONENTS:

- **Curriculum and instruction must be comprehensive.** All domains of development (cognitive, physical, social-emotional, as well as executive functioning and academic skills) should be addressed.
- Approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment must **reflect children's families and culture.**
- **Instruction should be developmentally appropriate** (i.e., play-based, child driven) and individualized to meet the needs of all children.
- **Assessments are aligned to standards and curriculum** and are based on developmentally appropriate milestones and assessment methods (authentic assessment, input from parents and primary caregivers).
- **Student growth expectations should be shared** across age and grade levels and among school and community-based settings with a focus on whole child development (e.g., academic, social-emotional, language, physical).
- **Information is shared with and elicited from parents** to educate parents as well as to inform individualized instruction and assessment and to support decisions around curriculum.
- **The KIDS Assessment** can serve as a link between preschool (0-5) and Kindergarten.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS IN ACTION¹

STRATEGY	COMMUNITY	EXAMPLES
Comprehensive curriculum	Rockford	The district is in year three of a five-year curriculum alignment process in which curricular maps are created, reviewed and revised by administrators and teaching staff. The Curriculum Department created a process that includes the recruitment and selection of teachers to serve on the Curriculum Leadership Teams, sharing of their work with the Instructional Council, and ongoing review of the curriculum maps.
Developmentally appropriate instruction	Elgin	Early childhood staff used the move to full-day kindergarten as a springboard from which to create and implement a play-based framework, and extend it into first grade, with plans to do the same in second grade and ideally third grade too. Messaging centers more on schools being ready for all children rather than on students' need to be ready.
Assessments aligned to standards and curriculum	West Chicago and Elgin	These communities have been intentional about using the alignment between the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) used in their preschool classrooms and the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) they conduct with kindergarten students. They have used this information to create appropriate report cards for their kindergarten students.

¹ Note that more in-depth information about community examples can be found within the appendix case studies.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

Supporting children with disabilities

Non-regulatory ESSA early learning guidance from the Department of Education notes that funding can be used "...to increase preschool teachers' competencies in instructing children with disabilities; ensuring that appropriate accommodations are in place, such as assistive technology, so that children can access the curriculum or participate in assessments; implementing school-wide models of positive interventions and supports to promote healthy social, emotional, and behavioral development; and supporting the universal design of the environment or instructional materials" (ESSA Non-Regulatory Guidance page 20).

ESSA statutes include many references to a well-rounded education. The term "well-rounded education" means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer

science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience (Sec 8101)."

The U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' joint Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs states that all young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive, high-quality early childhood programs with individualized and appropriate support in meeting high expectations. For inclusion programs to be successful, staff need to intentionally promote children's participation across all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations. Therefore, LEAs should examine their policies, procedures, and practices in supporting preschool children with disabilities in their systems, and consider how Elementary and Secondary Education Act (re authorized as ESSA) funding can be used to ensure access and participation in inclusive preschool classrooms. This could include providing professional development to increase preschool teachers' competencies in instructing children with disabilities; ensuring that appropriate accommodations are in place, such as assistive technology, so that children can access the curriculum or participate in assessments; implementing school-wide models of positive interventions and supports to promote healthy social, emotional, and behavioral development; and supporting the universal design of the environment or instructional materials" (ESSA Non-Regulatory Guidance p19).

DATA-DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

GOAL: USING MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY-LEVEL DATA, PROGRAM-LEVEL DATA AND CHILD-BASED ASSESSMENTS TO INFORM COMMUNITY AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND INSTRUCTION, IDENTIFY ACHIEVEMENT GAPS, ALLOCATE RESOURCES, AND DETERMINE AREAS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to make sound decisions, it is important to have accurate and comprehensive information and to share and analyze data with

stakeholders who can provide critical context to make meaning of the data. Birth-to-Third Grade collaborations will need different types of data to support continuity of experience in the early years. These include:

- A robust community assessment that describes the status of young children and their families in the community as well as the landscape of existing early learning and supportive services. Existing and unmet needs should also be documented so that community members can work together to address community needs.
- Assessments of child development and well-being can be used to individualize instruction, support transitions, and continually improve programs and services as well as to identify areas for joint professional development across the community.

Stakeholders must be extremely cautious to only use data and data collection tools, especially child level data, for the purposes for which it was intended. For example, standardized developmental screening instruments which are designed to identify children who need more in-depth evaluation should never be used for the purposes of determining program eligibility or demonstrating outcomes.

Data Can...

	Make Connections Help communities identify needs and possible solutions
	Make an Impact Appropriate data can inform instruction and learning environments
	Understand What's Happening Descriptions of policies, programs, implementation status, data trends
	Community Description/Profile Overview of findings to communicate data and attract stakeholders
	Engage Families Help parents and caregivers understand their student's progress
	Accountability Provide measurable to help hold participating stakeholders accountable
	Continuous Improvement Timely data to inform instruction and support services
	Strategic Tool Strategic planning tool to help in planning, gathering, analyzing or reporting of data

CRITICAL COMPONENTS:

- Data is a needed and useful tool for establishing systemic partnerships and **making sound program and policy decisions** impacting the community.
- Data can be **informative across multiple levels** (child, program, district, community) and data collection tools and assessments and the data generated from those should never be used for purposes other than the tool was originally intended.

- Districts and programs should **use data** to identify gaps and areas of need; make resource allocations and the case for additional funding; and to make changes at the program level. Discussions with key stakeholders across the community (vertically and horizontally) should take place to make meaning of the data.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS IN ACTION¹

STRATEGY	COMMUNITY	EXAMPLES
Making program and policy decisions	Carpentersville	Principals must make new budget requests and allocations with data to support the need. Data on participants in the Preschool Expansion program indicates that the district is "levelling the playing field" by the time preschoolers enter kindergarten. This information will be used in developing plans for the coming year, specifically as it relates to supports for students who may need Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
Informative across multiple levels	Rockford	The district has release of information policies in place for the sharing of individual student data with community collaboration partners. Data is shared at least quarterly with the Board of Education, and the Superintendent provides a yearly education update with the local Chamber of Commerce. Schools share data on individual students with their parents during parent-teacher conferences.

¹ Note that more in-depth information about community examples can be found within the appendix case studies.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

LEAs are required to include on their school report cards the number and percentage of children enrolled in preschool programs. Such timely information will help to identify potential gaps in access to preschool services and facilitate greater awareness about the continuum of learning between early learning and the elementary grades (Sec. 1111).

CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD

A myriad of opportunities exist for expanding and improving birth-to-third grade alignment efforts in Illinois. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) emphasizes and promotes the use of federal funds for early learning beginning at birth in a way that it has not done before. Both the state and local educational agencies (LEA) have the opportunity to choose to use these funds for early learning. Additionally, Illinois leaders continue to prioritize early learning by expanding the state Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG).

STATE EARLY CHILDHOOD BLOCK GRANT (ECBG) EXPANSION

Illinois is committed to an ambitious plan for increased funding for the ECBG, which supports our state-funded preschool (birth-to-five) programs. For state fiscal year 2017, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) received an increase of \$75 million for the ECBG. In state fiscal year 2018, ISBE received an increase of \$50 million for ECBG. Through the grantee process, Illinois is committed to a collaborative program model that relies upon a strong foundation of relationships between the State and our sub-grantees and between those sub-grantees and their communities. As noted previously, the ECBG now includes a requirement for grantees to be aligned within a birth-to-third grade continuum of services.

To enhance birth-to-third grade alignment across the state, ISBE is committed to dedicating Early Childhood Division staff to Birth-to-Third Grade Continuity Initiatives. ISBE Early Childhood Division staff will be instrumental in working with stakeholders to sustain the collaborative activities that are in place. The funding of new programs in FY19 will allow for new communities to add the alignment component into the programs from implementation.

Additionally, the 2017-18 school year was the first year of full implementation for KIDS (Kindergarten Individual Development Survey), the state's kindergarten entry assessment. The state has KIDS instructional coaches strategically located throughout Illinois that help in the training of the instrument and to increase awareness of developmentally appropriate practices in many districts. The data will help with transitions, curriculum alignment, and shared professional development from preschool to kindergarten and beyond.

Key parts of the State's strategy are professional development and technical assistance to programs. Supports are funded for FY19 toward the goal of supporting the development of administrative capacity and strong program systems for compliance and quality. ISBE anticipates sustaining the Birth-to-Third Grade Continuity Project.

FEDERAL EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) served to elevate the importance of early childhood education, especially in helping disadvantaged students, in the educational continuum. ESSA explicitly allows and promotes the use of federal funds for preschool students, beginning

at birth, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive and holistic approach to education and the importance of continuity and connection across the early years. There are opportunities and requirements at both the state and LEA levels to enhance and expand early learning opportunities. The following explicit provisions address early learning and can be used to further support birth-to-third grade alignment efforts in Illinois.

TITLE I CORE FUNDS

Title I provides financial assistance (approximately \$14 billion annually) to public school districts and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all students meet state standards. First established in 1965, Title I serves as the primary federal program designed to promote educational equity at the elementary and secondary levels. Program funds flow by formula, through states to districts, with a majority of program dollars being used at the district and school levels. States and districts that accept Title I funding must agree to a range of requirements, including

establishing statewide systems of accountability, assessment, and school improvement. These requirements, and other provisions of the new law including references to early learning, can be used to strengthen early learning programs and better align them with elementary school.



Under ESSA, Title I, **State plans must address early childhood.** States must submit Title I plans to the U.S. Department of Education. As part of this planning requirement, the new law calls on states to describe how they will assist school districts and elementary schools that elect to use Title I funds to support early childhood education programs. Under the statute, State

education agencies have wide latitude to shape this plan consistent with local needs. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education has further defined this obligation through [non-regulatory guidance](#) (ESSA Non-Regulatory Guidance).

State report cards must address preschool. ESSA also requires states and LEAs to annually publish “report cards” describing how public schools are performing and otherwise promoting greater transparency about educational opportunities. Among other data, Title I requires State report cards to include the number and percentage of students enrolled in preschool programs.

School districts using Title I resources for early learning must meet Head Start standards. If a district elects to use Title I resources for early learning, the new law maintains the current law to require that the services comply with the performance standards established by the Head Start Act.

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APPENDICES

A. COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES

Data collection took place over the 2017-2018 school year, and finalized in the spring of 2018. Given that alignment work is continually moving and programs make continually make decisions and modifications in response to conditions and funding, some discrepancies may be found between included case studies and work happening at the release of this report.

Please note: Preschool Expansion communities are in various stages of implementing birth-to-third grade strategies. There were a variety of pre-existing community collaborations and systems building efforts prior to the Preschool Expansion program. These contributed enormously to building a systems mindset and culture within different communities.

CARPENTERSVILLE

[Community Unit School District 300](#) (SD 300) is headquartered in Algonquin, a suburb of Chicago. Until recently, the district was based in nearby Carpentersville, and thus is still often known by this community name. Carpentersville is currently in the news for repealing a 2007 resolution to make English the official language, a controversial move that originally targeted the more than 50% of its 38,000 residents who speak Spanish. It is one of the most diverse communities in the Chicago area. As the 6th largest school district in the state, it is geographically sprawling, comprising 16 elementary schools, 5 middle schools and 4 high schools, as well as a preschool program at the DeLacey Family Education Center. SD 300's early learning options include a home-visiting program using the Parents as Teachers⁵ model to serve pregnant women and children from birth to three-years-old at home. The fact that the district is spread out, without a central hub or adequate public transportation services, makes it particularly challenging to develop systems and supports for the most at-risk children and families that they serve.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IL REPORT CARD⁶ 2017

# Children Enrolled	20,708
% Low Income	44%
Chronically Truant Students	7%
English Language Learners	15%
Students with IEPs	15%
Per Student Spending	\$11,330
PARCC Scores	33% met or exceed

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IECAM⁷ 2017

# Children 0-5	9,402
# @185% Poverty	3,244
ISBE PFA/PE	546
ISBE PI (0-3)	58
Head Start	122
Early Head Start	122

⁵ <https://parentsasteachers.org/>

⁶ <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>

⁷ <https://iecam.illinois.edu/> Displayed numbers represent the number of available slots not the number served.

PRESCHOOL EXPANSION (PDG-E) AS A CATALYST FOR B-3 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

“The Preschool Expansion Grant was the best thing that ever happened to us,” says Linda Breen, Director of Early Childhood Education for SD 300, reflecting on when they were first funded in 2014. In addition to being able to increase the number of four-year-olds and their families served, Breen notes that the Preschool Expansion brought a greater degree of accountability by raising the profile of their early childhood programs within the district. She remembers, “For years we were introduced as a K-12 district’ when we are really a PreK-12 district.” Breen sees that elementary principals are now demonstrating a better understanding of developmentally appropriate practices. Additionally, the assistant superintendent has begun to include preschool classrooms for instructional rounding, which includes non-evaluative observations and reflection time.

The Preschool Expansion program also placed more emphasis on family engagement in a district that had otherwise been operating in silos. In the past, SD 300 may have simply dropped students due to poor attendance. Staff now try to determine the reasons why preschool students are not in school and partner with their parents to try to address their problems. In doing so, staff can uncover additional challenges that families face and connect them to the local services they need. Breen notes, “The program gave us the opportunity to look at our communities individually and how they can function as a whole.”

Among their recent accomplishments, SD 300 staff include presenting on best practices using data at last year’s B-3 Continuity Conference; beginning to host community activities across programs for children birth to five-years-old; and recently creating a data dashboard.

EXAMPLES OF B-3 CONTINUITY STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

<p>Home for B-3 Continuity Work</p>	<p>COMMUNITY: New community collaboration established including Girl Scouts, pastors, libraries and other childcare providers</p>
<p>Comprehensive Services</p>	<p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift from family education to family and community engagement model • Establish family school liaisons and create a problem-solving process • Track provision of services through online Tableau system
<p>Family Engagement</p>	<p>COMMUNITY: Annual community wide resource fair</p> <p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey parents on family education interests • Provide transportation and childcare at family events • Make sure language used in materials is parent friendly and accessible • Parents serve on advisory council

Supported Transitions	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten information sessions held within public housing developments • Common kindergarten readiness flyers used amongst the primary early childhood providers in the area
Joint Professional Development	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track feeder patterns in online data system • Rotating location of kindergarten information sessions
Aligned Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite local childcare providers to PD • Cross grade workshops • Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade teachers
Data Driven Improvement	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly PLCs that include paraprofessionals • Data as evidence for new budget requests • Standards-based report cards • New data dashboard

BARRIERS TO CREATING B-3 SYSTEMS AND SUPPORTS:

The lack of adequate public transportation in a large and spread out community presents constant challenges to creating strong birth-to-third grade systems in Carpentersville. SD 300 staff is trying to generate new ideas for getting at-risk families involved and local churches often provide transportation to events to ensure greater participation.

While the Preschool Expansion program has brought more attention to SD 300's early childhood program, the collaboration with elementary school staff is an area for improvement. However, administrators are now taking greater ownership for the preschool programs within their buildings.

✚ COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND B-3 CONTINUITY STRUCTURES

SD 300 just established a new community collaboration that includes the local Girl Scouts, pastors, police, Aunt Martha's youth drop-in center, and other community childcare providers. They have held two meetings and intend to conduct a community needs assessment as they prepare to establish goals and improvement outcomes. Breen remembers, "When we got Preschool Expansion, I realized I had three silos: I had Prevention Initiative (for 0-3-year-olds), Preschool Expansion, and Preschool For All (PFA). We now meet

quarterly so everyone knows each other, and we talk about all three so we are all on the same page. When we host family events, we do it together.”

 **COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES**

Since being involved in the Preschool Expansion program, SD 300 has made a shift from family educators to a family and community engagement model. Their instructional leaders supervise two Family and Community Educators for 140 families and can now make meaningful comparisons of data. For example, they now have baseline data on their four-year-olds, thanks to Preschool Expansion, and can compare those classrooms to others. Title I buildings have a Family School Liaison and a problem-solving process to work through difficult cases with families. Staff would like to see these practices implemented throughout the district and for them to be more comprehensive in nature.

Referrals to social services or additional supports are documented by the Family and Community Support Liaisons. Birth-to-three year-old programs also track referrals, but use a different system. SD 300 sets academic focused benchmarks four times each year, and are hoping the new grant will provide for the role of a supervisor to oversee activities and better track referrals. The district conducts developmental screenings using the state approved Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)⁸; screenings are available community-wide.

 **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

With the Preschool Expansion, Carpentersville now surveys parents for interest in family events, and based on their feedback, have held workshops on nutrition, mental health, and domestic violence. The district provides food and childcare, and tailors events to families' interests. Transportation is the biggest barrier to parent attendance. Family Coordinators reach out and remind of events. These events are documented with sign-in sheets and surveys, and staff make sure that the language level is accessible to parents.

Parents serve in a variety of leadership roles in the district per school improvement plans, including on the Parent Advisory Council, and on the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). School improvement plans also mandate family engagement. Schools try to be culturally inclusive of the community's ethnicities, even asking parents to review lunch menus at one point.

Every year, SD 300 plans and hosts a resource fair with more than 20 local partners, including Children's Home and Aid and the local Head Start. Due to how well these fairs have been attended, they plan to expand them to twice annually.

⁸ <https://agesandstages.com/>

SUPPORTED TRANSITIONS

SD 300 tracks feeder patterns in the district in their online data systems, and they are able to compare students' progress and connect with directors for curriculum and social-emotional learning (SEL) support. In the first year of doing so, they identified two local areas that lack sufficient space in their private early childhood programs. Each year in April, SD 300 holds parent-teacher conferences to develop transition plans and to determine student placement as they progress from preschool to kindergarten classrooms. They also use color-coded forms for children coming from the birth to three years-old programs to illustrate how they are doing.

The district's Title I buildings host kindergarten information nights at middle schools to outline expectations, but are aware that undocumented families are anxious to attend these events due to their lack of immigration status. In response, SD 300 will rotate the location of these events or host them where families already gather to allow for better participation. Kindergarten readiness has been defined and shared with providers that the district regularly partners with, but less so with smaller or less connected providers. The district also distributes kindergarten reading flyers that include readiness information.

JOINT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SD 300 invites staff from the local Head Start and Children's Home and Aid childcare providers to their professional development, including one recently on trauma-informed practice. Teachers are encouraged to attend cross grade workshops, and the district sets aside two to three district days for alignment meetings. The early childhood programs have a "kindergarten alliance" for preschool teachers to visit kindergartens and vice versa, and an early childhood collaborative council made up of administrators, teaching and services staff. The district's Title I buildings also have professional learning communities (PLCs) that bring preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade teachers together for articulation purposes.

ALIGNED CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENTS

In addition to hosting PLCs, principals conduct monthly data reviews with intentional questions to ensure aligned curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The PLCs also have "level up and level down" sessions to focus on vertical alignment. With math and literacy administrators examining grading versus testing, SD 300 staff members feel that they are on a good path to alignment and moving from standards-based to competency-based learning. They also have a portal where parents can see lesson

"You will be collecting a lot of data. Really analyze that data and look at how the children are doing in kindergarten. What we found is that we have leveled the playing field for the most at-risk kids. They were scoring the same as other kids in that first kindergarten assessment. And do not hold onto that data; share it with your community collaborators. Be your own champions: tell them all the great things you are doing. Ask to share data with your school board."

Linda Breen, Director of Early Childhood Education

plan summaries, and Boys and Girls Club and other after school staff can access curriculum plans. Linda Breen notes that since the advent of Preschool Expansion, “The administration realized there is a curriculum in preschool, and wondered how it compared to other curricula. We showed them how they are aligned and that was a fascinating experience.”

 DATA DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

SD 300 preschool programs have monthly professional learning groups to review Teaching Strategies GOLD⁹ lesson plans, attendance, and literacy and social-emotional learning data. All educators, including paraprofessionals, plan together and use a social-emotional learning rating scale to gauge students' progress. When school principals make their annual budget plans, they must use data to back any new requests. SD 300 uses iReady, an adaptive diagnostic tool similar to the widely used Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP), three times per year to drive preschool programming.

Data is presented at school board meetings, shared with community partners via the Illinois School Report Card and with the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program designed to help older students develop the skills they need to be successful in college. SD 300 currently has a standards-based report card.

CONCLUSION

Carpentersville is an example of how, even with the best intentions and planning, community collaboration often should take a back seat to the ongoing demands of serving some of the hardest to reach families. They have made great strides and have laid a solid foundation on which to build more comprehensive systems and supports for their students and families.

⁹ <https://teachingstrategies.com/>

ELGIN

Elgin is a city roughly 35 miles northwest of Chicago in the Fox River Valley. [School District U-46](#) serves families in 11 communities across 90 square miles within Chicago’s suburbs, and is the second largest district in Illinois after Chicago Public Schools. Their vibrant student population comprises more than 100 home languages. More than half of their students are from Hispanic families who value their district’s nationally recognized English Language Learner (ELL) programs. U-46’s early childhood programs offer a continuum of educational services to meet the individual needs of children, following the special education mandate of least restrictive environment. Early learning, developmentally appropriate experiences support children’s social, academic and physical development to help prepare them for a successful kindergarten experience. To support this, district staff are engaged in multiple partnerships and community collaborations including the [Elgin Partnership for Early Learning](#) (EPEL) and the [Alignment Collaborative for Education](#) (ACE).

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IL REPORT CARD¹⁰ 2017

# Children Enrolled	39,377
% Low Income	61%
Chronically Truant Students	12%
English Language Learners	29%
Students with IEPs	13%
Per Student Spending	\$12,095
PARCC Scores	28% met or exceed

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IECAM¹¹ 2017

# Children 0-5	20,413
# @185% Poverty	7,799
ISBE PFA/PE	1,140
ISBE PI (0-3)	216
Head Start	205
Early Head Start	0

PRESCHOOL EXPANSION (PDG-E) AS A CATALYST FOR B-3 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Elgin was awarded Preschool Expansion three years ago as part of the first cohort of Illinois communities to implement the program. They worked very hard to find the hardest to reach families and have made many adaptations to their programs in order to serve the needs of this population. U-46 staff credit Preschool Expansion with pushing conversations on trauma-informed practice, the critical nature of social-emotional learning as a foundation for academics, and the need for more professional development for their family educators. As a result, individual students have smoother transitions since there is a more cohesive awareness in elementary schools on the supports students’ need and the value of early childhood programs. The district can provide “warm hand-offs” for the highly mobile families that may transition between Elgin, Rockford and Carpentersville districts, and make sure they continue to receive the wrap around services they need.

¹⁰ <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>

¹¹ <https://iecam.illinois.edu/> Displayed numbers represent the number of available slots not the number served.

U-46 has shared this information with community partners in efforts to develop common messaging around kindergarten readiness. U-46 also provides information about the KIDS¹² assessment to private preschools and daycare providers. Their Director of Early Learning Initiatives describes the efforts to “try to get us all pulling together in one direction with the goal of having children happy and successful in school.”

EXAMPLES OF B-3 CONTINUITY STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Home for B-3 Continuity Work	COMMUNITY:
	Multiple collaborations, including Elgin Partnership for Early Learning (EPEL) and Alignment Collaborative for Education (ACE)
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendent supportive of partnerships • Implementation of full-day kindergarten has raised the profile of early childhood for its impact potential
Comprehensive Services	COMMUNITY:
	Community collaborations connect families with services through a “warm line” telephone information program
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track provision of services through online data system • Wide range of staff roles to ensure that parents can access services • Coordinated intake to reduce duplication of services in home visiting • MOUs with Head Start to provide services to students • District conducts developmental screenings and connects students with program that best suits their needs
Family Engagement	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent leaders serve on community council • Plan and host family programs with the library, dance studios and recreation department
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and community engagement department • “Engage” program for preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade families • Develop parent “promises” with the family and track them • Board requires engagement included in school improvement plans and feedback on kindergarten programs • 5 Essentials surveys for parents • Parents serve on advisory council, bilingual parent council, and African American or Hispanic parent leadership institute, Instructional Council • Use COFI parent leadership model

¹² <https://www.isbe.net/kids>

Supported Transitions	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten Rally held in February, multiple Welcome to Kindergarten events in the spring • Parent education programs and transition meetings • Community "Give Me 5" campaign shares common messaging on readiness
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey parents of incoming kindergarten students • Track feeder patterns through information gathered at registration • Full-time transition facilitator • Screenings and assessments housed in home visiting program • Pipeline committee to address transitions and alignment of data systems
Joint Professional Development	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share resources and invite community childcare providers to play-based learning workshop • EPEL hosts annual conference
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the natural connections between Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers • Instructional coaches identify needs in prior year's assessments and portfolios • Conduct professional development on developmentally appropriate practice content so 1st grade teachers have better expectations
Aligned Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community liaisons share expectations at curriculum nights • Web-site contains kindergarten expectations
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine KIDS data and discuss the fade-out • Explore how to make math more hands on in 1st grade • Use results from preschool's observational tool (DRDP) to inform kindergarten readiness expectations • Developed and implemented play-based kindergarten framework • Trained teachers and administrators on effective early learner environments • Plans to introduce DAP to 2nd grades • Use KIDS as catalyst for common assessments in 1st grade • Curriculum cycle reviews drive coaching needs
Data Driven Improvement	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data sharing agreements with community partners • KIDS data shared in aggregate with community partners • EPEL has Data Subcommittee and developed a Data Dashboard

- Prior use of Enrollment and Capacity survey for area providers to track openings / areas of need

DISTRICT:

- Data “rich” and examined across age ranges
- Guidance and deadlines for data entry
- Interest in using data to support quality of community childcare experiences

BARRIERS TO CREATING B-3 SYSTEMS AND SUPPORTS

Like other Preschool Expansion communities, Elgin struggles to hire and retain highly qualified staff to meet the needs of families served. The most at-risk children and families really do have more significant needs than they previously have seen. To help address this, U-46 staff urge intentional hiring practices to ensure that staff new to the program are the right fit. Ondera says, “When we talk about children experiencing trauma, teachers are experiencing or taking on that trauma alongside them.” As a result, ongoing professional development for staff has been key to providing the supports that children and families need.

Another challenge posed is not being able to blend ages in classrooms; Preschool Expansion four-year-olds are all placed together. In the one year that teachers and staff have these students, developing trusting relationships is difficult, and requires a variety of family engagement staff and strategies. All the more reason U-46 tries to bring multiple grants and programs together rather than having different expectations and approaches in each one.

U-46 maintains that there are still too many transitions for children and their families. In efforts to make critical information and strengths-based practices available to all staff that may touch the families, they have created an online transition form. Additionally, to address the behavioral needs of students, U-46 uses a screening process, including the Ages & Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional (ASQ:SE)¹³, implements a social-emotional learning curriculum, added social workers and paraprofessionals, and doubled the number of parent community liaisons.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND B-3 CONTINUITY STRUCTURES

District early learning staff are encouraged by their superintendent to collaborate, and are active members of both the EPEL and ACE. They share a focus on goals to help community members overcome barriers to information and access, and to ensure that all children are ready for kindergarten. U-46 staff also sit on a kindergarten readiness work group through Elgin Community College.

The district has created heat maps, layering district demographic information over academic readiness data to identify areas of great need. They then surveyed households within those areas to better understand the barriers to services, and challenges families might

¹³ <https://www.brookespublishing.com/product/asqse-2/>

be facing. This information has been used by multiple collaborative partners, including EPEL, ACE, Gail Borden Public Library, and the United Way. U-46 uses demographic and academic data to identify areas in need of support in order to tailor resources.

U-46 also has an Early Learning Leadership team made up of staff from Prevention Initiative (PI) home visiting programs, Preschool For All (PFA) and Preschool Expansion. They meet monthly to discuss their programs, and all three use the same weighted eligibility form so they can track children as they move between programs. U-46 has two full-time transition facilitators, one from PI to preschool, and another for preschool to kindergarten and the early grades.

Peggy Ondera attends all community groups to ensure that they are coordinating their work. Her role is seen as collaborative and she is truly supportive of partnerships. She has also had a lot of district support and encouragement to try innovative approaches. With the move to full day kindergarten, U-46 staff note the growing recognition that early childhood is where they can make the most difference.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

Comprehensive services are also a central feature of the Preschool Expansion model. U-46 has a number of different strategies they employ to try to ease transitions and accomplish smooth handoffs among providers, but it is a challenge. They have transition facilitators for coming into and leaving programs. They also use coordinated intake to reduce duplication of services in home visits. U-46 has Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)s with Head Start to provide services to their students. They also are part of community collaborative efforts to connect families with the services they need or want.

"B-3 work has given us a platform from which to continue conversations about developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). Instead of having practices pushed down from upper grades, we have been pushing up to have DAP in preschool, then K, then 1st grade, and now 2nd grade is the goal so that we are really meeting the needs of children both academically and socially in a developmentally appropriate way."

Peggy Ondera, Director of Early Learning Initiatives

U-46 provides Child Find screening within their community to identify children and their families who may benefit from early intervention and special education services. Referrals are made to programs that can best meet the families' needs. EPEL has a warm phone line with a live person to connect families seeking information or services to an appropriate provider, but this is still in its infancy.

The district has dramatically increased the number of family and community roles, parent community liaisons, transition facilitators, and home/school liaisons so families of different backgrounds can access services. They track comprehensive services depending on the

grant requirements. Data from their home visiting program is recorded in an online data system, Penelope; previously they used VisitTracker.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

U-46 puts a lot of time and effort into building caring communities where families feel welcome and heard, noting that many parents may not have had positive experiences in school themselves. The district has a Family and Community Engagement department. Family engagement is included in goals of their strategic plan, school improvement plan, and at the school board level. They provide multiple opportunities and use a “one size does not fit all” approach. U-46’s “Engage” program invites preschool, kindergarten and 1st grade families to learn about programs, and different ways to be involved. Parents in turn develop “promises” to support the schools at different levels and this is tracked within data systems.

The staff emphasize the importance of outreach and being visible year-round, noting that parents do not typically take the first steps to come to them. They survey families and staff for their needs and interests, and families complete the 5 Essentials survey which addresses climate. The school board requires yearly feedback on full-day kindergarten programs, including parent survey responses. Parents serve in a range of leadership structures, including the Parent Advisory, Community Advisory Council, Bilingual Parent Advisory Council (BPAC), African American Parent Leadership Institute, Hispanic Parent Leadership Institute, and the Instructional Council. The early learning collaborative uses the [Community Organizing and Family Issues](#) (COFI) ambassador model, which aims to strengthen the power and voice of low-income and working families at all levels of civic life. U-46 cooperates with their community collaboratives, including the library, dance studios, and recreation department, and partners to host family programs.

SUPPORTED TRANSITIONS

The district tracks what type of early learning experience incoming kindergarten students may have had using a survey for parents. Next year, this information will be included as part of the registration process. Elgin has found that 41% of Latino children have had no prior school experience, citing transportation as the primary barrier. U-46 preschool staff are exploring a variety of ways to capture and share students’ learning, including mixed media or electronic portfolios. Until then, they compare ratings on the preschool Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)¹⁴ assessment to the KIDS¹⁵ assessment to see progress over time. Information on the assessment has been shared with local childcare and preschool centers in efforts to support those programs.

Elgin may be the only district in the state with full-time transition facilitators, one for birth to three home visiting programs and another for preschool into kindergarten and the early grades, and a pipeline committee to address hand-offs and systems that are not aligned.

¹⁴ <https://www.desiredresults.us/drdp-forms>

¹⁵ <https://www.isbe.net/kids>

They also use parent community liaisons to be the connector to kindergarten classrooms, to sit in on transition meetings, and to be visible out into the community. U-46 hosts a kindergarten rally each year in February, and holds Welcome to Kindergarten events at the schools in April or May. They hold transition parent education programs and have transition meetings for parents of their preschool program.

U-46 uses individualized electronic transition forms containing strategies that help children and families from a strength based perspective. These forms can be accessed wherever a child lands in district, and teachers can even view them before children start school. All of these efforts reflect the district's strategy to be proactive, not reactive, and to make sure that if they know something is successful for children or families, it can be continued in elementary school.

JOINT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The district uses a range of approaches toward joint PD, and often invite local childcare providers to their workshops. When Elgin rolled out their play-based curriculum with the move to full day kindergarten, they invited community providers to a workshop on play. Their instructional coaches identify needs for PD based on the prior year's DRDP, portfolios, and students' social-emotional learning needs. U-46 partnered with community collaboratives to provide training around trauma-informed communities. EPEL also organizes an annual conference for collaborative members as a way to bring them together and share resources.

ALIGNED CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

Three years ago, U-46 developed and implemented its own play-based framework for their full day kindergarten programs, based on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Guiding Principles. Since then, they have conducted PD on developmentally appropriate practices with their administrators and 1st grade teachers so that they have a better sense of their expectations and know what an effective early learner environment looks like. They plan to do the same with 2nd grade teachers this coming year.

Staff have reviewed KIDS data and noticed some fade-out on students' performance. One result of this review is that they are exploring how to make math more hands on in 1st grade. U-46 provides meeting times for preschool and kindergarten teachers, as well as kindergarten and 1st grade educators to discuss expectations. Since the DRDP aligns with the KIDS assessment, the district credits the introduction of the KIDS assessment as a catalyst for the shift to the DRDP assessment in preschool classrooms.

The district also has a curriculum cycle and process for review of curriculum and writing of new curriculum. They gather assessment data to determine the effectiveness of new initiatives and use that data to adjust curriculum as needed. These practices are part of the district's strategic plan, school improvement plans, and the curriculum cycle review drives professional development and coaching. A variety of strategies are in place for

communicating grade-level expectations to community partners and families, including their web-site, curriculum nights, and their community liaisons.

DATA DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

Peggy Ondera describes Elgin as "data rich" saying, "I'd like to look at the data to support the childcare experience." Data for preschoolers is recorded in the district's database, Infinite Campus. Data can then be pulled into their data warehouse, Edvantage, to be analyzed. As U-46 just changed their assessment tool this year to the DRDP, they have not yet analyzed the data but plan to look at growth over multiple years.

U-46 is working with their community partners to address data sharing needs. There is guidance and deadlines for data entry. They share aggregate data with the community and partners. EPEL's Data Subcommittee developed a data dashboard that has various metrics that they are tracking. They also have created an enrollment and capacity survey for area providers to better track openings or lack of openings in programs.

Like other Preschool Expansion communities, Elgin has multiple data systems and uses nothing systems wide. They have to re-enter data in other systems, and rely on paper and files otherwise. Within Infinite Campus, Elgin's online data program, there is a parent contact log.

CONCLUSION

Elgin has led the charge of bringing play back into early learning settings, serving as an example and a resource to many other B-3 communities in the state. U-46's vision is that five years from now, DAP will be the norm all the way up to 3rd grade. Their staff has worked very hard to identify changes they can implement systems wide to ensure that more of their community's children and families have their best chance at success at school and life.

MCLEAN COUNTY

One hundred fifty miles south of Chicago, among the corn and soybean fields of McLean County Illinois, [McLean County Unit District No. 5 \(Unit 5\)](#)'s early learning program provides a stimulating and nurturing environment for their youngest learners. McLean County comprises the towns of Bloomington, Normal and beyond, and is home to Illinois State University and State Farm Insurance's national headquarters. However, almost half of the community's population without a high school diploma lives in poverty. The needs-based early learning programs at two sites, Brigham and Sugar Creek, teach students, through play, how to work with others, to acquire and use language for communicating thoughts and feelings, to feel confident and good about themselves, to develop skills and knowledge needed for success, and to love school. As one of 18 grantees selected to participate in the first phase of the Preschool Expansion in 2014, Unit 5's administrators, teachers and family engagement staff have gained traction in developing birth-to-third grade systems and supports, while test-driving innovative and sustainable responses to the enormous problems faced by their families.

Unit 5 staff acquired their initial practices and experiences developing aligned education and services for high needs families through the establishment of a [child-parent center](#) (CPC). The CPC at Sugar Creek served as a model of center-based early intervention, providing comprehensive educational and family-support services from preschool to early elementary school. Unit 5 has built on these successes and applied what they learned in the CPC model to the school district and broader community.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IL REPORT CARD¹⁶ 2017

# Children Enrolled	13,586
% Low Income	33%
Chronically Truant Students	2%
English Language Learners	4%
Students with IEPs	15%
Per Student Spending	\$10,189
PARCC Scores	34% met or exceed

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IECAM¹⁷ 2017

# Children 0-5	6,651
# @185% Poverty	1,734
ISBE PFA/PE	200
ISBE PI (0-3)	0
Head Start	102
Early Head Start	0

PRESCHOOL EXPANSION (PDG-E) AS A CATALYST FOR B-3 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Citing the similarities between the CPC and desired Preschool Expansion expectations, Unit 5 used the Illinois' [Birth-to-Third Grade Continuity Project](#) to build their programs. Unit 5's Early Learning coordinator Kris Pennington asserts, "Our biggest accomplishment so far has been getting our district kindergarten classrooms to move toward more developmentally

¹⁶ <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>

¹⁷ <https://iecam.illinois.edu/> Displayed numbers represent the number of available slots not the number served

appropriate practices and a play-based curriculum, which is more aligned with birth-to-age five.” Pennington credits Unit 5’s push to align preschool and kindergarten programs, noting that tight restrictions on use of funds previously tied their hands for implementing these strategies, but that they have been able to work through this over the last couple of years. The district’s instructional coaches have cemented improvement and more play-based practices primarily through their use of the [CLASS](#)¹⁸ observational tool.

Pennington also touts the district’s increasing awareness of just how critical family engagement is in school improvement. Currently, all eight Title I elementary schools in Unit 5 have full-time family educators, six social workers, and up to six interns devoted to establishing and maintaining trusting relationships, addressing social-emotional learning needs, and connecting families with comprehensive services. The elementary school family educators observe and model themselves after those working in the early learning programs. This is a huge improvement from the days when these positions, afforded only by grants, were targeting only high-risk families, or considered the exclusive domain of early childhood programs.

Additionally, McLean County’s early childhood staff have worked hard to develop a system or trans-organizational mindset and foster buy-in for birth-to-third grade continuity strategies. After years of being focused on individual buildings and programs, district and community staff have learned a great deal about systems development and, more importantly, are actively trying to implement these innovative approaches. They have collaborated in a variety of venues, be it at the State’s training on the [ABLE Change](#)¹⁹ framework for systems development, at the county’s United Way, through the Community and School Engagement Collective (CSEC), or through other partnerships. The school district is onboard and may expand principals’ job descriptions to include more outward-facing work and partnerships, and recently created a separate role, that of Director of Early Learning to tie these systems together.

EXAMPLES OF B-3 CONTINUITY STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Home for B-3 Continuity Work	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While no specific B-3 focus, the district has collaborations with All Our Kids Network (AOK), United Way, and other partnerships • Community asset mapping
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of Director of Early Learning position devoted to collaboration and building systems • Use B-3 Self-Assessment

¹⁷ Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom assessment scoring system (CLASS) manual, pre-K*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co.

¹⁹ Foster-Fishman, P. G., & Watson, E. R. (2012). The ABLe Change Framework: A Conceptual and Methodological Tool for Promoting Systems Change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(3-4), 503-516. DOI: 10.1007/s10464-011-9454

<p>Comprehensive Services</p>	<p>COMMUNITY:</p> <p>District family educators and social workers responsible for identifying and monitoring needs and connecting students with community service providers</p> <p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOU's w partners • Family engagement staff quickly connect families with service providers • Streamline medical and physical health resources
<p>Family Engagement</p>	<p>COMMUNITY:</p> <p>Events at rotating locations and co-hosted with District 87, libraries, Head Start, Children's Discovery Museum, YWCA, health department, and other partners</p> <p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family goal setting • Track feedback, attendance per location of events • Curriculum nights • Parent-teacher conferences • Literacy programs • Home visits and surveys to determine needs and interests
<p>Supported Transitions</p>	<p>COMMUNITY:</p> <p>Community events held at registration time</p> <p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track feeder patterns among publicly funded programs • Use of student portfolios in district programs • Transition meetings for specialized populations
<p>Joint Professional Development</p>	<p>COMMUNITY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABL e Change community systems development workshops • B-3 Continuity Conference <p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task force to align PD practices • Late start days provide consistent time for professional learning communities (PLCs) • Instructional coaches bridge PreK and kindergarten classrooms

<p>Aligned Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments</p>	<p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of play-based approaches in kindergarten • Professional development task-force examining connections between the CLASS and Creative Curriculum • Administrators have vertical alignment meetings • Standards based report card • Use of task forces and curricular grids to monitor effectiveness
<p>Data Driven Improvement</p>	<p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data walls • Data from Title I schools used to determine placement of family educators • Principals share goals at board meetings

BARRIERS TO CREATING B-3 SYSTEMS AND SUPPORTS

Despite McLean County’s previous experience with the CPC model and comprehensive services for families, it has been a challenge for staff to develop a “systems mindset”. School staff have typically focused on the children and families in their buildings; systems thinking requires time and staff devoted to looking across programs for opportunities to improve. The time it takes, the skills needed, and the relational trust required cannot be underestimated. In addition to taking the time to build buy-in and understanding of B-3 strategies, Unit 5 recently created the full-time position of Director of Early Learning, who will be responsible for collaborations and for systems work. In the past, these responsibilities would be expected of school principals, who may have little or no time or experience to undertake this work.

Another barrier is the lack of a system for collecting and sharing data on students and families at the community level. Individual programs gather information, which may be housed in a variety of ways, and these methods are not aligned. Even if consent were granted and agreements made to share student-level data, the systems do not “speak” to each other or provide opportunities for meaningful comparisons or tracking. Were it not for family educators and social workers who track students from specialized populations as they receive services in the community, many more children and families would miss out on opportunities for learning and development and critical supports.

Given the Preschool Expansion model’s emphasis on serving the most vulnerable children in the community, Unit 5 has struggled to meet the needs of transient and homeless students, in particular. Families may be in a school for a year or two before moving on, leaving little to no opportunity to develop strong relationships or to ensure their access to vital learning and social services. School staff are aware of losing students throughout the early years and up, creating leaks in what would otherwise be a more robust pipeline from cradle to career.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND B-3 STRUCTURES

Fortunately, district leadership is very supportive of collaboration, and in addition to developing large scale partnerships with corporate entities on behalf of the community, they encourage school staff to engage with local agencies and programs. Unit 5 staff are involved in collaborations through the local health department's [All Our Kids Early Childhood Network](#) (AOK) and every year they increase the number of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) they have with service providers in the community. In doing so, the lack of adequate programs serving children birth-to-three, relative to those for preschool aged kids, has become glaring. There is also a need for clearer goals and outcomes within the community collaboration, and the Director of Early Learning will play a more active role in leading this going forward.

The district also created a multi-disciplinary mental health committee in an effort to address the effects of trauma in the community. Like many other Preschool Expansion communities, McLean County is painfully aware that the hardest to reach families are, in fact, a challenge to serve. A principal commented that data from standardized assessments “screamed” the need for adjustments to behavioral interventions, and noted that the move to more play-based learning is already having a positive impact. That said, it is a challenge to recruit staff for core teams to problem solve across the district programs. While individual schools may engage in B-3 continuity strategies, they have a way to go towards syncing up program and district goals. Unit 5 conducted a community asset mapping project five years ago as part of the CPC program which it is working to update.

Unit 5 is also making greater use of the [B-3 Continuity Self-Assessment](#) tool. Pennington references the puzzle piece graphic that the B-3 Continuity Program uses to illustrate the eight different strategies of alignment, saying, “You don't always sit and do a big puzzle all at once. You may put in a couple of pieces, and come back to it later.” She remembers when she first started working on the Preschool Expansion program, saying, “It was the kind of program I had spent my career dreaming about, and I was on board with the whole model.” After years juggling roles and not being able to carry out as much as she would have liked, Pennington advises new grantees to advocate early on for time for collaboration, and to use the B-3 Continuity Self-Assessment to guide their work.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

The Preschool Expansion program has been the impetus for strengthening the wrap around services that high needs children and families in McLean County need to make progress in school, home life and work. School staff have worked hard to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with local service providers and formalize these connections through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Once families' needs are identified, staff refer them quickly to service providers and follow-up to ensure they can access the additional supports they require.

They have also streamlined the process of physical and mental health referrals, in particular. Family educators, social workers and school nurses are primarily responsible for this process, and keep logs to track contacts, needs and referrals. There is currently no community-wide developmental screening of children, other than those with individualized education plans (IEPs), nor is there any system in place to coordinate or track the delivery of services and supports among providers beyond the logs that school staff keep.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement is the cornerstone of Unit 5's efforts to build a stronger school community and see the kind of growth and improvement central to their mission. It is also the domain of some of their best cross-systems community collaboration; schools, programs and agencies cooperate to plan and implement a wide variety of family engagement activities. They have learned that rotating the location of the events allows for greater participation and turn-out. Unit 5 collaborates with a wide range of partners to host family engagement activities, including Bloomington School District 87, Head Start, libraries, Children's Discovery Museum, the YWCA, public health department and others.

While practices vary among different school buildings, one of the key strategies used is to work with families to set goals each year. Through this process, Unit 5 has learned that many families are distressed or as one staff member put it, "in survival mode." Additional strategies include home visits, open houses, and surveys to determine parents' interest in different topics; nutrition services continue to be a priority. Family representatives serve on district and school leadership committees as well.

Of the 16 schools in the district, 8 are Title I schools and as such have requirements for parent engagement in support of student learning, specifically in the domain of literacy. Schools host a variety of activities both during and after school hours to strengthen parents' ability to help their children with language and literacy, host popular music programs, and send books and math packets home over the summer for children who are behind.

Family educators have been crucial in the district's family engagement efforts. They are evaluated using a performance management tool originally designed for teaching staff and modified for the district's purposes, and thus are held accountable for their work. Culturally inclusive resources are available for teachers and staff, and in addition to a Spanish family educator, other cultures are supported with input from the district's English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator.

SUPPORTED TRANSITIONS

The district has a five-year plan for improving families' transitions between programs and schools. Unit 5 tracks where incoming kindergarten students are coming from, be it Head Start, district preschool or other publicly funded programs. This process is becoming more formalized by inclusion in the digital student information system (SIS); in the past schools have

used data walls to track incoming kindergarten students to allow for disaggregation and to determine if students are staying on track.

Standardized child portfolios are shared with kindergarten teachers within district programs and the district has policies in place regarding expectations of transition supports between grade levels. Protocols mandate that data on special education students and English language learners (ELLs) remain in their cumulative files, and that students with IEPs have transition meetings.

Unit 5 staff see transitions as an area for improvement going forward, specifically from programs serving birth to three-year-old families into preschool. At the time of registration, community events are hosted to help transition families from preschool to kindergarten. Kindergarten readiness has not been defined, but rather messaging has focused on schools being ready to serve *all* students.

JOINT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development (PD) is a high priority for the district. Unit 5 has a task force charged with aligning PD practices and to promote the importance of the CLASS observational tool. The district also has late start days, to allow teaching staff to have secure, consistent time for professional learning communities (PLCs) during which they can review data and plan together. One strategy that has strengthened alignment and allowed for more consistent messaging has been to have instructional coaches work in both preschool and kindergarten classrooms. After some initial reluctance to work with coaches, teaching staff now see their value and the impact on their teaching practice has been well worth it. The move to more play-based practices will provide yet more opportunities for PD as teachers collaborate and gain insights into each other's work and across ages.

ALIGNED CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENTS

The Preschool Expansion program provided a springboard for curriculum alignment in the early grades of Unit 5. After initial opposition, the district has reversed its position and put in place play-based learning in kindergarten, which is aligned to curricula used in both birth-to-age three and preschool programs. To prepare for this change, Unit 5 staff visited their fellow Preschool Expansion grantees in Elgin to observe their new play-based kindergarten curriculum and environments in classrooms, a curriculum coach worked close with teachers, and a team of administrators and teachers attended training.

The PD task force is examining connections between the CLASS and the Creative Curriculum used in preschool programs, as well as linkages between the CLASS, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)²⁰ and the Danielson²¹ framework for effective teaching practice. Administrators have collaborative time set aside for vertical and horizontal

²⁰ <https://ers.fpg.unc.edu/node/324>

²¹ <https://www.danielsongroup.org/framework/>

alignment, and developmentally appropriate standards have been set by the district for each grade level. Unit 5 now uses standards-based report cards, and monitors curriculum and instruction effectiveness through the use of curricular grids to visually represent learning across grades. An education task force initially developed these grids last year.

 DATA DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

One of the primary ways that the district uses data to make instructional improvements is through data walls. Kindergarten and the early grades have refined this process, and preschool staff are learning from them. Data is also used to make resource allocation decisions. For example, data from the Title I schools was used to determine how family educators would be assigned. Principals share their goals annually with the board of education.

Use of the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS)²² is still in its infancy, but staff are hopeful that with the growth of developmentally appropriate practices, KIDS data can be used more for pre- and post-assessment. The district collaborated with the United Way to develop a kindergarten screening tool for classroom placement and, when needed, referral for further assessment. A parent survey on literacy is also used to identify students who may have dyslexia. Additional assessments include the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP)²³ and the Fountas and Pinnell²⁴ literacy assessment.

CONCLUSION

McLean County is well positioned to strengthen its continuum of high quality care and instruction for children from birth-through-third grade. The community continues to focus on collaboration, planning, and professional development as levers in improving outcomes for children and families, and their efforts should advance the systems change necessary for the community to grow and thrive despite the challenges they face.

²² <https://www.isbe.net/kids>

²³ <https://www.nwea.org/the-map-suite/>

²⁴ <http://www.fountasandpinnell.com/>

ROCKFORD

Rockford is the third largest city in Illinois, and is located in the northern part of the state. [Rockford Public Schools \(RPS\) District 205](#) comprises 44 schools, including four early childhood centers and a home visiting program. The mission of the RPS [Early Childhood Program](#) is to empower all young children to become effective, enthusiastic and socially competent learners by creating a bond among children, their families, the school, and the community. Rockford has a strong community collaboration, [Alignment Rockford](#), whose mission is to align community resources in support of public school strategies to raise student achievement, improve the health and happiness of their children, and advance the economic and social well-being of the community. [Alignment Rockford's Healthy Starts](#) team focuses its efforts on children birth to five and their families.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IL REPORT CARD²⁵ 2017

	# Children Enrolled	28,370
% Low Income	51%	
Chronically Truant Students	8%	
English Language Learners	14%	
Students with IEPs	14%	
Per Student Spending	\$12,376	
PARCC Scores	16% met or exceed	

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IECAM²⁶ 2017

	# Children 0-5	15,895
# @185% Poverty	9,862	
ISBE PFA/PE	2,216	
ISBE PI (0-3)	241	
Head Start	557	
Early Head Start	124	

PRESCHOOL EXPANSION (PDG-E) AS A CATALYST FOR B-3 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Rockford staff note that Preschool Expansion funding in 2014 allowed for and encouraged more family engagement in their preschool and encouraged them to look at the alignment between their preschool and elementary programs. Specifically, they have seen more robust participation in their parent advisory council. They developed a plan with the District's Community and Family Engagement Team to create a pipeline of parent leaders through the integration of the Early Childhood (EC) Parent Advisory Committee with the District Parent Advisory Committee. The EC Parent Advisory Board joins the District Parent Advisory Committee every other month for joint learning opportunities.

RPS staff worked hard to find and serve the most at-risk families. They are most gratified seeing children

come out of self-contained classrooms where students receive specialized interventions and

"Our system is like a plate of spaghetti – you could keep pulling strings but it never makes sense – if we cannot figure it out how can families?"

Kim Nelson, Executive Director of Early Childhood

²⁵ <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>

²⁶ <https://iecam.illinois.edu/> Displayed numbers represent the number of available slots not the number served.

support into general education classrooms by kindergarten. They also note that they have dramatically increased the number of homeless students served; in FY12 they served 158, and in FY18 this number went up to 328 students.

Kim Nelson, RPS' Executive Director for Early Childhood noted that while they had collaborative work going on, Preschool Expansion has helped to focus their work, and "shined a flashlight" on their local community service providers. She likened Rockford's system to "a plate of spaghetti," saying "you could keep pulling strings and it never makes sense. If we can't figure it out, how can families?"

EXAMPLES OF B-3 CONTINUITY STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Home for B-3 Continuity Work	COMMUNITY:
	Alignment Rockford's Healthy Starts team
	DISTRICT:
	Educational Services department
Comprehensive Services	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year-round developmental screenings • Developing single point of entry process
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School based health center • Families in Transition department for homeless families • Infant mental health consultants work with teachers rather than students • New MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) Director position to unify systems
Family Engagement	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family engagement nights with Discovery Center Museum • Play groups held at public housing development
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent cafes four times per year • Parents surveyed for interests and needs • Family goal setting • Parent education conducted in workshops and in-home visits on targeted topics
Supported Transitions	COMMUNITY:
	"Ready, Set, Kindergarten" information distributed by Healthy Starts team
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track feeder patterns of incoming kindergarten students • Targeted Child Find efforts to identify service gaps

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Learning Scale scores included in online data system • Meetings on high needs children between early childhood and elementary principals • Formalized and robust transitions from Early Intervention to preschool
Joint Professional Development	COMMUNITY:
	Community wide conversation on trauma
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All early childhood staff trained on trauma-informed practices • Joint PD with Head Start • New teachers across grades attend orientation together
Aligned Curriculum, Instruction & Assessments	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In year three of five-year curriculum alignment process • Instructional coaches support K-3rd grades • Use and review of curriculum maps • Use of CLASS for instructional monitoring in preschool
Data Driven Improvement	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longitudinal CLASS and ECERS data tracked • Targets provided to the School Board of Education • Superintendent gives education update annually to Chamber of Commerce • Data used in caseload and budget allocations • KIDS data shared with Head Start

BARRIERS TO CREATING B-3 SYSTEMS AND SUPPORTS

Like other Preschool Expansion communities, RPS cites the lack of a comprehensive data system and the ability to access common data as a significant barrier to strengthening birth-to-third grade systems. As a result, different agencies are still fairly siloed, each with different regulations, approaches, and data warehouses.

They have also noted that progress has been much slower than they anticipated in the philosophical shift toward developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in kindergarten and the early grades. The staff is hopeful that the curriculum alignment process will further those conversations, along the integration of dramatic play learning areas and a massive amount of LEGO blocks recently provided.

Also like other Preschool Expansion programs, RPS saw turnover among their preschool teachers. With the full implementation of instructional coaching and the support of infant-toddler mental health consultants, their teaching staff has been more stable. They cite teachers' lack of preparation to meet the needs of children and families with such high needs, and have put in place a variety of hiring and teacher supports to address this going forward.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND B-3 STRUCTURES

RPS benefits through its work with Alignment Rockford, a collective impact public school support organization. Alignment Rockford's Healthy Starts team focuses on children and families from birth-to-five years old, and developed goals that support the district's strategic plan in support of B-3 Continuity. While struggling to define readiness, they have a broad goal to increase kindergarten readiness through their [Ready, Set, Kindergarten](#) program. One of their primary efforts was the start of playgroups at an area housing development that aims to improve parent-child interactions with families who have not previously engaged in services by increasing their awareness of the importance of the first five years.

The City of Rockford Human Services Department completed a community needs assessment in 2012. In addition, an early childhood synthesis and asset map was prepared for Alignment Rockford in 2016. The program reviews and utilizes data from a variety of other resources including Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), Winnebago County Health Department, and district data.

On a community level, the [Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting](#) (MIECHV) grant spurred creation of coordinated intake system among home-visiting programs. As of April 2018, RPS established a coordinated intake process for public preschool and Head Start placement. This focused conversations on why programs feel the need to compete when they are plenty of families to go around.

RPS' Educational Services Division drives alignment within the district, and their work gets vetted by the Instructional Council, which includes union representatives, teachers and other staff. Three years ago, they conducted a needs assessment and realized they were missing an aligned curriculum. They put in place a process to align curriculum from preschool to twelfth grade, and are now in year three of the five-year plan.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

RPS' early childhood program has a structure of supports in place to provide a seamless transition from early intervention and home visiting programs to preschool. This structure includes a school-based health center that is available for district families. In addition, the district has MOUs with a variety of dental providers that complete dental screenings in the school and will provide restorative care as needed. The district has a Families in Transition (FIT) department that works to identify families that are homeless and will connect them to resources in the community. In addition, social workers, family support specialists, and school counselors are responsible for connecting families to services.

The drive to identify and reach the community's most at-risk families also increased Rockford's sense of urgency for a single point of entry. Alignment Rockford's Healthy Starts team has been engaging with the Rockford area, social-service, case managers group to increase awareness of early childhood and the need for a common connection forms to support families accessing services in the community. Healthy Starts recently released an

invitation to participate on “connected families” that identifies a single point of entry for a variety of community services. The single point of entry posters will be posted in a variety of locations and Rockford case managers received a stack of flyers to distribute. Phase two of this work will be the development of a common connection form.

RPS provides year-round developmental screenings at the district office and off site. They work with the City of Rockford Head Start program during the spring and summer months to offer additional community screenings. Infant mental health consultants support teachers to be more reflective and to build capacity. Each early childhood site has a social worker to support students, teachers, and families and to serve on problem solving teams.

RPS buildings have problem solving teams and PLCs to address families concerns and needs. The birth-to-three, year-old home visiting program utilizes Visit Tracker to track connections to community services and Individual Family Goal Plans. Home visitors complete family case notes within the system. In preschool programs, Family Support Specialists and social workers record connections as a case note. The special education department monitors service delivery for students eligible for special education through their online database.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The district has a broad strategy and goals for family engagement within the strategic plan. RPS also has a Parent and Community Engagement Department that supports family engagement at district schools. In preschool, all families receive two home visits each year, and families are surveyed for needs and family goals are established. During the FY18 grant planning process, RPS' parent advisory board was instrumental in providing feedback on family engagement strategies. They indicated that they would rather teachers hold off on home visits until they knew their children, but did not mind family support visits. As a result, they have built in days throughout the school year for home visits. They used to do it in the beginning of the year, but parents wanted to come to school to meet teachers at an open house. Preschool programs also have staff trained in the Parents as Teachers (PAT) model of family engagement.

RPS tracks the number of parent conferences attended, attendance at department and school events or workshops, and attendance at the Parent Advisory Board. The birth-to-three-year-old program tracks the number of family goals met. The bilingual department provides translation services for district programs and families. In addition, the district provides an online translation service in the event that they do not have a staff member that speaks an identified language.

The early childhood program has engaged with the Discovery Center Museum to provide family engagement nights at the museum. In addition, the program provides a family engagement night, the Scarecrow Fest, at Midway Village every fall.

The Alignment Rockford Healthy Starts team has engaged community providers to support a playgroup at The Grove, a Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) site. This tactile plan was

developed to engage families, specifically parenting children under the age of three, who are not currently engaged in services. Playgroups began in March 2018 and ran through the end of May. If they were determined successful, they will continue to provide playgroups at The Grove, and will add an additional RHA site.

RPS continues to work on implementing and documenting family engagement activities. Challenges include teachers understanding the role they play in family engagement and that family support specialists are an extra layer to provide more intensive supports and linking families to resources. They continue to explore ways of getting more families to come to workshops and are trying to figure out the barriers to their participation. RPS will focus on chronic absenteeism in the coming year, and provide more training for their family support specialists.

SUPPORTED TRANSITIONS

RPS tracks feeder pattern data for students enrolled in the district preschool program, but is not currently able to track this information if a child had an experience outside of the district. The early childhood program did attempt to track this information for three years at fall registration but it was not integrated into the registration form. However, the information they did gather is used by the program to targeting Child Find efforts in areas with low percentages of early education experiences. They are now working on this information to be collected during kindergarten enrollment. RPS would need to create a data field in their district data management system. In the future, this will allow them to disaggregate data and possibly provide information to community providers.

To help with transitions, RPS' preschool Early Learning Scale (ELS)²⁷ scores are entered into their online system. The early childhood program provided each elementary school with the ELS manual so that kindergarten teachers could review the criteria used in assigning scores to student. RPS is planning to host meetings among early childhood and elementary principals about high needs children. Transitions from early intervention and birth-to-three-year-old programs are formalized, with linking meetings for special education students. While there are no fleshed-out policies on kindergarten transition meetings, the school board has expectations for principals to do so. Individual elementary schools also hold transition activities.

As children are getting ready to transition to preschool, preschool family support goes with the home visitor so they meet families in the home for the first time. When they set up a school visit, the home visitors come with the family. They are still working on data sharing; they have put a sheet in each child's folder with the home visitor's contact information on it for teachers, and try to include all the developmental screenings. Their Ready, Set, Kindergarten pamphlet developed by Alignment Rockford's Healthy Starts committee provides parents

²⁷ <https://www.myelonline.org/the-assessment>

with information about skills they can develop in each domain. This pamphlet is aligned to the Illinois Early Learning Standards and the format was vetted by parents.

 **JOINT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

RPS trained all early childhood staff on trauma informed practices, and included their Head Start partners in this opportunity. RPS early childhood staff participated in a community conversation with more than 100 other local leaders on the impact of trauma in communities. This event was sponsored by Winnebago County Health Department and the Early Learning Council. Joint PD is also regularly held with Head Start, but no other providers at this time. The local Childcare Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency provides professional learning opportunities for local childcare providers. RPS developed training on authentic assessment and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) for new teachers as part of their onboarding. Through RPS' PD Pathways, there will be opportunities for cross training based on topic.

New teachers across grades participate in their new teacher training together. The early childhood program is implementing a job-embedded professional development framework that supports capacity building for all early childhood staff. The program uses CLASS²⁸ to guide data conversations on high quality instructional strategies. Individual teachers' CLASS scores are used to drive discussion between the teaching team and coach, and not given to principals. Building principals receive only their building's average of CLASS scores that they can use to drive best practice in their buildings. The first year's implementation of job-embedded professional development was met with some resistance as teachers needed to develop trusting relationships with their coach. Interestingly enough, the same year the early childhood program began instructional coaching, the district implemented a plan to provide coaching to teachers who had a needs improvement through their evaluation. It took time for early childhood staff to recognize the difference.

Using CLASS as a tool to measure, RPS wants the work of their instructional coaches to be truly job embedded and something teachers want. Initially, they trained all staff, not just from Preschool Expansion, on the CLASS. Three years later, they are really seeing the impact: their CLASS data is going up, teachers are welcoming coaches and seeing more connections in lesson planning. Staff note that coaches need a year to build relationships, and that it is a parallel process to their work with children and families.

 **ALIGNED CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT**

RPS is in the third year of a five-year pre-k-12th grade curriculum alignment plan. Central to this plan is the convening of Curriculum Leadership Teams by grade level and subject. All curriculum leadership teams are supported by content administrators, receive common training (Effective Teams, Standards Training, and WEB's Depth of Knowledge), and use the same format for curriculum maps. The Curriculum Department has created a process that

²⁸ Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom assessment scoring system (CLASS) manual, pre-K*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co.

includes the recruitment and selection of teachers to serve on the Curriculum Leadership Teams, sharing the work with the Instructional Council (made up of union members and administration), sharing the curriculum maps with teachers, and ongoing review of the maps. Next steps include the development of processes to monitor the implementation of the curriculum maps.

RPS has been exploring opportunities to increase play-based learning in kindergarten. During the 2017-18 school year, dramatic play centers were purchased for kindergarten classrooms and the curriculum department provided training to teachers on using the materials to support literacy and math standards. The Curriculum Department has developed a Plan/Do/Study/Act process for adding LEGO materials to kindergarten classrooms for the 2018-19 school year.

RPS curriculum deans facilitated a committee of kindergarten teachers, early childhood staff, and administrators in a review of the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS)²⁹ and the RPS kindergarten report card. The committee was formed to explore the redesign the kindergarten report card. The committee developed the Kindergarten Early Learning Continuum aligned to KIDS. At this time, the district is still working to determine if this continuum can be used as the kindergarten report card in the future.

Rockford Public Schools developed aligned benchmarks to monitor student growth and achievement across grade levels. The Early Childhood Department has identified a literacy, numeracy, and social emotional benchmark measured by the ELS. These benchmarks are aligned to KIDS and are identified on the FY19 Early Childhood Scorecard. The E ELS is administered 3 times per year. Elementary schools utilize the MAP assessment to measure student growth 3 times per year.

The Early Childhood Program has developed an Instructional Coaching Model to support high quality instruction. Key to this model is the use of CLASS data to monitor effective instruction and to drive job embedded professional learning. Principals across the district utilize also the Danielson Framework to evaluate teacher effectiveness. The Early Childhood Program has utilized Instructional Coaches for the past 3 years. This past year, Instructional Coaches were hired to support Elementary teachers.

At the building level, Principals across all grade levels monitor instruction through walk-throughs, teacher evaluations, and the monitoring of data related to the school improvement plans. At the district level, the Educational Services Division, monitors district data points and identifies opportunities to provide additional supports.

DATA DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

The RPS's Continuous Improvement Department works to align all improvement efforts to the District's Strategic Plan. One level of support specifically supports building leaders as they work to develop individual school improvement plans. Schools analyze a variety of data

²⁹ <https://www.isbe.net/kids>

points as they develop SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) goals. Building leadership teams have an opportunity to share outcomes and strategies with other leaders during SMART Sharing, a process developed by the Continuous Improvement Department. Buildings share their data with families through a variety of methods including data walls in buildings, data on websites, and during parent conferences.

The Early Childhood Department is utilizing student data as measured by the Early Learning Scale, CLASS data, ISBE monitoring reports including ECERS data, KIDS data to drive improvement. The Early Childhood Department has identified a target on KIDS: 80% of children attending the early childhood program will achieve beginning-middle on each of the 14 required measures. The program also reviewed KIDS data for students living in poverty that did not attend the early childhood program. The program will be using these data points to identify trends and opportunities to engage the community on supporting all students prior to kindergarten. Disaggregated KIDS data has been shared with the City of Rockford Head Start Program.

At the District level, the Executive Director of Academics reports district academic data to the School Board of Education during their retreats. Additional data points, aligned to the strategic plan, are also reported to the Board of Education. The Superintendent shares district progress annually during the Chamber of Commerce Education Outlook luncheon.

The District has developed a Plan/Do/Study/Act process that schools and departments participate in when exploring initiatives. Included in this process is the identification of measurable outcomes and a reporting schedule. Elementary and Secondary buildings utilizing ESSA funds develop a plan for improvement that includes measurable outcomes. These plans are reviewed and approved by the Improvement and Innovation Department.

All district departments utilize data to inform processes and decisions. Examples include but are not limited to audits of student records, allocation of staff based on enrollment data, completion of work orders, kindergarten enrollment processes, recruitment strategies, budgeting, and more.

CONCLUSION

Rockford has served as a model and a resource to other communities engaged in birth-to-third grade alignment efforts around the state. Their staff's dedication to systems building is inspiring, especially given how large and complex their community's needs are. Rockford is well-positioned to strengthen its continuum of high quality care and instruction for children and their families, and build upon their strengths and assets, as they progress through school and life.

WEST CHICAGO

West Chicago is a city located roughly 30 miles due west of downtown Chicago in DuPage County. Originally established around a railroad junction, about half of the current population is Spanish-speaking, indicative of the growing trend that immigrants bypass Chicago for surrounding communities with better job prospects. [West Chicago Elementary School District 33](#) reflects the diverse demographics of the community and comprises 10 schools, including the [Early Learning Center](#) and home visiting services for families of children birth to three years old. The district's preschool program facilitates social-emotional and academic skills for children of all abilities, and prides itself in preparing open-minded and independent thinkers for kindergarten.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IL REPORT CARD³⁰ 2017

# Children Enrolled 4,530	
% Low Income	57%
Chronically Truant Students	3%
English Language Learners	52%
Students with IEPs	16%
Per Student Spending	\$12,057
PARCC Scores	17% met or exceed

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM IECAM³¹ 2017

# Children 0-5 2,836	
# @185% Poverty	1,885
ISBE PFA/PE	120
ISBE PI (0-3)	136
Head Start	102
Early Head Start	40

PRESCHOOL EXPANSION (PDG-E) AS A CATALYST FOR B-3 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

District 33 credits Preschool Expansion with encouraging them to move faster and compelling them to make needed program improvements. In addition to their participation in the [WeGo Together for Kids](#) collaborative and the DuPage County Early Childhood Collaboration, District 33 staff have established a B-3 committee made up of early childhood, elementary and even middle school administrators, and increased awareness of B-3 continuity strategies. The B-3 committee plans to establish goals and outcome metrics by the end of this school year.

Another accomplishment District 33 staff attributes to their participation in the Preschool Expansion program is building buy-in for developmentally appropriate practices beyond their early childhood program, targeting both kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Their hope is that this would address behavioral problems and lead to greater alignment of curriculum and assessments between their preschool program and the early grades.

As a full-service community school program, District 33 has always valued the active participation and leadership of their parent community. The Preschool Expansion program prioritizes comprehensive services and provides for roles devoted to family engagement. As

³⁰ <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>

³¹ <https://iecam.illinois.edu/> Displayed numbers represent the number of available slots not the number served.

a result, the district has created a strong foundation for increased parent involvement and leadership, as well as creative ways to respond to parent's interests in the community-wide events they plan for students and their families.

EXAMPLES OF B-3 CONTINUITY STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Home for B-3 Continuity Work	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Collaboration housed within WeGo Together for Kids • WeGo Together active in DuPage County regional collaboration
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B-3 Committee
Comprehensive Services	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head Start and district collaborate on screening • DuPage County Early Childhood Collaboration developing county-wide coordinated intake process
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Schools model allows access to partners coming into school and external support • Mental health clinician conducts home and school-based therapy • Family liaisons ensure families have medical and dental homes • Wellness checks four times each year • Database to track provision of services under development
Family Engagement	COMMUNITY:
	Events jointly planned and hosted with community partners, including local library, hospital and public health department
	DISTRICT:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents serve on district advisory committee, bilingual parent advisory council and on academic committee • Use of Bloomz app to communicate regularly with families • Plans to conduct twice yearly home visits during which families will develop goals • Parent input led to creation of a walking club and Zumba classes • Fathers Read Every Day (FRED) program has improved relationships and increased family time
Supported Transitions	COMMUNITY:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating to develop common messaging around "ready" child • Community wide open houses

	<p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten “Bee Night” and Kinder Camp for incoming children and families • Tracking of feeder patterns within district • Sharing variety of summary reports with Head Start • Transition forms, files and meetings • Kindergarten teachers observe incoming preschool students in classroom • School visits for preschool students
<p>Joint Professional Development</p>	<p>COMMUNITY:</p> <p>Community partners and two other preschools invited to attend and/or present</p> <p>DISTRICT:</p> <p>Professional development on developmentally appropriate practice, cultural competency and trauma-sensitive schools provided across age ranges</p>
<p>Aligned Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments</p>	<p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum and assessment committee includes early childhood staff • District curricula has been aligned • Grade level alignment meetings, with annual vertical alignment meetings
<p>Data Driven Improvement</p>	<p>COMMUNITY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data retrieved from community programs shared with elementary schools for instructional purposes and planning • Asset mapping to be conducted by WeGo Together <p>DISTRICT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly PLCs to review data • Data reported to school board and administrators

BARRIERS TO CREATING B-3 SYSTEMS AND SUPPORTS

Despite their well-established community collaborations, District 33 staff still struggles to create and align district and community policy. The goals of the B-3 Committee will align to those of WeGo Together and the regional collaboration, and contingent upon union contract negotiations, they look forward to including teachers in the future. They note that programs and departments are still fairly siloed, but that they have made significant progress.

Another barrier District 33 encounters is in curricular and assessment alignment birth-to-third grade. District staff are hopeful that greater implementation of developmentally appropriate practices, particularly in the early grades, will lead to greater alignment. While their preschool

programs use the DRDP assessment, which is aligned to the KIDS, this is not the case when students get to third grade and students sit for standardized assessments that are not necessarily developmentally appropriate.

Another systemic barrier is the lack of common messaging across district and community programs, specifically one that promotes continuity of services that students and families may need well beyond their early years. While family liaisons are built into preschool programs, the demands and the caseloads increase as students progress through elementary school and up.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND B-3 CONTINUITY STRUCTURES

West Chicago established a community collaboration in 2005, WeGo Together for Kids, with the mission to address the health, safety and well-being of students and families. WeGo Together is also active in the DuPage County Early Childhood Collaboration with other school districts, childcare providers, the health department, social service providers, and other local early childhood collaboratives. WeGo Together has more than 60 member organizations that strive to provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach for West Chicago schools and the community.

The goals of the West Chicago Early Childhood Collaboration were set by the birth-to-third grade work group. They aim to ensure that every child has a healthy body mass index (BMI), that parent education should be about health and nutrition, and to improve literacy outcomes, specifically to address the 30-million-word gap. District 33 houses WeGo Together, which has infrastructure teams to coordinate the partnership and improve transitions birth to five years and to middle school.

During community collaboration meetings, community data is pulled from a variety of sources including American Community Survey through Impact DuPage. In addition, WeGo Together is introducing the implementation of asset mapping within the community and partnering with parents to do community development. The West Chicago Early Childhood Collaboration utilizes results based accountability (RBA) as a planning and management framework. The RBA process assisted in the collaboration's vision of families in the early childhood community in West Chicago feel supported, healthy and eager to learn. The collaboration will look at data that supports parenting education opportunities, and nutrition within the early childhood community.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

WeGo Together members work together for collective impact, and by establishing strong relationships with community partners, District 33 has succeeded in the implementation of the community school model. They have also excelled in developing comprehensive services for students and families. The WeGo Together community collaboration was awarded a full-service community school grant that supports efforts to provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, their family members, and community members that

result in improved educational outcomes for children. Services include a Family Center that provides English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for parents, and other resources such as nutrition and fitness classes, and financial literacy opportunities. These activities provide an approach for the school and its families to close the achievement gap, improve student and family health, enhancing parent stability and engagement and increase emergency preparedness.

WeGo Together plans to create written program information to give to hospitals and provide and to provide all West Chicago newborns with a book. They are working with community agencies to develop a system to connect children to the community and district programs that best meet their needs. They also will continue work with Erikson Institute on a database that allows District 33 and community partners to access shared data.

The community schools model allows for access to partners to both come in the schools to provide services and for external support. A mental health clinician conducts home and school based therapy; family liaisons make sure families have a medical and dental home, and respond to family interests such as nutrition and positive parenting. Schools schedule wellness checks four times each year. Parents participate in leadership training by Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)³², leading to increased parent leadership; alumni of the program created a walking club.

WeGo Together for Kids tracks the provision of comprehensive services through a variety of databases depending on grant and funder requirements. Paper sign in sheets are used to track attendance, and WeGo Together also has paper referrals and case notes. They are currently working on a database to house the information and this will become their online platform for pulling all data.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The community school model has improved the way community school coordinators and family liaisons build relationships with building staff, community partners, and families. Family liaisons have been able to connect families to school, with other families and to community resources. The family liaisons work holistically with families to remove barriers and build bridges that support student and family success. As a result, the schools have seen an increase in parent participation and engagement that has allowed for greater community feedback when developing programs that build on the gifts and strengths of families, rather than from a deficit perspective.

The district has used multiple ways to recruit families to serve on the B-3 Committee and remove the barriers for attendance. Parents sit on building level preschool parent advisory councils, on the district's academic committee, the district's family and community engagement committee, and the bilingual parent advisory council (BPAC). The district

³² www.cofionline.org

partners with the Language Access and Resource Center (LARC) to provide oral and written translations for non-English and non-Spanish speaking families. Ongoing professional development for all staff takes place on cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness. Schools host family events in which community partners participate, such as the West Chicago public library, Central DuPage Hospital, and the public health department.

The community schools model is widely implemented in their preschool programs to bring more resources in, and provide a variety of opportunities for parents, who are always welcome in their classrooms, to support their children's education. The district has found that using the app, Bloomz, is another helpful way to communicate with families. They plan to conduct home visits twice per year for every family in which they will develop SMART goals to be reviewed three times per year. They also surveyed families and have brought in partners to provide wellness events for identified needs. The schools gather input from families from Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) data. In addition to their quantitative data, they also track qualitative data; families complete exit slips and satisfaction surveys after each training and event. Feedback from the FRED program indicates that the fathers' relationships with their children has improved and that they are spending more quality time with their children.

The district uses teacher and family liaison job descriptions and the evaluation system to hold staff accountable. They conduct reflective supervision and have received funding to add more positions devoted to family engagement, with three family liaisons in their early learning programs, three liaisons in the elementary schools and three in middle school.

SUPPORTED TRANSITIONS

Smooth transitions are supported in a multitude of ways. The district holds a kindergarten "Bee Night" for all incoming kindergartners and their parents, a community-wide open house and visitation, kindergarten transition meetings, and a dual language information session. They had a Kinder Camp last summer for incoming kindergarten students.

District staff are participating in larger DuPage County efforts to establish common messaging around the "ready" child. Consultants will be brought in to facilitate vertical alignment meetings. Currently, preschool and kindergarten classrooms have developed a list of expectations but only shared internally. They track feeder patterns through their registration form, but not much is done with this information once gathered.

The Teaching Strategies GOLD³³, Desired Results Developmental Profile ³⁴(DRDP), and vocabulary summary reports are shared among the district and Educare's preschool programs. The district has "blue dot" files that contain transition forms on needed services, what works best for each child, and transition meetings held between preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and principals. They conduct presentations on options for

³³ <https://teachingstrategies.com/>

³⁴ <https://www.desiredresults.us/>

kindergarten on family night, and kindergarten teachers observe preschool children, who then go on school visits.

 JOINT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

District 33 makes efforts toward joint PD. They typically invite two other preschools in West Chicago and other community partners are invited to attend or facilitate. They are making progress in preschool and the early grades on play-based teaching practices using the same consultant to ensure greater alignment, although application at grades one to three is limited. The Consortium for Education Change will train all staff on trauma-sensitive schools and each building will develop an action plan. Staff participated in PD on cultural competency.

 ALIGNED CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENTS

District 33 school staff work with the director of assessment to find methods to share meaningful data between the preschools and the elementary school. Their curriculum and assessment committee includes early childhood staff and the curriculum has been aligned across a number of subjects. District staff hold grade-level horizontal alignment meetings and vertical alignment meetings once per year, and teachers are interested in more. They have good alignment between preschool and kindergarten, and want to improve continuity with first through third grades. The district is reviewing all assessments and notes that the use of the DRDP is helping in this process too.

Subject Area Committees (SACs), Academic Leadership Team (ALT) and Academic Learning Council (ALC) monitor curriculum. Instruction effectiveness is monitored through the evaluation process. They are also starting to review assessments of DAP in kindergarten classrooms. The district holds curriculum nights, but there has been no communication of expectations to community partners. However, the B-3 Continuity Self-Assessment they conducted highlighted the need for this.

 DATA DRIVEN IMPROVEMENT

District 33 uses data to drive improvement in a variety of ways. They are looking at kindergarten readiness data and parent satisfaction through surveys and the CSCI, but do not have data metrics at this time. WeGo Together has developed goals and a community scorecard for tracking, and the district uses a scorecard. They host monthly data meetings and PLCs in each building, leading to programmatic change and scorecards. The district has started asset mapping with WeGo Together, but would like to implement this within building and with community partners.

Schools have signed MOU's with their community partners that include data sharing agreements. Data is reported in a timely manner and per grant and funder requirements. Data is shared at the school board and administrator level several times a year. Teachers

formally review data on a monthly basis, but school improvement days or after-school meetings could provide other opportunities to drive growth.

CONCLUSION

West Chicago was well on its way to creating a continuum of experiences and services for their students and families before becoming a Preschool Expansion grantee. They have benefited enormously from their strong community collaborations and have laid the foundation for better outcomes for their students and families.

B. IN THEIR OWN WORDS: LESSONS LEARNED, Q AND A FROM COMMUNITY LEADERS

At the [2018 Annual B-3 Continuity Conference](#) held in Bloomington IL, a session focused on lessons learned was held to give more experienced community leaders a chance to share their insights with programs that may be new to B-3 continuity work and the Preschool Expansion program. What follows is a synthesis of the questions and answers that took place during this session.

PANELISTS:

- LINDA BREEN, Director of Early Childhood Education, Carpentersville SD 300
- PEGGY ONDERA, Director of Early Learning Initiatives, Elgin U-46
- KRIS PENNINGTON, Director of Early Learning, McLean County Unit 5
- KIM NELSON, Executive Director of Early Childhood, Rockford RPS 205

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS HAVING STRONGER B-3 SYSTEMS WOULD IMPROVE THE LIVES OF YOUR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES?

LINDA BREEN: Preschool Expansion forced us to look at our systems, in preschool, elementary, and community-wide. We have 11 communities in our district and it is a challenge to bring them together. The program gave us the opportunity to look at our communities individually and how they can function as a whole.

PEGGY ONDERA: The Preschool Expansion helped us build stronger relationships and partnerships and that has helped make for better transitions of children moving between programs. We now have “warm hand-offs” as students move between Carpentersville, Elgin and Rockford. We also have more wrap around services for families and making sure we do not lose them as they move.

KRIS PENNINGTON: Preschool Expansion encouraged us to have conversations among teachers and practitioners and observe different grade levels so everyone has a better sense of what is going on outside their own world.

KIM NELSON: We had some collaborative work going on, but Preschool Expansion helped focus and shined a flashlight on certain things. We had started working on alignment within district, but the program made us look at outside service providers. Our system is like a plate of spaghetti – you could keep pulling strings but it never makes sense – if we cannot figure it out how can families? This process sparked a community of practice among case managers from social service providers.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND B-3 SYSTEMS THREE YEARS AGO? WHAT IF ANYTHING WAS IN PLACE?

KIM NELSON: Four years ago, we did a needs assessment and realized we were missing aligned curriculum. On a district level we put in place a process to align curriculum PreK-12, and we are in year three of five-year plan. We have had some challenges in changing mindsets about developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in

kindergarten and early elementary, but the curriculum alignment process is helping those conversations. On a community level, the Maternal, Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant spurred creation of coordinated intake system among home-visiting programs. To make this work, we had focused conversations on why programs are competing when there are plenty of families to go around. As of April (2018), we have coordinated intake for public preschool and Head Start.

KRIS PENNINGTON: Like Rockford, it has been a springboard for curriculum alignment. We had challenges with the district on DAP in kindergarten, but we have done a “180” and this year we put in place play-based learning in kindergarten. Additionally, the district started looking at what we are doing in early childhood and began to see the value of Family Educators; we now have them in all eight of our Title buildings.

PEGGY ONDERA: B-3 work has given us a platform from which to continue conversations about DAP. Instead of having practices pushed down from upper grades, we have been pushing up to have DAP in preschool, then kindergarten, then first grade, and now second grade is the goal. This helps ensure that we are really meeting the needs of children both academically and socially in a developmentally appropriate way. We have shared this information with community partners to demonstrate what does it look like to be ready for kindergarten? We are giving information about the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) to private preschools and daycare providers, trying to get us all pulling in one direction with the goal of having children happy and successful in school. B-3 continuity has been that platform to have those conversations.

LINDA BREEN: For years people introduced us as a K-12 district when we are really PreK-12 district. B-3 continuity has been the platform for the district to stand up and take notice of early childhood as well as birth-to-age-three services. Three years ago, we were not working with private childcare providers, now we do professional development with them. District family educators go into community programs and work with them. We have been able to track through our data system that kindergarten readiness has increased dramatically.

WHAT DID YOU THINK WAS GOING TO BE HARD AND TURNED OUT TO BE EASY (AND VICE VERSA)?

LINDA BREEN: I thought full-day in preschool was going to be hard, but that turned out to be easy. What has been a challenge is changing mindsets of principals who are just realizing they have full-day preschool in their buildings, and wondering how do you include those teachers? Preschool Expansion has helped with articulation to kindergarten; they know these kids and can track their data. The administration realized there is a curriculum in preschool, and wondered how it compares to other curricula. We showed them how they are aligned and that was a fascinating experience.

PEGGY ONDERA: I agree with Linda Breen on the full day – it was not as difficult and we were able to do it in a short timeframe. Another challenge has been responding to the significant needs of children that we are putting in our Preschool Expansion classrooms. We worked really hard to find those children that are most in need of our services, and because we have done that, they have come with lots of needs.

KRIS PENNINGTON: And they are all in the same classroom! Another challenge was, I thought teachers would be so excited to have instructional coaches and get additional support but this was not the case. Getting supports in place has been a lot more involved than I anticipated, but the impact has been more significant than I ever could have imagined, and well worth it.

KIM NELSON: Rockford is a needy community. It is important to get the right teachers in place. Our first year of implementation we had experienced PFA teachers transfer to the Preschool Expansion program – one big draw was having one unique class of 20 children, rather than 40 morning and afternoon students to plan for and assess. In our first year, 105 of 120 kids all had the top four indicators for Preschool Expansion: poverty, youth in care, homeless, and special needs. These teachers were unprepared for the high needs of the classroom and had a difficult time shifting mindsets, and at the end of the year, chose to return to PFA classrooms. We added one paraprofessional for every two classrooms to provide additional support during learning activities and nap time. During our second year of implementation we added a social worker to help support social-emotional learning. This additional allocation has been reduced for the coming year.

On instructional coaches, we wanted it to be truly job embedded and something teachers wanted, using the CLASS observations as a tool to measure. We trained *all* staff on CLASS, not just Preschool Expansion, but they thought I was kidding on expanding this to the whole program. That first year, the knowledgebase was not there. One thing that impacted the roll out of the coaching model was that the district implemented coaches for teachers identified in the evaluation process as needing improvement at the same time. This was separate from the early childhood coaching model. Three years later, the impact is that our CLASS data is going up, teachers welcome coaches, and we are seeing more connections in lesson planning. Coaches need a year to build relationships – it is a parallel process with children and families. The process takes two to three years

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR BIGGEST STRUGGLES?

LINDA BREEN: We keep going back to the social-emotional piece in the classroom. New programs should be prepared for student needs. We use the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (a social-emotional tool) which has been helpful. We are doing a lot of professional development on social emotional learning –before the

academics. We spend the first six weeks with little to no academics. All we did was work on relationships and how to play.

PEGGY ONDERA: I agree about addressing students' social-emotional learning. We used a screener, and we used a social-emotional curriculum to teach students these skills. We added social workers, doubled parent-community liaisons, and added para-professionals. We struggle to find and keep highly qualified staff. When we talk about children experiencing trauma, teachers are experiencing or taking on that trauma alongside them. Until we added additional supports, we had high turnover of teachers and para-professionals. This is hard work!

KRIS PENNINGTON: I struggled with how to tackle all of these things. I was a principal and responsible for all the grants in several buildings. It was hard juggling these two roles. I wish I would have taken the time initially to advocate for this work, and educate the administrators. We accomplished this recently. I fully embraced the whole model, and loved it. As an early childhood educator, it is what I had been dreaming about my whole career, but I was not able to carry out so many things I wanted to do, even if I worked "24/7." I encourage new programs to take time to advocate. As the years went on, other administrators have understood.

KIM NELSON: We are still struggling with family engagement, and documenting it. We struggle with having teachers realize this is part of their job, and that family support specialists are an extra layer to provide more intensive supports. We underestimated the shift from a family involvement model to family engagement. We still have problems getting families to come to workshops and are still trying to figure out barriers there. We plan to focus on chronic absenteeism this year. We want to provide more training for Family Support Specialists. I look at whole programs; I don't run two different programs (i.e. Preschool for All and Preschool Expansion). We may not do it to the intensity, but the expectations are the same. We did not want to create this divide.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE JUST BEGINNING? WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU WOULD HAVE KNOWN STARTING OUT?

PEGGY ONDERA: Get the right people in the right jobs. Be very thoughtful as you are hiring, and ask questions that get to the heart of their belief systems. Do they view children and families through a strengths model? Be intentional about addressing the social-emotional needs, and put those supports in place or the rest of it falls apart. We too struggle with family engagement, and building trusting relationships with adults. With the families that we are finding, parents may not have had positive experience in schools, or have had trauma themselves. We put a lot of time and effort into how we can build caring communities where families feel welcome, addressing *their* needs, not our interpretation of what their needs are. Programs should get feedback from parents and stakeholders about what they need and want.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: HOW DO YOU BUILD RELATIONSHIPS IN PRESCHOOL EXPANSION WHEN YOU ONLY HAVE THEM FOR ONE YEAR? IT TAKES LONGER THAN A YEAR.

PEGGY ONDERA: That one year is difficult. All the more reason if you are working with multiple grants to pull them together into a single program, and doing more warm hand-offs. We use our Parent Community Liaisons to be the connector to that kindergarten classroom, to be a familiar face, sit in on transition meetings, and we push them out into the community. They are out recruiting and being visible. We do not expect that parents are going to come to us. We need to do that outreach to them – this helps with the relationships.

KIM NELSON: We run family support staff on a 12-month contract, which means in the summer they are out recruiting, doing initial screenings. To ensure they at least meet parents, they do home visits over the summer.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: HOW DO YOU BUILD TIME IN FOR HOME VISITS?

PEGGY ONDERA: We start a week later than our elementary schools and teachers go out and do home visits.

KIM NELSON: We worked with our parent advisory board and they recommended that teachers wait to complete home visits until they knew more about their children, but did not mind family support completing initial home visits at the beginning of the year. We have built in days throughout the school year for home visits for teachers to complete home visits. At the start of the year parents expressed that they preferred to come to school to meet teachers at an open house.

KRIS PENNINGTON: I wish I had picked up the [B-3 Continuity Self-Assessment](#) earlier. Boy was I wrong! That can really guide your work and show you what some of these strategies look like.

LINDA BREEN: That book is really helpful but do not read it alone! It is overwhelming. Take it to your administrators or your superintendents, or you will put it aside.

KRIS PENNINGTON: I love the visual of the pieces of the puzzle. This is a big puzzle, and when you do a big puzzle, you may not do it all at one time.

LINDA BREEN: I also changed up my hiring, interview questions. Do not be afraid to ask the tough questions. Define the roles of family support because they are out and you do not see them as much. It is an independent role, and they are going into home (or elsewhere) right away to develop goals. This year we had staff from elementary school attend parent-teacher conferences so they got to know them for a soft hand off, and they heard from families.

PEGGY ONDERA: We have early childhood staff at transition meetings so elementary teachers know what strategies and supports children need. We also have electronic transition

forms with strategies that help children, from a strength based perspective. They can be accessed wherever a child lands, and teachers can access them before children even come to school. Be proactive, not reactive. We make sure that if we know something is successful for children or families it can be continued in elementary.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: DO ANY OF YOU HAVE PREVENTION INITIATIVE (PI) AND HOW DO YOU COORDINATE SERVICES FROM BIRTH TO PRESCHOOL?

KIM NELSON: We try to create a smooth hand off. As kids are getting ready to transition to preschool, we have preschool family support staff go with the home visitor so they meet in the home for the first time. They set up a school visit, and we have the home visitor come with the family. We are still working on data sharing. We have put a sheet in each child's folder with the home visitor contact information on it. Family support staff already know the home visitor so this is for teachers. We are trying to include all the developmental screenings in the child's folder.

LINDA BREEN: When we got Preschool Expansion I realized I had three silos: I had PI, Preschool Expansion, and Preschool For All (PFA). We now meet quarterly so everyone knows each other, and we talk about all three so we are all on the same page. When we host family events, we do it together.

PEGGY ONDERA: I agree. We have an Early Learning Leadership team of all three that meets monthly. We use the same weighted eligibility form so we can look at apples to apples as children move between programs. We have transition facilitators, one from PI to preschool, another for preschool to kindergarten. The data system is something we all struggle with, electronically, so we have a lot of paper and folders.

KRIS PENNINGTON: I am getting a lot of good ideas! We are not there yet. In developing more partnerships, we realize what is in our community and we have a lot of great programming for 3-5-year-olds, not much for birth to 3-years-old.

HOW DO YOU THINK THINGS WILL BE DIFFERENT 5 YEARS FROM NOW?

KRIS PENNINGTON: I am really excited around that puzzle piece of building in more alignment with birth to three-year-old programs.

KIM NELSON: When you are thinking about the puzzle pieces, your community will have to start somewhere. Look for low hanging fruit to get a quick win to help build relationships. Use the B-3 Continuity Self-Assessment, and do a little piece at a time. We are getting play back into the classrooms but we are just getting there. We have a few champions, but I thought it would be quicker.

LINDA BREEN: You will be collecting a lot of data. Really analyze that data and look at how the children are doing in kindergarten. What we found is that we have leveled the playing field for the most at-risk kids. They were scoring the same as other kids in that first kindergarten assessment. And do not hold onto that data; share it with your

community collaborators. Be your own champions: tell them all the great things you are doing. Ask to share data with your school board.

PEGGY ONDERA: We want to extend developmentally appropriate practice all the way to third grade. We know that is what students need. Here is another suggestion: this has been a great opportunity for me to build relationships outside of my own community. When I have a question, I reach out to these women. I would encourage you to do the same as you are starting out. We do not always have all the answers ourselves, but together we do. You can see: we are all continually learning from each other. Any of us would be willing to answer questions as you get into the process.

THIS REPORT WAS SPONSORED BY:



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THE B-3 CONTINUITY PROJECT IS A COLLABORATION WITH:



Illinois
State Board of
Education



Governor's Office of
Early Childhood Development



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