

Illinois Preschool Expansion Communities: Birth-to-Third Grade (B-3) Continuity Program FAQ

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.

What is the B-3 Continuity Project?

In 2015, the federal Preschool Development Grant – Expansion (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. 2019 is the final year of PDG-E funding and will be the final conference for the project. A summary of the project and work happening in communities receiving PDG-E funding and B-3 supports was published in January of 2019 (<https://education.illinoisstate.edu/csep/b3/B3-Report.php>).

What is meant by “B-3 work?” Illinois has adopted the following eight core elements for B-3 alignment:

1. **Community Partnerships:** to strengthen education, supports and services for children and families from early childhood programs into early elementary settings
2. **Comprehensive Services:** including assistance in obtaining health, mental health, dental services, nutrition services, education, and linkages to other community services
3. **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
4. **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
5. **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
6. **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, support a wide range of development, and are reflective of children's families and cultures and rooted in science of child development
7. **Aligned Assessments:** sharing assessment practices and data across the full, early childhood continuum with particular focus on the implementation of the KIDS
8. **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



B-3 Continuity Project

B-3 work is NOT:

- All of these components at once
- An “initiative” or new work for schools and communities
- An effort solely to expand access to early learning
- The work only of school district staff or in service only of school district strategic plans
- A collection of unrelated events or strategies for children birth through third grade
- One size fits all: some communities are comprehensive in their approaches while others are more incremental

Who should be a part of our B-3 team?

If a community has an existing collaboration addressing education or early childhood development, this group may serve as an appropriate stakeholder team for this work or may help with identifying stakeholders. The community team should consist of a group of stakeholders that is diverse in expertise, role and perspective. These stakeholders may include representatives from: school districts (including superintendents, early childhood administrators and principals), community-based early childhood programs, Head Start grantees, social service organizations, parent groups, local collaborations (including Innovation Zones, AOK Networks and MIECHV collaborations), home visiting programs, or municipal staff.

Where do we begin?

The first step is make sure that the relevant community stakeholders learn about and are involved in the work. Reaching out and building stakeholder buy-in takes time but is well worth it in the long run: diverse expertise and perspectives create a lasting system. Once assembled, B-3 community teams will use needs assessment, asset mapping, existing strategic plans and community priorities (the [B-3 Community Self-Assessment tool](#) can be helpful in this process) to identify **one or two common and measurable goals** to work toward, such as:

1. Targeted outreach and coordinated screening and intake of children and families that are truly underserved
2. Develop a coordinated community referral system or work together to address families’ basic needs: get coats for children, arrange transportation to programs, find free medical and dental services
3. Develop community-wide messaging for all families with students going into kindergarten as to what “readiness” is and steps they can take to support their children’s learning
4. Improving transitions from programs serving infants and toddlers to preschools, and from preschool to kindergarten and the early grades
5. Joint professional development for early learning and early grade staff
6. Increase parents’ active participation in home, school, and community activities and their involvement in active leadership in the community.
7. Curriculum alignment between community and school-based early childhood programs and the early grades to ensure a coherent system
8. Sharing assessment practices and data across the continuum within community and school-based programs and elementary grades, with emphasis on the KIDS

Once goals are identified, B-3 teams may undertake cycles of action learning, reflect on short-term results, and choose strategy modifications based on data before determining a solution is ready for broader implementation and adoption into longer-term community-wide plans.

Contact Information: B-3 Continuity Project Director: Ashley Long (amlong3@ilstu.edu)

Updated: 2/2019 <http://education.illinoisstate.edu/csep/b3/>

