



Birth-to-College

COLLABORATIVE TOOLKIT

Why does an aligned pathway from recruitment to admissions matter for leaders?

Implementation Guide for Program and School Leaders: Installation*

Written by Samantha Aigner-Treworgy, Amanda Stein, Leanne Beaudoin Ryan, Holly Lewandowski and Elizabeth Rothkopf



RATIONALE

A seamless pathway between early childhood programs and welcoming elementary schools is the linchpin of an aligned educational experience. Coordinated procedures that start with recruitment in early childhood and end with admission to kindergarten facilitate the establishment of such a pathway. This seamless pathway has the potential to make all other alignment¹ efforts around teaching and learning meaningful to a child's—and family's—educational experience. Yet early childhood program eligibility requirements and kindergarten enrollment policies vary by location as well as by program or school type. Adding to the complexity, early childhood and K–12 governance and funding are often not automatically aligned at the local or state levels. Thus, the process of establishing this pathway across programs is complicated by its very nature. *Careful consideration must be taken when developing a process for coordinating recruitment, eligibility, admissions and enrollment in creating a seamless pathway.*

Regardless of potential challenges, establishing a coordinated process from recruitment to admissions allows educational entities to ensure that the curriculum, assessment, professional development, family engagement and other alignment efforts are maximized by impacting a targeted population of children and families who will benefit from a unified system. This process is an asset for both the early childhood organization, which can provide effective support for its transitioning students and families, and the elementary school, which can capitalize on student preparedness by continuing to provide high-quality educational experiences. The hope is that aligned experiences and systems will help sustain and perpetuate the achievements of all children, regardless of their point of entry.

This guide outlines key decisions and strategies for the installation of a seamless pathway from recruitment to admissions, provides reflection questions to support this effort, and offers examples from the BTC Collaborative specific to the leadership perspective. A similar guide for teachers and staff is located on the BTC Toolkit website.



KEY DECISIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

At the earliest stages of exploration, adoption and installation, input from all levels of leadership is crucial to success. However, as efforts move toward full implementation, it will become important to divide the many and varied responsibilities of alignment by level of leadership. In subsequent guides, the authors will make the distinction between organizational and site leaders, wherever applicable. The authors consider organizational leaders to be those individuals at the highest level of administrative responsibility (e.g., district, regional, institutional, grantee) whose concerns and efforts are focused more broadly on the overarching vision of alignment, not necessarily on the day-to-day efforts of implementation. Conversely, site leaders are those individuals who are housed within individual schools (e.g., principals) or programs (e.g., program directors) and are responsible for organizing and implementing alignment efforts on a day-to-day basis.

GETTING STARTED

All recommendations are based on the experiences of the BTC Collaborative. We have attempted to sequence these recommendations in a way that is logical for readers unfamiliar with the BTC Collaborative and embarking on the work of alignment in their own contexts. However, it is important to emphasize that these recommendations are in no way prescriptive and should be informed entirely by your own circumstances and sequenced based on your own organizational and contextual priorities and needs.²

- **Strengthen Relational Trust:** Open, honest communication is the cornerstone of any trusting partnership. In the previous guide,³ we recommended that potential partner organizations spend at least a year building relational trust by sharing information with one another at regularly scheduled meetings. At this stage, partners should continue to work toward strengthening this trust. Potential roadblocks to alignment provide an opportunity for partners to work together in service of a common goal. Logistical challenges imposed by school- or program-specific requirements, obligations and responsibilities have the potential to adversely impact efforts to align. Therefore, leaders must not only reaffirm commitments to one another but also remain engaged and responsive throughout the problem-solving process.
- **Understand Funding Regulations and Requirements:** Early childhood and elementary school programming are financed through different funding streams with different philosophical priorities, policies and regulations that are often at odds with one another. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of the parameters that impact each program, as well as the relationship that each entity has with its funders and governing bodies. Leaders should discuss each program's individual eligibility requirements and admissions process, as well as address the legal requirements around funding that each entity is obliged to follow. Identifying any points of alignment or contradiction in funding regulations and requirements as they pertain to recruitment, eligibility and admissions will help anticipate pitfalls prior to engaging families in the process.



- **Develop Buy-in:** Leaders must meet with and obtain buy-in from all governing entities. This includes, but is not limited to, boards; funders; school district or early childhood governing, licensing, accrediting or oversight bodies; charter approvers; and legal or regulatory administrators. Additionally, leaders should oversee their staff’s facilitation of family buy-in (see “Cultivate Family Engagement” below).
- **Determine Program Size and Available Slots:** Determine the average number of outgoing, kindergarten-bound students leaving the early childhood program each year versus the number of incoming kindergarten slots available in the receiving elementary school/s. Moreover, explore the types of programs and environments that children have come from and will be going to in the future. Proximity often plays an important role in the matriculation of students and families from one school to the next.
- **Consider Recruitment and Eligibility:** Understand the nuances of recruitment, screening, eligibility, admissions and enrollment policies and procedures across the early childhood and elementary school programs involved in the partnership. This will ensure that student/family recruitment and admissions efforts are targeted toward those who can benefit most from an aligned process. Factors that often determine eligibility that should be discussed and considered early on in the establishment of a pathway include income or need criteria, prioritization of risk factors (e.g., special needs, teen parent, single parent, homeless), sibling priority, attendance boundary or catchment area, selective enrollment through testing and random enrollment through lottery.
- **Optimize Timing:** Aligning the timing of recruitment, eligibility determination, admissions and enrollment procedures can be an important hurdle to overcome. Because elementary school enrollment often follows a different school-year calendar than early childhood enrollment, ensuring that staff and parents are fully aware of timetables and deadlines and that parents can be supported in filling out the appropriate forms at the appropriate times is a critical element in ensuring a streamlined pathway for admission. Laying out all necessary timetables and working to align and coordinate deadlines that meet the needs of all organizations involved will significantly facilitate effective admissions and transitions processes for staff, students and families.



ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Delegate and Share Responsibilities:** Various staff members across the organization have a critical role to play throughout the establishment and implementation of an aligned recruitment and admissions process. In order to effectively create a process that is family friendly and maintains fidelity to the needs of each organization, it is important that all staff members and their responsibilities in the process be carefully considered to create a successful foundation for alignment.
- **Leadership:** Leaders—organizational as well as site level—must hold the broader vision for alignment and help service staff navigate the external relationships critical to obtaining the permissions necessary to create a plan for aligned recruitment and admissions. Leaders should take responsibility for the written documentation of the policies, procedures, regulations and guidelines that will define this aspect of alignment. Examples include (1) specifying the number of families targeted for engagement in the pathway, (2) targeting populations or exception populations to be considered,

and (3) identifying policy or systems changes needed to effectively implement the aligned recruitment and admissions process. Moreover, leaders will need to create strategic work plans for aligning the recruitment and admissions processes. These work plans will include concrete goals that have specific action plans for achievement. Ultimately, ongoing engagement at the leadership level will ensure that the establishment of this seamless pathway is sustainable for all and aligned with the shared mission of building a continuum of education from early childhood through the elementary years and on through college.

- *Direct Service Staff:* Many of the details for program implementation will require active understanding, engagement and communication between and among staff in the coordinating programs and schools. Guided by the vision laid out at the leadership level, staff will be responsible for crafting written documents that will walk parents and families, step-by-step, through an explanation of the process from recruitment to admissions. While staff must understand the technical details of navigating this pathway, the documents that explain this process to families should be written in clear, easily understandable language. It is highly recommended that staff ensure parents' comprehension and get parents' signatures as written confirmation of understanding and agreement to the recruitment, eligibility, admissions and enrollment requirements and process.



- **Cultivate Family Engagement:** Establishing family buy-in both prior to and during the process is critical. Understanding the family's role in both choosing to engage in the pathway for aligned recruitment and admissions and continuing with the program long enough to benefit from the alignment across early childhood and K-12 is essential to ensuring that the efforts put into establishing the aligned process benefit the children and families they are intended to impact. For example, determining whether families enrolled in the early childhood program are interested in attending the elementary school/s and looking at trends in prior year's enrollment will help determine the actual viability of an aligned recruitment and admissions process early on. Patience on the part of teachers and staff members will be paramount. Many parents and families will struggle with unfamiliar terms, rules and policies related to not only the application, enrollment, and transition processes for kindergarten, but also the maintenance of eligibility. Staff members are responsible for making sure parents and families have the most up-to-date documentation to facilitate this process at each level (i.e., application, enrollment, transition and maintenance).
- **Ensure Sustainability:** Leaders should focus on remaining actively engaged with partnering organizations. In the shorter term, leaders will need to ensure the sustainability of the established pathway for recruitment and admissions. More broadly, leaders hold the responsibility for upholding the shared mission of building a continuum of education from early childhood through the elementary years and

on through college. This responsibility includes retaining the interest of governing and funding entities that will ensure that the program remains viable in spite of potential changes in funding at the local, state and federal levels.



SELF-STUDY

School and program leaders may use the following questions in their efforts to explore the nuances of creating a seamless pathway from recruitment to admissions from early childhood to K–12:

- Are there any restrictions on students/families to be eligible for each program/funding stream?
- Are there admissions policies that either program must abide by that should be accommodated and/or changed in order to ease the creation of streamlined recruitment and admissions processes?
- Are there rules or regulations that restrict how a program admits students/families or what documentation can/cannot be required?
- Are there priority populations that need to be taken into account within this streamlined recruitment and admissions process?



WINDOW TO THE BIRTH-TO-COLLEGE COLLABORATIVE

Below is a detailed description of the aligned process for recruitment and admissions to create a pathway from early childhood to elementary school and beyond established by the BTC Collaborative.

The goal was to create a viable pathway for children from Educare Chicago, an early childhood program, to the UChicago Charter School, a coordinated K–12 system. On the early childhood side, families enrolled at Educare Chicago must meet stringent eligibility requirements set by the Office of Head Start, Chicago Public Schools and the Illinois Department of Human Services.⁴ On the K–12 side, families wishing to enroll at one of the two pre-kindergarten-to-5th-grade campuses of the UChicago Charter School are admitted by lottery.⁵ Illinois law requires charter schools to admit students by lottery, as there are often more applications than available seats. Admissions priority is given to applicants who are attendance-zone residents and/or siblings of currently enrolled children.

Beginning each fall, UChicago Charter School invites applications and actively recruits families to apply. A pre-kindergarten-to-12th-grade charter school, it generally has spaces available at pre-kindergarten (for 4-year-olds only), kindergarten, 6th grade and 9th grade. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten spaces are available at the Donoghue and North Kenwood/Oakland (NKO) campuses, the 6th-grade spaces at the Carter G. Woodson and Woodlawn campuses and the 9th-grade spaces at the Woodlawn campus. Because Illinois requires charter schools to admit students by lottery, UChicago Charter School conducts a public lottery each spring. Admissions priority is given to applicants who are attendance-zone residents and siblings of children already enrolled at a UChicago Charter School campus. The Donoghue, NKO and Woodson campuses share an attendance zone.

For parents of 2-year-olds, UChicago Charter School coordinates its application process with that of Educare Chicago. Parents may apply to the 3-year-old program at Educare Chicago for fall entry and, simultaneously, to kindergarten at UChicago Charter School three years in advance. Educare Chicago follows Head Start, Chicago Public Schools and Illinois Department of Human Services policies to determine eligibility and admit children and families. Families must document that their income falls within federal poverty guidelines and that they are employed or in a school or training program at least part time to be eligible for Educare Chicago's preschool program. Families admitted to Educare Chicago's 3-year-old program are given priority in the UChicago Charter School admissions process to kindergarten three years later. Families admitted to UChicago Charter School kindergarten may choose to enroll their children either at the Donoghue campus or the NKO campus. It is generally the case that children with an admissions priority will receive admission to UChicago Charter School.



SUMMARY

The purpose of this guide is to walk leaders through many of the initial considerations for establishing a seamless pathway for recruitment and admissions from early childhood to K–12. The hope is that these considerations will inform leaders across partnering organizations and help them consider whether or not a seamless pathway is feasible given their unique circumstances. The authors believe that coordination of recruitment and admissions is a powerful tool for alignment, as it physically bridges the gap between early childhood programs and the K–12 system. In the next guide, alignment within the domain of professional development—a crucial point of initial alignment within the BTC Collaborative—is discussed.

FOR MORE ON THIS SUBJECT

Fixsen, D.L., Naoom, S.F., Blase, K.A., Friedman, R.M., and Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication No. 231). <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/sites/nirn.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/NIRN-MonographFull-01-2005.pdf>

UChicago Charter School 2014–2015 New Student Application. http://www.uchicagocharter.org/uploaded/documents/UChicagoCharter_Application_2014-15_UPDATED.pdf

The Birth-to-College Collaborative Recruitment Brochure for Families. <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/educare/pdfs/BTC-Recruitment-Brochure.pdf>

Educare Chicago Eligibility Screening Tool. <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/educare/pdfs/Educare-Screening-Form.pdf>

The BTC Collaborative is documenting further efforts around alignment that impact family engagement work and, more specifically, transitioning children from Educare Chicago to the UChicago Charter School. Look for more information within the BTC Collaborative Toolkit website on this critical aspect of alignment work to come in 2015.

NOTES

- * These guides were organized and informed by the framework on program implementation created by the National Implementation Research Network. “Installation” is the process of preparing to “begin implementing an evidence-based practice or program.” That is, “structural supports necessary to initiate the program are put in place (e.g., ensuring the availability of funding streams, creating reporting frameworks, outlining outcome expectations).”
- ¹ For an in-depth discussion of alignment, including a review of possible areas of alignment, please refer to Stein, A., Beaudoin-Ryan, L., Lewandowski, H., and Rothkopf, E. (2014). *Implementation Guide for Program and School Leaders: What Is Birth-to-College Alignment? How Do School and Program Leaders Get Started?* Retrieved from the Ounce of Prevention Fund’s Birth-to-College Collaborative website: theOunce.org/BTCToolkit; and Kauerz, K., & Coffman, J. (2013). *Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK–3rd Grade Approaches*. Seattle: College of Education, University of Washington. http://depts.washington.edu/pthru3/PreK-3rd_Framework_Legal_paper.pdf
- ² For additional information on how the BTC Collaborative developed its mission, vision and initial goals, please refer to the teaching case study and its accompanying video *Working Together to Build a Birth-to-College Approach to Public Education: Forming a Partnership Between the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and the Ounce of Prevention Fund*. <https://uei.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/FCD%20UEI%20CaseStudy%20%231.pdf>
- ³ Beaudoin-Ryan, L., Stein, A., Lewandowski, H., & Rothkopf, E. (2014). *Implementation Guide For Program & School Leaders: How do school and program leaders jointly establish a vision, goals, outcomes, and processes for birth-to-college alignment?* Retrieved from the Ounce of Prevention Fund’s Birth-to-College Collaborative website: theOunce.org/BTCToolkit
- ⁴ Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs>
- ⁵ In addition to charter schools, Chicago Public Schools offers a variety of other options, including neighborhood, magnet and selective-enrollment schools, as well as career and military schools, small schools and contract schools. These options are meant to afford parents the freedom of school choice, though all these options have differing enrollment criteria, application processes and timelines. http://www.cps.edu/Schools/Elementary_schools/Pages/Elementaryschooltypes.aspx