

ILLINOIS EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL



7/1/2012

Strategic Plan

The Illinois Early Learning Council coordinates existing programs and services for children from birth to five years of age in order to better meet the early learning needs of children and their families. The goal of the Council is to fulfill the vision of a statewide, high-quality, accessible, and comprehensive early learning system to benefit all young children whose parents choose it.

The Illinois Early Learning Council Act P.A. 93-380, 20 ILCS 3933/5

Illinois Early Learning Council

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Early Learning Council launched the strategic planning process in February 2011. The Council's previous plan was completed in 2007. The first step was administering a 46 question survey to Council and Committee members as well as representatives from the broader early childhood community for the purposes of assessing stakeholder priorities, capturing Council strengths, and identifying areas for improvement. Of the 137 respondents who completed the survey, 34 were Council members and 96 were Committee members. The survey questions and aggregated responses are included in Appendix A. Many of the concerns raised during the survey have been addressed through the strategic planning process.

Following a presentation on the results of the survey, the Council members and stakeholders participated in a day long discussion focused on the future of the Council and the structures necessary to support the early learning system vision. The participants also explored ways the Council can strengthen its processes and discussed goals for the future. Both the survey and the meeting helped to set the stage for the rest of the strategic planning process.

In the summer of 2011, the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) was announced and the Council Co-Chairs suggested that the application and strategic planning process should work together. Both required the Council to define its vision and identify the key issues within the Illinois early learning system that need to be addressed. The Strategic Planning Team and Executive Committee joined forces in July to identify the key issues that the RTT-ELC and Council needed to address.

Key Early Childhood System Components

1. Sustainable Funding
2. Access
3. Quality
4. Community Collaboration
5. Unified Data Systems
6. Workforce Development

Throughout the summer and into the fall the Council continued to work on the RTT-ELC application, further fleshing out the priority areas identified in July. The Council approved the RTT-ELC application in October and following the grant's submission the Executive Committee and Strategic Planning Team met again to further discuss the core elements of a comprehensive early learning system. The group also discussed the preliminary results of the statewide Needs Assessment developed by Chapin Hall and the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) project. The Needs Assessment analyzed demographic and systems data to identify gaps in service.

Subsequently, the Executive Committee convened monthly through October and at least bi-monthly over the course of the next six months to review progress on original goals, discuss prioritization of ongoing projects, and consider updated strategies. The Council agreed that after having convened as a formalized advisory

body for nearly a decade, the landscape of early childhood had evolved and it was time to revisit the Council's goals, vision, and work priorities. Following nine months of targeted discussions, the process culminated in a streamlined reorganization of the Council structure as well as an updated vision for a comprehensive, statewide early childhood system and a plan for ensuring accountability.

This winter the Executive Committee reviewed the draft vision, mission, and goals developed through the strategic planning process. It further refined these items and developed a set of guiding principles to direct the work. The Executive Committee then identified the work to be done by the Council and recommended a reorganized committee structure to the full Council at the February 27th meeting. The Council approved four new committees and the continuation of the Home Visiting Taskforce. The new committee structure will be discussed later in the report and is included in Appendix B. The Council also approved the new vision, operating mission, and guiding principles. To enable the Council to better track progress towards bringing about such a system, it was decided that a temporary, ad hoc committee would be created for the purposes of identifying key metrics and benchmarks. The work of the Ad Hoc Committee will be discussed later in the report.

This summer the Council will continue to define its governance structure including clarifying the roles and responsibilities associated with council and committee membership as well as co-chairs and infrastructure to support enhanced communication between the Council and its committees and State agencies. It will also continue to develop linkages to related advisory bodies and create a broader communications strategy for the Council.

The remainder of the report summarizes the work products accomplished as a result of strategic planning.

VISION

At the highest level, the ELC vision includes a well-coordinated, accessible, easy to navigate early childhood system that incorporates the components listed both in the vision and the guiding principles.

System Components:

- Ongoing preventive health care -- including all appropriate well-child care, screenings and immunizations, and periodic developmental screening to determine whether children may be exhibiting developmental delays that warrant intervention services.
- High quality early education programs and services serving children birth to eight with continuous improvement under the Tiered Quality Ratings and Improvement System (TQRIS), where applicable. Programs and services with aligned standards, instruction, assessment, and supports as students/families transition from infant toddler programs into prekindergarten programs and from prekindergarten programs into kindergarten and beyond.
- A well educated and compensated workforce.
- Diverse funding mechanisms and delivery systems; integration and maximization of funding streams set at appropriate, sustainable levels.
- Increased participation, at an earlier point (i.e. before prekindergarten entry) by children and families with high needs, including those who are hard to reach, English language learners (ELL's), homeless, and disabled.

- Enhanced parent engagement, including multiple information channels that help parents identify high-quality service providers.
 - Community systems coordination and development.
 - Public awareness on the benefits of high quality early childhood programs and services and the ongoing work of the Early Learning Council, particularly amongst policy makers.
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OPERATING MISSION

The role of the Council has evolved in the time since the Council was created in statute nearly a decade ago. As a result of the strategic planning process, the Council developed an operating mission to guide the work of the Council.

The early childhood framework is based on the vision that every child entering kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed and eager to learn. We celebrate diversity and partnering with community stakeholders who value a bright future for all young children in Illinois. We are committed to universal access for all children birth to age eight, to high quality programs and services, prioritizing children with high needs and families that are hard to reach. When Illinois' vision is realized, we will see all young children's needs being met, including access to early childhood education, physical and mental health care, and family supports.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To establish a framework by which the work of the Early Learning Council can be assessed, the Council approved a set of guiding principles to direct the work of the committees and reflect the priorities and commitments of the Council as a whole.

We are committed to:

- Serving the hardest to reach children and families first and providing them access to the highest quality services.
 - Ensuring that resources are sufficiently allocated to provide high quality services for every age from birth to five.
 - All children entering school healthy and ready to learn.
 - A holistic approach to supporting the needs of families and children.
 - Ensuring that family engagement and partnership is integrated and embedded in all early childhood programs and services.
 - Striving for an early childhood system that is transparent and easily navigated and accessed by the families it is intended to serve.
 - Ensuring that all children have well educated and well compensated teachers.
 - Ensuring that the learning and care continuum from birth to third grade is aligned, allows for smooth and effective transitions, and reflects best practices.
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COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Alignment of Work Priorities and Creation of a New Committee Structure

The goal of reorganizing the Council was to create a more efficient, nimble structure that makes the best use of the resources of the early childhood community. Members of the Strategic Planning Team and Executive Committee decided to reduce the number of committees and consolidate their work in addition to creating more formal linkages to key partners such as related State agencies and advisory bodies as strategies for realizing this goal.

The Executive Committee began by identifying the top priorities of the Council within the framework of the defined guiding principles. These priorities formed the basis of the work areas for the reconstituted committees. The Executive Committee was re-envisioned as a more focused leadership team comprised of committee co-chairs and a small number of at-large members from the Council. The Executive Committee recommended and the Council approved the continuation of the Home Visiting Task Force and its revised subcommittee structure given the Task Force’s unique role as a strategic planning and advisory body for Illinois’ Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, funded through the Affordable Care Act. In addition to oversight of MIECHV planning and implementation the Task Force will continue to identify opportunities for integrating and aligning their work with that of the other four committees.

Early Learning Council Committees
 Program Standards and Quality
 System Integration and Alignment
 Data, Research, and Evaluation
 Family and Community Engagement
 Home Visiting Tasking

The Council Co-Chairs appointed two co-chairs to every committee as well as an agency liaison. This liaison will work to ensure stronger communication and alignment of efforts between the work of their respective committee and the priorities of state government. Each agency liaison also sits on the Intergovernmental Agency Team, which is a group of state government managers, led by the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development, who work to strengthen coordination within the state’s early childhood system.

Within each of the new committees, the Executive Committee worked to identify specific work priorities with the understanding that there is a great deal of cross-cutting work that could be housed under any or all of the new committees. The Executive Committee in their new capacity will work to ensure alignment and prevent overlap both within the Early Learning Council structure as well as between other similarly oriented advisory bodies.

The new committee work plans are attached to this report.





EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Council's Executive Committee is comprised of Council co-chairs, co-chairs from the five committees, and at-large members. The Executive Committee intentionally reduced its membership to allow for a more nimble, responsive

committee. The committee will play a greater role in ensuring coordination across the Council's committees and across related advisory bodies. The Executive Committee will also play a larger oversight role, monitoring the status of both the vision benchmarks and committee recommendations.

Role of the Executive Committee

1. Move action forward on broad early childhood strategic goals
2. Integrate committee work to ensure that there is no duplication within the Council and also within groups outside of the Council
3. Approve all formal recommendations prior to full Council action and develop strategies for implementation and monitoring
4. Review and track the progress of the Council benchmarks
5. Discuss and make recommendations on resource allocations in order to integrate and maximize resources.
6. Review and ensure alignment with the Council's guiding principles.
7. Develop a communication strategy that informs Council members, the working groups, and the broader public.
8. Design, implement and monitor Council's governance framework.
9. Provide input and support to fully implement KIDS.
10. Develop strategies for expanding the birth to 8 system
11. Make recommendations on the allocation of resources to support improvement of programs serving the most at-risk children to ensure they can deliver highest quality services
12. Build public awareness of benefits of high quality early learning programs and services.
13. Continue building policy-maker support and leadership for early childhood.
14. Research and make recommendations on adoption of a State definition of At-Risk applied to all programs
15. Coordinate efforts with ongoing planning entities

AD HOC COMMITTEE

As a result of strategic planning, the Executive Committee outlined a set of guiding principles and system components to inform efforts towards realizing a more unified early childhood system. To enable the Council to better track progress towards bringing about such a system, it was decided that a temporary committee would be created for the purposes of identifying key metrics and benchmarks.



The Executive Committee tasked the Ad Hoc Committee with the following responsibilities:

1. Develop a plan for a statewide early childhood system including child, family, program, and system outcomes, goals, measures/targets, action plans and monitoring tool. The plan will include benchmarks tied to child outcomes related to goals for increased program quality, increased access to programs and improved connections to community resources.
2. Create a companion document for external audiences that includes the framework for Illinois' vision for a statewide system of early childhood programs and services, including goals, strategies and measures of success based on child outcomes.

The Ad Hoc Committee is comprised of self-selected members of the Executive Committee representing a variety of perspectives including higher education, research and data, advocacy, service provision, and state government. Members are committed to thinking in more detail about the most meaningful ways to measure the impact of the Council's work on Illinois' early childhood system. In addition to the diverse expertise already at the table, the group also includes an author of Illinois' Early Learning Challenge application to ensure that the priorities of the State's proposal help to inform the Committee's work.

The Ad Hoc Committee began meeting on May 1, 2012 for preliminary discussions on the types of indicators that could serve as proxies for the system components laid out during strategic planning. The initial meeting yielded a set of indicators which the Committee identified as being representative of the system components. Subsequently, the group also outlined next steps for producing the agreed upon deliverables which included compiling information on indicators, metrics, and benchmarks used by other states. The selected indicators were:

- 1) High Needs Index
- 2) Access to High Quality Early Care & Education Programs for 0 – 3
- 3) Access to High Quality Early Care & Education Programs for 3 – 5
- 4) Health
- 5) Family & Community Engagement
- 6) School Readiness

During the Committee’s second meeting, which took place on May 17, 2012, the Committee began crafting names for these indicators in addition to discussing metrics which provide a measurable snapshot of these priority areas.

Indicator	Metric	Significance
Ready for Success	% of children 0 – 5 ready and prepared to succeed in Kindergarten & beyond	Factors included in this measure help predict readiness for academic success including family’s economic stability, child health, and safe home environment.
Access to High Quality Early Care & Education Programs for 0 - 3	% of children 0 – 3 in high quality early care & education settings	Studies show that infants & toddlers who have benefited from quality early childhood experience are more likely to not only do better in school but are also less likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, and chronically ill.
Access to High Quality Early Care & Education Programs for 3 - 5	% of children 3 – 5 in high quality early care & education settings	Data tells us that children who participate in quality early childhood programs prior to entering school are more likely to achieve academic success, attain economic independence, and even enjoy healthier lives.
Health	% of children 0 – 5 enrolled in Medicaid with a medical home	Consistent access to health care increases the likelihood that a child receives appropriate screenings, vaccinations, & preventative care, ensuring they are healthy & developing properly.
Coordinated Community Systems	% of children 0-5 in communities working together to support families with young children	To be sure that children are healthy & prepared to learn, communities must work together to meet the needs of their families including connecting them to supports like special education services, English language learner programs, & early learning centers.

Kindergarten Development	% of children meeting or exceeding State Kindergarten standards	The Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) tells us about the growth of a child's skills during the first year of school, offering early signs of strengths & areas where more support may be needed for the student to continue to thrive.
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In order to display this information in a concise and easily accessible format, a dashboard was constructed as one side of a single page document which could be distributed to external audiences including communities, providers, and policy makers for the purposes of communicating the priorities and progress of Illinois' early childhood system as well as the Appendix C: Illinois Early Childhood Dashboard

The reverse side of this document has not yet been developed but will feature information on the Council's vision, guiding principles, and system components presented in an easily accessible format which can be used as a tool for raising the visibility of the Council and the State's early childhood system.

In addition to this one page outreach document, the Committee intends to produce a more detailed report which will include discussion of the logic for selecting a specific metric as a proxy for an indicator, information on additional secondary indicators and associated metrics as well as data on sub-groups such as special needs children, English language learners, low income children, and racial groups metrics where available.

The third meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee was scheduled for May 25, 2012. Agenda items for this meeting included fine tuning the language and format of the dashboard, further discussion of metrics to be included in the dashboard, and identification of metrics for secondary indicators. Additional work to be undertaken by the Committee includes developing a framework for the Early Learning Council which incorporates broad level goals (guiding principles), objectives (system components) and strategies (committee work plans) for instituting the type of systems change outlined during the strategic planning process.

NEXT STEPS

The Council will complete committee transitions in July 2012. It will continue to move forward with examining its governance structure and further refining its communications strategy, linkages with other advisory groups and State agencies, and identifying system benchmarks.



Appendix A

STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY

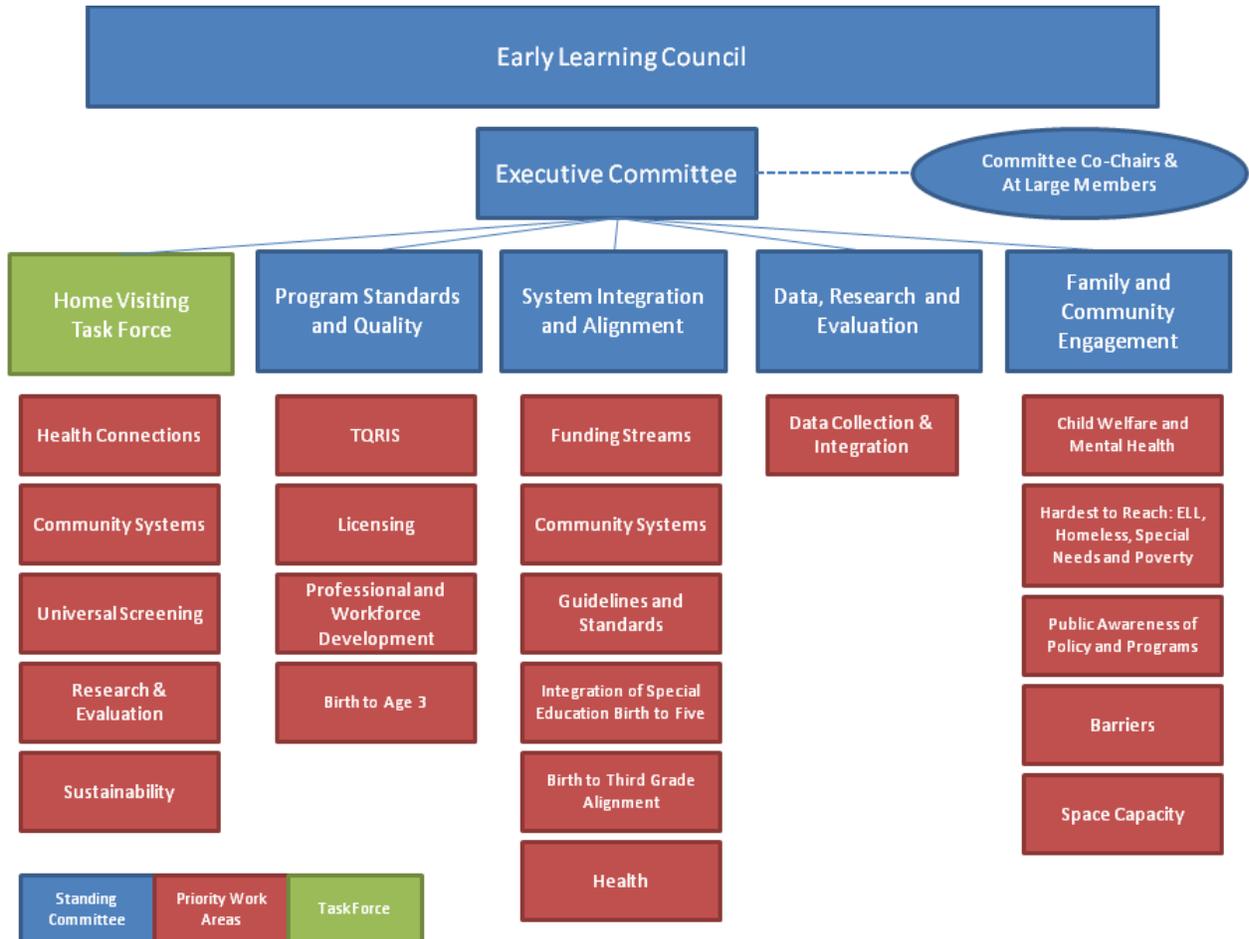
1. What is your affiliation with the Council
2. The definition of early childhood is evolving to include ages 0-8. What do you see as the best way to incorporate this perspective into the work of the Council?
3. One of the products that the Executive Committee hopes will be created through strategic planning is a blueprint that illustrates how the early childhood system could work in Illinois. For the questions below, we will refer to BUILDS's national model, which was developed by their Early Childhood Systems Working Group. BUILDS describes a comprehensive early childhood system as the integration of the following components children's health, mental health and nutrition; early care and education; family support and parenting programs; and services for children with special needs. What early childhood system components would you like to see as a part of a model for Illinois, and therefore within the scope of the Early Learning Council?
4. Using 10 points total, please allocate points to each system component based on how much Early Learning Council time or resources should be devoted to working on this area:
 - a. Children health, mental health, and nutrition
 - b. Early care and education
 - c. Family support and parenting programs
 - d. Services for children with special needs
 - e. Other
5. What are the critical questions that the Early Learning Council should be addressing?
6. Are there issues that should be taken off/left off the Early Learning Council agendas?
7. Comments
8. Which governance and membership policies would you like to see revisited?
9. List any stakeholder groups or organizations that you think have been underrepresented in the Early Learning Council.
10. The Office of Early Childhood Development plans to improve the Early Learning Council website. Please indicate your support for certain approaches.
11. How would you like to be alerted to early childhood news and web updates?
12. The people involved in the process usually are focused on broad goals, rather than individual agendas. [Agree or disagree]

13. The process is free of favoritism. [Agree or disagree]
14. Often decisions are made in advance and simply confirmed by the process. [Agree or disagree]
15. In the process, everyone has an equal opportunity to influence decisions. [Agree or disagree]
16. The process gives some people more than they deserve, while shortchanging others. [Agree or disagree]
17. The process responds fairly to the needs of its members. [Agree or disagree]
18. Decisions made in the process are based on fair criteria. [Agree or disagree]
19. In the process, some people's "merits" are taken for granted while other people are asked to justify themselves. [Agree or disagree]
20. In the process, strings are being pulled from outside, which influence important decisions. [Agree or disagree]
21. The allocation of resources is decided fairly. For this question consider the following as ELC 'resources'- funding for staffing organizations, State Advisory Council funding for activities/grants, Federal funding for Home Visiting infrastructure, services and evaluation. [Agree or disagree]
22. The criteria for allocations are fairly applied. For this question consider the following as ELC 'resources'- funding for staffing organizations, State Advisory Council funding for activities/grants, Federal funding for Home Visiting infrastructure, services and evaluation. [Agree or disagree]
23. In the process there is sufficient opportunity to challenge decisions. [Agree or disagree]
24. In discussions about decisions or procedures, some people are discounted because of the organizations they represent. [Agree or disagree]
25. The decisions made in the process are consistent. [Agree or disagree]
26. Decisions are based on accurate information. [Agree or disagree]
27. Is it important for the Early Learning Council to build leadership skills? [Agree or disagree]
28. How important is it for the ELC to build leadership skills of: Council Members, Committee Members, A small group of early-career individuals with leadership potential
29. Do you feel that the Council's cross-program knowledge is broad/deep enough, or should we be doing more to develop members' understanding of key components in an early childhood system?
30. Would you participate in brief conference calls or webinars on key topics?
31. Early Childhood and Poverty- What is the relationship between poverty and early childhood systems and services? [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
32. Children's Budget in Illinois- What do we spend and who is served by the state' programs for children and families. [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]

33. Quality improvement and infrastructure, i.e. Gateways to Opportunity and IL's professional development system. NAEYC Professional Development Project, quality improvement strategies, CCDBG quality initiatives, IL Birth to Five Evaluation. [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
34. State and Federally funded programs to strengthen and support families and communities. [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
35. Federal government initiatives related to Early Childhood Systems Building. [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
36. Major Federal and/or State Programs providing services to children and families. [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
37. Birth to Eight Issues- e.g. standards, transitions, kindergarten readiness, alignment, and children's development [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
38. State Data Systems- e.g. ISBE Longitudinal Data Project, Human Services data Framework Project, CHIPRA, and other state agency databases. [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
39. Hot Topics in Research-e.g. Impact of toxic stress on children's brain development, trauma-informed practice, relationship of intensity/duration of high quality EC programs and child outcomes, dual language learners, bilingual education, health and wellness, children's social-emotional development and mental health, professional development, partnership with parents, parent decision-making. [Your knowledge: low/high, Interest in further discussion or information: low/high]
40. Other-Please Specify

Appendix B

EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE



Appendix C

ILLINOIS EARLY CHILDHOOD DASHBOARD



Illinois Early Childhood Dashboard

2012 %
Change from Last Year

<p>Safe & Supportive Environment</p>	<p>% of children 0 – 5 in safe, stable, and supportive environments</p> <p>Factors included in this measure such as family's economic stability, child health, and safe home environment help us understand a child's readiness for success.</p>	<p>High Need Index Coming Soon!</p>	<p>↑</p>
<p>Access for Infants and Toddlers</p>	<p>% of children 0 – 3 in high quality early care & education settings</p> <p>Studies show that infants & toddlers who have benefited from quality early childhood experience are more likely to not only do better in school but are also less likely to be unemployed, incarcerated, and chronically ill.</p>	<p>Number</p>	<p>↓</p>
<p>Access for 3-5 Year Olds</p>	<p>% of children 4 – 5 in high quality early care & education settings</p> <p>Data tells us that children who participate in quality early childhood programs prior to entering school are more likely to achieve academic success, attain economic independence, and even enjoy healthier lives.</p>	<p>Number</p>	<p>↓</p>
<p>Coordinated Community Systems</p>	<p>% of children 0-5 in communities working together to support families with young children</p> <p>To ensure that children are healthy & prepared to learn, communities must work together to meet the needs of their families including connecting them to supports like special education services, English language learner programs, & early learning centers.</p>	<p>Coordinated Community Systems Index Coming Soon!</p>	<p>↑</p>
<p>Health</p>	<p>% of children 0 – 5 enrolled in Medicaid with a high quality medical home</p> <p>Consistent access to health care increases the likelihood that a child receives appropriate screenings, vaccinations, & preventative care, to be sure they are healthy & developing properly.</p>	<p>Number</p>	<p>↔</p>
<p>Kindergarten Growth</p>	<p>% of kindergarteners developing on track for academic success</p> <p>The Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) is an assessment of the growth in a child's skills during the first year of school, offering an early indicator of individual strengths & areas where additional support may be needed.</p>	<p>KIDS coming soon!</p>	<p>↑</p>