

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

Illinois believes that a high-quality, intentionally aligned education system from birth to third grade is essential for the success of the State's highest-need children and is committed to ensure a high-quality, comprehensive system of teaching, learning, and support for children from birth through third grade. In order to more effectively serve Illinois children and families, the State is aligning and transforming state and local systems to assure collective impact across service sectors.

What does the B-3 program intend to achieve?

The mission of B-3 state supports is to strengthen Preschool Expansion communities' ability to develop a high quality, intentionally aligned education system from birth through third grade. This is accomplished through one or more B-3 approaches led by a team of community stakeholders.

What are the goals of the B-3 program?

B-3 state supports include the following approaches to ensure birth through third grade alignment:

1. **Curriculum alignment** between the early childhood programs and the elementary schools to which children will transition, including **joint professional development** opportunities for teachers
2. High level of **parent engagement** activities sustained in the early elementary years
3. **Assessment** of children using the KIDS and sharing of assessment data across the age continuum among partnering programs

The State will support Preschool Expansion communities to successfully implement these strategies so that children and families are well-prepared for kindergarten, successfully transition to full-day kindergarten, and are able to sustain gains made in preschool through the third grade year.

What is meant by "B-3 work?"

The following areas comprise an aligned B-3 continuum:

1. **Family engagement:** 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
2. **Transitions:** increased access to early childhood programs and smooth transitions that focus on the continuum provided to each child and sustain gains into the early grades
3. **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
4. **Professional development:** to ensure highly-effective teaching staff whose professional development is aligned from birth through third grade and is grounded in child development and effective instructional practices
5. **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
6. **Assessments:** sharing assessment practices and data across the full early childhood continuum with particular focus on the implementation of the KIDS

7. **Comprehensive services:** including assistance in obtaining health, mental health and dental services, nutrition services and education, and linkages to other community services
8. **Community partnerships:** to strengthen education, supports and services for children and families from early childhood programs into early elementary settings

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

What kind of support can we expect?

The Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) partner with the Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University (ISU) to develop state supports for B-3 efforts, create useful and practical tools and opportunities to support communities in the creation of an aligned B-3 education continuum, including:

- **Technical assistance:** individualized support to communities in their planning and implementation of strategies to ensure B-3 alignment
- **Site visits,** regional exchanges and planning sessions to document work underway, successes and challenges
- **Webinars** on topics relevant to multiple districts and sharing current research and resources
- **B-3 Institutes:** intensive, three-day learning with experts, facilitated conversations for planning, and sharing work with other communities

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. There is no point in moving forward with a smaller group of partners who already collaborate well together. 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 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.

What if we are already doing a lot of B-3 work?

The ultimate goal of this program is to support communities towards achieving their goals for B-3 alignment. The State's supports to communities will build on a foundation of existing work taking place in the community through technical assistance and resources, including needs assessments, asset mapping, logic models and planning to support these efforts. Community groups that are further along in their B-3 planning may be showcased for their best practices and asked to serve as a resource for others that may just be starting out.

For more information, please contact Elizabeth Rothkopf, B-3 Director, erothko@ilstu.edu