



Birth-to-College

COLLABORATIVE TOOLKIT

What is birth-to-college alignment? How do school and program leaders get started?

Action Plan for Implementation for School and Program Leaders: Exploration and Adoption

HOW TO USE THE ACTION PLAN

An action plan accompanies each Birth-to-College (BTC) Implementation Guide for school and program leaders. This tool is intended to provide a place to document your school's process of exploring, installing, and implementing birth through 3rd grade alignment. Ideally, this tool is to be used in a group setting such as an alignment leadership team meeting. To use the action plan, first identify up to five (5) priorities out of the key decisions and strategies for implementation listed below for which you and your colleagues would like to focus. Once you have identified priorities, follow the instructions on page 6 for completing the action plan.

KEY DECISIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- **Inform Yourself:** Inform yourself about alignment (i.e., what it is and what it could be) through readings, videos and examples of the current evidence base (i.e., places where alignment is working). For relevant examples, please refer to the "For More on This Subject" section at the end of the guide for school and program leaders entitled "What is birth-to-college alignment? How do school and program leaders get started?" and the "References" section of the BTC Collaborative Toolkit.
- **Establish an Internal Alignment Leadership Team:** This team would be comprised of individuals within your own school/program. An existing group can also be used for this purpose, given that there are mechanisms in place for feedback and communication by all relevant stakeholders. Participants should ideally include: (1) high level administrators and mid-level management, (2) instructional leaders (e.g., coaches, curriculum specialists, educational coordinators), and (3) family support/engagement leaders. If possible, nominate some direct service staff and parents as representatives on the team. This team will be charged with exploring and discussing the advantages and drawbacks, and eventually successes and challenges of pursuing a BTC-aligned approach.

NOTES:

- **Explore Possibilities:** Begin discussions about the “why” and “how” of alignment. Two distinct yet complementary sets of discussions should occur:
 - Internal discussions among the members of your alignment team, using some of the following guiding questions:
 - Why might alignment be important to our students, our families, our teachers, and our family-support staff?
 - How will alignment make our school stronger?
 - How will alignment enhance our ability to ensure better outcomes for our children and families?
 - External discussions with potential partners to explore and begin defining the purpose and desired results of any kind of alignment efforts, using some of the following guiding questions:
 - How will alignment make our set of schools or organizations stronger?
 - How will an aligned system of schools and programs contribute to better outcomes for our children and families, above and beyond the individual efforts of each school?
 - What categories of effort or buckets might be appropriate for initial alignment efforts? Where is there significant overlap?
 - These discussions can occur sequentially (internal then external) or simultaneously depending on your needs. However, some external discussion must occur for progression to ensue.

- **Understand the Bigger Picture:** Understand the needs of your community. This will help you not only identify potential partners, but will also help in determining fit and compatibility between organizational entities.
 - Determine the needs of the individuals you are serving. For example, you might explore questions such as:
 - What is the median income in your community?
 - What is the rate of poverty, homelessness, unemployment?
 - How many individuals have or are at risk for disabilities or developmental delays?
 - What resources are in place for these individuals?
 - What are the racial, ethnic, and linguistic characteristics of the children and families served?
 - Define your community’s educational context.
 - For early childhood programs, you might explore questions such as:
 - What types of early learning opportunities are available?
 - How are these opportunities funded?
 - What are your criteria for eligibility and enrollment?
 - How many children attend early learning programs?
 - What are the elementary schools to which your students will be matriculating?
 - Is there one school or multiple school choices?
 - For elementary schools, you might explore questions such as:
 - Where are your kindergarteners coming from?
 - What kinds of early learning and education experiences are they having?
 - Home with relative
 - Home-based, non-relative care provider

- Community-based center
- School-based programming
- What are your criteria for eligibility and enrollment?
- Continue this exploration for later grades as needed. For example, does the elementary school have a feeder middle school/junior high school?

NOTES:

- **Identify Partners:** Based on these needs, identify potential partners. Determine if your alignment efforts will focus solely on educational settings or if there are other potential partners besides schools. For example, community organizations with a potential stake in the alignment process could include:
 - Social service agencies
 - Housing communities
 - Health- and mental-health-care providers
 - Libraries
 - Museums and cultural centers
- **Assess Compatibility:** Gather data and determine how it will be used to assess compatibility (i.e., fit between potential partners). For example, potential partners should ideally demonstrate the following:
 - Organizational readiness
 - Acknowledgment that there is room for improvement
 - Commitment and capacity to undertake the task
 - Ability and willingness to undertake an effort of this scope
 - Cultural readiness
 - Recognition that school, program, and organizational cultures have evolved independently of one another over time. The ECE and K–12 worlds have each developed their own ways of working with children and families, as well as their own expectations around children’s learning and development.
 - Dedication to reculturation as part of the alignment process
 - In order to develop an aligned BTC culture, both worlds need to come together with the understanding that there will need to be some give and take and, more than likely, some growing pains. Peoples’ day-to-day endeavors will look different, yet the results of alignment efforts will be beneficial and worthwhile.
 - Potential partners must have a positive organizational climate and characteristics that make them high functioning and ready for change and improvement.
 - Emphasis on positive social relationships among stakeholders including, but not limited to, administrators, teachers, children, and families.

- Additionally, when assessing compatibility of potential partner organizations consider the following questions:
 - Do potential partners share similar pedagogical approaches to interactions, learning, and instruction?
 - Do potential partners share similar expectations for children’s learning and development, including trajectories and benchmarks at certain ages/grades?
 - Do potential partners share a similar philosophy and approach around partnering with and engaging families?

NOTES:

- **Vet Alignment Plans With Stakeholders:** Build awareness with key stakeholders by sharing the research behind and information about current efforts underway with alignment (e.g., mostly pre-k–3rd but also BTC). It is crucial for these individuals to get a flavor for what alignment is before deciding whether to proceed.
- **Prepare for Challenges:** Ensure that each organization acknowledges the potential challenges/reservations and benefits of alignment work. For example, the ECE and K–12 systems have sometimes been reluctant to work as partners to realize shared purposes that would benefit young children because:
 - Early childhood development professionals have worried about the risks of extending testing and highly structured, more-didactic, upper-level academic instructional approaches into programs for younger children in ways that would be considered developmentally inappropriate.
 - K–12 professionals have been concerned that too many children, especially those from families with low incomes, enter the K–12 system unfairly disadvantaged because their language, cognitive, emotional and social skills are not yet adequately developed to ensure success in the American school system.

NOTES:

- **Share Information:** Have conversations with families early on about the benefits of having a line of sight from birth through college when it comes to their child’s education. When families have been familiarized with the concept of alignment and how it is a powerful catalyst for change in education, it is crucial to converse with parents and other relevant family members about what

they would like to see in an aligned BTC continuum. Relevant topics include:

- How they would like to see their children’s learning and development advanced
- The types of opportunities they would like for their children
- How they experience the enrollment process and other transitions at your school/program and at other schools
- What they would like in terms of opportunities for family engagement

NOTES:

- **Increase Understanding:** Have conversations with teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, social workers, school psychologists, family-support specialists, and other related support staff about their understanding of alignment. Understanding how alignment can benefit the children and families they serve will help establish common goals and common language across organizations.

NOTES:

- **Examine and Accumulate Resources:** Explore possibilities for funding and resources for BTC-alignment implementation.
 - Identify all available options to support alignment, such as public funding streams (federal, state, local) that support professional development, public or private grants to apply for, and/or reallocate time or other resources.
 - Take a critical look at the programs, initiatives, and/or interventions being implemented in your school/program. Based on your school-improvement goals, determine if there are less-successful programs that could be phased out, and reallocate time and resources to BTC-alignment implementation.

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PRIORITY #__:				
ACTIVITIES RELATED TO PRIORITY #__				
ACTIVITY #__				
Tasks (list creation of "products" or "what to do" to meet activity/outcome)	Who (list all staff involved and lead)	By When	Supports/Resources Needed	Next Steps