



# Birth-to-College

## COLLABORATIVE TOOLKIT

## How do school and program leaders jointly establish a vision, goals, outcomes, and processes for birth-to-college alignment?

### Action Plan for Implementation for School and Program Leaders: Installation

#### 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 5 for completing the action plan.

#### KEY DECISIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- **Establish a BTC Alignment Leadership Team:** This cross-organizational team will build the foundation upon which the whole BTC structure rests. Determine the individuals who need to be involved from the beginning during these decision-making and partnership-building phases. Key players should be a representative mix of administrators, directors, program leaders, faculty, and staff from the respective partners with equal representation from each organization. Even if these individuals cannot be physically present, they are still stakeholders and their opinions, ideas, beliefs, and recommendations are still valuable and should be sought out and incorporated into meetings. Ultimately, systems for bi-directional feedback for other stakeholders who may not be regular participants in these meetings should be established.
- **Ensure Commitment From Leadership:** Success is contingent upon endurance. Leaders can expect to allot a significant number of hours—which will vary depending upon the specific alignment areas and goals you choose for your schools—to thinking through the practicalities and logistics of aligning standards and best practices across two or more organizations. This is especially important in the earliest stages of implementation. Once alignment is further along, leaders may be able to transition from active involvement to progress monitoring.

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- **Relational Trust:** Plan to meet with partner organizations monthly for at least a year to build trust through sharing. For example, leaders should work on finding commonalities across their schools/ programs by providing partnership members with an orientation around the philosophies, structures, and practices of each school or program. Alternatively, trust may be built by identifying and respectfully working through potential roadblocks to alignment (e.g., determining if there are any areas that will not align within each respective school/program).
- **Take Stock of Pre-existing Structures and Processes:** Determine how what you are trying to build can honor, support, and inform systems that are already in place, especially around staff professional collaboration and continuous improvement. It is important to note that this is not a “new” initiative. Rather, it is about advancing and aligning the work of teaching children and supporting and engaging families.
- **Seek Guidance:** Consider hiring an expert group facilitator who is not engaged with the partnership to provide support at key points in time. This individual would be charged with guiding the processes of building a solid foundation and creating a mission and vision, as well as aiding in the development of relational trust amongst the partners.

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- **Define Mission and Vision Statements For Your Partnership:** Your alignment leadership team will be responsible for developing a shared mission and vision for your partnership that will ultimately be vetted with all relevant stakeholders. Mission and vision statements are important because they “situate [the] practical, technical aspects of the work in large-scale, long-term goals that emerge from common ground and extensive discussion between...organizations”
- **Decide What to Align:** Alignment can take myriad forms. Yet, planning, implementing, and evaluating activities around alignment should be informed by the framework, created by Kauerz and Coffman, consisting of eight “categories of effort,” or “buckets”. These categories deemed “essential to high quality and comprehensive Pre-K to 3rd grade approaches”, include: (1) cross-sector work, (2) effective leadership, (3) staff effectiveness through intentional interactions and instructional practices supported by collaborative, embedded professional development, (4) exploration of standards, curriculum, and learning objectives, (5) supportive learning environment, (6) use of assessment and data-drive continuous improvement, (7) family support and engagement practices, and (8) continuity and pathways.
- **Create a Strategic Plan:** Such a plan should aim to lay out the long-term priorities of alignment; specifically, the ‘categories of effort’ or ‘buckets’ that respective partners have agreed to tackle.

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- **Set Concrete Goals:** Construct a detailed work plan for setting concrete goals within each “category of effort,” where goals are set using the SMART criteria: (1) Specific, (2) Measurable, (3) Attainable, (4) Relevant, (5) Time-bound. Each goal area should have its own action plan that outlines not only the resources necessary to achieving that goal and the action steps or strategies for making progress, but also realistic timelines for achievement. Moreover, leaders should collaboratively determine measurable outcomes for tracking progress made toward each goal for each area of alignment. Monitoring the completion of these actions within the allotted timelines will help you to track where you are in your BTC alignment efforts.
- **Start Small:** Plan on focusing on only one or two “categories of effort” over the course of the first year or two. Alignment is a large undertaking. Administrators, teachers, family support specialists, and direct service staff are already busy fulfilling their primary responsibilities within a school or program. Therefore, alignment efforts are best served through careful consideration and meticulous planning that will ensure initial success. Schools and programs may also ease into this process by choosing “categories of effort” that relate to areas where there may already be significant overlap among organizations.

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- **Plan Communications:** Develop a plan for dynamic communication and information sharing across schools: Consider the benefits of the following: (1) web-based project management tool(s), (2) monthly newsletters, (3) shared calendars, and (4) email blasts. While communities of practice may also support communication through information sharing, it is important to note that this is secondary to the main purpose of such meetings, which is to provide a forum for professional development and learning.
- **Schedule Joint Work Time:** A cross-organizational BTC Alignment Leadership Team would benefit from regularly scheduled joint work time to frequently revisit and modify goals. However, finding times to meet can be a challenge due to the differences in calendars and timelines between ECE and K-12. Be willing to think creatively. Examples may include: (1) ‘brown bag’ meetings once per month at lunch time, (2) professional development time (e.g. times when staff are on-site, but students and families are not), (3) meetings on early release or early close days, and (4) the incorporation of technologies such as videotaped presentations or Skype calls. Lastly, consider dividing up the responsibility of hosting in-person joint work time, so that one organization is not unduly burdened by continually accommodating events and meetings.

- **Delegate Responsibilities:** There are innumerable aspects to successful alignment, each requiring time and attention. Consider forming sub-committees, task teams, or work groups to accomplish work plans and action steps to make progress towards goals. This will help keep the work of alignment moving forward in a timely fashion.

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- **Encourage Cross-Pollination:** Consider cultivating strategies that will encourage cross-pollination of beliefs, approaches, and practices that could readily lend themselves to potential “buckets” for alignment, with the added benefit of developing mutual respect and understanding. Example strategies include: (1) inviting partner organizations to participate in your existing professional development activities, (2) providing opportunities for observations of classrooms, instructional approaches, and/or family events, as well as for staff to talk with one another, (3) jointly contemplating how current classroom practices impact student outcomes by examining student data, and (4) fostering opportunities for conversation across the spectrum of individuals (i.e., teachers and staff) comprising the birth-to-3rd range in terms of both age and grade level.
- **Stay Positive:** Don't get overly discouraged if progress is slow as this is complex work. If needed, chunk large goals into smaller, more accomplishable steps and set feasible timelines and expectations for alignment progress. The National Implementation Research Network has found that 2–4 years are generally needed to achieve full implementation.
- **Seek Feedback:** Regularly gather feedback on the progress you are making from administrators, teachers, and staff, who are serving as members of alignment teams. In the event that these individuals cannot be physically present for meetings, actively seek out opinions, ideas, beliefs, and recommendations. Moreover, incorporate this information into any and all meetings. Input from all relevant stakeholders is valuable and should be treated as such.
- **Engage Parents:** Get early input and buy-in from parents whose children would be involved on either the ECE or K–12 end of the partnership. Also, consider providing parents with a collaborative forum for discussion around what alignment is and how it will impact their children and families.

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**ACTION PLAN**

From the list of Key Decisions and Strategies for Implementation, identify no more than 5 priorities, for which you and your colleagues would like to focus using the template below. For each priority, write in activities related to the priority, what types of tasks are related to the activity, who will be involved in the activity, when the activity will be completed, what supports and resources are needed to complete the activity, and next steps. Print action plans to organize and document priorities and activities as needed.

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