



Birth-to-College

COLLABORATIVE TOOLKIT

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

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

- Strengthen Relational Trust:** Open, honest communication is the cornerstone of any trusting partnership. In the previous guide, 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.

NOTES:

- **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).

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- **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.

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- **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.

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- **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).

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- **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.

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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