



# Partner ★ Plan ★ Act

an Illinois Action for Children Community Systems Development Initiative

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## The Power of Community Collaborations:

A Journey to Improve Early Childhood Systems for Children and Families

Celebrating  
**50** illinois  
action for  
children  
— 1969–2019 —

# A Letter from CS3 Director, Grace Araya

Greetings,

Dec 11, 2019

It has been said that systems change is about shifting the conditions that are holding a problem in place. As a state, as organizations, and as individuals, it is essential that we recognize the persistent problems that result when certain children, most often children of color, get left behind. Acknowledging how systems were created and continue to perpetuate inequities is the first step in creating real and lasting systems change.

Only once we understand the issues we face are we then able to act. To improve outcomes for children and families, particularly those most marginalized, we must partner together across systems, plan strategically alongside those most impacted, and act with urgency and resolve.

Systems change work is not for the faint of heart. It is difficult and requires fierce commitment and significant collaboration. It also requires individuals and organizations to prioritize the needs of the community above their own. Illinois Action for Children's CS3 team recognizes this and created its framework to engage a diverse collaboration leadership team, rather than a single person, and that empowers communities to continue this work long after their participation in the Collaboration Institute concludes.

It has been my profound pleasure to watch collaborations and their leadership teams rise to the occasion and tackle challenging community issues in innovative ways. I am thankful to everyone who committed themselves so fully to the inaugural cohort of the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute. Thank you for your time, your tenacity, and your unwavering support for strengthening the Illinois early childhood system. Together, we can change outcomes for children and families.

In Gratitude,

Grace Araya



Director, Community Systems Statewide Supports  
Illinois Action for Children



## Table of Contents

|    |   |    |   |
|----|---|----|---|
| 03 | Collaboration Institute Overview              | 08 | Champaign County<br>Home Visitor Consortium           |
| 04 | Collaboration Strategy Snapshots              | 10 | DeKalb County<br>Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative |
| 06 | Altgeld Riverdale<br>Early Learning Coalition | 12 | Skokie-Morton Grove<br>Early Childhood Alliance       |

# What is the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute?

The Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute (PPACI) is a year-long program of Illinois Action for Children's Community Systems Statewide Supports (CS3) project that provides in-depth support for early childhood collaborations to strengthen their early childhood systems. Launched in January 2019, the project is funded by the Illinois State Board of Education, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Early Childhood.

The Collaboration Institute ensures that communities are working to help children birth-through-five—especially those from low-income families or families with multiple needs—enter kindergarten healthy, safe, ready to succeed, and eager to learn. Depending on a collaboration's capacity and readiness to engage in systems-change work, one of three levels of targeted supports are offered—developing, advancing, or thriving.

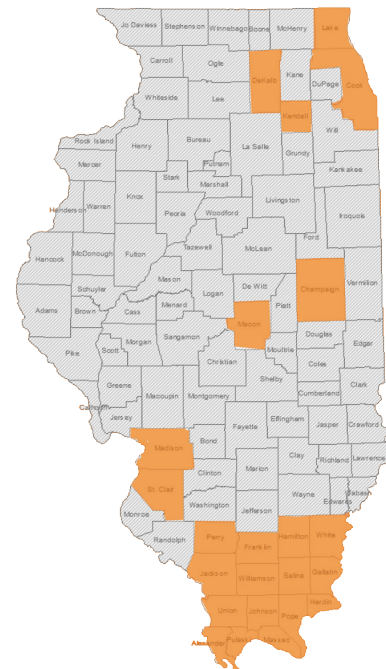
There are three levels of supports available to collaborations in the Institute:

- **Level 1 Supports (Developing):** Collaboration receives at least 24 hours of monthly coaching around a menu of services including: facilitation skills, member roles and responsibilities, governance structures, engaging diverse stakeholders, understanding Priority Populations, fine-tuning a shared agenda, using data, and action learning.
- **Level 2 Supports (Advancing):** Collaboration progresses through four in-person trainings (24 hours) and receives a minimum of 24 hours of monthly coaching for the year. The training topics include: Community Assessment and Targeted Problem Identification, Systems Scan and Root Cause Analysis, Strategy Design, and Implementation and Action Learning.
- **Level 3 Supports (Thriving):** Collaboration receives at least 24 hours of monthly coaching focused on systems change and systems building strategies, including: increasing the supply and accessibility of quality early learning services, integrating and aligning practices across systems, and focusing on Priority Populations—all through an equity-embedded lens and family and community-centered practices.

## 2019 Collaboration Institute Participants:

The inaugural Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute cohort consisted of collaborations from across the state of Illinois with different strengths, strategies, and stakeholders:

- Altgeld Riverdale Early Learning Coalition
- Champaign County Home Visitor Consortium
- DeKalb County Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative
- Early Childhood Alliance (Skokie-Morton Grove)
- Early Childhood Coalition of Lake County
- Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership
- Macon County Early Childhood Collaboration
- Palatine Early Learning Alliance
- Plano Area Alliance Supporting Student Success
- Southern Illinois Coalition for Children & Families



14 Lake County

Early Childhood Coalition

16 Greater East St. Louis

Early Learning Partnership

18 Macon County

Early Childhood Collaboration

20 Palatine

Early Learning Alliance

22 Plano

Area Alliance Supporting Student Success

24 Southern Illinois

Coalition for Children & Families

26 Meet the Team

| <b>Collaboration/Level of Support</b>  | <b>Goal(s) for Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute</b>  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Altgeld-Riverdale<br/>Early Learning Coalition</b></p> <p>Support Level: Advancing</p>           | <p>To increase capacity for systems change leadership at the local level</p>   |
| <p><b>Champaign County<br/>Home Visitor Consortium</b></p> <p>Support Level: Developing</p>            | <p>To build an effective governance structure and create systems-level change that increases enrollment in home visiting programs</p>        |
| <p><b>DeKalb County<br/>Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative</b></p> <p>Support Level: Advancing</p>   | <p>To increase capacity for systems change leadership at the local level</p>   |
| <p><b>Early Childhood Alliance<br/>(Skokie-Morton Grove)</b></p> <p>Support Level: Developing</p>      | <p>To strengthen the collaborations leadership, governing, and decision-making processes to enable members to be strategic and effective</p> |
| <p><b>Lake County<br/>Early Childhood Coalition</b></p> <p>Support Level: Developing</p>               | <p>To increase capacity for systems change leadership at the local level</p>   |
| <p><b>Greater East St. Louis<br/>Early Learning Partnership</b></p> <p>Support Level: Thriving</p>     | <p>To increase capacity for systems change leadership at the local level and build an effective governance structure</p>                     |
| <p><b>Macon County<br/>Early Childhood Collaboration</b></p> <p>Support Level: Developing</p>          | <p>To build an effective governance structure and to create systems-level change that increases enrollment in early learning programs</p>    |
| <p><b>Palatine<br/>Early Learning Alliance</b></p> <p>Support Level: Advancing</p>                     | <p>To create systems-level change that increases enrollment in early learning programs</p>   |
| <p><b>Plano Area Alliance<br/>Supporting Student Success</b></p> <p>Support Level: Developing</p>      | <p>To strengthen the collaborations leadership, governing, and decision-making processes to enable members to be strategic and effective</p> |
| <p><b>Southern Illinois<br/>Coalition for Children and Families</b></p> <p>Support Level: Thriving</p> | <p>To build collaborative knowledge on community systems development</p>   |

| Community Systems Strategy and Approach  | Results   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Implemented community needs assessment utilizing a racial equity approach</li> <li>» Identified a targeted problem and examined system conditions contributing to the problem</li> <li>» Developed a plan to address the lack of kindergarten-readiness by increasing the number of developmental screenings in the community</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Increased member and community residents engagement by including them in designing and co-leading collaborative meetings</li> <li>» Made community residents an integral part of the decision-making processes</li> <li>» Designed an Early Intervention family awareness campaign in partnership with health care providers, WIC, and Birth Through Five early learning programs</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Deepened knowledge of community assets as well as each home visiting program in the county</li> <li>» Identified member roles and responsibilities</li> <li>» Formalized and updated Memorandum of Understanding detailing goals, objectives, procedures, and expectations of each member organization</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Created an innovative, non-staffed, Coordinated Intake initiative, assuring there is “no wrong door” for families to access home visiting</li> <li>» Provided home visiting staff regular support and professional development</li> <li>» Held a community-wide developmental screening event for the first time</li> <li>» Developed a referral process to connect more families to Early Intervention services</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Refined their vision, mission, and goals</li> <li>» Conducted a community assessment</li> <li>» Facilitated a consensus workshop to identify barriers and root causes for why children in their community were not ready for kindergarten</li> <li>» Partnered with local Chamber of Commerce in community saturation efforts for Basics DeKalb County</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Implemented a range of community engagement and saturation strategies focused on building an awareness of the importance of early learning to support kindergarten-readiness</li> <li>» Developed local champions at the Chamber of Commerce called Chamber Champions who are messengers and advocates for Basics DeKalb County</li> <li>» Built a sustainability plan for funding and support</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Honed leadership skills and capacity-building skills through facilitation, consensus-building, and developing action plans</li> <li>» Developed mission and vision and defined roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Established a charter</li> <li>» Received more than 20 endorsements from the community with their newly established charter</li> <li>» Deepened commitment with partners as evidenced by several member organizations committing to seek additional resources to support the collaboration</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Produced maps that provided snapshots of county-wide and town-specific needs of young children and their families</li> <li>» Implemented a survey to providers to learn about their needs to further inform the Coalition’s community systems change strategy</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Increased the number of new members and sectors represented on its board to include early childhood mental health, the local public health department, Early Intervention services, and Head Start services</li> <li>» Developing a video portraying a day in a quality childcare setting to be used for advocacy and educational purposes</li> <li>» Updated the brochure with all the community services the Coalition and its partners offer to increase community awareness of services available</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Designed a new member engagement strategy to reach and engage more community stakeholders</li> <li>» Assessed functioning and developed a sustainability plan</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Convened a fall gathering that generated commitments from families with young children and leaders from various sectors including several new partners</li> <li>» Developed a Resource Alignment and Development Plan to track in-kind investments of members and guide future resource generation efforts</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Developed a decision making process</li> <li>» Defined group norms, roles, and responsibilities</li> <li>» Implemented a process for analyzing coordinated intake and referral data to understand patterns and plan for improvement</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Created a charter and defined operating procedures</li> <li>» Developed a Coordinated Intake Handbook that will help Coordinated Intake staff to enhance their referral process</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Completed a community needs assessment</li> <li>» Engaged diverse stakeholders in a consensus workshop to identify the root causes for the lack of access to early learning services</li> <li>» Conducted a survey on child care needs that received close to 400 parent responses</li> <li>» Consolidated available child care information on a website to inform families about their childcare options in their community</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Deepened understanding of community systems development</li> <li>» Developed facilitation skills and improved data analysis skills</li> <li>» Designed strategies to increase access to early learning services in their community</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Clarified their mission, vision and goals</li> <li>» Strategized on how to engage diverse stakeholders in their community</li> <li>» Analyzed community level data</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Completed and improved their equity infused charter agreement</li> <li>» Increased and diversified their leadership team and increased their number of partner organizations</li> <li>» Featured in a video on Illinois State Board of Education’s website for Plano’s play-based kindergarten classroom</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Implemented an equity assessment</li> <li>» Identified local early childhood data that needs to be disaggregated by race and ethnicity</li> <li>» Assessed resources and developed a resource plan</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Secured \$25,000 grant to implement collective impact trainings from Tamarack Institute</li> <li>» Partnered with Applied Research Consulting from Southern Illinois University to compile local disaggregated data by race and ethnicity</li> <li>» Developed a multi-year resource development plan to support growth</li> </ul>   |

# Altgeld- Riverdale Early Learning Coalition



The Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition (ARELC) is a diverse network of member organizations with the mission of building a comprehensive community infrastructure that will ensure all children in the Altgeld-Riverdale community are on track to succeed by third grade academically, physically, socially, and emotionally.

On the southeastern edge of Chicago, Altgeld-Riverdale is home to about 7,000 people, 95 percent of whom are African American, and 50 percent are under the age of 18 years old. The community mainly comprises of Altgeld Gardens, a public housing development, and 4 surrounding low-income developments.

## APPROACH

### Supports Received: Advancing

The ARELC applied for Advancing Supports to receive the community systems training and coaching for their leadership team. Through the Collaboration Institute, the ARELC:

- Completed a community needs assessment to review their strengths and opportunities for growth utilizing a racial equity approach to assess their collaborative competencies and operations.
- Utilized newly learned facilitation methods to collectively identify the lack of kindergarten-readiness as their community problem.
- Compiled and analyzed community level data to understand the systems conditions further and discovered that children are not receiving needed Early Intervention services because they are not being screened for developmental delays.
- Conducted a root cause analysis that revealed that children are not getting screened because families are not aware about the importance of developmental screenings.



### Ruby Flores, Coach:

"The Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition team is committed to asking the tough questions that can help propel their community forward. Their love for—and knowledge of—their community is evident in all they do. It was a privilege to work with such an interesting and funny group, and I will miss our loud Starbucks meetings!"



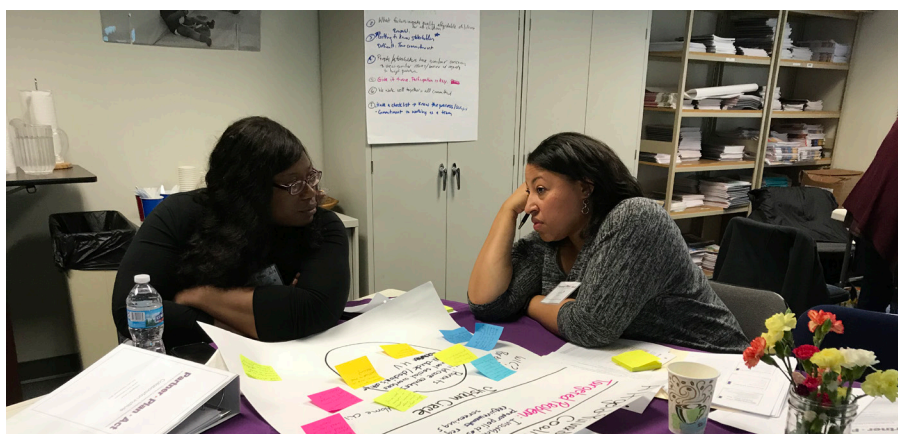
## RESULTS

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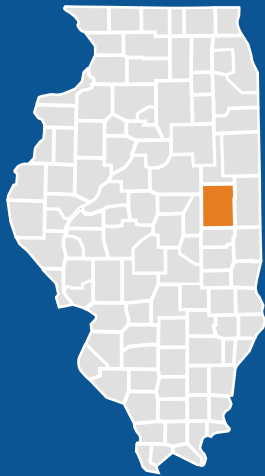
The ARELC is working with health care providers, WIC, and birth-through-five early learning programs to design an Early Intervention family awareness campaign. The campaign will address the lack of family awareness of Early Intervention supports. This campaign will result in more families getting their children screened for developmental delays and consequently, more children accessing Early Intervention services needed to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

Through the Collaboration Institute, the Coalition observed an increase in member engagement. The participation in the Collaboration Institute helped to inject new energy, a sense of purpose, and build the necessary momentum with their members.

ARELC members are now involved in designing and co-leading meetings and community residents are now an integral part of the decision-making process.



# Champaign County Home Visitor Consortium



The Champaign County Home Visitor Consortium was created in April 2018 in response to the expanding birth-to-three home visiting programs in Champaign County. Their mission is to effectively coordinate activities and services to the highest priority families pre-natal through age 5. The coordination activities of this consortium create a system of care which eliminates duplication of services, implements community awareness and parent education programs, coordinates transitions between programs servicing 0-3 and 3-5 year olds and ensures highest quality service delivery. The Consortium currently consists of eight home visiting programs and the United Way of Champaign County.

Champaign County is in central Illinois. According to the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map, 13,578 people out of their total population of about 209,000 were children birth-through-five in 2017.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Developing

The Champaign County Home Visitor Consortium focused on team-building, gaining an in-depth understanding of each home-visiting program and other community assets, restructuring their monthly meetings, and identifying member roles and responsibilities.

Mid-year, the Consortium began to explore using coordinated intake as a strategy, with the support of The Ounce of Prevention.

Soon, they will formalize their goals, objectives, procedures, and expectations in an updated Memorandum of Understanding.



### Kim Zalent, Coach:

"This action-oriented Consortium built up steam (and some frustration) at first. Now, they are going full-speed ahead on solid plans for an innovative non-staffed, coordinated intake system for member home visiting programs."





## RESULTS

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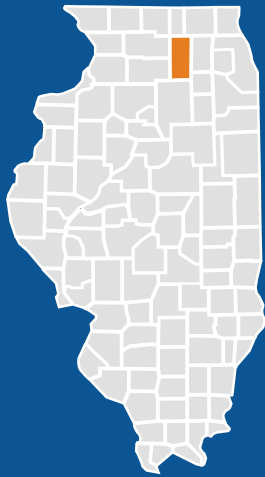
The Champaign County Home Visitor Consortium members now have a better sense of their collective long-term goals and are no longer working in silos.

Together, they created an innovative non-staffed, coordinated intake initiative, assuring that there is “no wrong door” for families to access home visiting services.

If a given program cannot serve a family, they will receive a “warm hand-off” to another home visiting program that is able to do so. It is estimated that thirty to forty families will benefit each month! Moreover, the Consortium brings together home visiting staff three times a year for support and professional development, and a conference is being planned. Joint efforts among members are created wherever possible, such as a breast-feeding support group open to all home visiting clients.

To build relationships with the Early Intervention system and to increase the number of children being screened for developmental delays, the Consortium held its first community-wide developmental screening event in October. It was very successful and additional events are scheduled for the Spring. The Champaign County Home Visitor Consortium is currently working on a referral process to connect more families to Early Intervention services.

# DeKalb County Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative



In 2016, community leaders from the DeKalb Regional Office of Education (ROE), the DeKalb County Health Department (DCHD), the DeKalb County Mental Health Board, DeKalb County Community Foundation (DCCF), and Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) came together to form the DeKalb County Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative (DCKRC). In 2017, the group worked together to define kindergarten-readiness as a “student’s preparedness for school and life success.” They continue to work on increasing kindergarten-readiness in DeKalb County.

DeKalb County is in north-central Illinois. According to Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), 7,202 of 104,473 people (6.8 percent) living in DeKalb County in 2017 were children age five and under.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Advancing

The DeKalb County Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative participated in the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute because they wanted the opportunity to refocus their collective efforts. The DCKRC received training and coaching supports that helped them reaffirm their understanding of their roles and expectations as a collaborative. The group revisited and refined their vision, mission, and goals. Once they had a common vision and language, they were able to embark on a strategic planning process.

The DCKRC team conducted a community assessment utilizing more updated community data that enhanced what they already understood about kindergarten-readiness in DeKalb through the DeKalb County Kindergarten Readiness Study commissioned in 2017. The DCKRC also facilitated a consensus workshop to identify barriers and root causes surrounding the lack of awareness of the importance of early learning and kindergarten-readiness within the community. Through this visioning process, the collaboration developed a goal of engaging stakeholders in a more meaningful way to help them recognize the long-term value of investing in kindergarten-readiness. Specifically, the DCKRC engaged a new partner, the local Chamber of Commerce, in their efforts with Basics DeKalb County to bring together community sectors in support of families and to nurture promising practices that enhance infant and toddler brain development.



**Chris Foster, Coach:**

“This team has reflected deeply on their current capacity and taken important steps towards building their skillfulness at creating systems change while also enhancing their governance structure. It’s been an honor to work with this very dedicated and capable team.”



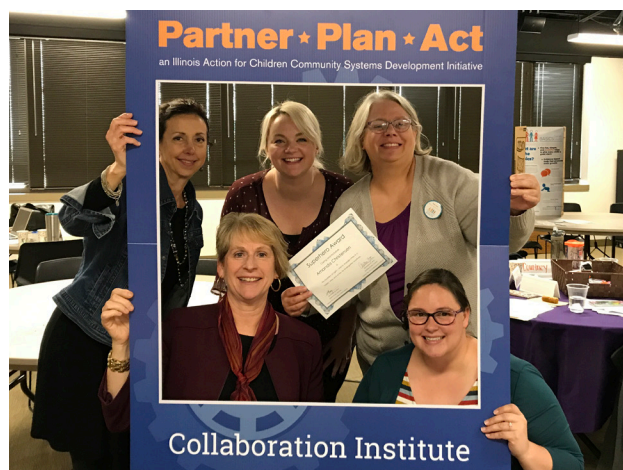
## RESULTS

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The DCKRC developed new local champions, called Chamber Champions, at their local chamber of Commerce through a targeted outreach and messaging campaign. The Chamber Champions started connecting the Basics DeKalb initiative with key people, encouraging them to support the work and invest in kindergarten-readiness.

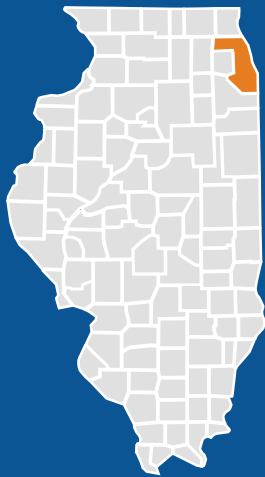
The Chamber Champions also assisted in sharing information about the importance of early learning. The Basics DeKalb team participated in community events and spaces, such as libraries, parks, early learning programs, and the local health department, to share information about the importance of developing infants and toddlers with children and families.

The group is implementing a range of community engagement strategies including hosting community forums and events to build awareness of the importance of early learning. In order to further support the collaborative and the Basics DeKalb initiative, the team is building a sustainability plan for funding and staffing support.



# Skokie- Morton Grove

## Early Childhood Alliance



Formed in 2016, the Early Childhood Alliance (ECA) provides holistic, community-based supports to all families with young children, ensuring their safety and development. The collaboration ensures families and their children have access to high-quality early childhood care and experiences that honor their diversity and build upon their strengths. To give children a strong start and a bright future, the ECA makes data-driven decisions that address inequity and disparity, coordinates developmental screening and child care placement, provides professional development, and advocates for community-level change that opens pathways for children to reach their full potential. The ECA is also a part of the Early Development Instrument initiative, in partnership with Erikson Institute.

The Early Childhood Alliance serves the Niles Township and surrounding areas in Cook County, Illinois. According to Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), 6,773 of the 106,073 (6 percent) people living in Niles Township in 2017 were children five years of age or younger.

### APPROACH

#### Support Level: Developing

As a newer collaboration, the ECA participated in the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute to receive support in establishing their governance process.

Participating in the Collaboration Institute provided the opportunity to work together frequently, resulting in the breakdown of pre-conceived perceptions and barriers that had inhibited their ability to work together. As their work with the Collaboration Institute progressed, the relationships between the leadership team and other community partners strengthened and deepened.

In addition to creating a strong foundation, the ECA learned new skills and strategies to accomplish their collaboration goals, such as how to ask questions, write agendas, build consensus, and develop action plans. The knowledge and skills gained through the Collaboration Institute helped them focus and work productively together.



#### **Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach:**

“The Skokie Morton Grove Team is a dedicated, determined group. I enjoyed my time with this thoughtful group whose willingness to lead and consider all things governance enabled them to work with a dynamic group of community leaders to craft a birth charter for the Early Childhood Alliance.”



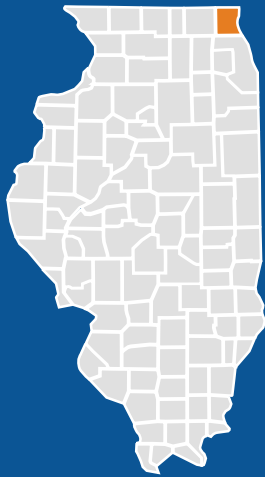
## RESULTS

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Through the Collaboration Institute, the collaboration members' confidence in community systems approaches and their collective work increased over the course of the year. The ECA members developed a deep sense of commitment to the local early childhood community and to each other. They cultivated recognition and credibility with their partners and their community. Several member organizations have deepened their commitment to the collaboration's mission by committing to seek additional resources to support the collaboration.

The Collaboration Institute helped the Early Childhood Alliance accomplish their goal to establish a charter. Now, the ECA is advancing their collective goals and objectives forward. They held a community-wide event on Nov. 4, 2019 to re-engage the larger early childhood community and unveil their newly established charter. As a result, the ECA received over 20 endorsements from the community, including elementary and high school public school districts, private providers, local libraries, and state representatives. Furthermore, they recently received data from the Early Development Instrument (EDI), an existing project of the ECA, and will convene gallery walks in the community featuring the EDI data results.

# Lake County Early Childhood Coalition



The Early Childhood Coalition of Lake County (ECCLC) was established 41 years ago. Their vision is to be a community where children develop to their highest potential in a healthy and stimulating environment. The ECCLC is a united voice comprised of community partners and leaders in Lake County who advocate, collaborate, and strategize to support healthy early childhood growth, development and school-readiness.

Lake County is situated in the northeastern part of Illinois. According to Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), 50,718 of the 704,476 (7.3 percent) people living in Lake County in 2017 were children five years old or younger.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Developing

Through the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute, the Early Childhood Coalition of Lake County completed a community assessment and system scan of Lake County's early childhood landscape. They worked with their coach and CS3's Data Analyst to produce county-level maps that provided snapshots of county-wide and town-specific needs of young children and their families.

To further inform their community systems change strategy, the ECCLC sent out a survey to providers to hear about their needs. They will compile the system scan data and results to inform their assessment and understanding of Lake County.



#### **Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach:**

"The Lake County Team worked hard to understand children ages birth-to-five and programs that serve them. I appreciated their commitment to providing accessible information that offers a clear starting point for community conversations to prioritize the needs of children and strategies to address them."



## RESULTS

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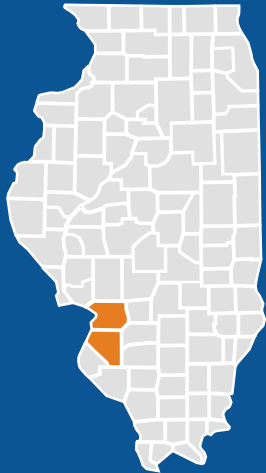
Through the Collaboration Institute, the ECCLC focused on bringing more diverse stakeholders to their group and used the opportunity to build relationships with other agencies. As a result, the ECCLC increased the number of new members.

The ECCLC successfully expanded the range of sectors represented on its board to include early childhood mental health, the local public health department, Early Intervention services, and Head Start services.

ECCLC members are also developing a video portraying a day in a quality childcare setting.

While analyzing their community needs, The Early Childhood Coalition of Lake County examined their existing community supports for families with young children. Based on this analysis, they updated their brochure with all the community services the ECCLC and its partners offer to ensure the community is aware of them.

# Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership



The Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership (ELP) was established in 2009. Their mission is to strengthen and sustain a high-quality, prenatal-to-five, early childhood system of programs, services, and supports within Greater East St. Louis. The ELP envisions a community where every child has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for kindergarten success. Their executive committee members include parents, key early childhood practitioners, and representatives from the following sectors: K-12 education, health care, media, and finance/ banking.

In their commitment to the adage, “nothing about us without us,” the collaborative actively engages parents and caregivers—those with lived experience—throughout all aspects of their work. The Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership primarily serves children and families within the boundaries of the East St. Louis School District 189, which includes four municipalities within St. Clair County, Illinois: the City of East St. Louis, Village of Washington Park, and portions of the Village of Alorton and City of Centreville. According to the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), an estimated 3,260 of the 37,226 people (8.7 percent) living within the East St. Louis School District 189 in 2017 were children five years of age or younger.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Thriving

This past year, the Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership participated in the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute to strengthen their member engagement. The ELP completed the Collaboration Institute’s assessment tools to convene reflective and generative dialogue and set priorities for strengthening their collaborative. ELP’s leadership identified the expansion and deepening of member engagement and ownership of the work within community and across sectors as a main priority. They designed and implemented a new member engagement strategy to reach and engage more community stakeholders with their collaboration and develop more champions for early childhood.



### Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach:

“The Greater East St. Louis Team exudes excitement about their work. Their openness to examining the ways in which they include people in the work allowed them to identify engagement points and entry strategies for all stakeholders—a win for all with increased people power and commitment.”





## RESULTS

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The Greater East St. Louis Early Learning Partnership's newly minted member engagement strategy created new and strengthened existing ways for community stakeholders to engage in and lead in championing the readiness and well-being of young children. Furthermore, the collaboration now intentionally tracks and communicates member engagement. They convened a fall gathering which successfully gathered and generated commitments from families with young children as well as leaders from various sectors, including law enforcement, public housing, healthcare, K-12 education, finance, and government.

ELP has expanded their network of early childhood advocates and is excited to cultivate more champions to build a stronger community for children.

In addition to their member engagement strategy, ELP developed a Resource Alignment and Development Plan to track the in-kind investments made by collaborative members and guide future resource generation efforts. Partnership members see this added level of detail and rigor as another critical element for sustainability.

# Macon County Early Childhood Collaboration



The Macon County Early Childhood Collaboration (MCECC) was initially established in 2013 as the iGrow collaboration for home visiting and was renamed in 2017. Their Leadership Group currently includes the iGrow Coordinated Intake Coordinator and representatives from each of the home visiting agencies in Macon county: Macon Resources, Inc. Bright Start, Healthy Families Illinois (HFI), District 61 Early Beginnings, and Baby TALK. The MCECC mission statement is to work collaboratively to maximize the impact of early childhood home visiting in their community.

Macon County is in central Illinois. According to Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), 8,009 of the 107,587 (7.4 percent) people living in Macon County in 2017 were children age five or younger.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Developing

Macon County Early Childhood Collaboration applied to the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute to receive support with developing their governance structure. Through consultation supports, they worked together to create a charter and operating procedures through a step-by-step process, focusing first on establishing a decision-making process, group norms, and developing the team's shared and individual responsibilities. With this foundation in place, the group established a new goal to create a handbook for the collaborative that strengthens their coordination of home-visiting services and referrals. Together, they reviewed and documented key aspects of their coordinated intake process that informed their "Coordinated Intake Handbook." A key component of the handbook will be a "Decision Tree" that The Ounce of Prevention is supporting them to develop collectively.

The Decision Tree would help them to identify how coordinated intake staff could distribute referrals between the different home visiting programs to enhance their referral process. Finally, the collaboration created a process to regularly analyze data about their coordinated intake program and referrals. By examining the data together, the group will identify important patterns and opportunities for improvement. The collaboration will present the coordinated intake data to their advisory committee to frame their support through a community systems lens.



### Kim Zalent, Coach:

"Through unexpected twists and turns this MCECC team made steady progress. They "made lemonade" together after major staff and team changes, creating a sustainable on-boarding approach and documentation for new Coordinated Intake staff and leadership team members."



## RESULTS

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By developing a governance structure that allowed them to create a Coordinated Intake Handbook, MCECC members are working more effectively together and deepening their impact in the community. The collaborative can navigate change, such as staff transitions, and has a better process to onboard new team members.

MCECC is also implementing their new decision-making and consensus building process in their monthly meetings—thanks to the support from the Collaboration Institute.

The team will meet with all the executive directors and supervisors in their collaborative to communicate their progress through the Collaboration Institute. Through this meeting, they will seek approval and agreement of the new charter and the Coordinated Intake Handbook. This collaborative meeting will help ensure that community members at all levels of the participating MCECC organizations are informed, connected, and communicating regularly.



# Palatine Early Learning Alliance



The primary mission of the Palatine Early Learning Alliance (PELA) is to avoid duplication and service gaps in early childhood services by building a cohesive and ongoing awareness of the resources available for children and families in the area. In the last five years, the PELA increased their efforts to create a more fluid system of referrals between Early Intervention, state-funded preschool programs, the Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee and the Community Consolidated School District 15 by providing joint workshops and developing partnerships with community networks such as United Palatine Coalition (UP) and the Partners in Our Communities agency.

Collaboration stakeholders are varied, but their work largely converges on the high-need community of North West Cook County, specifically those living in the boundaries of the Palatine Community Consolidated School District 15 (CCSD 15). According to the CCSD 15 website, their diverse student body of 12,430 preschoolers through eighth graders comprises of majority White (39.5 percent), Latino (35.2 percent), and Asian (18.7 percent) students. 26 percent are English Language Learners, and more than 70 languages or dialects are spoke in the homes of students.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Advancing

Through the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute, the Palatine Early Learning Alliance (PELA) leadership team deepened their understanding of community systems development. With the help of their coach, they completed a community needs assessment and engaged diverse stakeholders in a consensus workshop to identify barriers and roots causes to the lack of financial mobility for families, especially those with young children. A root cause analysis revealed families were not able to find and keep employment due to their lack of child care.

As a result of their systems scan, the PELA compiled almost 400 parent responses to their child care needs survey and found that families did not access childcare services because they were unaware of local child care options. The collaboration consolidated available child care information on a website as one strategy to inform families about their childcare options.



### Ruby Flores, Coach:

“As a relatively new group, the Palatine Early Learning Alliance team is dedicated to co-creating a collaboration that will be a positive force for the children and families in their community. I have enjoyed watching them be fearless, jumping into the work even when they knew it could be messy. I have no doubt they will be successful in any endeavor they undertake!”



## RESULTS

The Collaboration Institute provided the Palatine Early Learning Alliance with a framework to understand community systems and the opportunity to hone their skills in collaborative processes. They developed their facilitation skills by convening meetings with their diverse stakeholders. Their leadership team also improved their data analysis skills by conducting a community needs assessment and systems scan of the early childhood landscape.

Equipped with qualitative and quantitative data, PELA is prepared to implement additional strategies to increase access to childcare services in the community.

PELA is especially proud to have a parent representative on their Leadership Team who is contributing to the success of the collaboration. With the support of the coach, the parent representative was ready and prepared to provide their voice and leadership in meetings.



# Plano Area Alliance Supporting Student Success



Plano Area Alliance Supporting Student Success (PAASSS) was initially formed in February 2018 to network, find, and share resources for children prenatal to third grade and their families. The group convened a quarterly meeting of early childhood stakeholders in the Plano area. In December 2018, PAASSS took steps to formalize the collaboration and formed a Leadership Team.

PAASSS's work is guided by their mission to "strengthen the community by ensuring that all families in the Plano area are aware of and have equitable access to services and supports that empower them to raise children that are safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed."

The collaboration serves Plano and the surrounding areas. The Plano area—the city of Plano and areas to the west—is at the crossroads of four counties and families often must travel far outside the immediate area to obtain services. According to the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM), an estimated 1,588 out of 11,863 people (13 percent) living in Plano in 2017 were children five years of age or younger.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Developing

Although the collaboration was less than a year old when they applied to the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute, PAASSS had already achieved several important wins which expanded early childhood supports and demonstrated the potential of the collaboration.

Their initial goals were to adapt their draft mission statement, determine next steps for engaging additional stakeholders, and move forward in a strategic and focused manner.

Through their experience in the Collaboration Institute, the PAASSS leadership team was able to use a participatory approach, with the support of their coach, to engage their full collaboration to develop an equity-infused charter agreement, mission, vision, and values that guides their work and collective decision-making. The leadership team also restructured their full collaboration quarterly meetings to include team-building exercises and member updates to promote relationship building, foster trust, and support between members.



### Kim Zalent, Coach:

"The PAASSS Leadership Team combines fun, passion, team-building, and deep-yet-practical discussions about equity, distributed decision-making, community assets, stakeholder engagement—keep your eye on this collaboration!"



## RESULTS

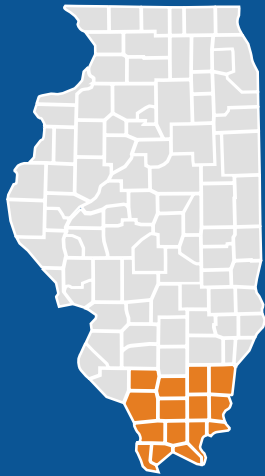
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The PAASSS leadership team and collaboration members are now much more cohesive and committed to their community work. PAASSS completed and approved their equity infused charter agreement.

They have increased and diversified their leadership team, as well as the number of partner organizations and participants represented at their collaboration meetings.

While the group completed its initial work to identify community assets, stakeholders, and data on early childhood services, the collaboration looks forward to building on its early program successes with the intentional recruitment of more members, development of collaboration materials, and implementation of system change strategies to improve kindergarten-readiness in the Plano area. A video was developed and will feature Plano's play-based kindergarten classroom on the Illinois State Board of Education's website—an amazing accomplishment for a newly formed collaboration.

# Southern Illinois Coalition for Children & Families



The Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families (SICCF) serves the southernmost 15 counties in Illinois. The Coalition is dedicated to providing leadership and support to build stronger communities, strengthen families, and promote children’s success in school and life. The Coalition’s primary goal is to develop a strong and effective infrastructure that promotes positive outcomes for children and families in southern Illinois. Their current early childhood initiatives include efforts to increase developmental screenings, partnerships to improve trauma-informed, trauma-responsive educators, and the Ready Freddy kindergarten transition program.

## APPROACH

### Support Level: Thriving

The SICCF leadership team worked with the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute to increase their members’ understanding and support for implementing community systems development work. With the support of their coach, they guided their Governance Council and full collaboration through a process to select, fund, and plan a community system’s training.

The process of completing the Collaboration Institute’s community needs and equity assessment helped the SICCF realize that they did not have a race and ethnicity lens applied to their work. This realization changed their members’ mindsets and practices. After finding data system gaps, they set out to find a research partner to assess how to gather locally-specific data disaggregated by race and ethnicity that they could use to inform program and collaboration initiatives.

Finally, with their collaboration’s sustainability in mind, the SICCF leadership team developed a multi-year resource development plan to identify available and necessary resources to support the collaboration’s growth and efforts.



### Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach:

“The Southern Illinois Team thinks and acts large. I deeply valued seeing how this committed and creative team operates in a poorly resourced, expansive region of the state. They framed big goals and made exciting progress in their efforts to strengthen the infrastructure of their Coalition.”





## RESULTS

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The Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families is moving forward with increased strength and renewed confidence. The CS3 team compiled and presented to the SICCFs Governance Council a range of collective impact trainings that they could learn from to build their knowledge and skills. They selected the Tamarack Institute's Five Pillars Collective Impact workshop for their community systems training and successfully wrote a proposal for a \$25,000 grant from the Grand Victoria Fund to finance the collective impact training. The training will begin in early 2020.

The collaboration completed their resource development plan, revised their by-laws to reflect the responsibilities and growing interests of the Coalition, and created a work plan for the Governance Council to increase accountability.

They also built a partnership with Applied Research Consulting (ARC) at Southern Illinois University and are working to define the scope of their work together. SICCF looks forward to using the new datasets to identify and address inequitable access to high quality early childhood programs and services. The Southern Illinois Coalition for Children and Families had a very productive year with the Collaboration Institute, but is confident that "the best is yet to come."

## Meet the CS3 Team

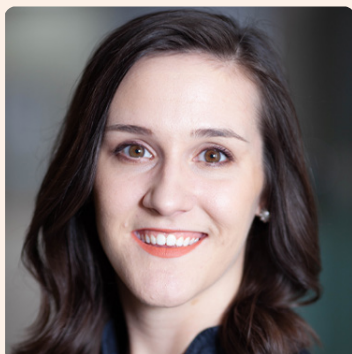
From all of us at CS3, we thank you for your passion and commitment to improving outcomes for children and families in Illinois!



**Choua Vue**  
Vice President of Community Impact  
Illinois Action for Children



**Grace Araya**  
Director of Community Systems  
Statewide Supports  
Illinois Action for Children



**Kristina Rogers**  
Project Manager  
Illinois Action for Children



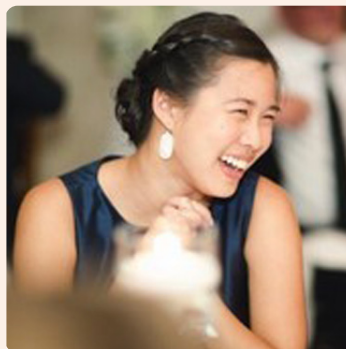
**Kim Zalent**  
Trainer/Coach  
Illinois Action for Children



**Ruby Flores**  
Trainer/Coach  
Illinois Action for Children



**Janet Vargas**  
Trainer/Coach  
Illinois Action for Children



**Vanessa Lee**  
Community Impact Data Analyst  
Illinois Action for Children



**Chris Foster**  
Consultant



**Trish Rooney**  
Consultant



**Carolyn Newberry Schwartz**  
Consultant

## Congratulations on completing the year!

As you continue on your community systems development journey with your early childhood community collaboration, please remember that Partner Plan Act still has supports to offer you.

### On-Demand Consultation

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Take advantage of this support when your early childhood community collaboration needs to tackle a specific, short-term issue. A consultant will be matched with your community based on the topic area requested. Up to six hours of consultation per issue will be provided over the course of the fiscal year.

On-Demand Consultation topics include:

- Collaboration Skills
- Governance
- Data
- Equity
- Systems Thinking
- Family Engagement
- Quality
- Enrollment
- Coordinated Intake
- Priority Populations
- Collaborative Developmental Screenings
- Birth-3rd Grade/PreK-Kindergarten Transitions
- Chronic Absenteeism.

### On-Demand Learning

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Take your community systems development learning into your own hands. Through 2022, there will be at least 15 on-demand learning modules, covering various topics including data, systems-thinking, equity, and community engagement strategies.

Currently, there is a six-module “Early Childhood Collaboration Data” course that you can access through your WeConnect account. Please check out the course and happy learning!

[learn.actforchildren.org](https://learn.actforchildren.org)

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To learn more about these opportunities and to stay abreast of current trainings offered near you, check out [www.PartnerPlanAct.org](https://www.PartnerPlanAct.org) and make sure you sign up to receive our monthly e-newsletter.

# Partner ★ Plan ★ Act

an Illinois Action for Children Community Systems Development Initiative

# Take Your Collaboration to the Next Level.

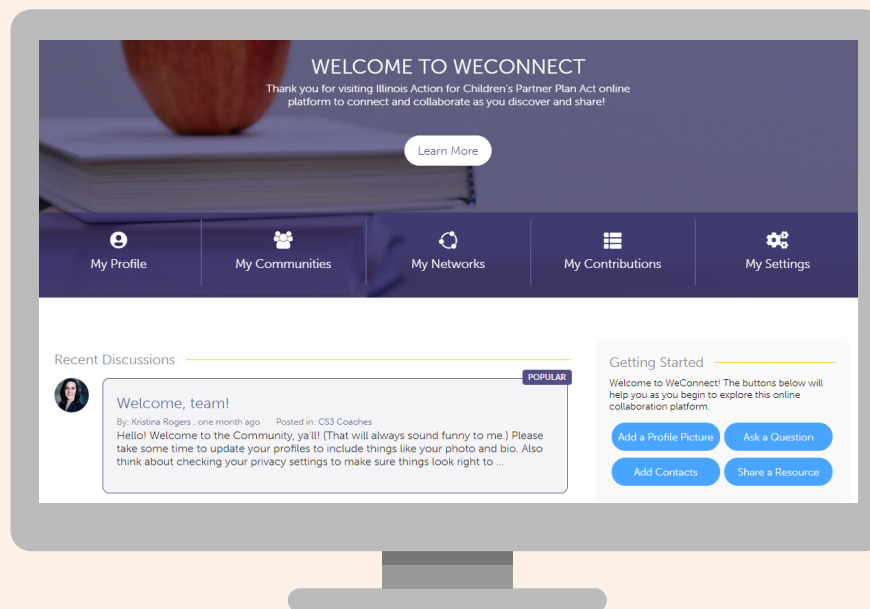
## Connect with your members online!

Illinois Action for Children is thrilled to support collaborations through our online collaboration platform, WeConnect! Get ready to take your community systems development work to a whole new level. Once you sign in, you'll have instant access to:

- **Online Communities:** Connect with members of your collaboration and others online.
- **Discussions:** Ask questions and share your knowledge and ideas.
- **Resource Libraries:** Share your documents and find resources you need.
- **Member Directory:** Connect with other collaboration members.

There is strength in numbers. Connect with other collaborations on WeConnect, today!

[weconnect.actforchildren.org](http://weconnect.actforchildren.org)



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