



# Collaboration Institute 2023 Year in Review



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# Greetings

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 in particular children—most often children of color—getting 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 are facing are we then able to act. If we really want 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 work that requires fierce commitment and significant collaboration. It also requires individuals and organizations to prioritize the community's needs above their own. The Community Systems Statewide Supports team recognized this and intentionally created a framework that engages a diverse collaboration leadership team, rather than a single person. In addition, we were intentional about creating a program that empowers communities to continue this work long after the Collaboration Institute is over.

It has been a profound pleasure watching collaborations and their leadership teams rise to the occasion and tackle tough community issues in innovative ways. I am thankful to everyone who committed themselves so fully to the fifth 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**

Vice President of Community Impact  
Illinois Action for Children



# What is the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute?

The Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute (PPACI) is a yearlong 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 aged 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, two tracks of targeted supports are offered: Coach-Guided and Process-Guided.

## Coach-Guided Track

Collaborations receive a minimum 24 hours of coaching and technical assistance in-person or over the phone.

## Process-Guided Track

Collaborations receive four trainings based on the Collaboration Institute framework along with monthly coaching, with a minimum of 24 hours of coaching for the year. The Collaboration Institute structure and supports are built upon the Community Systems Statewide Supports Framework which includes four core components.

1. **Community Assessment & Targeted Problem Identification**
2. **Systems Scan & Root Cause Analysis**
3. **Strategy Design**
4. **Implementation & Action Learning**

These components draw upon our experience with previous community systems development initiatives such as the Innovation Zones and the ABLe Change Framework developed by Drs. Pennie Foster-Fishman and Erin Watson at Michigan State University. Community systems work will be approached with the goal of equitable outcomes for all children and authentic engagement of families and community members in the process.



# This Year's Featured Participants

## 1. Early Childhood Forum

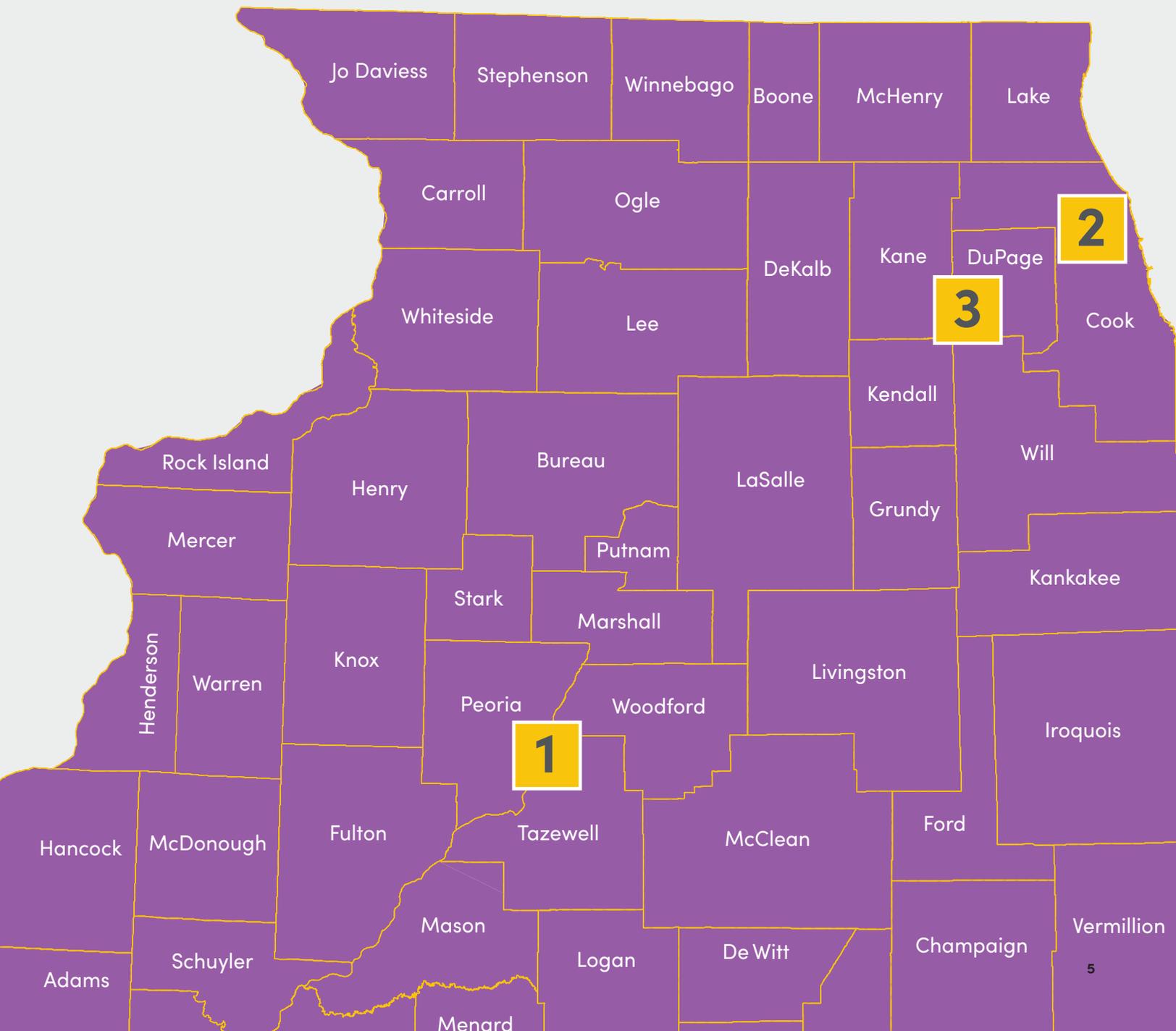
Serving: Peoria, Tazewell, Mason, Woodford, and nearby surrounding communities.

## 2. Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative

Serving: 37 Jewish early childhood centers in Chicago and neighboring suburbs as far north as Vernon Hills, as far south as Hyde Park, and as far west as Naperville.

## 3. St. Charles Early Learning Partnership

Serving: St. Charles School District 303 boundaries. St. Charles School District 303 is in DuPage and Kane Counties (North-Central Illinois) and includes portions of West Chicago, South Elgin, Campton Hills, Wasco, Elburn, and unincorporated Kane County.



# Featured Collaboration Strategy Profiles

Collaboration / Level of Support	Goal(s) for Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute	Community Systems Strategies and Approaches	Results
<b>Early Childhood Forum</b> <b>Support Track:</b> Process-Guided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To develop an equity strategy for the collaboration which is embedded in our work, communication, planning, and events so that we can use that lens to make decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted a community needs assessment.</li> <li>Engaged the local early childhood education and care community in a root cause analysis for low developmental screening rates.</li> <li>Launched a system scan to learn about the community's experiences with developmental screening, referral and supports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiated monthly spotlights of local agencies and services to showcase the rich and diverse local resources available to parents, families and individuals.</li> <li>Expanded the scope of collaboration meetings to move forward collective system development.</li> <li>Engaged partners in important discussions, data collection and reflection around child development and screening for children birth to five years old.</li> </ul>
<b>Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative</b> <b>Support Track:</b> Coach-Guided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop governance agreements to support the growth of the Collaborative.</li> <li>Identify beliefs and create definitions to inform our approach to parent engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified values and guiding principles, decision rules, power sharing, and roles and responsibilities of members of the Collaborative.</li> <li>Became familiar with parent engagement concepts and explored beliefs about parent engagement.</li> <li>Examined parent engagement in early learning programs and in a collaboration dedicated to systems change.</li> <li>Identified the value of parent voice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drafted governance agreements that are ready for endorsement by the membership of JECC.</li> <li>Identified beliefs and drafted a definition for parent engagement.</li> <li>Explored ways to deepen parent engagement in the Collaborative and ways the Collaborative can support programs with their parent engagement efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>St. Charles Early Learning Partnership</b> <b>Support Track:</b> Coach-Guided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and revise governance agreements.</li> <li>Develop a systems-change strategy to address results of 2021 survey and fall 2022 data walk.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified new components for charter and reviewed current ones.</li> <li>Contextualized survey data through data walks with focus on parents not connected to early childhood programs.</li> <li>Learned skills to develop a systems-change strategy: targeted problem identification, root cause analysis, SOAR Analysis and action planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified lack of knowledge about early learning programs as a community need.</li> <li>Developed and began to act on plan to create an early childhood resource guide to address the community need.</li> <li>Amended and endorsed the charter to incorporate new values and guiding principles.</li> <li>Identified a fiscal sponsor for the Partnership.</li> </ul>

# Early Childhood Forum

## Community Overview

The Early Childhood Forum of Central Illinois (ECF) began in the fall of 1998, under the leadership of Sharon Doubet, to create a coalition to unite all early childhood programs. Since it began in 1998, the ECF has continued this mission but also has continued to expand their scope of work.

### Mission/Vision

The Early Childhood Forum of Central Illinois (ECF) is a network of community service providers who share a vision of promoting quality programming for families with children birth to age eight. This partnership advocates for children and families, provides opportunities for professional growth and development and increases public awareness of the benefits of early childhood education.

## Approach

The Early Childhood Forum's coaching team participated in the process-guided track of the Partner Plan Act Collaboration Institute (PPACI) to develop and embed a community systems-change framework in their collaborative's mode of operation.

The community needs assessment the team completed as part of the Institute highlighted the need to increase developmental screening and referrals. The coaching team engaged early childhood stakeholders who confirmed that screening was a priority and began to identify the issues contributing to this targeted problem. Next, they launched their system-scan to further learn from families, providers, and medical professionals about their experiences with screening.

In addition, the collaboration has also procured two local grants to help bring needed resources to parents in central Illinois. They look forward to leveraging their years of experience and newly acquired supports to building a more robust and aligned way of screening and supporting children birth to five years old.



**“The Early Childhood Forum joined the Institute as an already well-established collaboration with many strengths. Their participation in the PPACI reflects their dedication to continuous improvement and speaks to the seriousness with which they approach their collaboration’s role. It was an absolute pleasure to work with a collaboration as committed to making an impact for families as is the Early Childhood Forum. Their curiosity for learning and intentional approach to everything they do will undoubtedly continue blooming into a more inclusive and equitable early childhood system.”**

*- Janet Vargas, CS3 Trainer and Coach*

## Early Childhood Forum

### Results

The Collaboration Institute provided the Early Childhood Forum with a framework to understand community systems and the opportunity to hone their skills in collaborative processes.

This past year, The Forum has shifted the nature of their meetings from mostly updates to a collective approach to community systems change with a goal to create a more equitable local early childhood system. The coaching team shares, “These

experiences are building more engagement within the collaboration and across agencies and systems for support. Through our work, we have already begun to build awareness around child development and screening to support children birth to five.”

The Forum is prepared and committed to implement additional strategies to increase early childhood developmental screening and access to inclusive supports and services in the community.

### The Early Childhood Forum Team



Erin Stout



Jacqui Jones



Shannon Dault



Carol Tiggelaar



Brenda Smith

# Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative

## Community Overview

The Collaborative serves 37 Jewish early childhood centers in Chicago and neighboring suburbs, from as far north as Vernon Hills, to as far south as Hyde Park, and west to Naperville. Before the pandemic, these programs served 3,067 children annually, from infants through six-year-olds. Some are independent organizations, though the majority are nested in community centers, synagogues, and independent schools.

## Vision

An effective Jewish early childhood education ecosystem in Greater Chicago in which a maximal number of families are enrolling in our schools, where educators love and are supported in their work, and that actively models high-quality, cutting-edge opportunities for learning and growth for school professionals, lay leaders, children, and families.

## Mission

The Collaborative is a broad-based coalition of early childhood directors, teachers, researchers, and community members committed to increasing access to and enrollment in high quality Jewish early care and education in the Chicago Metropolitan area. Its core goals include strengthening the pipeline of teachers and leaders; advancing a culture of excellence in the centers so that all children can maximize their potential; and expanding access to early care and education by lowering financial and geographic barriers that families may face. Its mission is also to meet the ever-changing needs of the Chicagoland Jewish community through accessible, high-quality Jewish ECE programs.



**“The JECC Team held thoughtful, honest, and heartfelt conversations at every coaching session. It’s clear that they are deeply committed to their partners and the children they serve. I have no doubt that JECC will thrive and make a meaningful impact on children, families, and early childhood community collaboration. It’s been an honor and great fun to work with this dynamic group!”**

*- Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach*

## Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative

### Approach

The Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative team engaged in activities and conversations in which they explored characteristics of responsive and effective collaborations, and how values and principles promote these characteristics and provide the undergirding for governance agreements and structures. Their examination of charters from other collaborations in Illinois helped them determine the components they wanted to include in their charter. The group had robust discussions about decision rules and who had authority to make what decisions. Roles and responsibilities for members were derived from these discussions.

The team also explored parent engagement in collaborations and similarities and differences with parent engagement in early learning programs. They held frank and honest discussions about parent engagement and began to identify ways to deepen parent engagement in the Collaborative along with discussing the possibility of supporting member programs to strengthen their parent engagement efforts.

### Results

The Collaboration Institute provided the Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative (JECC) team with a framework and activities to understand governance and successfully work through the myriad questions related to structure and processes involved in establishing a solid infrastructure for their collaboration. The team closely examined the way in which the Collaborative had been functioning and honestly debated their values and principles. The team also wrestled with how decisions will be made and how power and authority will be shared. The team identified governance practices that promote a cohesive and responsive organization and codified them in a written charter that is ready for endorsement by the JECC.

The Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative team effectively utilized Collaboration Institute materials related to parent engagement. Through their involvement with the Institute, the team took advantage of the opportunity to explore and confirm their beliefs, create a definition and identify ways to strengthen parent engagement in the Collaborative. They also explored the benefits of supporting partners' efforts to effectively engage parents in

## The Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative Team



Anita Denes-Meador



Kate Warach



Hannah Bloom-Hirschberg



Anna Hartman

# St. Charles Early Learning Partnership

## Community Overview

St. Charles Early Learning Partnership focuses their work in St. Charles School District 303 which is in DuPage and Kane Counties (North-Central Illinois). According to Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map (IECAM) 2022 data, there are 3,815 children ages five years and under with 155 living in limited English-speaking households (25 of these Spanish-speaking) and 460 children living in families at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Only 37% of School District 303's kindergartners are considered ready in three developmental areas according to the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) Fall, 2021.

### Vision

A community connected to prepare every child from birth to age eight for success.

### Mission

Bringing together people, resources and services to create a community-wide system of support so that every child from birth to age eight in the St. Charles' area is healthy, safe, eager to learn, and ready to succeed.

## Approach

The Partnership Team continued with their activities from 2021–2022 to finalize the materials and focus for a data walk. After hosting data walks that were poorly attended, the Team engaged in outreach by going to locations frequented by families not connected with early learning programs. This enabled the Team to identify a community need, lack of knowledge about early learning programs, that, when addressed, would make a meaningful difference for these families, and benefit the wider St. Charles community. After deciding to create the St. Charles Area Resource Guide: For Families with Young Children, the Team worked to develop and implement an action plan that targets publication as school opens in fall 2023.

The Team engaged in activities and conversations in which they examined the values and principles they believed should guide the work of the Partnership. Team members reviewed the decision rules and decision-making process to ensure they aligned with their values and principles and explored roles for new members.



**“It was exciting to see the St. Charles Early Learning Partnership Team emerge from the strain of Covid this year, to implement data walks and develop and act on their strategy to create the Resource Guide. The Team is a talented and insightful group of people whose passion for their mission and grit, along with the humor and care they share with each other, sets them up for success in building a dynamic early childhood community system.”**

– Carolyn Newberry Schwartz, Coach

## St. Charles Early Learning Partnership

### Results

The Collaboration Institute provided the Partnership Team with coaching to implement data walks and to seek responses to the survey data from parents who do not participate in early learning programs. This helped the Team to develop the plan to create a resource guide for families and agency staff with the information that will enable parents to not only locate and utilize programs but also to make informed decision about which programs and resources to access. The guide will also help early

learning and service providers become more knowledgeable about what services and supports are available to families in the St. Charles area. The Team has identified a fiscal sponsor for the project, secured the agreement of District 303 to host the Guide on their website. As the coaching ends, the Team is engaged in collecting information for the guide.

As a result of the governance framework and activities offered by the Collaboration Institute, the Partnership Team developed values and guiding principles to guide their work.

### The St. Charles Early Learning Partnership Team



Tricia Sabathne



Rosaura Realegeno



Brooke Radford-Knight



Nathan Jarot



Katelyn Boyle



Kim Peterson



Ivette Montes de Oca



Liz Schaffer



Tracy Taylor

## 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!



**Grace Araya**  
*Vice President of  
Community Impact*  
Illinois Action  
for Children



**Ruby Flores**  
*Training and  
Coaching Manager*  
Illinois Action  
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**Chris Foster**  
*Consultant*



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**Hannah Miro**  
*Community Impact  
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Manager*  
Illinois Action  
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**Carolyn Newberry  
Schwartz**  
*Consultant*



**Janet Vargas**  
*Trainer/Coach*  
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# Ongoing Support Offerings

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

## On-Demand Consultation

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 24 hours of consultation 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

Take your community systems development learning into your own hands. Through 2024, there will be at least 15 on-demand learning modules, covering various topics including data, systems-thinking, equity, and community engagement strategies.

**There are six courses available that are accessible through your WeConnect account:**

- **Early Childhood Collaboration Data**
- **Shared Intake for Early Childhood Collaborations**
- **Shared Intake for Early Childhood Collaborations**
- **Collaborative Developmental Screenings for Early Childhood Collaborations**
- **Early Childhood Collaboration Parent Engagement**
- **Effective Governance in Early Childhood Collaborations**

# Welcome to WeConnect

WeConnect is an online platform, a place to connect, find collaboration opportunities, ask questions, share ideas, and search for resources. Get ready to take your community systems development to a whole new level.

## Online access to:

### Online Communities

Connect with members of your collaboration and others.

### Discussions

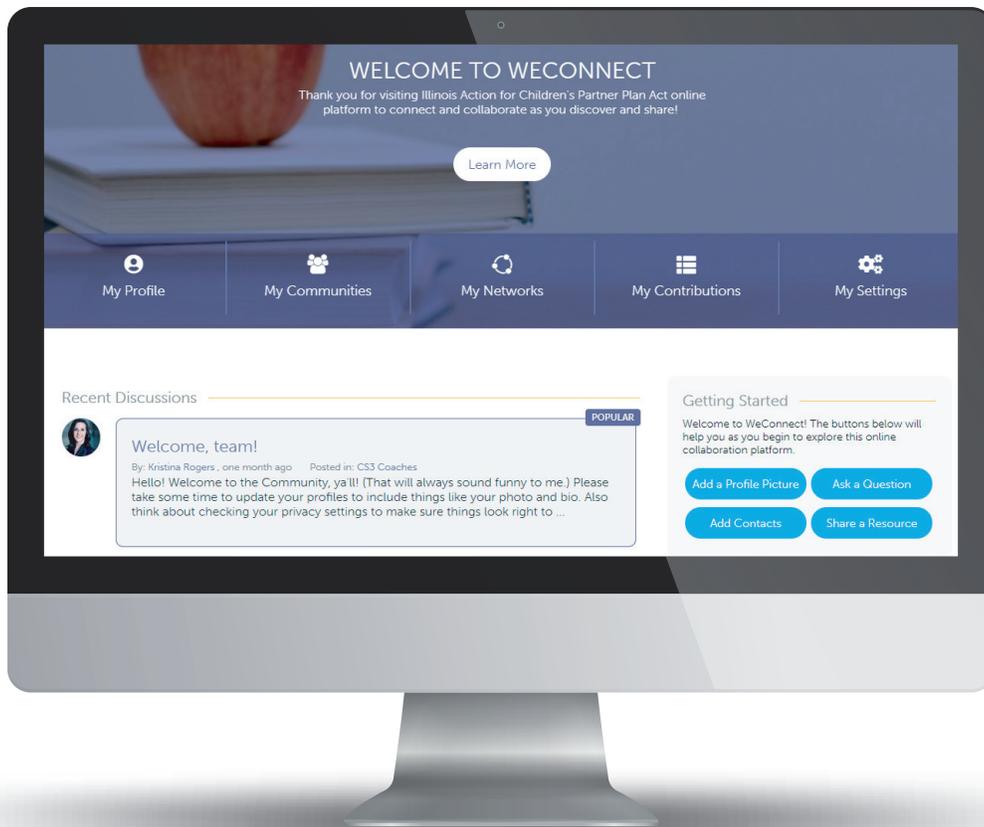
Ask questions and share your knowledge and ideas.

### Resource Libraries

Share your documents and find resources you need.

### Member Directory

Find and connect with other collaboration members.



**Connect with WeConnect today. Sign in at:**  
[weconnect.actforchildren.org](https://weconnect.actforchildren.org)



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Early Childhood Development**



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