



**Chicago Early
Childhood Collaborations:
Current Landscape
and Potential Opportunities**



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- Chicago Southeast All Our Kids
- Connect Home Visiting
- The Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative
- Little Village Education Collaborative
- North Lawndale Early Learning Collaborative
- Southside Early Learning Network

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the early childhood community collaboration landscape in Chicago, including the role of collaborations in supporting young children and families, the unmet needs that might be addressed by expanding community collaborations, along with options for decision makers to consider as they evaluate how to move forward.

Landscape Analysis Findings:

- Existing early childhood community collaborations are valuable community resources, which are structured to address individual community needs, yet many Chicago communities lack a collaboration.
- Collaboration leaders are dedicated professionals and while they are stretched thin, they do their best to serve children and families.
- Relationships are at the heart of community collaborations and collaboration leaders highly value learning from and partnering with parents and families.
- Collaboration leaders are invested in their communities and crave opportunities to learn from their colleagues across the city, so they can further refine their approach to serving young children and families.
- Collaboration operations and activities vary, and their outcomes and impact are difficult to measure.
- Collaboration leaders are eager to engage in and influence public policy decisions at the city and state levels.

Suggested Next Steps for Addressing Unmet Needs

Community collaborations have shown they are a key strategy to ensuring families can access the early childhood services they need. Yet, unmet needs remain and the following tactics could address them:

- Stand up early childhood community collaborations in designated high priority communities.
- Connect families to services beyond early childhood resources.
- Promote early childhood workforce pathways.
- Embrace community collaborations as a resource to help the City of Chicago understand and respond to families’ needs.

Options for Developing, Expanding, and Supporting Collaborations

This report also provides a series of options to consider for expanding early childhood community collaborations across the City of Chicago, how they could be supported, and further considerations for each option:

Options for Developing and Expanding Collaborations

- A. Prioritize funding community collaborations in communities that demonstrate the greatest need.
- B. Implement an early childhood collaboration in each designated or pre-determined geographic area.
- C. Prioritize funding community collaborations in communities that demonstrate interest, capacity, and commitment.

Options for Supporting Collaborations Across the City

- A. Collaborations operate independently with access to a stable funding source.
- B. Create and manage a city-wide hub that distributes funds AND connects and coordinates collaborations.
- C. Establish a citywide team that facilitates connection between collaborations and provides training, technical assistance, and support.

INTRODUCTION

Chicago early childhood collaborations aim to address complex issues that a single organization or sector cannot solve alone. These collaborations aim to connect and improve services for young children and families by gathering local, diverse, cross-sector stakeholders to collectively advance equitable access to and outcomes in the early childhood system. Community collaborations believe that children and families thrive when their communities receive adequate investments to support their needs. Moreover, Chicago communities are distinct with specific needs and local collaborations are uniquely positioned to respond to these needs.

Across Chicago, there are currently nine¹ early childhood collaborations working to bridge the gap between families and local early education services. Beginning as far back as the late 1990s, various stakeholder groups and service providers across the city have joined forces both formally and informally to develop collaborative strategies to better serve families seeking access to early childhood services. These collaborations connect directly with families to understand what they need from early childhood services and link them to service providers. While the current structure offers these valuable collaborations in some communities, many communities across the city lack this type of support.

To understand how early childhood community collaborations could be established in more communities, Illinois Action for Children, in partnership with Start Early, convened early childhood community collaboration leaders and stakeholders across Chicago. We learned firsthand about the vital role of community collaborations and what is needed to improve and expand them, to ensure all families have access to the early childhood system they desire and deserve.

This report documents what we learned and provides an overview of the current early childhood community collaboration landscape in Chicago, the role collaborations could play in the larger early childhood system, and the unmet need for collaborations. We present a menu of options, including advantages, challenges, considerations, and recommendations associated with each, to help decision-makers build a robust city-wide early childhood community collaboration system.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

It was important to the project team to develop this report in partnership with early childhood collaboration leaders and stakeholders, to honor their work and to build on the progress that has already been made to develop and expand collaborations and community systems in the City of Chicago.

The project team first reviewed existing data and reports on early childhood collaborations in Chicago and Illinois to inform the scope. Next, we collected recent and relevant information to develop an understanding of the current landscape, unmet need, and potential for collaborations, as well as interviewed more than 20 early childhood collaboration leaders and stakeholders. Following this data collection, we facilitated two co-design meetings with local collaboration leaders to review and confirm themes and findings, as well as develop a menu of options for expanding collaborations throughout the city.

¹ Nine Chicago-based early childhood community collaborations participated in this project. Yet, we recognize there are coalitions and groups that most likely exist and/or operate without formal or even informal recognition as community collaborations. There are many groups, coalitions, and other cross-sector organizations and partnerships doing work across the city and while they were not included in this research effort, their work is equally important to ensuring Chicago's children and families have access to the services and supports that help them survive and thrive.

DEFINING EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

The definition of community collaboration varies depending upon the community, context, and stakeholders involved in accomplishing its mission and goals. Moreover, it is difficult to explain the unique role, purpose, and structure of collaborations since they vary widely. Because early childhood collaborations operate to meet the specific needs within the community or population they serve, there are numerous models of early childhood community collaborations.

To anchor this work and ensure all collaboration leaders recognize their collaboration model in this report, we partnered with early childhood stakeholders across the city to refine and enhance the existing definition of collaboration used by the Community Systems Statewide Supports team. It was important to this effort that the definition provided here represents the variety of early childhood collaborations currently operating in Chicago.

What is a collaboration?

A collaboration is defined as an organizational structure and way of working that addresses complex issues in communities — issues that are best solved by multiple organizations or sectors. A collaboration is characterized by a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more individuals, organizations, or systems within a community. The relationship includes a mutual commitment to a:

- Shared vision, goals, definitions, and measurement
- Jointly developed structure with clear and formalized roles for participants
- Shared decision-making and power
- Shared responsibility and accountability for success
- Shared resources, risks, and rewards

What is an early childhood community collaboration?

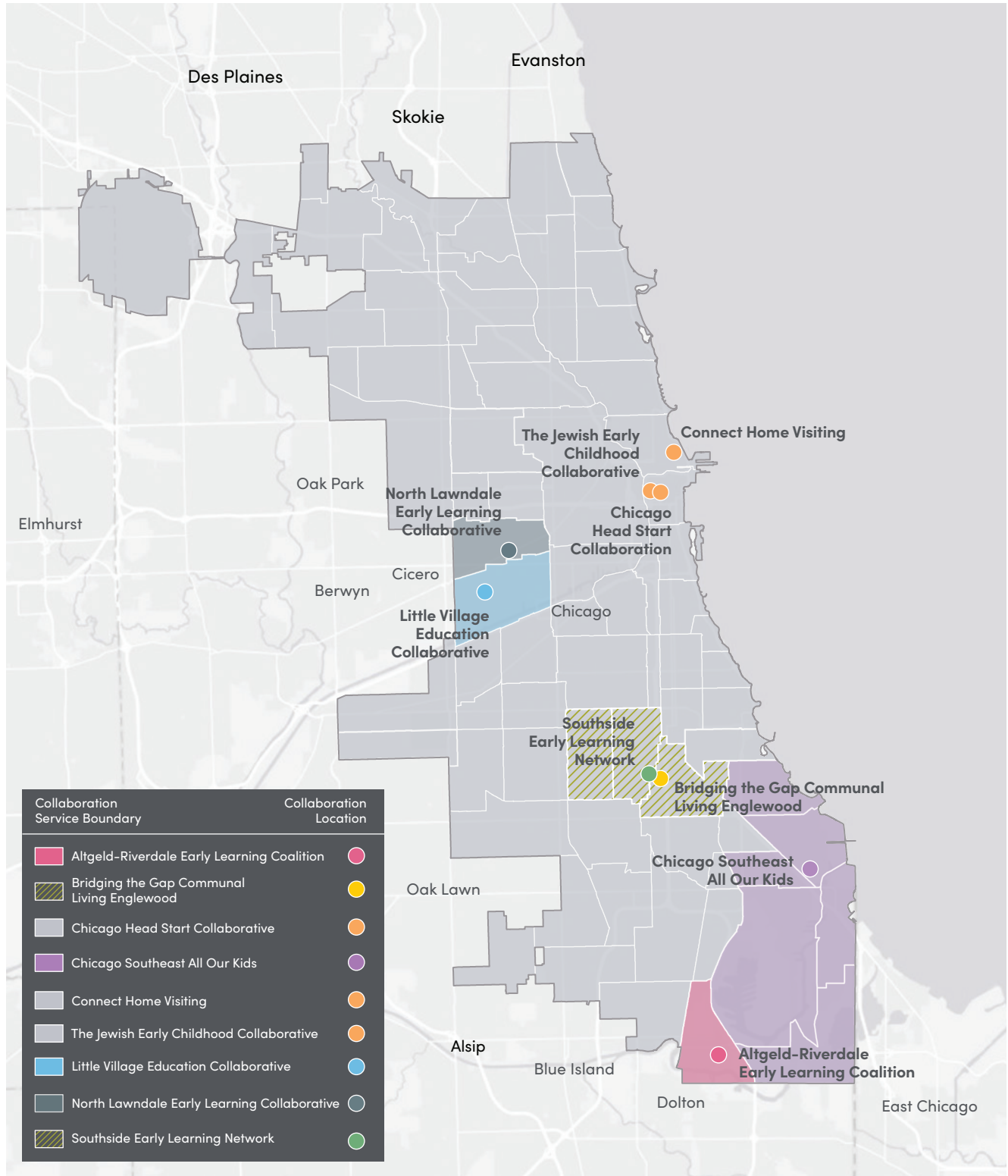
Early childhood community collaborations are defined as groups that connect local partners, stakeholders, and parents who represent the full spectrum of people, programs, and services that touch the lives of young children and their families. Together, they serve as a trusted community resource that responds to local needs, aligns with community goals to tackle complex issues, supports families as they navigate the early childhood system, informs policy and programs to make real-time improvements, and increases access to resources.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHICAGO EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY COLLABORATION LANDSCAPE

Chicago has a long history of employing various community level approaches to support families as they navigate the complexities of the early childhood system. Early childhood community collaborations have operated in the city since at least the late 1990's, and over time, leaders have refined their design, approach, and service offerings by involving families, engaging providers, and partnering with community stakeholders. Yet, despite the longstanding tradition of early childhood community collaborations, many Chicago communities still lack access to a collaboration, leaving large numbers of families without a centralized resource to help them navigate the early childhood system.

Nine early childhood community collaborations currently operate in Chicago. The map and accompanying table below provide information on the community areas served by these collaborations and the primary activities of each. Six of the collaborations operate within specific Chicago community areas and three of the collaborations span the city, with a focus on specific early childhood services or populations.

Map: Early childhood community collaborations currently operating in Chicago



View an interactive map of the early childhood collaborations in Chicago [here](#).

Table: Early childhood community collaborations currently operating in Chicago

Early Childhood Collaboration	Geographic Service Area	Primary Activities
Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition	Altgeld Riverdale Community Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrollment in early learning programs • Serve priority populations • Increase children's attendance in early learning programs^a
Bridging the Gap Communal Living Englewood	Englewood, West Englewood, Greater Grand Crossing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrollment in early learning programs • Serve priority populations^a
Chicago Head Start Collaborative	City of Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrollment • Strengthen collaborative relationships • Increase awareness of services^b
Chicago Southeast All Our Kids	South Chicago, East Side, Hegewisch, South Deering, Calumet Heights, and South Shore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene organizations that engage with the same populations and share information about services. • Implement a shared practice to facilitate efficient referrals between organizations. • Engage and learn from families about their experiences accessing services^d
Connect Home Visiting	City of Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrollment in early learning programs • Serve priority populations • Provide coordinated intake^c
The Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative	City of Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrollment in early learning programs • Increase quality of early learning programs • Serve priority populations^a
Little Village Education Collaborative	South Lawndale (Little Village)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrollment in early learning programs • Increase quality of early learning programs • Align birth to third grade using B-3 Framework^a
North Lawndale Early Learning Collaborative	North Lawndale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrollment in early learning programs • Increase children's attendance in early learning programs • Serve priority populations • Provide coordinated intake^c
Southside Early Learning Network	Englewood, West Englewood, and Greater Grand Crossing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide coordinated intake^c

^a ["Illinois Early Childhood Collaboration Directory,"](#) Illinois Action for Children, July 2022.

^b [Grant Recipients,](#) Birth to Five Illinois website, retrieved June 29, 2024.

^c CS3 Collaboration Profile Data, 2024.

^d [All Our Kids Network – Southeast Chicago,](#) All Our Kids website, retrieved June 29, 2024.

We invited Chicago early childhood collaboration leaders and stakeholders to share their in-depth perspectives and experiences related to the current collaboration landscape. These conversations surfaced a range of stories, views, and examples related to current collaboration strengths and challenges, as well as ideas for improving collaboration operations, reach, impact, and sustainability. Below is an overview of key insights and conditions of the current early childhood community collaboration landscape in Chicago.

Operations, Value & Community Focus

- **Many collaborations are hyper-local, enabling them to respond to specific community needs.** Collaboration leaders regularly communicate with community members to understand the needs of children and families, allowing collaborations to shift goals, refine programming, and prioritize resources to center families' most pressing needs.
- **Collaborations are a valuable resource for families and help prepare children to enter school ready to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.** Families are eager for help accessing resources and supports that ensure their children's health and safety, and for many of these families, early childhood collaborations connect them to essential services.
- **Collaborations operate differently in each community.** Some collaborations serve as informational hubs to help families understand their options and connect them to resources and services, including childcare, nutrition, and housing supports. Other collaborations engage in systems building and improvement, with the intent of transforming existing systems to serve children and families more effectively. Some collaborations do both, while others provide interagency referrals and warm hand-offs.

- **Many communities lack an early childhood collaboration.** Currently, nine early childhood collaborations operate in the City of Chicago. There are large geographic areas with no collaboration and therefore many families are left to navigate the patchwork of early childhood services on their own.

Funding, Leadership & Impact

- **Collaborations receive funding from a variety of sources, with different grant requirements and restrictions.** Collaboration leaders are grateful for every dollar they receive. Yet, funding is often time-limited and restricted to specific programs or activities. There is a need for sustained investments in collaboration work, to recognize the long-term work that collaborations do to support families, expand their reach, and invest time in cultivating and nurturing relationships at the community, city, and state levels.
- **Collaboration leaders are stretched thin and do their best to serve children and families, despite limited time and staff.** Most collaborations are understaffed and many have staff who work outside traditional business hours to handle managerial tasks on behalf of the collaboration. Some collaborations do not have paid staff who are fully dedicated to the collaboration's work, so the work is done in addition to other job duties or on an entirely volunteer basis.
- **Collaboration leaders and stakeholders are eager to expand their capacity to influence public policies.** Early childhood programs and services are delivered at the local level, yet public policy decisions do not always reflect the needs and priorities of local communities. Collaboration leaders repeatedly expressed interest in leveraging their knowledge of community needs to elevate their contributions to public policy discussions and decisions.

- **Collaboration outcomes and impact are difficult to measure, yet vital to ensuring continued support from community leaders, funders, and policymakers.** Collaborations serve as a network of leaders and providers who support families in accessing early childhood services, making it difficult to quantify the value of these relationships. Both the direct results and long-term impact of those relationships and the strength of those relationships are hard to measure, making it difficult to fully articulate the value of collaborations.

Relationships, Family, & Community Engagement

- **Relationships are at the heart of early childhood collaborations.** Cultivating and nurturing relationships with community members, families, and early childhood service providers is the most essential role played by early childhood community collaborations. Building these relationships requires concentrated time and effort, and results in better connected services for young children and families.
- **Collaboration leaders are dedicated to their communities and crave opportunities to learn from colleagues doing similar work in other communities.** Collaboration leaders are creative and many have developed relationships, systems, and processes to effectively respond to the needs in their specific communities. Yet, many collaboration leaders are unaware of how their colleagues in other communities approach their work or deliver services. Collaborations are eager to learn from each other, and welcome more opportunities to reflect on their approach, discuss ideas to strengthen their work, and engage with other leaders in the field.
- **Collaborations rely on diverse voices and perspectives to strengthen their efforts, align systems, nurture local relationships, and foster community conversations.** Community collaborations intentionally engage in cross-sector partnerships and gather the unique perspectives of stakeholders who are racially, ethnically, culturally, and ably diverse. This enables collaborations to address community-specific challenges and implement relevant solutions.
- **Collaborations invite, engage, and learn from parents, caregivers, and early childhood practitioners to enhance collaboration work.** Collaboration leaders do their best to engage parents, caregivers, and early childhood practitioners in designing and carrying out the collaboration's work. Yet, collaboration leaders noted the need to increase the involvement of each of these stakeholder groups, especially because each of these groups are most often directly affected by the collaboration's efforts.

THE ROLE OF COLLABORATIONS

What role do early childhood community collaborations play in supporting the needs of young children and families?

Early childhood community collaborations provide a customized and needs-based approach to serving young children and families. They play a valuable role in connecting stakeholders, coordinating services, improving local early childhood systems, and raising awareness about the importance of and access to early childhood education. Stakeholders view collaborations as essential for supporting families and communities, and for addressing their diverse needs. In particular, collaborations facilitate the following:

Organizing and Coordinating Systems & Resources

- **Community involvement and shared agendas.** Collaborations involve community stakeholders and families in the decision-making processes and leverage local assets to support early childhood community collaboration agenda items.
- **Data utilization and conducting needs assessments.** Utilizing data to assess community needs is essential for tailoring services to meet the needs of young children and families. Collaborations often lead data collection and analysis activities, in the spirit of identifying and acting on service gaps. Additionally, they facilitate solution design and implementation activities to address the specific needs of the community.
- **Connect stakeholders and coordinate resources.** Collaborations connect stakeholders such as families, providers, practitioners, and policymakers, to assess local early childhood needs. This is particularly crucial in the post-COVID era, which further fragmented the early childhood system. They coordinate services and resources, provide navigation support, and help families access needed resources.
- **Systems change.** Collaborations bring together cross-sector partners and organizations to collaborate and improve the early childhood system for children and families. They have the unique ability to identify gaps in current systems and advocate for improvements, while also ensuring that families' voices are included in the process.

Engaging Families & Communities

- **Center parent engagement.** Early childhood community collaborations are at the nexus of early childhood programs and parent engagement. A collaboration's role in connecting with parents to understand their needs and improve the early childhood system results in better outcomes for children, families, and communities.
- **Raise awareness and provide information to families and the community.** Collaborations raise awareness about the importance of early childhood and some provide programming, including parent education and playgroups for young children. They also help partner organizations align their efforts and support each other to achieve both individual and collective goals.
- **Support families in navigating systems.** Collaborations are deemed essential for supporting families in navigating complex systems, particularly in accessing early learning services and other resources to support young children's healthy growth and development. They also help families build relationships and access information through peer-to-peer relationships.
- **Connect families to services.** Some collaborations connect families to early learning services, including childcare, and other essential resources such as healthcare, food supports, and housing assistance. In other words, they provide hands-on support with enrollment and understanding programs and services.

ADDRESSING UNMET NEED FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATIONS IN CHICAGO

Chicago is home to 167,000 young children under the age of six. There are nine early childhood community collaborations, meaning there are thousands of children and families who do not have a local collaboration in their community. Of the nine collaborations that participated in this project, three operate throughout the city and focus on specialized services or priority populations. The remaining six collaborations operate within specific Chicago community areas. Out of 77 community areas in the city, eleven have collaborations specifically focused on connecting young children and families to early childhood services.²

Existing community collaborations in the City of Chicago have shown they are a key strategy to ensuring families can find and access culturally relevant care and early learning programs that meet their needs and preferences, including full day care or a combination of services from school districts, community-based organizations, and other wrap-around services. An expansion of early childhood collaborations throughout the city would more fully meet the diverse array of families' needs and leverage the power of our communities.³ Potential strategies and benefits for addressing the unmet need for collaborations across the city could include:

- **Stand up early childhood community collaborations in designated high priority communities.** Many communities lack a formal early childhood education collaboration or informal mechanism to learn about and address families' needs. Community leaders identified several Chicago communities that would benefit from an active and engaged early childhood community collaboration, including Rogers Park, Roseland, and West Ridge. Each of these communities is home to large numbers of young children, many of whom are not being served by early childhood programs.⁴
- **Connect families to services beyond early childhood resources.** Collaborations are trusted and credible community leaders with the ability to connect families to early childhood resources, as well as additional supports such as housing, food, health care, employment, etc. Some collaborations already do this, yet others have interest in and potential to provide intensive navigation assistance and centralized supports to young children and families.
- **Promote early childhood workforce pathways.** Some collaborations help develop pathways for aspiring early childhood educators to enter the workforce. Yet, given the severe workforce shortages across the city, collaborations would be well positioned to engage in formal activities that help build a pipeline of qualified early childhood educators.
- **Embrace community collaborations as a resource to help the City of Chicago understand and respond to families' needs.** Collaborations could serve as a resource for the city as a whole, providing a direct line of communication between families and decision makers, to help the latter understand families' experiences and direct relevant resources to the appropriate communities.

To comprehensively understand the unmet need for collaborations across the city, it is important to conduct additional research on specific community characteristics, needs, and wants. One next step would be to analyze Chicago Community area population data, identify existing local service providers and agencies, as well as engage parents and families to learn more about their needs and wants.

Understanding the relational nature between data, community partners, and family needs and wants is an essential component to fully understanding how to address the unmet need for early childhood community collaborations.

² Some collaborations span multiple community areas and collaborations noted that while they do have a geographical focus, they do not turn families away.

³ Illinois Action for Children, Policy and Advocacy, Policy Priorities to Elevate Child Care in Chicago, unpublished, 2024.

⁴ "Early Childhood Regional Community Needs Assessment, Region 1-A", Birth to Five Illinois, 2023.

EARLY CHILDHOOD COLLABORATION EXPANSION: OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

In order to outline a menu of options for how early childhood collaborations could be expanded throughout the city, current collaboration leaders and stakeholders were asked to consider options for addressing comprehensive and citywide needs. The following three options outline how collaborations could be developed across the city, along with another three options for how collaborations could be supported in an expanded network. Reflected in each option are the advantages and challenges identified by collaboration members. Additionally, we included considerations and recommendations to inform planning and implementation.

Note: Collaborations exist to foster systems change, address community-level gaps, and facilitate equity. As decision makers consider each option, it is imperative that they evaluate existing community resources and access to those resources, which are currently uneven throughout the city.

How could collaborations be *developed*?

<p>OPTION A: Prioritize funding community collaborations in communities that demonstrate the greatest need. Develop collaborations based on community needs, using clear and credible data, as well as family, community, and other stakeholder input.</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizing collaboration expansion based on need would allocate resources to specific communities, with the focus on areas where resources are most inaccessible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jump start collaborations in communities with the greatest need and commitment on access and equity. • Optimize investment of early childhood funding.
<p>Challenges:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This approach could lead to an imbalance of community supports. Communities could become oversaturated or discourage other communities from participating in important systems development conversations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An entity or organization would need to be identified within the specific community to lead the new collaboration, and it may or may not have the connections, knowledge or skills to effectively support community needs.
<p>Considerations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would decision makers define and prioritize “need” and ensure the definition is unbiased? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would disaggregated data be used to inform and prioritize community needs?
<p>Recommendations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly and credibly define “need” in partnership with community stakeholders and parents, and openly share the methodology with communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure initial funding meets community needs, including factoring in the staff time necessary to build relationships and establish connections to local services and providers.

How could collaborations be *developed*?

OPTION B:

Implement an early childhood collaboration in each designated or pre-determined geographic area. This top-down approach offers various design options for developing or expanding collaborations based on existing geographic boundaries, such as community or neighborhood areas, school-zones, or legislative districts.

Advantages:

- Each Chicago community would have the opportunity to establish a collaboration that represents their unique approach to supporting young children and families.
- Collaborations would be hyper-local, meaning they would focus on serving young children and families who reside within the designated geographic boundary.
- Individual collaborations would partner with community stakeholders to identify and prioritize needs, as well as implement culturally relevant solutions.
- Each collaboration would be positioned to demonstrate measurable progress as a result of focusing their time and attention on community-identified priorities and ways of working.
- Collaborations would be recognized as a one-stop shop for families seeking access to and knowledge of early childhood services and supports.

Challenges:

- A top-down, comprehensive, community-level structure has the potential to create competition among collaborations, which may result in their reluctance to share knowledge and resources.
- Unique aspects of the early childhood field and community may become more siloed.
- It may be difficult to ensure seamless support to families who relocate to another Chicago community, one that is served by a different collaboration.
- Not every community will need or want an early childhood collaboration.
- Amplifying access to supports may further stretch already scarce community resources and/or duplicate efforts.
- A more comprehensive early childhood collaboration system would require more qualified staff, which may exacerbate existing and pervasive staffing shortages.

Considerations:

- How would collaborations balance a top-down approach with grassroots efforts to address local needs?
- Will every collaboration share the same goals?
- What body or organization would lead a top-down, centralized effort?
- Who would cultivate and nurture stakeholder buy-in given that collaborations are not well-known or understood?
- How would community areas be geographically defined?

Recommendations:

- Support collaborations by providing resources, suggestions, and supports to develop and implement an equity-centered approach.
- Provide guidance and supports to limit duplication of efforts across neighboring collaborations.
- Establish data frameworks and tools to support collaboration design, development, and implementation.

How could collaborations be *developed*?

<p>OPTION C: Prioritize funding community collaborations in communities that demonstrate interest, capacity, and commitment. Collaborations would be developed or expanded in areas or communities that complete a needs assessment and demonstrate ‘readiness’ for implementing a collaboration.</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grassroots option that allows communities to own the process. • Centers community voice and cultivates ownership in the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community commitment and buy-in is a central component of this option, increasing the likelihood of collaboration success and sustainability.
<p>Challenges:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential conflicts or turf issues when multiple organizations or entities express interest in leading the collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining how funds would be disbursed could be challenging. • Developing a shared definition for interest, capacity, and commitment may prove difficult with various stakeholders.
<p>Considerations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would communities be made aware of the needs assessment? • Would interested communities receive funding to conduct a needs assessment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who would cultivate and nurture stakeholder buy-in given that collaborations are not well-known or understood? • How would community areas be geographically defined?
<p>Recommendations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness benchmarks should be broad enough to apply across communities, yet provide flexibility for communities to define their collaboration structure and focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand current community investments to prevent duplicative efforts.

How could collaborations be supported?

<p>OPTION A: Collaborations operate independently with access to a stable funding source. Collaborations focus on the community or group they serve and have access to steady and unrestricted funding.</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowers collaborations to design approaches to meet their communities’ unique needs. • Each collaboration is free to leverage their unique expertise and engage in cross-collaboration teaching and learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established collaborations would appreciate this approach as they would have access to a variety of resources.
<p>Challenges:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absent an overarching structure, collaborations may duplicate efforts. • Without an easy and obvious connection to a larger system, collaborations may only focus on delivering programs and not engage in early childhood systems change work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without defined measures, metrics, and indicators, or common benchmarks, the collaborations may not produce tangible results for children, families, or communities. • Determining how collaborations are funded and at what level would require a transparent, collaborative methodology. • Building in shared accountability will be a challenge.
<p>Considerations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will equitable funding be ensured? • How will stable funding be provided? • Would funding be public, private, or a combination of the two? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will determine how collaborations are funded, and at what level? • How would shared accountability be built in?
<p>Recommendations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using a shared framework that aligns with city and state goals to drive and track the work. • Create a feedback loop that involves community to city and city to state input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and coordinate a shared advocacy agenda to advance solutions to shared problems.

How could collaborations be supported?

<p>OPTION B: Create and manage a city-wide hub that distributes funds AND connects and coordinates collaborations. Collaborations would develop across the city, and this option would support them.</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The citywide hub would be a neutral entity and provide a network of resources and supports that collaborations could voluntarily access to support their efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some citywide coordination and support, in addition to funding.
<p>Challenges:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This option could add another layer of bureaucracy that may be difficult to navigate and could result in “gatekeeping” of funding and resources. If a hub is a separate entity, it may be too far removed from grassroots efforts to understand nuanced needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding delays would impact the entire collaboration workforce. If a government agency manages a hub, the work could be dictated by political will. A hub could create competition between collaborations.
<p>Considerations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who would manage and oversee the hub? That may influence buy-in and support. Are other groups (such as CS3 or IAFC) already providing connections between collaborations? What checks and balances could be added to ensure distribution and connections are equitable? What entity would fund a city-wide hub? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would funding a hub limit the amount of funding available to local collaborations? Can the city commit to providing long-term sustainable funding? How would the hub operate to ensure it effectively supports collaborations?
<p>Recommendations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some collaborations may require more funding than others. Design the hub so that it facilitates effective partnership with and between collaborations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the hub is responsible for capacity building, in addition to funding and coordination of services and activities. Charge the hub with data collection and analysis, as well as partnering with collaborations to build their capacity to do the same.

How could collaborations be supported?

<p>OPTION C: Establish a citywide team that facilitates connections between collaborations and provides training, technical assistance, and support. Provide some technical assistance support but omit coordination.</p>	
<p>Advantages:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers a birds-eye view of the capabilities and expertise within the various collaborations across the city. • Bridge gaps in understanding individual collaboration goals and alignment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborations may have access to tailored supports. • This option would be useful to communities that want a collaboration but need support getting started.
<p>Challenges:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variations in the skills and capacity of collaboration staff, coupled with unique community needs, may make it difficult for a citywide entity to adequately support individual collaboration development areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of duplicating existing funding and current efforts. • There may not be funding or political will for a citywide team.
<p>Considerations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will supports be tailored to ensure that collaborations value what is offered? • How will collaborations be supported to self-organize and create learning communities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would this structure be sustainable and/or subject to elimination when funding is limited?
<p>Recommendations:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider building an “outreach team” situated within a hub. The hub is administrative in regards to allocating funding and tracking compliance, and the outreach team is grassroots and focuses on connection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support collaborations to use data to inform their work, as well as share their outcomes and impact with community and city stakeholders.

AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This report provides an overview of the early childhood community collaboration landscape in Chicago, the role of collaborations in supporting young children and families, the unmet needs that might be addressed by expanding collaborations, along with options for decision makers to consider as they evaluate how to move forward. While this report is expansive, it is not exhaustive, and therefore presents the opportunity to gather additional data and insights and conduct further research. Next steps might include:

- Partner with existing early childhood community collaborations to understand what resources and funding they need to sustain and elevate their work.

- Develop a tool that existing early childhood community collaborations can adopt and use to document their approach, understand their progress, measure their impact, and share their story. This will serve multiple purposes – it will capture what works in individual communities so that others collaborations can learn from them and provide existing collaborations with data and information that will help demonstrate their value to funders and policymakers.
- Assess individual community needs by partnering with community stakeholders in areas that do not have an existing collaboration to determine community characteristics, interest in and need for a collaboration, partner availability, and leadership capacity.

While the above list is not exhaustive, it provides clear next steps to improve families' access to early childhood education and care services so that all children have what they need to thrive.

