

Start Early organizes its work in Chicago toward a sustainable, equitable, and accessible system of high-quality early care and learning around four primary systems-level goals. These goals include:

STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE

- Promote state-level policies and regulations that promote an inclusive, well-resourced early childhood system in Chicago.
- Grow city funding for Chicago's early childhood programs, system infrastructure and supports.
 - Deepen city investment in an early childhood local collaboration system with defined functions connected to aligned, effective regional and state council infrastructure.
- Establish a coherent, consolidated early childhood administrative/governance structure in the city of Chicago, centering the experiences of families and providers, especially those families furthest from opportunities and with the most complex circumstances.
 - Strengthen the Every Child Ready Chicago public-private advisory and other policy making tables to improve bi-directional communication across families, communities and system leaders.
 - Promote early childhood, bilingual, and special education expertise on public policy-making bodies, including the Chicago Board of Education and City Council.
- Improve the mechanisms by which providers receive public funds to preserve the mixed-delivery system of school- and community-based programs and provide greater stability and adequacy.
- Establish a system to provide inclusive special education services to children with disabilities in early care and learning programs across all settings;
 - Work with Chicago Public Schools to ensure delivery of special education services in community-based early childhood programs.
- Promote the sustainability and expansion of a city-wide system for Universal Newborn Screening and Support services.
 - Identify public and private funding for and ensure integration of Family Connects Chicago into broader prenatal-to-three health and early learning services.
- Strengthen early childhood data systems, capacity, and the utilization of data in policy/decision making.
 - Promote sustainability of the Chicago Early Childhood Integrated Data System (CECIDS) and the Early Childhood Research Alliance of Chicago (EC-REACH).

WELL-DESIGNED AND ADMINISTERED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Early Intervention

- Increase number of Chicago children served in the Early Intervention program, with a focus on children under age 3 and children who meet automatic eligibility criteria.
- Improve the process of transitioning children from Early Intervention to Special Education.
- Strengthen direct communication with providers and families to increase active engagement in improving the system and their ability to advocate for their children.

Early Childhood Block Grant

- Ensure the supply of adequately funded early childhood slots in a range of settings (including full-day, full-year), particularly in areas of highest need.
- Increase equitable distribution of funds and program slots across Chicago Public Schools, community-based programs, and family child care.
- Increase supply of adequately funded center-based slots for children birth-three.

Child Care

- Improve supply and quality of center- and home-based child care, with a focus on infant-toddler slots and inclusion of children with delays or disabilities.

Home Visiting & Doula Services

- Raise the profile of and strengthen the role of home visitors and doulas in the broader mixed delivery system of early care and learning.
- Improve family participation rates in home visiting and doula programs through increased public awareness of the program and supporting the development of new models or promising practices to better meet family and community needs.

Head Start and Early Head Start

- Increase family enrollment and participation in Chicago's Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- Increase the availability of center-based Early Head Start slots.
- Improve alignment, collaboration, and cohesion across Chicago's Early Head Start and Head Start grant recipients.

THRIVING, REPRESENTATIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

- Increase recruitment and retention of early childhood professionals, including those with specialized skills in bilingual and special education.
 - Increase compensation with a focus on pay parity and competitive benefits between community-based providers and Chicago Public Schools teachers.
 - Strengthen opportunities for professional development, reflective supervision, and infant and early childhood mental health consultation.
- Strengthen the perception and reputation of the early childhood field by partnering with city agencies to promote early learning careers as desirable for youth.
- Increase credential, degree, license, and endorsement attainment for the early childhood field, including in bilingual and special education.
 - Expand access to the Chicago Early Learning Workforce Scholarship and other supports for candidates.

HEALTHY, SAFE AND ECONOMICALLY SECURE FAMILIES

- Strengthen the alignment and integration of the health and early care and learning systems.
 - Inform and support policies and initiatives that promote safe and healthy early care and learning environments
 - Increase access to culturally and linguistically responsive health care for families with young children and pregnant people, including preventive and specialty care, mental health and substance use recovery care.
- Improve access to public and private health insurance for families with young children and pregnant people.
- Increase economic supports for families with young children, including paid family and medical leave, access to public benefits and tax credits.
- Inform and support policies and initiatives that promote safe and healthy neighborhoods, housing and environments and positive social and community supports.

