



STEP Forward with Data Framework: At-A-Glance

The System Transformation for Equitable Preschools (STEP Forward with Data) Framework is designed to help preschool leaders use data to promote greater equity at every step of their system. It is intended to help preschool systems leaders understand the experiences of children, families, or workforce members within their systems to begin identifying potential inequities and examine root causes that could be addressed.

The Framework was developed by the Early Childhood Data Collaborative at Child Trends, in partnership with a consortium of experts. The intended users of the Framework are **preschool system leaders**— those who can influence decisions or establish a policy for more than one preschool program or site.

The STEP Forward with Data Framework is organized into **six preschool system steps** that can contribute to inequities that a child, family, or workforce member may face and on which a preschool system leader could make actionable changes to improve quality and access to equitable preschool experiences. Across the six steps, there are **20 essential questions** for preschool systems leaders to answer, understand, and address.

Product overview

The Framework document first establishes the rationale for developing a unifying data framework in preschool. Second, it details the goals of the Framework, including guidance for preparing to use it. The Framework then provides a list of essential questions which preschool systems leaders may want to answer about their preschool system, organized around six steps in the preschool system. For each step, we describe how children, families, and workforce members experience the system and establish the relevant questions that could be answered at each step. These essential questions are broken down into recommended metrics that can help answer the question using data, which also include suggested ways to calculate the metric, the level at which to collect the data, and example data sources. Finally, we include a glossary that defines terms used throughout the Framework.

Preschool System Steps



20 Essential Questions

System Step	Essential Question	Answering this question ensures that an equitable preschool system...
Supply	Q1. Does existing supply meet the needs of families from focal populations?	...has an adequate supply of preschool programs whereby families from focal populations have the choice to attend preschool programs they want.
Outreach	Q2. Do outreach methods improve knowledge and understanding of program options among families from focal populations?	...seeks to ensure that families, especially those from focal populations, know and understand the preschool options available to them.

System Step	Essential Question	Answering this question ensures that an equitable preschool system...
Enrollment	Q3. Do eligibility processes allow families from focal populations to attend programs they want?	...establishes program eligibility criteria that allow children and families from focal populations to attend preschool programs of choice.
	Q4. Do enrollment procedures help families from focal populations attend programs they want?	...aims to make the enrollment process as seamless as possible for families from focal populations.
	Q5. Are children from focal populations enrolled proportionate or higher than their representation in the community?	...aims to enroll as many children as possible into preschool programs, especially those from focal populations who would benefit from preschool.
	Q6. Are children from focal populations enrolled in programs rated as high-quality proportionate to their representation in the system?	...ensures that children from focal populations can access high-quality preschool options.
	Q7. Do children from focal populations have consistent attendance?	...supports children to attend preschool for the intended duration of the preschool program to maximize the impact of benefits from preschool.
Learning Experiences	Q8. Are identities of children from focal populations and families reflected in programs?	...has children and families from focal populations reflected, appreciated, and celebrated in preschool programs.
	Q9. Do workforce members receive training in supporting the needs of children from focal populations and families?	...builds in and fully supports continued professional development to workforce members that are culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and trauma informed and tailored to the needs of children from focal populations and families.
	Q10. Do children from focal populations receive positive behavior supports?	...ensures that children from focal populations receive positive behavior supports and limit their exposure to discipline practices that may cause harm to children.
	Q11. Do children from focal populations have the learning accommodations they need?	...ensures that children from focal populations have the learning accommodations they need to fully participate in activities with their peers.
	Q12. Does the program offer or connect families from focal populations with whole family services?	...supports the whole family, by connecting families to services they need, such as housing supports or nutrition assistance programs.
	Q13. Are multiple forms of evidence used to understand the developmental progress, strengths, and needs—across domains of development—of children from focal populations?	...gathers information from a variety of sources (and does not lean on one source) to understand how a child's development.
	Q14. Are facilities structured and maintained to support the well-being of children from focal populations?	...maintains facilities that meet basic health and safety requirements to support learning for children from focal populations.

System Step	Essential Question	Answering this question ensures that an equitable preschool system...
Transitions	Q15. Do transition activities meet the needs of families from focal populations?	...facilitates the transition between learning accommodations, services, classrooms, and/or schools for children and families from focal populations.
	Q16. Are children from focal populations reaching developmental and learning milestones when transitioning to kindergarten?	...supports children from focal populations to reach developmentally appropriate milestones across developmental domains (i.e., language/literacy; cognition; social emotional development; approaches to learning; and physical development) upon kindergarten entry.
Administration	Q17. Are families from focal populations and workforce members engaged in shared leadership?	...is co-created with families, especially from focal populations, to ensure that the system is operated in a way that best meets the needs of families.
	Q18. Are there funding mechanisms to support equitable experiences for children, families, and workforce members?	...has sufficient and sustainable funding to ensure that children and families from focal populations have their needs met.
	Q19. Is there system-level guidance for how to support equitable experiences for children, families, and workforce members?	...is made stronger when preschool system leaders provide accessible guidance and expectations for how to support equitable experiences for children, families, and workforce members.
	Q20. Are there mechanisms to support equitable experiences for workforce members from focal populations?	...supports its workforce, especially those from focal populations, by ensuring that they are provided access to supports and resources to enter and continue to thrive in the system