



State Policy and Fiscal Opportunities to Support Implementation of Itinerant Services

Advancing Preschool Inclusion in Community-Based
Early Childhood Education Settings

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I. Overview of the project purpose

Leaders in Illinois have been focusing on how to ensure that children with disabilities and developmental delays access inclusive early childhood special education services (ECSE) in their least restrictive environment (LRE) alongside children without disabilities or delays. In 2022, the [Illinois State Board of Education released a report](#) with recommendations to better support children with disabilities and developmental delays with itinerant ECSE services in community-based settings. In 2023, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in partnership with Early CHOICES leveraged a dedicated portion of IL's federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) funding to begin to more deeply explore the recommendations from the 2022 report.

Early CHOICES engaged Start Early Consulting to research the cost drivers and barriers that local school districts face to providing itinerant ECSE services to children in community-based PreK programs; this research is intended to assist with setting the foundation for future statewide funding and fiscal analysis needs for inclusive ECSE. With advisory oversight from the Illinois Advancing Preschool Inclusion Advisory Group (Advisory Group), Start Early engaged in research and identified recommendations to address cost barriers that local school districts face when providing itinerant ECSE. The following report outlines: Start Early's research process, the foundational findings from this research, state-level opportunities to strengthen inclusion, and profiles of four Illinois school districts.

II. Start Early Process

Start Early, with input from Early CHOICES and the IL Advancing Preschool Inclusion Advisory Group, interviewed seven school districts to gain a better understanding of cost-driving implications to providing itinerant Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services to children in community-based PreK settings. Start Early did not research how local school districts provide itinerant or inclusive ECSE services to children that receive their services in school-based Pre-K programs or how school districts use blended or co-teaching models to provide inclusive services. The first interview was with the School District of Palm Beach County, Florida, where the district has been implementing itinerant ECSE since 2018. The intention of the Palm Beach County interview was to understand the various cost drivers the Start Early Consulting team should be exploring prior to interviewing school districts in Illinois. Based on information gleaned from Palm

Beach County and input from Early CHOICES and the Advisory Group, Start Early reached out to the following school districts in Illinois:

- Berwyn South School District 100
- City of Chicago School District 229 (aka Chicago Public Schools)
- Collinsville Community Unit School District 10
- Evanston School District 65
- TrueNorth Cooperative 804
- West Chicago Elementary School District 33

Through virtual interviews conducted with district staff, Start Early identified four Illinois-based districts where cost-related information was applicable to other districts working to implement itinerant ECSE services to children in community-based PreK programs and could help inform state-wide public policy and financing implications. The four districts profiled in this memo are: Berwyn South, Chicago Public Schools, Collinsville, and Evanston. The information gathered from these interviews were synthesized, analyzed, and compiled into draft findings and considerations that were shared with Early CHOICES and the Advisory Group for their feedback and review. From the interviews and input from the Advisory Group, foundational findings and state-level opportunities to strengthen inclusion across all settings via itinerant ECSE services are highlighted in the next sections.

III. Foundational Findings

A. State funding is essential to ensure equity

When the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) passed in 1975, Congress promised to cover 40% of the extra cost of providing special education, with support for children with disabilities intended to be a shared responsibility across federal, state, and local governments. However, federal funding currently covers less than 15% of those costs, and states and communities struggle to resource ECSE adequately. For Illinois, federal preschool special education funding through IDEA amounted to roughly \$14 million in fiscal year (FY) 2023, which is inadequate to support existing services, let alone more comprehensive supports to young children with disabilities and developmental delays who are enrolled in community-based settings. There are also no dedicated Illinois state funds to support preschool special education or the delivery of ECSE and related services in community based early learning settings. Not

surprisingly, each of the school districts interviewed identified that federal IDEA and state preschool funds alone were insufficient for the districts to provide itinerant ECSE services to children in their community-based settings.

Each district leveraged either local funding to support inclusion in community-based settings or private funding to support the planning and roll-out of inclusive services to community-based settings. All Districts stressed the importance of planning and relationship building to support inclusion in community-based settings, and that this pre-implementation work was vital to laying the foundation for successful itinerant services. While additional capacity (through either dedicated private funding, local funding, or targeted and intensive technical assistance) helped with the planning for most of the districts profiled, they all used existing dollars to provide itinerant ECSE services to children in community-based programs – predominantly supported with local revenues. Two districts indicated using a small portion of their federal IDEA allocation to support the implementation of ECSE itinerant services, but no districts mentioned using any other public funds.

This reliance on local funds to support itinerant services in community-based settings relies on local leadership, political will, and the ability to raise and leverage local revenues to support implementation. The ability to leverage local property taxes and other revenue streams varies by community; raising local revenues is more challenging for communities with families of lower income and communities that have been historically marginalized and underinvested through public policies. **Having equitable access to sustainable state funds that are specifically dedicated to preschool special education will be essential for all districts across the State of Illinois to be able to intentionally plan for the roll-out of itinerant ECSE services and to ensure that services can be provided in all settings.**

B. Districts have different cost needs

While the importance of state funding cannot be overstated, ensuring that districts have flexibility with how to use those resources is also important. In the districts profiled, it was clear that one district's "costs" might be another district's "savings" – particularly given how ECSE services may have been previously provided as districts shift to an itinerant model. For example, in Collinsville, providing transportation for children from their homes to their community-based pre-K program is an anticipated cost burden when this type of transportation is specified in a student's IEP. By

contrast, Chicago anticipates cost savings from not having to transport children from community-based Pre-K programs to their school-based sites to access services. Additionally, some districts may need to navigate teachers' union contracts that may result in additional costs – as in Chicago Public Schools – while other districts may not have such union contracts.

In some communities, funds may need to be dedicated to adjusting the physical environments or facilities of the community-based sites to ensure they can accommodate children with disabilities, while others may need to provide additional accommodations for itinerant teachers and related service providers to be able to implement itinerant services. Districts will know best what their needs will be to implement itinerant ECSE services to community-based sites. **Therefore, ensuring flexibility in how districts can spend additional state investments in preschool special education, along with existing early learning dollars to support these services, will be important.**

C. No district in Illinois has “figured it out”

Each of the Illinois school districts interviewed are in the early stages of providing itinerant early childhood special education services to children in community-based settings. Of the districts profiled, the length and reach of their itinerant services ranges as follows:

- Chicago is beginning implementation in Fall 2023 with an ability to serve up to 108 students.
- Collinsville has been providing itinerant services since 2020 and can serve up to ten students.
- Berwyn served approximately 15 children per year in community-based settings when they were implementing itinerant services. They no longer provide itinerant ECSE services.
- Evanston District 65 began providing itinerant services in January 2023 and serves between seven-to-nine students.

The districts interviewed are on the cutting edge of providing itinerant services in Illinois, yet these districts are either just beginning or have only been providing itinerant services for a short period of time with a relatively small reach. These districts are still norming and forming their program implementation needs for itinerant ECSE services in their communities. As a result, fully understanding key cost drivers or fiscal barriers to providing itinerant ECSE services continues to be a learning experience for these districts (additional detail is included in [Section V: District Profiles](#)). **Yet these local projects offer key lessons to inform needed state policy improvements**

and investments to support itinerant ECSE services and will offer newer community pilots the opportunity to build and learn from existing efforts to support inclusion of children with disabilities across the mixed-delivery early learning system. The following section outlines six key state-level opportunities that have surfaced from this research.

IV. State-level opportunities to strengthen inclusion across settings

A. Strengthen preschool LRE and inclusion in program administration and state rule

Across the districts interviewed, a strong commitment to serving children in inclusive and least restrictive environments (LRE) wasn't always the driving force leading districts to begin to implement itinerant ECSE services in community-based settings. While districts indicated varying levels of buy-in from their school district staff and the community-based providers when it came to inclusion, it wasn't atypical for a district to begin providing itinerant ECSE services out of practical necessity. For example, two of the districts interviewed indicated that they began providing itinerant ECSE services because they were running out of slots at school-based PreK programs to serve newly identified children with disabilities and delays with inclusive services. Thus, districts needed to identify other solutions to meet their legal obligation to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the LRE to children eligible for IDEA services. This may offer a partial explanation as to why itinerant ECSE services aren't more broadly available across the state and why all of the current efforts are relatively small in scale and inconsistent.

In light of the updated 2023 federal [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#), Illinois should update and create additional guidance that clearly articulates the expectations for school districts, community-based early childhood partners, and other constituents to support children's rights to be served in inclusive programs alongside children without disabilities in their LRE, inclusive of community-based early learning programs. These efforts should provide clarity on how to operationalize [IL's Early Childhood Inclusion Vision Statement](#) while ensuring proper state support and oversight so local school districts can comply with federal law.

For example, ISBE has already created some guidance, including [key questions to ask during IEP meetings](#), to help placement teams consider the supplementary aids and services a child would need to have their IEP successfully implemented in the early childhood program they would attend if not disabled, in accordance with federal guidance. This guidance emphasizes that best practice is that a family should never have to choose between attending the child care of their choice and receiving special education services. However, the district interviews indicate the potential need for additional clarity on the existing responsibility that the state and local education agencies (LEAs) hold to ensure this is the case. This could take the form of stronger administrative guidance or rulemaking by ISBE. The state could also codify the 2023 federal [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#) to ensure FAPE is provided in the LRE to every child with a disability in its jurisdiction, including in public or private early childhood or preschool programs including Head Start and community-based child care programs.

In conjunction with new rules and state policy, definitions for key terms to support inclusion in LRE should be explicitly defined by the state and universally used across all districts, including terms like “itinerant services.” This will address the issue surfaced by Start Early’s research regarding how different school districts understand and use the term “itinerant services” to mean different types of service-delivery that included transporting children across early care and education (ECE) settings to receive services. Clarity in language and expectations for both LEAs and community based ECE partners will support the state in moving toward greater alignment on the inclusion of children with disabilities across all settings.

B. Collaborative professional learning can support success

All districts profiled explicitly expressed the value and importance of professional learning as an essential element of success for their implementation of itinerant ECSE services. Two of the districts profiled mentioned leveraging the statewide infrastructure of professional learning (PD) and technical assistance (TA) through STAR NET or Early CHOICES. Statewide, STAR NET in collaboration with Early CHOICES could be a valuable resource for districts working on inclusion in all settings. Efforts similar to the collaboration between Chicago Public Schools itinerant ECSE implementation with STAR NET Region V could be replicated and scaled. The regionalized coverage of STAR NET, plus the flexibility of Early CHOICES to support a range of communities, could open up opportunities for role-alike trainings or communities of practice across school

district administrators, ECSE and related service providers, community-based ECE staff, or even special education cooperatives from different districts.

Because inclusion of young children with disabilities and delays requires collaboration across a mixed delivery ECE system, **Illinois can also consider bolstering its professional learning and technical assistance supports that cut across child care, Head Start, PreK, and early childhood special education to support inclusion.** This includes leveraging multiple PD and TA funding streams across ISBE, Head Start, and Child Care Development Funds to support educators and providers anywhere they work within the mixed delivery ecosystem. This would ensure the workforce has access to comprehensive and continuous job-embedded professional learning such as coaching, as well as TA to support the inclusion of children with disabilities and delays in their programs that are children's LRE and supports deep collaboration with ECSE.

C. Identify systemic solutions to the workforce shortage

Even though the districts profiled were able to allocate the appropriate workforce to begin providing itinerant services, districts experienced challenges with the workforce shortage, with a particular issue being the lack of Related Service Providers (RSPs). Districts indicated that the workforce shortage would become even more challenging if they were to expand their small-scale itinerant model in the future. In addition to the actual service delivery providers and special education teachers, larger districts like Chicago Public Schools (CPS) indicated that they would need additional administrative capacity to manage their collaborative partnerships with a potentially growing number of community-based early care and education sites. In the first year of the rollout, CPS has been able to spread that additional work across their current administrative team, but this was work above and beyond their existing responsibilities managing itinerant services to school-based Pre-K sites.

To properly support an expansion of itinerant ECSE services, **the State will need to take a closer look at the current workforce landscape and shortages** across the state by role across ECSE teacher and related service providers, as well as by the general education pre-K and child care teachers in community-based settings. Across these roles, focusing on expanding the multilingual workforce is essential. Additional research is needed to determine whether the workforce shortages – including the multilingual workforce shortage – specific to the Related Service Provider pool are due to breakdowns in recruitment pathways, a lack of qualified professionals, a

lack of incentives to recruit existing professionals to work in school and community-based settings versus hospital or other health systems, or a combination of many factors. This issue should be examined alongside workforce issues in the Early Intervention (EI) system as there may be overlap in key barriers and potential solutions, including work with the professional associations for many Related Service Providers and EI providers.

With a better understanding of the key barriers to having a robust multilingual workforce, the State will need to identify solutions that focus on compensation as well as new and innovative strategies to recruit and train people to address pipeline and pathway challenges related to becoming ECSE teachers and related service providers. This may include expanding pipeline strategies like apprenticeships, loan forgiveness programs, scholarships like the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarship Program, and exploring changes to licensure.

D. Provide guidance on background check requirements across early childhood programs

Two districts elevated the cost and logistical burden of complying with the differing background check requirements for school districts versus Head Start, and child care programs. As employees of local education agencies (LEAs), early childhood special education and related services providers are subject to specific background check requirements by the district. However, per federal Head Start requirements and the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) child care licensing, individuals whose activities involve the care or supervision of children for a child care provider or unsupervised access to children who are cared for or supervised by a child care are also subject to comprehensive background checks. Absent clear guidance from DCFS, ISBE, and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), child care providers – including Head Start programs – may not know whether existing background checks and documentation from LEAs can “count” toward the DCFS required background check processes. At times, this may result in LEA itinerant staff completing additional and duplicative background checks and can delay the timely delivery of IEP services to children enrolled in community-based early learning programs.

DCFS should provide clarifying guidance to operationalize how Head Start and licensed child care programs can streamline and simplify employee background check requirements for itinerant ECSE teachers and related service providers who deliver ECSE services within community-based

early learning programs. Guidance may need to be issued jointly by DCFS, IDHS, and ISBE. This guidance should explain the mechanisms to support how programs can accept existing documentation from LEAs on employee background checks to comply with DCFS and Head Start background check requirements that maintains employee confidentiality, as well as how to link background checks or other documentation from itinerant professionals to the community-based early care and education program in which they are delivering services. Once this guidance is created, it should be widely published and marketed, and ensure that all DCFS licensing representatives understand how to provide appropriate technical assistance to community-based programs and LEAs based on the new guidance.

E. Clarify how programs can leverage all available funding streams

Start Early's research elevated the need to clarify how both school districts and community-based Pre-K sites can leverage state early childhood block grant funded Preschool for All and Preschool for All Expansion (PFA/PFAE) to support a child in an inclusive setting that is their LRE. **The state will need to be more explicit about how communities can leverage existing Early Childhood Block grant funds, as well as other child care money through IDHS (CCDF funds) and Medicaid, to implement inclusion in community settings.** This can begin in the next funding opportunity for the Early Childhood Block Grant; ISBE should proactively prioritize activities and quality measures to support inclusion in the PFA/PFAE application. This could include offering supplemental guidance on what implementation of an itinerant ECSE model could look like in a community-based ECE program leveraging ECBG funds or could detail how a grantee could leverage these funds and other public funds to enhance staffing in the CBO to support push-in ECSE and related services.

F. Conduct a more comprehensive fiscal analysis

Future costs to implement itinerant ECSE services are still unclear as all of the districts interviewed are in early stages of implementation. A comprehensive fiscal analysis is needed for the State and any district to grow this model. **The fiscal analysis needs to identify the specifics of cost drivers and savings** such as background check requirements, recruiting and retaining qualified staff, or transportation; as well as identify revenue sources that LEAs and community-based early learning programs can leverage to implement services. This fiscal analysis should take

into consideration important economies of scale issues that may impact rural, suburban, and urban school districts differently. For example, considerations like the minimum number of children in a community-based early childhood education site, the caseloads for itinerant ECSE teachers and Related Service Providers, transportation savings and/or costs for children and the workforce, administrative costs for school districts to partner with community-based organizations, etc. all need to be taken into account.

Additionally, with both Governor Pritzker's *Smart Start Illinois* initiative and his announcement in October 2023 to create a new, unified state agency focused on early childhood, ensuring that **coordinated state governance across the mixed delivery early care and education system to support inclusion in all settings should be considered as a potential added cost to the comprehensive fiscal analysis.** Collaboration with staff as a mechanism in strengthening coordination is necessary; however, additional funding is needed for these collaborative efforts as it enlists the use of staff time and capacity. Understanding opportunities to strengthen coordination and collaboration, technical assistance, and data collection at the state administrative level across the Early Childhood Block Grant, Child Care Assistance Program, Head Start, Medicaid, and Early Childhood Special Education will be important for a robust and inclusive early childhood system. Cost modeling for Early Childhood Block Grant programs, Early Intervention, and child care compensation efforts can all ensure that the analysis represents the full cost of supporting all children in any base estimates of funding adequacy; inclusion should not be seen as an add-on but instead part of the fundamental calculations for these services and systems. This coordinated governance should also consider the important role that beneficiaries – including families with young children who have disabilities and developmental delays – play in strengthening the early childhood system. As a result, the costs associated with stronger coordination and incorporation of lived experience voices should also be considered.

As part of the comprehensive fiscal analysis, it will be important to **understand the revenues needed to support equitable access to inclusive early childhood special education services** across the state so that regardless of where children live, they can have high quality inclusive early learning experiences. As part of this analysis, Illinois should examine its current revenue streams for ECSE, and consider whether a new funding stream is needed to resource additional capacity for school districts and community-based providers to deliver itinerant ECSE services, particularly with a focus on equity across communities and in particular, those that have been historically underinvested in and marginalized due to policy and public budgeting.

In conjunction with the comprehensive fiscal analysis and exploration to leverage new funding streams, the State should plan to **provide and/or expand technical assistance** focused on individual district's or region's approaches to implementing itinerant ECSE services in community-based Pre-K settings so that communities can appropriately plan and budget. While ISBE has provided [guidance on how to layer funds](#) including child care, Head Start, and the Early Childhood Block Grant to support children with disabilities, additional guidance and technical assistance is needed on how to leverage and maximize all public funding to support students with itinerant ECSE services so both school districts and community-based Pre-K sites have sufficient resources to support their workforce and other service needs. This includes leveraging Medicaid, which, as elevated in the ISBE *Advancing Preschool Inclusion in Community Based Early Childhood Education Programs* report, school districts have the option to access for certain special education related services but may need more support to claim Medicaid reimbursement. Finally, the TA will also need to support communities with navigating cost implications for community-based providers to meaningfully engage in authentic collaboration and partnership, and considerations for districts on the right blend of itinerant services with other inclusive models of ECSE in communities like blended or co-taught classrooms.

V. District Profiles

A. Berwyn South School District 100

Overview:

Situated in the western suburbs of Chicago, Berwyn South School District 100 served a total of 3,125 PreK through eighth grade students in the 2021-2022 school year.¹ Prior to the implementation of itinerant early childhood special education (ECSE) services, Berwyn South School District 100 was operating free Pre-K at their schools using Preschool for All funding. As enrollment at the school-district expanded, private child care programs offering Pre-K were on the verge of closing due to the free school-based Pre-K. With this shift in demand, Berwyn South's Pre-K spots were quickly filling up, yet they needed to continue to meet their legal obligation of serving children with disabilities. This district-wide issue prompted the implementation of ECSE itinerant services through a highly collaborative partnership between the Berwyn South School

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, Retrieved on December 7, 2023 from [NCES website](#).

District and five community-based preschool sites. Prior to this, Berwyn South only provided speech-only services to community-based Pre-K partner sites.

At the beginning of this partnership, a mission and vision statement were developed to guide planning and service provision of preschool, including special education. The community-based preschool slots were funded using Berwyn South's local revenues – rather than state funds – and community-based programs were required to follow the same preschool program requirements as the school district's program. This included alignment with the public school calendar including providing Pre-K for the same number of school days and hours, the requirement to have a team inclusive of a bilingual assistant, having aligned joint professional development days, etc. To accommodate working parents, one partner site implemented an extended day program, with parents paying tuition for the extended hours. Berwyn South also partnered with community-based agencies so that children with disabilities and developmental delays in those settings could be screened, evaluated on site at the child's community-based Pre-K program, and ensure FAPE while receiving their related services on site.

In the community-based Pre-K programs, only ECSE related services were being provided by district employed Related Service Providers (RSPs). If a child had academic goals in their Individualized Education Program (IEP), they received their ECSE services at the school-based Pre-K sites. The expansion to itinerant services resulted in the RSPs caseloads expanding by providing district-wide related services to children attending both school-based and community-based preschool. These RSPs and the staff at community-based preschool sites held monthly joint problem-solving meetings to discuss classroom concerns; this was also an opportunity to manage incoming referrals and identify children that needed to be monitored and screened for ECSE.

Berwyn South's model also included the following components:

- Berwyn South School District and community-based partners were fully committed to providing inclusion in all settings including community-based organizations due to intensive relationship building and collaborative planning. Joint Professional Development days between partner site staff and district school staff not only supported relationship building but also had a major positive influence in the creation of inclusive classroom environments.
- The strong partnerships between teaching staff at Berwyn South and the partner sites resulted in the ability to influence the teaching and learning occurring in the classrooms.

This allowed the model to work well because they were able to assist CBO staff build capacity and understanding around ECSE students and learning.

- Implementing “Family Days” where half of the day would be spent with families and the other half of the day would be focused on staff PD allowed for strong partnerships with both families and teaching teams across Berwyn South and the partner sites.

Key Findings Related to Costs:

- All of the Pre-K seats in the five community-based programs that Berwyn South partnered with were funded with local revenues; only one of the five partner sites also received other public funding, which was Head Start. For children at all of these sites, their itinerant ECSE services were paid for using local revenues.
- To accommodate the travel across the District, RSPs were paid a travel stipend paid for by the school district.
- The District did not incur any cost issues with regards to background check requirements in community-based Pre-K sites.
- Challenges specific to timing and the ability to meet children’s IEPs arose when there was an increase of children in partner sites that needed ECSE related services. This resulted in the District not having enough RSPs to serve all eligible children at the partner sites – a workforce shortage and cost barrier. In reflection, they were able to determine that if they implemented the itinerant teacher model they would’ve still run into the same barrier. They have since hired an Instructional Coach and feel that if they had that position at the time of implementation that model could’ve worked.
- From the beginning of building out the implementation plan, they were able to determine that accounting for and building in shared planning time was crucial. They were able to achieve this by intentionally planning this within their infrastructure including the contracts with community-based Pre-K sites.

Current Status: Because their community-based itinerant services were provided using locally funded Pre-K, when Berwyn South experienced declining enrollment at the school-based, state-funded PreK for All sites, the District was no longer able to make the case that they should continue to spend local revenues to pay for community-based Pre-K and serve children using itinerant services there. This resulted in the elimination of their itinerant ECSE program. However, Berwyn South continues to provide speech-only services to children in community-based Pre-K sites. In Fall 2023, the District shared that they were experiencing growing enrollment and that

the school-based Pre-K classrooms were at maximum capacity. As a result, Berwyn South indicated they wished there were opportunities for community-based Pre-K partnerships like they had previously.

B. Chicago Public Schools

Overview:

Illinois' largest school district, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) served a total of 329,836 PreK through twelfth grade students across the district in the 2021-2022 school year.² From 2017-2019, CPS piloted an itinerant model of providing ECSE services to children in community-based early learning programs that ended due to a variety of factors including staffing challenges and leadership shifts. Therefore, the 2023-2024 school year is the second time that CPS is implementing itinerant ECSE services to children in community-based settings, and they are leveraging lessons learned from the 2017 pilot. Planning for the 2023-2024 implementation began a full year prior in 2022 – resourced with philanthropic funding – which allowed for implementation and logistical details to be ironed out in advance. For the 2023-2024 school year, CPS is partnering with six community-based Head Start agencies to provide itinerant ECSE services, leveraging twelve itinerant ECSE teachers already employed by CPS to serve up to 108 diverse learners throughout the school year. Per CPS's design of the rollout, children who will be served using itinerant ECSE services in the 2023-2024 school year have IEPs that indicate a need for 275 minutes of ECSE services or less related to academic goals with as many or as few related service minutes they need, or children needing only related services with no cap on minutes. Children needing more intensive academic services will continue to receive their ECSE services at CPS sites rather than in their Head Start program.

As part of the planning process, CPS was very intentional about the selection of partner Head Start sites, with CPS choosing to require teachers in the Head Start classrooms to be Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) certified holding a Professional Educator License (PEL) to ensure alignment of teacher qualifications between CPS brick and mortar sites with the partner Head Start sites. In the rollout, CPS is using a two-year phased approach to provide itinerant ECSE services to incoming 3- and 4-year-old students who are being found newly eligible for ECSE.

² National Center for Education Statistics, Retrieved on December 7, 2023 from [NCES website](#).

CPS recognizes parents and families as a part of leadership and decision-making and ensuring parents understand children's rights and protection under special education. Including families in the intentional planning for implementation of itinerant services to community-based Head Start beginning in 2022 was imperative to ensure families had a voice. Additionally, CPS highlighted the importance of obtaining perspectives from a diverse subset of parents who had prior positive and negative ECSE experiences for planning purposes. Along with including families, CPS shared that having teacher perspectives was invaluable, especially because they had CPS teachers who were part of the 2017 pilot who could offer key insights to inform a more successful 2023-2024 school year model.

Chicago Public Schools' model also includes the following highlights:

- Professional learning is an essential component; and at the time of the interview, two joint professional development opportunities had been conducted for both Head Start and itinerant teachers and professional learning cohorts had been established – one for classroom staff and one for leadership. Because of the size of CPS, a dedicated STAR NET technical assistance region is specifically assigned to CPS, allowing for CPS to work with STAR NET to provide opportunities to accommodate new professional learning needs related to providing itinerant ECSE services at the Head Start programs. Because STAR NET is already a part of the TA and professional learning network supporting CPS, CPS did not anticipate additional costs related to professional learning needs at the time of the interview.
- CPS's Related Service Providers (RSPs) were already using an itinerant model of service delivery, in that RSPs were assigned to a specific network that covered certain neighborhood(s) in the City of Chicago. RSPs were assigned to serve children with related services at CPS schools in their network. Now, in addition to CPS school buildings, the RSPs covering the network inclusive of the new Head Start sites have the children with IEPs in those Head Start programs added to their caseloads.

Key Findings Related to Costs:

- Philanthropic funding was essential to pay for the intentional year-long planning period that occurred before the rollout of itinerant ECSE services in the 2023-2024 school-year.
- Although CPS still provides mid-day transportation for children who require more intensive ECSE academic services from their Head Start sites to CPS sites, there is an overall cost

savings for the District because there is a decrease in how many students are being bussed to CPS brick and mortar sites from the Head Start agencies.

- CPS did not anticipate nor account for the potential need for their staff (itinerant teachers and RSPs) to complete an additional background check and provision of up-to-date medical records to be able to go into the Head Start partner sites to provide services. Because itinerant teachers and RSPs are CPS employees and all costs related to their employment are covered by the CPS budget, CPS assumed that having complied with their own background checks would have been sufficient. However, when the need to comply with the federal Office of Head Start and the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services' background check requirement for all staff providing services in Head Start was elevated, CPS couldn't share their itinerant staffs' background check results with the Head Start agencies due to employee privacy issues. This issue was still being parsed out at the time of the interview but may be an additional cost burden if the itinerant teachers and RSPs have to do additional background checks to comply with the Head Start and DCFS requirements.
- Because itinerant ECSE teachers and RSPs are part of the Chicago Teachers Union, union-related negotiations and connected cost implications had to be navigated. One area of negotiation was the cap of 275 minutes or less of IEP academic service minutes as previously indicated. Physical workspace was another area that had to be accounted for, since union agreements specified the type of workspace accommodations required for all unionized employees, which also applied to union employees working in Head Start sites. Being able to meet these workspace accommodations may have a potential cost implication (e.g. a separate private space to work, access to Wi-Fi and printing).
- Because CPS is the largest school district in the State of Illinois, they recognize that they are a huge employer of the specialized personnel needed to implement itinerant ECSE services in community-based settings. They also recognized that for smaller districts – and potentially smaller districts closer to Chicago – workforce shortages would likely impact their ability to provide itinerant ECSE services.
- With this relatively small rollout of itinerant services to Head Start settings, CPS has been able to navigate planning and implementation rather seamlessly from an administrative perspective. Currently there is no additional CPS staff managing the implementation of itinerant ECSE services to Head Start partners and is, rather, a management effort across multiple positions. To support implementation, CPS meets with the Head Start agencies a few times a week, though they expect the meeting frequency to decrease as time

continues. However, they recognized that if this model of itinerant ECSE services were to expand, they would need to expand their administrative personnel budget to manage relationships at new community-based preschool settings. CPS recommended the incorporation of additional administrative staff capacity for larger school districts so that there is adequate management and oversight of implementation and collaboration with community-based early learning partners.

Current Status: The implementation of itinerant ECSE services to Head Start partner sites is underway in the 2023-2024 school year. Currently, from CPS's vantage point, it was noted that they are continually thinking about the direction in which special education is moving as they have noticed that overall student enrollment has declined but the number of students with IEPs has increased. They noted that further attention is required to determine why they're seeing this increase and implications for expanding itinerant ECSE services and the impact on the District, the workforce, etc.

C. Collinsville Community School District

Overview:

In the Southwest part of Illinois and a suburb of the St. Louis, Missouri metropolitan area, Collinsville Community School District served 6,097 students PreK through twelfth grade in the 2021-2022 school year.³ The Collinsville Community School District (Collinsville) began providing itinerant ECSE services in 2020. Before implementing itinerant services, a team from Collinsville Community School District attended the Inclusion Roundtable with Early CHOICES and was one of three communities asked to participate in the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center's TA opportunity focused on improving Illinois's indicator 6 data on providing inclusive ECSE services for children with disabilities and delays alongside children without disabilities and delays. As part of the ECTA opportunity, Collinsville set a goal to start providing itinerant ECSE services to children in community-based settings, and included their local Head Start partner as a member of their Community Inclusion Team group. With that intentional planning work, Collinsville was able to successfully partner with the local Head Start agency to begin providing itinerant ECSE services, and the 2023-2024 school-year will be their third year of implementing this model.

³ National Center for Education Statistics, Retrieved on December 7, 2023 from [NCES website](#).

In the 2023-2024 school year, Collinsville provides itinerant ECSE services – both special education and related services – to two classrooms at their Head Start partner site. Collinsville Community School District employs one 0.5 FTE itinerant special education certified teacher who serves children at the Head Start site and provides push-in services either in small groups or individually. Up to ten students with IEPs can be served at the Head Start site with itinerant services.

The Collinsville Community School District model also includes the following highlights:

- Prior to itinerant ECSE implementation, the district had already been providing itinerant speech services to their Head Start partner site. The team noted that because the district had the foundation of providing itinerant speech services, they were able to expand and implement the itinerant ECSE academic services because the necessary supports for collaboration were already in place. To begin providing itinerant ECSE academic services, Collinsville Community School District shifted 50% of one full-time special education teacher's time to provide itinerant services at the Head Start, while teaching the other 50% of the time in an ECSE self-contained classroom in a school-based program. Collinsville noted that the success of rolling out itinerant services was due to the fact that they used an experienced teacher.
- From the beginning of itinerant implementation, the power of relationships was the driver of success. Collinsville Community School District was able to reallocate staff seamlessly to providing itinerant services because their staff understood and believed in the benefits of inclusion including itinerant services. This same belief was also true among staff at the Head Start partner site. Additionally, a tangible example of the collaboration was in sharing the anticipated costs, with the Head Start partner paying mileage for the itinerant ECSE teacher to travel to their site and providing any needed supplies at the Head Start location.
- Collinsville worked with families of children at the Head Start partner site to update their IEPs via amendments to reflect the itinerant services they would receive at the Head Start.

Key Findings Related to Costs:

- Transportation has been difficult to navigate; the District provides transportation for students from their homes to their school-based sites, but are not able to transport students from their home directly to the Head Start partner site. While the Head Start site has their own transportation, they faced bus driver shortage issues which impacted their transportation services. Currently, students who receive itinerant ECSE services in place at

Head Start are unable to access bus transportation provided in the past by the agency. If families are unable to transport children, the Head Start is problem-solving other ways to get them to and from the facility.

- Collinsville indicated that the issue of additional background checks for anyone regularly going to the Head Start site like itinerant ECSE teachers and RSPs has recently been elevated in the 2023-2024 school year and could come with an additional cost burden. This cost is being covered by Head Start at time of publication.
- A primary workforce challenge for Collinsville is that their related service providers are currently stretched thin, so they would need to hire more RSPs if they expand their itinerant services.
- Collinsville's itinerant ECSE services are funded using local funds.

Current Status: Collinsville Community School District expressed a desire to provide itinerant services to more children in community-based settings if they had adequate staffing. In 2023, Collinsville received a small planning grant from Early CHOICES funded through IL's PDG B-5 grant to explore expanding their itinerant ECSE services to children in community-based child care. However, they face challenges with partnering with child care programs such as: needing to foster new relationships with child care programs, the reality of the workforce turnover at child care sites, and the fact that Collinsville is a child care desert. These all make expansion difficult.

D. Evanston School District 65

Overview:

A suburb of Chicago situated on the North Shore along Lake Michigan, Evanston School District 65 served 6,709 prek through eighth grade students in the 2021-2022 school year.⁴ Evanston District 65 (Evanston) began implementing itinerant early childhood special education (ECSE) services during the middle of the 2022-2023 school-year, starting in January 2023. Prior to this, the District noticed they were filling all of their inclusion spaces at their Early Childhood Centers (their school-based Pre-K), and were struggling with meeting the 70/30 proportionality provision. As a result, the special education team across the District came together to brainstorm solutions and agreed on two potential options: either expanding the special education program by beginning to provide services to children in community-based early learning programs or opening satellite

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, Retrieved on December 7, 2023 from [NCES website](#).

preschools. The District ultimately decided that because of the age of the school buildings where potential satellite preschool classrooms would've been opened, expanding ECSE services via itinerant services was the best option. Because the District had deep relationships with the Evanston Early Childhood Council (EECC), they worked closely with the EECC to plan their expansion efforts.

The District can serve 360 children in preschool slots; and at the time of the interview there were 104 children with active IEPs at the start of the 2023-2024 school year, not including the anticipated Fall evaluations. At the start of itinerant model implementation, the District was providing itinerant services for just under 10 children attending four community-based organizations that provide Head Start or Preschool for All programming within Evanston District 65 boundaries. The itinerant ECSE team consists of a special education teacher, social worker, a speech-language pathologist, and an occupational therapist. Evanston School District's Early Childhood Centers continue to be the first placement option for children with IEPs, so children who received itinerant services in the 2022-2023 school-year will shift over to receiving their preschool and ECSE services at those Early Childhood Centers in the 2023-2024 school year. The itinerant ECSE team will provide services in the 2023-2024 school year to children who are found newly eligible for ECSE services while attending a community-based early learning program.

The Evanston District 65 model also includes the following highlights:

- Through the partnership with the Evanston Early Childhood Council (EECC), the District was able to onboard community-based preschools, which was noted as one of the best decisions made. The District focused on creating a multi-disciplinary lens as the foundation for the partnership, which helped them garner interest from additional community-based preschools to collaborate with the District to provide itinerant ECSE services. Additionally, the District highlighted that the collaboration with the EECC included a focused priority on professional learning, so the District intentionally hired staff who have a passion for community education so they could support community-based early learning teachers to better support children with disabilities and developmental delays.
- Because of the new and reactive nature of the District's partnerships with the community-based preschools at the beginning of 2023, there was no executed memorandum of understanding at the time of the interview. Within the partnership, the District, community-based early learning partners, disability coordinators, and other staff collaborate to determine the components of program implementation that are and are

not working for continuous improvement. And the District receives ongoing feedback from all partners as they continue to get clarity on what the preschool teams are responsible for versus the special education team to best support children with IEPs in the community-based preschool programs.

- The District uses a consultative model of itinerant services to deepen collaborations with the preschool teachers in the community-based sites. It was highlighted that a major focus of the ECSE itinerant program is to strengthen the inclusive environment of the community-based preschool programs to better serve children with disabilities and delays rather than defaulting to a one-to-one service model.

Key Findings Related to Costs:

- Because of the partnership focus on Head Start or Preschool For All (PFA) funded programs, both the District and community-based partners work closely to avoid any issue of double-dipping on those public dollars.
- With the District implementing itinerant ECSE services mid-school-year, the special education team had to deeply collaborate on how to cover program implementation. While the District indicated that IDEA funds were used to support itinerant services, they acknowledged that they didn't know all of the financing mechanisms that went into place to allow for the funding to support itinerant services and that they just "got it done."
- For the 2023-2024 school year, the District was able to upstaff at their Early Childhood Centers to accommodate rolling enrollment – meaning they hired all the anticipated teaching staff and related services providers they anticipate they'll need for the entire school year at the beginning of the school year. This allows for flexibility to expand itinerant services to community-based early learning sites throughout the school year.
- The District has identified equity as one of its biggest challenges. Specifically, as families learn about the District's itinerant ECSE service model, some families have unenrolled their children from a Head Start or PFA-funded preschool program to attend a more elite private school with the assumption that itinerant ECSE services would follow their child. This shift results in Evanston needing to provide itinerant ECSE services to children in those private schools in addition to publicly-funded settings, which stretches school district resources. With the rollout of itinerant ECSE services, it will continue to be important for the District to not only figure out its partnerships with its Head Start and PFA-funded community-based preschool partners but also figure out collaborations with the private schools.

Current Status: Long-term financing of Evanston School District's itinerant ECSE services are still in the planning stages as there is no budget line item to fund the itinerant team positions. The District's goal is to continue to work towards a five or ten year plan that encompasses the itinerant services as a budget line item. In the meantime, implementation of itinerant ECSE services in Evanston continues in a relatively reactive manner to meet children's needs in community-based programs as they arise.



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