

Using Program Documentation and Surveys to STEP Forward with Data

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Introduction

The [System Transformation for Equitable Preschools \(STEP\) Forward with Data Framework](#) is a tool to help preschool system leaders understand the experiences of preschool-aged children, their families, and early childhood workforce members. The Framework includes 20 essential questions and is flexible so that users can focus on one or more questions with one or more metrics, depending on their unique goals and context.

The Framework identifies six types of data sources to answer the 20 questions and associated metrics: administrative data, administrator documentation, community family surveys, preschool family surveys, program documentation and surveys, or workforce member surveys. One data source may be used to answer multiple questions, and one question may be answered with more than one data source. **In this resource series, we focus on how preschool system leaders, or those who oversee or can influence system-level decisions about preschool programs, can use individual data sources to answer multiple questions from the Framework**, which offers valuable insights into various aspects of their preschool system.

This resource describes the three types of program documentation or survey items that can be used to answer questions from the Framework about preschool programs, including 1) guidebooks and policies, 2) reported data, and 3) program surveys. We describe three types of program sources, highlight examples, and offer a sample program survey.

Overview of Program Documentation and Surveys

Preschool system leaders can answer multiple questions about their system by focusing on what is happening at the program level. A preschool program is defined as a shared approach or curriculum, set of standards or regulations, funding stream, and/or administration (e.g., Head Start). A preschool system often includes multiple preschool programs (e.g., state-funded public pre-K; Head Start; subsidized providers who provide preschool services; and tribal preschool programs). Each preschool program may include one or more sites. This resource focuses on three types of typical program-level data sources but may require also gathering information about what is happening at the site level.

- **Guidebook or policies:** Information about programs can be found in a guidebook, handbook, or manual which details how the program functions or provides services. These documents often have multiple guidelines and policies.
- **Reports:** States often publish regular reports to summarize their work or as a requirement for funders. Information from these reports may pull data from administrative data, but they can also provide information that highlight how the program has been operating or success stories.

- **Program survey data:** Information that could be gathered from a survey administered to preschool programs or preschool program sites, such as classroom, family, or workforce information within a program that might not be captured in data reported at an aggregate level.

This resource first describes the type of information that can be gathered across three types of typical program-level sources (guidebooks or policy documents, reports, and program survey items) and spotlights programs that use these documents. The resource then identifies the essential questions from the Framework that can be answered with these program-level sources. A sample program-level survey is provided at the end of the survey for preschool system leaders to use or adapt.

Spotlight of a guidebook or policy: South Carolina



South Carolina's Child Early Reading Development and Education Program 4K offers preschool programs for four-year-olds, and it is administered by two agencies, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) and South Carolina First Steps. Because this program is administered across two agencies, a program guideline document was developed to ensure that programs were implemented and administered as intended across both agencies. The [guidelines](#) include expectations around program operation, child and family eligibility, enrollment, provider eligibility, program standards, curriculum, personnel and training, assessments, program coaching, and funding and financial requirements. Each academic year, the guidelines are updated to reflect improvements or changes to program expectations. These guidelines can be used to answer questions, such as Q2 (*Do outreach methods improve knowledge and understanding of program options among families from focal populations?*) or Q4 (*Do enrollment procedures help families from focal populations attend programs they want?*).

Spotlight of reports: Head Start

As one of the nation's largest federally funded preschool program, Head Start must complete a handful of reports about their programming, compliance, funding, and workforce. For example, Head Start collects program-level data through the [Program Information Report \(PIR\)](#) to provide more information about Head Start programs to policymakers, the public, researchers, and other audiences. The PIR can help preschool system leaders answer questions such as Q8 (*Are identities of children from focal populations and families reflected in programs?*) because it collects data on the languages Head Start staff speak and their proficiency with these languages. This information about a program can be used to understand the alignment between languages children speak and the languages of staff in their program.

Essential Questions Answered by Program Documentation

The following section offers details about the types of documents that can be used to answer various questions from the Framework. This section is organized by the different steps in the Framework where program documentation or surveys can be used to answer the essential questions within those steps (for sample program survey items, see [Appendix A](#)). Preschool system leaders can identify which question they are most interested in answering and see the type of document(s) that can be used to answer this question.



Supply

Q1. Does the existing supply meet the needs of families from focal populations?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Guidebook or policy	Percentage of program sites that support a language other than English (supports child's development)	Policies about how languages other than English are supported in the program or program site
Reported data	Percentage of program sites where children with a disability or developmental delay are enrolled in which workforce members have early childhood special education training or experience working with children with special needs (supports child's development)	Human resource records about workforce members' education, experience, or training; enrollment data with children's status of disability or developmental delay
	Preschool system has enough preschool openings for the number of children who want to attend preschool, especially those from focal populations (reasonable effort)	Program report of the number of children who are waitlisted for their program (e.g., child care supply survey).
	Percentage of children from focal populations who are on a waitlist for at least one preschool program (reasonable effort)	Program report of the number of children who are waitlisted for their program
Program survey	Percentage of programs that provide before- and after-school programming (meets families' needs)	Question to program directors or owners about before- and after-school programming offerings. See suggested survey item below.
	Percentage of available full-time slots (i.e., available six hours per day for five days per week) (meets families' needs)	Question to program directors or owners about their operating schedule. See suggested survey item below.
	Percentage of program sites that offer transportation services between child's home and preschool site (meets families' needs)	Question to program directors or owners about whether they offer transportation services to children and families. See suggested survey item below.



Outreach

Q2. Do outreach methods improve knowledge and understanding of program options among families from focal populations?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Reported data	Percentage of programs that use more than one outreach strategy to inform families from focal populations about preschool options	Outreach strategies reported by programs



Enrollment

Q4. Do enrollment procedures help families from focal populations attend programs they want?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Guidebook or policy	Percentage of program sites that offer at least two types of supportive enrollment resources to families, especially families from focal populations, to support enrollment in the programs families want to attend	Guidebook with descriptions about eligibility processes, including what resources or supports are offered to families
	Percentage of programs that have a defined process dedicated to helping families from focal populations with preschool enrollment applications	Program guidebook with descriptions about eligibility processes, human resource's role descriptions
	Percentage of programs that offer multiple ways for families to verify their child's eligibility for enrollment	Program guidebook with descriptions about eligibility processes



Learning experiences

Q8. Are identities of children from focal populations and families reflected in programs?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Reported data	Percentage of program sites where children from focal populations are exposed to staff in their program who reflect their own identities	Enrollment data with demographic data; human resources data with staff demographics
	Percentage of program sites that use materials, projects, activities, curricula, and resources that reflect or celebrate the identities of children from focal populations and their communities.	Observational data on number of culturally appropriate materials used in a program in the past year
Program survey	Percentage of program sites that use materials, projects, activities, curricula, and resources that reflect or celebrate the identities of children from focal populations and their communities	Question on number of culturally appropriate materials used in a program in the past year. See suggested survey item below.

Q9. Do workforce members receive training in supporting the needs of children from focal populations and families?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Reported data	Percentage of workforce members who receive training in culturally responsive instruction, especially to understand a child’s developmental progress to inform instruction	Workforce member participation in training opportunities on culturally responsive instruction
	Percentage of workforce members who receive training on reducing or eliminating bias in their work	Workforce member participation in training opportunities on reducing or eliminating bias in their work
	Percentage of workforce members who receive training on trauma-informed care or responsiveness	Workforce member participation in training opportunities on trauma-informed care or responsiveness

Q10. Do children from focal populations receive positive behavior supports?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Reported data	Percentage of children who do not experience any of the following: in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, disciplinary use of restraint and seclusion, or expulsions	Data on in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, disciplinary use of restraint and seclusion, or expulsions within the program

Q12. Does the program offer or connect families from focal populations with whole family services?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Guidebook or policy	Percentage of programs that provide referrals to families from focal populations about whole family services	Program guidebook or documentation about how referrals are made; newsletters where service referrals are provided
	Percentage of programs offering health, mental health, and social services in-house, including staff or consultants providing infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) services	Program guidebook or documentation about services offered in-house; program budgets with line items for supported services
	Percentage of programs that offer whole family services in their programs.	Program guidebook or documentation about services offered in-house; program budgets with line items for supported services

Q13. Are multiple forms of evidence used to understand the developmental progress, strengths, and needs—across domains of development—of children from focal populations?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Guidebook or policy	Percentage of programs that use multiple forms of evidence to understand a child’s development	Program documentation or guidance that outlines the types and number of pieces of evidence that must be used to determine a child’s development

Q14. Are facilities structured and maintained to support the well-being of children from focal populations?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Guidebook or policy	Percentage of program sites that meet children and workforce members’ health and hygienic needs, in programs where focal populations make up at least half of the student population	Health and hygiene policies and procedures
	Percentage of program sites that have the infrastructure necessary to support student learning, in systems where focal populations make up at least half of the student population	Information on the types of infrastructure available to support student learning and how it is used, maintained, and updated as necessary
	Percentage of program sites that ensure the safety and security of children and workforce members, in programs where focal populations make up at least half of the student population	Information on the types of safety and security measures available and maintained



Transitions

Q15. Do transition activities meet the needs of families from focal populations?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Guidebook or policy	Percentage of programs that minimize the number of transitions when supporting children with learning accommodations	Policies or guidebook detailing the process programs will take to minimize transitions for children with learning accommodations to ensure continuity of care or full participation of the child

Q16. Are children from focal populations reaching developmental and learning milestones when transitioning to kindergarten?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Guidebook or policy	Percentage of children from focal populations meeting benchmarks across all developmental domains (language/literacy; cognition; social emotional development; approaches to learning; and physical development)	Policies or guidebook on how a child's development is understood and what may be meaningful benchmarks that align with children and families' expectations

Q19. Is there system-level guidance for how to support equitable experiences for children, families, and workforce members?

Program Source Type	Recommended Metric	Source Details
Reported data	Percentage of families and workforce members reporting positive relationship quality with one another	Family/teacher relationship assessment tool, such as Head Start family engagement measures or Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) survey
Program survey	Preschool system leaders regularly evaluate the number of programs that implement early learning standards, curricula, assessments/screenings, professional development activities, and quality monitoring tools for classroom environment and/or child-adult interactions that meet stated guidelines	Question about whether the program is implementing system recommendations around early learning standards, curricula, assessments/screenings and practices, professional development activities, and quality monitoring tools for classroom environment and/or child-adult interactions. See suggested survey item below.

Final Thoughts

Gathering program-level information is critical for preschool system leaders to have a comprehensive understanding of what may be happening across and within programs in the preschool system. The policies and regulations at the system level are implemented by programs, and programs are the direct link to children and families within the preschool system. Thus, understanding what may be happening at the program level is critical to understanding how best to improve the preschool system.

Appendix A. Sample Program Survey Items

Below is a sample set of survey items designed for preschool programs. These questions align with the Framework and can be added to existing program-level surveys. Program-level questions apply across all sites within the same program but can be adapted for site-level use if responses may vary by location. Preschool system leaders are encouraged to modify or integrate these items into current surveys to best meet their needs.

Sample introduction

The goal of this survey is to understand more about how our preschool system can best support preschool programs. This survey should not take more than 15 minutes of your time. By continuing with the survey, you are agreeing to participate. You are welcome to skip any question you do not want to answer. We will actively incorporate the feedback you provide to make improvements to our preschool system. This survey is anonymous, which we hope will encourage you to share as honestly as possible.

Program operations

In this section, we want to know more about your program's operating schedule.

1. Which days of the week are you open? Select all that apply.
 - a. Monday
 - b. Tuesday
 - c. Wednesday
 - d. Thursday
 - e. Friday
 - f. Saturday
 - g. Sunday
2. What are your regular operating hours during the weekdays? (open-ended)
3. What are your regular operating hours during the weekends? (open-ended; answer N/A if you are not open on the weekends)
4. Do you offer care before your regular operating hours (e.g., before-school programming)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Do you offer care after your regular operating hours (e.g., after-school programming or non-traditional hour care)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Which months of the year are you open? Select all that apply.
 - a. January
 - b. February
 - c. March
 - d. April
 - e. May
 - f. June
 - g. July
 - h. August
 - i. September
 - j. October
 - k. November

I. December

Program offerings

7. Do you offer transportation services to families in your preschool programs?
 - a. Yes (*Skip to Question 8*)
 - b. No, but we offer vouchers or financial support to families who need it (*Skip to Question 9*)
 - c. No, we do not offer any transportation services (*Skip to Question 9*)
 - d. Unsure (*Skip to Question 9*)
8. (If “Yes” for Question 7) What type of transportation services do you offer to families in your preschool program?
 - a. At-home pick-up
 - b. After school drop-off
 - c. Other, specify
 - d. None
9. On average, what percentage of the materials used within your program reflect or celebrate the identities of children from focal populations and their communities? (*Numeric value*)
10. **Is your program currently implementing any of the system-level guidelines in the following areas?** (*Select all that apply*)
 - a. Early learning standards
 - b. Curricula
 - c. Child assessments and/or developmental screenings
 - d. Instructional practices
 - e. Professional development activities
 - f. Quality monitoring tools for classroom environment
 - g. Quality monitoring tools for child-adult interactions
 - h. Not sure
 - i. Not currently implementing system-level recommendations in any of these areas
11. Which of the following **program** guidelines do you use to inform your program’s operations? (*Select all that apply*)
 - a. Early learning standards
 - b. Approved or recommended curricula
 - c. Approved or recommended assessments
 - d. Approved or recommended screenings
 - e. Approved or recommended monitoring tools
 - f. Guidelines for child-adult interactions
 - g. Approved or recommended professional development activities and training for staff
 - h. Other, specify
12. Which curriculum do you use that reflects or celebrates the identities of children from focal populations and their communities? (*Open-ended response*)
13. What resources does your program offer that reflect or celebrate the identities of children from focal populations and their communities? (*Open-ended response*)
14. How many activities or events did you conduct/do this year that reflected or celebrated the identities of children from focal populations and their communities? (*Numeric value*)

Closing

Thank you so much for sharing your insights! Let us know if you have any other feedback that we should consider when improving our preschool system.

About the Data Source Series to Support the STEP Forward with Data Framework

This resource is part of a series to support preschool system leaders with implementing the STEP Forward with Data Framework. The Framework outlines six types of data sources that can be used to answer 20 essential questions. Each resource in this series focuses on how to use one of the data sources to answer the questions in the Framework. To learn more about the other data sources and access the entire series, go to our [Tools](#) page.

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Key Terms

Preschool: Early learning programs offered to 3- and 4-year-olds. In the Framework, we focus on those that are local, state, Tribal, or federally funded, including through state-funded, locally funded, and Tribal preschool and Head Start programs.

Preschool program: A type of preschool with a shared approach or curriculum, set of standards or regulations, funding stream, and/or administration (e.g., Head Start).

Preschool site: The location at which a child receives preschool, including center-, school-, home-, or faith-based settings.

Preschool system: The set of preschool programs that are overseen by a common set of leaders. The preschool programs in the system could be one type of program (e.g., state public pre-K) or multiple programs (e.g., Head Start, subsidized family child care, and state-funded pre-K).

Preschool systems leaders: Those who oversee preschool programs and who can influence systems-level decisions about how to improve preschool programs. Leaders may include state public pre-K administrators, Head Start State Collaboration Office directors, federal Head Start administrators, Head Start grantees overseeing large or multi-site preschool programs, Tribal early childhood administrators, state officers or administrators managing systems-wide early childhood initiatives, and city- or county-wide public preschool administrators.