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Building a Birth-to-College Model: Professional Learning Communities

# A Teaching Case Study



the **Ounce**



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The series is available at:

[Foundation for Child Development](#)

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## Introduction

The University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund (the Ounce) are collaborating to develop a Birth-to-College (BTC) Approach to public education in order to close the achievement gap for vulnerable students. The gap in achievement is discernible in children as young as nine months old and is reflected in students' performance on standardized tests, as well as in high school graduation and college-going rates. Through a seamless alignment of effective early education and K-12 standards and practices, the Ounce and UEI hope to model an approach for closing the achievement gap.

The Ounce operates Educare, a school for children from birth to age five, 100 percent of whom are from low-income households.<sup>1</sup> UEI manages the University of Chicago Charter School, a network of four campuses that serve students from prekindergarten to grade 12, more than 80 percent of whom are from low-income households.<sup>2</sup> Children enrolled at Educare and the University of Chicago Charter School are predominately African American.

Much of the achievement gap is attributable to poverty. UEI and the Ounce believe their approach to public education can trump poverty if their schools learn how to provide children with consistently effective teaching and family support that span the birth-to-college learning continuum. The initial focus of the BTC partners towards this ambitious goal is the effective design and demonstration of the birth-to-grade three spectrum of a Birth-to-College Model.

The Ounce and UEI see the formation and support of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)—

composed of, and authored by, teachers and family support staff — as the primary means by which they will realize the BTC vision. As stated by Linda Wing, UEI senior advisor,

“Birth-to-college is a concept and it doesn't exist in reality, anywhere. So, to create it in any form other than a high-level concept needs the collective minds, hearts, and hands of all those who would be responsible for teaching and learning in such a model. That consists, by and large, of our teachers.”

Wing continues,

“[Organizing PLCs] is a very promising method of supporting teachers to come together to focus on a birth-to-college vision and think about what that means for their practices, what they believe, and what they know about children's teaching and learning and then expand that to develop an idea of the whole trajectory of a child's life and how they can impact it.”

In essence, UEI and the Ounce have entrusted their teachers and family support staff with the mission of

<sup>1</sup> Since 1982, the Ounce of Prevention Fund has persistently pursued a single goal: that all American children—particularly those born into poverty—have quality early childhood experiences in the crucial first five years of life. <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/>

<sup>2</sup> The mission of the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) is to create knowledge to produce reliably excellent urban schooling. <http://uei.uchicago.edu/>

designing and demonstrating the mindset, knowledge, standards, and practices necessary to realize a BTC approach to public education. They believe that PLCs have the potential to enable faculty and staff to “come outside their individual spaces and concept worlds,” as Danielle James, Educare master teacher, puts it, to learn from each other and in the process collaboratively create BTC knowledge. When practitioners create knowledge, observes Carrie Walsh, University of Chicago Charter School primary literacy coach, they “own” that knowledge and are more likely to act upon it. Overall, the BTC partners think of PLCs as the best architecture for the incubation of a new and effective model of schooling for children and families, one that is “informed, shaped, driven, experimented with, and put forth by practitioners themselves,” as described by Amanda Stein, senior research associate at the Ounce.

Between March 2011 and early February 2012, UEI and the Ounce set the stage for the formation of PLCs consisting of teachers and family support staff from Ounce’s Educare School, as well as North Kenwood/Oakland (NKO) and Donoghue, the prekindergarten-to-grade five campuses of UEI’s University of Chicago Charter School. They organized the first Community of Practice meeting for birth-to-grade three teachers and family support staff from all three schools and arranged opportunities for NKO and Donoghue staff to observe Educare classrooms and for Educare staff to observe NKO or Donoghue classrooms.

Teachers and family support staff were encouraged to join one of six PLCs – the Transitions PLC, the Family and Social Support PLC, the Assessment PLC, a Socio-Emotional Learning PLC, the Foundational Mathematics PLC, or the Language

and Literacy PLC. Each PLC was conceptualized by the Ounce and UEI to consist of teachers and family support staff from all three schools, with the members representing expertise in teaching or supporting families at each developmental or grade level from infancy to grade three. Training was provided to PLC leaders to enhance their team-building and facilitation knowledge and skills.

It is an unusual undertaking to form PLCs that are teacher-led, inclusive of family support staff, multi-disciplinary in their focus of inquiry, and reflective of three schools and the birth-to-grade three learning continuum. PLCs generally consist of teachers within one grade level within a single school, with disciplinary scopes of work often determined by school leadership. While every PLC counters the tradition of teachers working behind “closed doors,” observes LeAnita Randolph, Donoghue first grade teacher, the PLCs formed by UEI and the Ounce face the additional challenge of overcoming what Brenda Eiland-Williford, director of program and curricula at Educare, calls the “silos of indifference” that characterize the historical relationship between the fields of early childhood education and K-12 education.

This teaching case study is intended to illustrate the evolutionary process of PLC development by UEI and the Ounce and inform the work of others interested in building similar birth-to-college systems to benefit children and families. It is based on interviews of 25 participants in the Birth-to-College Partnership, observations of PLC and other Birth-to-College Partnership meetings over the six-month period between January 2012 and June 2012, and a review of Birth-to-College meeting notes and other documents dating back to June 2010.

## Background

### A. Vision and Mission

Between April 2009 and June 2010, UEI and the Ounce explored the merits and feasibility of forming a partnership.<sup>3</sup> Upon completion of a series of facilitated meetings, both organizations succeeded in finding common ground in their mutual commitment to close the achievement gap that plagues public education and to work in concert with families to advance their children's learning with the ultimate goal being a college-preparatory education.

During monthly three-hour-long meetings with an expert facilitator, a working group of eight leaders from the two organizations addressed the structural divides between early childhood education and K-12 education, dissonance between their perspectives as professionals from disparate fields, and dissimilarities between their respective institutional cultures to develop the trust required to coalesce around shared beliefs and commitments. The vision and mission of BTC were the tangible returns on their investment of 30 hours of face time.

The BTC vision is to “build a model of public education that begins at birth and creates success in school, college, and life.” To achieve this vision, the Ounce and UEI developed the shared mission to “align and co-create instructional approaches, and academic and social supports, to accelerate student learning, while honoring and building upon the strengths of the families we serve.”<sup>4</sup>

### B. Infrastructure

UEI and the Ounce spent nine months crafting the infrastructure of the BTC Model. Between July 2010

and March 2011, the working group constructed the birth-to-college ‘pipeline,’ studied relevant literature and best practices, decided upon four major research and development (R&D) objectives, and submitted proposals to three foundations to secure funding for the R&D work. Additionally, the Ounce and UEI created structures to lead and govern the incubation of the BTC Approach.

*Constructing the pipeline.* To make it reliably possible for children to begin their schooling at Educare, continue to the NKO or Donoghue campuses of the University of Chicago Charter School (UCCS) for kindergarten, and graduate with a college preparatory education from UCCS's high school, UEI devised a system for coordinating the independent admissions policies of Educare and UCCS. Under the coordinated admissions system, families have the opportunity to apply simultaneously to Educare for admission to its three-year-old program in the fall and to UCCS for advance admission to kindergarten three years later. Educare applies Early Head Start and Head Start criteria to admit children, while UCCS uses a lottery. Families with children already enrolled at Educare since birth, as well as families newly interested in Educare, may apply. This system effectively results in families winning the UCCS lottery if their children are admitted to Educare.

With a ‘pipeline’ in place, leaders of family support at Educare, Donoghue, and NKO worked together to inform families of the opportunity, encourage them to apply, and support them in the application process. Their aim was to develop and follow a clear, consistent, and integrated approach to family recruitment. For the first time, family support

<sup>3</sup> With the support of the Foundation for Child Development, UEI developed a teaching case study and video on the formation of the partnership and the joint envisioning and missioning that led to the BTC approach. That case study and video provide useful background to the work described in this case study, which is also accompanied by a video. Please see Ping, R.M. et al. (2010). *Working Together to Build a Birth-to-College Approach to Education: Forming a Partnership between the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and the Ounce of Prevention Fund*. Retrieved from: <http://uei.uchicago.edu/news/article/case-study-working-together-build-birth-college-approach-public-education>.

<sup>4</sup> The vision, mission, and core values of the Birth-to-College Approach may be found in Appendix A.

leaders from three different schools embarked upon engaging and educating families to develop what Ounce president Diana Rauner calls “a line of sight” for their children that begins at birth and extends to college, a long time horizon whose logic they believed would lead to families taking informed action on behalf of their children’s education by applying simultaneously to Educare and UCCS. Foundational to the leaders’ work to engage and educate families were efforts to emphasize the importance of families serving as their children’s best advocates in a city where high-quality early learning and K-12 schools are all too few in number.

Family support staff from the three schools shared information about their existing family recruitment strategies, informational materials, and timelines; and NKO and Donoghue directors of family and community engagement participated in new Educare events to provide families with information and advice. The UCCS admissions office incorporated information about the coordinated admissions opportunity in the UCCS application and, in concert with Educare, devised the beginnings of a BTC system for tracking the number of applicants and following their progress through the Educare and UCCS admissions processes.

*Reading the literature and studying best practices.*

The Ounce-UEI working group believed that, if organized and supported as members of PLCs, NKO, Donoghue, and Educare teachers and family support staff could and should lead the way to creating a mindset, standards, and practices that would altogether comprise a Birth-to-College Approach to Education. The group read the professional literature to inform their thinking about PLCs as an appropriate architecture to scaffold and support the teachers and staff in this ambitious endeavor and took a deep dive into *Mindset*, by Carol Dweck, which affirmed their belief in the capacity of students, families, and educators to transform their thinking about learning and schooling and become mindful of a BTC Model. A contingent of leaders and teachers

from Educare, NKO, Donoghue, UEI, and the Ounce participated in a trip to the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in order to learn from the district’s example of building an integrated preK-12 school system that led to the narrowing of the achievement gap and high rates of college admission and graduation.

*Establishing R&D objectives and garnering resources.*

The fruits of the working group’s discussions about the readings and lessons learned from MCPS were invaluable. The group crafted a concept paper<sup>5</sup> identifying and explaining four major objectives. The objectives would constitute the first steps to building an on-the-ground BTC Model, with an initial focus on serving children and families from birth to grade three. The objectives would additionally constitute the core of proposals the Ounce and UEI developed to obtain the resources needed to fund the incubation of the BTC Approach.

The four objectives are: 1) develop and engage in a comprehensive, transformative approach to professional development that results in a new, shared belief system and set of values, behaviors, and practices that will demonstrably improve outcomes for children; 2) provide families with a coherent set of experiences, including intensified supports for parents of children with special needs, while at the same time honoring and building upon family strengths; 3) document the work to develop a BTC Model, and disseminate best practices and lessons learned to inform initiatives in other school communities and influence broader educational reform; and 4) launch and continuously improve an effective approach to public education comprised of standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, and family supports that are coherent and consistent across a child’s learning trajectory from birth to college. In the spring of 2011, these objectives were presented by UEI and the Ounce to three foundations in proposals for funding. The foundations found merit in the proposals and awarded grants that took effect in 2011-12.

<sup>5</sup> The concept paper for the Birth-to-College Model can be found in Appendix B.

*Crafting leadership and governance structures.*

Ultimately, the Birth-to-College Approach is intended to constitute the DNA of Educare, NKO, and Donoghue. The Ounce-UEI working group designed leadership and governance structures to make this goal achievable.

From its inception, the working group consisted of school leadership from the University of Chicago Charter School and Educare, as well as organizational leadership from UEI and the Ounce. To bring the BTC vision into reality, the working group expanded its membership to more fully reflect school leadership. The principals (called directors) of Donoghue, Educare, and NKO, their heads of family engagement and support, and selected teacher leaders—master teachers in the case of Educare and literacy coordinators in the case of NKO and Donoghue—are members of the present working group. In contrast, the original working group consisted of individuals in all these school roles, but not the full complement of individuals in these roles from every school. For example, the family support leader at Educare represented all family support leaders while a teacher leader at Donoghue represented all teacher leaders. That BTC’s working group—its core leadership—consists of the major leaders from all three schools, as well as key organizational leaders from UEI and the Ounce, gives both “roots” and “wings” to the BTC approach.

When the working group strengthened its membership, growing from eight to 12 key players, it additionally increased the number of BTC

structures from one—the working group itself—to 13. The 13 structures are: 1) the working group; 2) four “objective teams,” so called because each team is dedicated to achieving one of BTC’s major objectives; 3) six Professional Learning Communities; 4) a family advisory council comprised of parents of children attending Educare and NKO and Donoghue parents whose children are Educare graduates; and 5) a Community of Practice encompassing everyone previously described. All together these structures are comprised of 75 individuals, including eight parents and 100 percent of the family support and classroom teaching staff responsible for the education of Educare, NKO, and Donoghue children from birth to grade three.

As an integral aspect of the scale up, the leadership of BTC widened to include PLC and family advisory council leaders. Each PLC is co-led by a practitioner from Educare and a practitioner from NKO or Donoghue. A parent leader chairs the family advisory council. Connecting all the structures and leaders are the members of the working group. They provide overall leadership to the BTC Model and also chair an “objective team,” facilitate a PLC, or support the development of the teachers and family support staff leading the PLCs. Because of their multiple roles, the 12 individuals are positioned to maintain clear lines of communication, support collaborative decision-making within and across structures, and embody a system-wide whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.



## Building Birth-to-College Professional Learning Communities

### A. Expanding Professional Learning from Individual Schools to Professional Learning in a New System of Schools

In forming a partnership to create a Birth-to-College Approach to Public Education, the Ounce and UEI are leveraging the professional learning cultures of Educare, Donoghue, and NKO. This is an opportunity and a challenge. The professional learning culture of each school is well articulated, collaborative, and focused on continual improvement of instruction and family support, as informed by analyses of student, practitioner and school data. These professional learning cultures offer the BTC partnership much to build upon. The challenge for the partners is to maintain and enhance these strong school cultures while also inspiring, incenting, and supporting teachers and family support staff to create the professional culture of a birth-to-college system of schools. Put another way, UEI and the Ounce have asked their teachers and staff to deepen professional learning within their individual schools while simultaneously participating in, and indeed leading, the design of professional learning communities that span three schools.

*School-based professional learning.* The Ounce and UEI were advantaged when they conceived of Professional Learning Communities as the primary means by which a new Birth-to-College Model of Schooling could be created. They could build upon the strengths of the professional learning cultures of Educare, Donoghue, and NKO.

Each of the three schools has a purposeful, multifaceted professional learning system. Professional development is built into their weekly calendars and includes the close study of the effectiveness of lessons and how to refine them, classroom coaching, analysis of videos of instructional practice, discussion of shared readings, teacher observations of each other's classroom practices, and study of interim and formative data on student

progress in order to make targeted and timely improvements in instruction. Teachers lead much of the professional learning.

Erica Emmendorfer, NKO first grade teacher, describes what professional development looks like at her school,

“We collaborate on lesson plans and curriculum building and just working together to make our classrooms look fairly uniform.”

Moreover, Emmendorfer explains that teachers contribute to professional development efforts by sharing the responsibility for planning and leading weekly meetings. She describes the forms that teacher-led professional development often takes,

“It could be presenting your own work and then asking people to give their feedback and critiques of the things that you're doing, then—based on the feedback—developing a plan to change things. It could be a workshop model, where you do a mini-lesson [on] something that's a little higher level. It could be 'let's read this text and have a discussion about it.' So, it takes on a lot of different forms.”

Ongoing school-focused professional development efforts are highly functional for NKO, Donoghue, and Educare. They emphasize the “here and now” of continuous improvements in teaching and learning; they are driven by the goal to enable every student, every day, to not only meet, but also to exceed, learning standards.

*Connecting the “here and now” to the future: The rationale for Birth-to-College Professional Learning Communities.* When first informed of the BTC vision, Donoghue, Educare, and NKO teachers and family support staff were visibly excited. “This is BIG,” observed Laney Frazier, kindergarten teacher at NKO. Soon however, the faculty and staff wanted to know more about how the vision would be connected to them as individuals and to their work



in the “here and now.” Yet the path to a Birth-to-College Model is largely uncharted. Thus UEI and the Ounce focused on forecasting connections they believed would be made possible within the supportive architecture of PLCs, connections that would emerge from the collaborative learning of teachers and staff who: 1) explore, develop, and are guided by a mindset that spans the development and education of children from birth to college; 2) build common knowledge from a wellspring consisting of their own areas of expertise, as well as research and best practices; 3) draw upon the co-created knowledge to collaborate in designing and piloting practices to better educate children; 4) assess and learn from the processes and outcomes of their work; and 5) align, create, and connect practices that more effectively educate children now and in the future, across the entire line of sight.

Brenda Eiland-Williford, Educare director of program and curricula, articulates the way in which PLCs are intended to scaffold the development of a birth-to-college mindset,

“It helps teachers in early childhood programs have the vision of where these children are going. They need to tweak and think about how they’re comparing, so they can be ready for that environment. [Also], there is the give and take that has to happen, so that all teachers are learning at the same time about what’s appropriate for children that they’ll be receiving or that they’ll be sending up.”

Tracy White, Educare preK teacher, also provides a nuanced understanding of the development of a BTC mindset, when she explains,

“If I’m in elementary, [I should] reach back to early childhood teachers and say, ‘Okay, these are the things that the children are coming to us with.’ So, if I’m teaching somewhere from K-3, I should have expectations [that] I want to see [met] when they come from Head Start. Then, I also need to collaborate with the upper elementary [staff], so I’ll send those children to them knowing that I’ve given them what they need to advance on that level.”

By sharing their individual experiences and varied areas of expertise, educators and family support

professionals across the birth-to-grade three spectrum can uniquely create and “own” knowledge—BTC knowledge. NKO literacy coordinator Carrie Walsh, voices this notion when she states,

“In PLCs, people own their knowledge because they’re creating it. The best things are really created out of different perspectives. PLCs are a great opportunity to really learn, especially in this work where I don’t have knowledge of 0 to 3, and somebody else may not know the older grades. I feel like, ‘you don’t know what you don’t know.’ So, PLCs are a perfect way to fill those gaps.”

LeAnita Randolph, first grade teacher at Donoghue, seconds this idea,

“[Past views say] ‘go in your classroom and close your door and do what you’re going to do.’ This PLC says, ‘No, that’s not okay. You need to open your door...you need to go across the hall and you need to go down the street and find out more, just talk a little bit with the people’.”

In this way, individual teachers and family support staff, within supportive and collaborative PLCs of colleagues engaged in developing a BTC mindset and creating and owning BTC knowledge, are motivated and enabled to improve their professional practices. As Educare director of program and curricula Brenda Eiland-Williford puts it,

“In a PLC, you can, within your own self, internalize what the conversation is, and, within your own self, consider what changes you might make. [You can] consider the information that you’re hearing, and consider what else you may need to do for yourself in order to be brought up to speed more, in order to know and understand more, [so you can] go back and make the kind of changes you need to make.”

Educare infant-toddler master teacher Danielle James echoes this argument in her own thinking about the purposes and benefits of PLCs,

“[PLCs] really put professionals together in a real setting and provide that opportunity to communicate and dialogue with one another about how they do what they do and why they do what they do, [as

well as] offer ideas, advice, and strategies, for how they might improve, inform, or change that... and to do that on a consistent, regular basis.”

As their birth-to-college work progressed, in response to the questions of committed teachers and family support staff, the Ounce and UEI attempted to provide ever more clear descriptions of the purpose, process, and outcomes of PLCs as the primary means of connecting high-level vision to on-the-ground practice. “Clarity precedes competence,” Carrie Walsh learned as the result of attending a national conference on PLCs. UEI and the Ounce went back and forth between trying to provide enough clarity to support the competence of their teachers and family support staff while avoiding the degree of clarity that prompts mere compliance.

## **B. Setting the Stage for the Launch of Birth-to-College Professional Learning Communities**

During the initial phase of determining if they should and could form a viable Birth-to-College Partnership, UEI and the Ounce asked their respective school leaders and a small select number of teachers and family support staff to visit Educare or UCCS for the purpose of exploring the ‘goodness of fit’ between the schools in terms of core beliefs about children’s capacity to learn and achieve. The evidence was positive and supportive, leading to the formal establishment of the BTC partnership. Subsequently, between March 2011 and February 2012, the Ounce and UEI, including their school leaders, worked to prepare 100 percent of their birth-to-grade three teachers and family support staff to engage directly in the creation of the BTC model by participating in Professional Learning Communities. Setting the stage included organizing a Community of Practice (COP), determining the design of PLCs, training PLC co-leaders, and arranging classroom observations.

*The Community of Practice.* In March 2011, UEI and the Ounce asked their respective faculties and staff to convene in separate meetings. At each meeting the BTC vision and mission were presented and the floor was open for questions and comments from

the teachers and staff. The UCCS convening included the viewing of the case study video on the formation of the BTC Partnership and the crafting of the vision and mission. Questions and comments could be anonymously written on post-its and also posed in the public forum. The Ounce and UEI forecasted the May 2011 meeting where all Donoghue, NKO, and Educare teachers and family support staff from birth to grade three would meet each other for the first time in a Community of Practice. The Community of Practice meeting was designed to permit the participants to begin to know each other on multiple levels—as individuals with different personal backgrounds, professionals with specific roles and responsibilities, members of three distinctive school cultures, and as potential colleagues curious to explore how the BTC vision might affect their thinking, learning, and practices.

The May 2011 Community of Practice meeting was held from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., after the school day ended. By design, at each table sat individuals from each of the three schools, each discipline (teaching and family support), and each developmental or grade level from infancy to grade three. This very simple act had a profound effect on those attending the meeting. Linda Wing describes the depth of this experience,

“[Prior to the Community of Practice meeting], I had never, ever, sat a table before with a master teacher of infants. That was the first time ever I had met a teacher of infants. I started out as a high school teacher. I’m sure it was the first time ever that my colleagues from Donoghue and NKO had sat with teachers of infants.”

The first activity consisted of UEI and the Ounce asking individuals at each table to recall a memorable teacher and share a story about that teacher. A volunteer from each table then recounted trends in the stories or a unique story. One table shared the story of a teacher who had been home schooled by her parents from birth until high school graduation. Another table told the story of a teacher who consistently called a child “Harvard,” although few of the child’s classmates thought he had the potential to pass the class, much less go on to

Harvard. Yet, the child today is a Harvard graduate. Cumulatively, the stories showed the power of teachers to impact children over the course of their lifetimes, as vividly remembered and recounted 10, 20, even 30 years later.

The second activity consisted of the examination of a series of “I” statements made by teachers at a school known for effectively educating young African American males. These “I” statements are affirmations of the teachers’ commitments to engage in practices they found to be successful with their students<sup>6</sup>. The affirmations were posted around the room. Teachers and family support staff members were asked to view the affirmations and place post-it notes next to those that resonated with them. These post-it notes were color-coded by school, so that the knowledge of which affirmations resonated with which groups of practitioners was immediately apparent to observers.

One affirmation stated: “I plan for each day and use achievement data to develop my lessons.” As recalled by Linda Wing, this affirmation generated conversation at one table between teachers of infants and toddlers and teachers of children in elementary schools.

“In the conversations with teachers of infants and younger children, [the elementary teachers learned that] there is no such thing as achievement data in the way that they think of it. Achievement data is usually a grade on something. It is a test score. It is something that is based on some kind of student performance. An infant doesn’t take a standardized test or write or speak words indicating understanding. So, we learned about the kind of data that a teacher of infants is constantly taking in and thinking about, so as to adjust how that individual teaches an infant.”

It appeared to the Ounce and UEI organizers of the Community of Practice that the participants had arrived at a mutual understanding of the influence of a teacher over the entire trajectory of a child’s life and the developmentally and educationally different strategies that are required to advance a child’s

learning, depending on where she is on the learning continuum. They also hoped they had gained the participants’ commitment to working with each other in an ambitious endeavor. When asked to reflect on their experiences at the Community of Practice meeting, individual after individual stood and said she had been “inspired.” Eric Lester, Donoghue kindergarten teacher, had the last word when he said,

“I didn’t know what to expect [when I arrived]. It’s after hours and we have lots of other things to do. I had to drive some miles to get here, and my daughter is waiting for me to pick her up. Now, [at the end of the meeting], I can say that I am legitimately excited. I know I’m in the right place. I’m in the most important place I need to be.”

Applause followed Eric’s comments, a signal that he had articulated the thoughts of most, if not all, of the participants in the Community of Practice.

*The Design of Professional Learning Communities.* Each PLC was conceptualized by Ounce and UEI to consist of teachers and family support professionals from all three schools, with the members representing expertise in teaching or supporting families at each developmental or grade level from infancy to grade three. Additionally, UEI and the Ounce designed the PLCs to be topic-driven, rather than grade level- or developmental level-driven. They selected six topics for the PLCs: 1) transitions, 2) family and social support, 3) assessment, 4) socio-emotional learning, 5) foundational math, and 6) language and literacy. These six topics reflect the core values of the BTC vision and mission. Foundational mathematics, language and literacy, and socio-emotional learning represent the three major content areas of a birth-to-college spectrum. Transitions epitomize children’s movement along a BTC trajectory, while assessments demonstrate the importance placed on tangible evidence of student learning and achievement. Lastly, family and social support gives honor to the priority placed on collaborating with families. Teachers, as well as family support staff, were encouraged, with a few

<sup>6</sup> Selected Affirmation Statements from the May 2011 Community of Practice Meeting may be found in Appendix C.

recruited, to join one of these six PLCs by virtue of their self-identified interest or expertise in a specific topic. The focus of inquiry for each PLC could potentially include observations of instructional and/or family support practices, shared readings, and student work samples. Individuals were additionally encouraged to volunteer to serve as PLC co-leaders, with each PLC enjoying one leader apiece from Educare and either NKO or Donoghue. PLCs range in size from nine to 12 members, with a grand total of 61 participants.

Consequently BTC PLCs have these characteristics: 1) they are multi-disciplinary, meaning they explicitly draw upon both the discipline of teaching children and the discipline of family support; 2) they span the birth-to-grade three learning continuum, both in terms of the roles of PLC participants and the topical focus of the PLCs; 3) they encompass individuals from three school campuses to promote the making of a system of schools; 4) they are comprised primarily of voluntary participants to honor the professional expertise of teachers and family support staff; and 5) they are meant to be practitioner-driven to respect the professional leadership capacity of teachers and family support staff. Usually, PLCs are housed within single schools, comprised of individuals who work within a single discipline as well as a single grade or developmental level, and are organized by school leaders to fulfill a specific school need. Typical PLCs are able to coalesce relatively quickly as their members are located in the same school, work in the same discipline, serve children in the same developmental or grade level, and are given a specific charge. BTC PLCs need to be fostered explicitly to account for their more dynamic and complex nature.

Taking into consideration the scheduling of PLC meetings after school hours, and recognizing that they were asking teachers and family support staff to author something completely unprecedented, the Ounce and UEI chose to provide PLC members with stipends of \$50 for every hour devoted to PLC work. PLC co-leaders receive an additional \$50 for every hour they devote to planning and organizing

PLCs. UEI and the Ounce conceive of PLC meetings as 90 minutes long.

*Selecting and training PLC co-leaders.* Under the BTC model, PLCs are practitioner-led and practitioner-authored. The Ounce and UEI truly believe that educators and family support staff are experts, capable of teaching and learning from one another, and collaboratively creating the standards and practices that comprise a BTC approach to schooling. Ounce senior research associate Amanda Stein touches on this concept when she states,

“The reason that I think that professional learning communities have been demonstrated in research to work is because of the opportunity they provide educators to really excel and shine as professionals and as experts.”

Seconds Eric Lester, kindergarten teacher at Donoghue,

“There was a commitment made to PLCs, which is like ‘why don’t we take people who actually do this and invest in their time and experience?’ That’s a pretty good investment because all that information is in those people. [We] share that information [with each other] and then [you] trust us to identify what is important to move on to the next layer of people.”

In order to begin working together to self-author their own work, PLCs would need to be guided in some way. UEI and the Ounce decided that co-leaders—one from Educare and one from either NKO or Donoghue—should be recruited from the PLC groups themselves and trained to serve as these guides. Moreover, it was decided that each PLC should have a member of the Ounce-UEI working group serve as a facilitator; namely, to act as a resource for the PLC and an intermediary between the PLC and overall BTC leadership. UEI and the Ounce selected co-leaders for the PLC groups based on an individual’s interest in serving as a co-leader and her reputation for possessing and demonstrating strong leadership qualities within her home school environment.

PLC co-leaders and facilitators participated in a series of initial trainings, held in January and early February 2012. Trainings were aimed at providing PLC co-leaders and facilitators with the opportunity to enhance their team-building and facilitation knowledge and skills. Demonstrated for them was an approach to engaging PLC members in developing knowledge and understanding of what socio-emotional development looks like across the birth-to-grade three spectrum using indicators in DECA, an assessment measure used by Educare, as well as DESSA<sup>7</sup>, an assessment measure being adopted by UCCS. Members of leadership made concerted efforts to not only anticipate the appropriate level of support, but also determine the forms that such support might ultimately take. To this end, PLC co-leaders and facilitators were given binders of materials aimed at helping them transition more easily into their roles as guides to the work of their PLCs. For example, these binders contained PLC-specific materials, such as readings from the professional literature on PLCs, clearly outlined expectations for both co-leaders and facilitators, and protocols for developing goals, as well as the norms that would be used as codes of conduct at individual meetings. Co-leaders and facilitators also participated in activities<sup>8</sup> aimed at teaching broader leadership skills like understanding individual leadership styles, exercising co-leadership, and surfacing sensitive problems of practice through the use of consultancies.<sup>9</sup>

*Seeing is believing.* UEI and the Ounce sought to lay a strong foundation and focus for the work of PLCs by giving all participants the opportunity to engage in observations of teaching and learning. During February 2012, teachers and family support professionals from Educare had the opportunity to observe classrooms at either NKO or Donoghue. Moreover, a similar opportunity was extended to UCCS teachers and family support professionals who were able to spend time observing classrooms at Educare.

PLC members seemed to agree that the experience was invaluable in enabling them to see firsthand the spectrum of children and families who would benefit from a BTC approach and the practices currently in place to educate and support them. Alnita Buchanan, Educare 3-5 family support supervisor, recalls,

“[Initially] you have that shock, like, ‘this is what it looks like from 0–5’ and ‘this is what it is like when they go to the [elementary] schools’.”

There was universal agreement that these experiences have the potential to inform the work of the PLCs going forward. Buchanan recalls,

“When they [i.e. elementary teachers] come and take a tour and see the work [at Educare], it’s totally different. It opens their expectations, their eyes, to say, ‘Okay...this is what you guys [are doing]... you’re going to prepare them to come to us’.”

Glenda Perkins, Educare 0-3 lead teacher, was impressed by the ways in which the hallways of NKO are covered with paintings of NKO students and notable historical figures reading books, creating a school environment that emphasizes the love of reading. She explains,

“I went over there [to NKO] and looked at their program and it’s really nice. I really liked the literacy piece. They had all the different children painted on the wall, reading books...it was awesome to me. It really got you in the mindset that they’re really doing great things, [that they] really value children.”

Educare infant-toddler master teacher Danielle James describes the reaction of a NKO third grade teacher when he observed the level of children’s socio-emotional development at Educare. he notes,

“There was one particular set-up of infants where one baby was crying and so another toddler took the pacifier off of one baby that was fine to try to

7 DECA and DESSA assessment information can be found at <http://www.devereux.org>.

8 Artifacts pertaining to the PLC Leader & Facilitator trainings may be found in Appendix D.

9 For more information about consultancies, visit the National School Reform Faculty at <http://www.nsrffharmony.org>

offer it to another child who was crying—so, she had some empathy and was trying to soothe the baby. The third grade teacher was like, ‘Really? They’re able to soothe each other? They recognize that so early?’”

### **C. Birth-to-College Professional Learning Communities**

The Professional Learning Communities of the BTC initiative were officially launched during a Community of Practice meeting held in the late afternoon of February 2, 2012. During the first half of the meeting, educators and family support professionals gathered collectively to review the vision and mission of the BTC initiative and to become reacquainted with the underlying purpose of the initiative—to close the achievement gap. During the second half of the meeting, individuals met within their respective PLCs to review and make meaning of the vision and mission of BTC from the vantage points of their specific PLCs, establish norms that would serve as codes of conduct for subsequent meetings, plan for a minimum of two PLC meetings to take place prior to the end of the school year, and acquaint themselves over dinner and conversation. The two PLC meetings would focus on establishing PLC goals and beginning to accomplish them. The academic year would close with the PLCs reconvening on the afternoon of May 24, 2012 for a final Community of Practice meeting before the summer recess.

*Snapshot of the Foundational Mathematics PLC.* On April 12, 2012, the Foundational Mathematics PLC held a meeting from 4:30-5:30 p.m. at Educare. PLC members from each school came together to discuss what mathematics learning looks like for children at each developmental and grade level from birth to grade three.

The meeting commenced with a brief overview of brain development in infancy by Barbara Abel, infant-toddler curriculum specialist at Educare. This presentation focused on two main points: 1) that infants come into the world with a brain consisting of cognitive structures that are ready for

learning, and 2) that many of the developmental milestones met in the first few years of life may be considered precursors to the school-based learning that occurs in later childhood. The information presented came from the most recent research on cognitive development in infancy.

This presentation was immediately followed by an interactive experience known as the “Math Gallery.” Before the meeting was scheduled to start, each PLC member brought in an example of what a mathematics lesson looks like at the developmental or grade level of the children they primarily serve. These examples were arranged on a table in chronological order.

The Math Gallery experience consisted of PLC members walking the length of the table to examine the types of activities that are used to teach mathematics at each point along the developmental and educational continuum, beginning in infancy. While PLC members who were UCCS teachers could anticipate the types of activities that would characterize mathematics learning in older children, it was enlightening for them to see how mathematics learning could begin with younger children, given developmentally appropriate instruction. LeAnita Randolph describes her reflections on an object permanence activity for infants and toddlers,

“One of the project[s]...was about object permanence, [which is] just being able to keep track of an object. When you think of that, you don’t necessarily think, ‘Oh, that’s math,’ but obviously it is because you want [infants and toddlers] to be able to look at something and manipulate it, know how much it is, what’s the quantity, how heavy...so being able to hold their attention to an object definitely goes with math, but we just don’t think of that as elementary teachers.”

Furthermore, the Math Gallery experience left most individuals excited about the prospect of what the PLC could accomplish. Ken Taylor, preK family support specialist at Educare, describes this enthusiasm for what could potentially come when he notes,

“When we walk our galleries, we put things on the [table] and walk up and down, there’s so many

creative things coming out of that. So, even though it [the PLC] is in the developmental stages, I'm excited about it."

*Snapshot of the Language and Literacy PLC.* On June 6, 2012, the Language and Literacy PLC met at NKO for their last meeting of the school year. Over chips, salsa, and fruit, PLC members began to update each other on the process and outcomes of an inferencing lesson that each had attempted in their respective classrooms, including infant-toddler, prekindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, second grade and third grade classrooms. Inferencing involves using clues to figure out some detail of a story that is not explicitly stated by the author. Kellie Washington, NKO first grade teacher, explains why inferencing was selected as a skill to focus on,

"We're noticing through data that the kids are having a hard time with this concept. I think inferring is a skill that you're going to need forever. So we, by looking at data [said], 'Okay, this is a skill that's a challenge, so let's go with this challenge and see how we can make it work and apply different activities and lessons to our own class[es]'. "

Each teacher came up with a lesson plan that would tackle the concept of inferencing in some way and also determined the types of supports that would be necessary to teach inferencing at the developmental or grade level of the children in her classroom. Each teacher came to the PLC meeting armed with actual student work samples from these lessons. Washington shares how this experience has changed her view of the teaching and learning of younger children,

"What I didn't know [before] is how kindergarteners [at Donoghue] can do this sort of inferring, independently, without the teacher doing most of the [work], so that was something that I can take back to my colleagues here at NKO and share with them."

Members of the Language and Literacy PLC, based on an inquiry project that they had designed, came to the preliminary conclusion that inferencing could potentially be taught to children earlier than they previously thought was possible, given appropriate supports.

*Five months of development.* These snapshots of the Foundational Mathematics and Language and Literacy PLCs demonstrate how far BTC PLCs were able to progress in five short months. The meeting of the Foundational Mathematics PLC demonstrated an openness and enthusiasm among the members for learning about one another's practices through their display and review of instructional artifacts in a mathematics gallery and expanding their knowledge through Barbara Abel's presentation on the cognitive capabilities of typically developing infants. The meeting of the Language and Literacy PLC demonstrated the co-planning and implementation of an inquiry project. PLC members looked at evidence of student learning to identify a skill that many students did not master—the skill of inferencing. They planned and implemented lessons to see if they could effectively teach this skill at each of the developmental and grade levels represented in their PLC. In sharing student work, the PLC members experienced an "aha" moment in seeing that inferencing could be taught to learners at younger ages than previously thought, if skillfully undertaken.

A contributor to the success of the inferencing inquiry project seems to be the quality of the relationships among PLC members. Washington suggests the Language and Literacy PLC members were operating from a foundation of hard-won trust,

"[Initially] we were in a room with people who, you know, we really didn't know . . . so when opinions or suggestions were thrown out, it was hard for people to accept it because we don't know each other. . . we were hitting road blocks and we needed to do something about it. So, we just started to do things like getting to know each other, our likes and dislikes, telling more about ourselves, doing some building of trust, because once trust is established, then, we can kind of throw out suggestions and people won't feel offended or we can say things or joke with each other and it's a safe place to do that. So, we had to build trust with each other first and then go from there."

## The Reset

In spite of initial success, some PLCs found it difficult to gain traction in developing the goals necessary to guide their work. Ounce and UEI identified three possible contributing factors.

First, educators are accustomed to professional learning environments driven by the urgency to better educate children in the “here and now.” It is not often they are engaged in a long-term discovery process where there are no set routines, answers or deliverables, but instead, only good questions. A degree of uncertainty is to be expected. Linda Wing explains,

“Most people in early childhood and K-12 don’t [typically] have the opportunity to be in this mode of learning and collaboration, reflecting on our own practices in order to create a new approach to schooling. Rarely is that an experience for teachers.”

Second, it can be challenging for educators to assume leadership roles with respect to their peers. Kellie Washington voices her thoughts on this issue, reflecting on her experience as co-leader of the Language and Literacy PLC. She recalls,

“I [have] had other leadership roles where I was a lead teacher for a UTEP [Urban Teacher Education Program] program at the University of Chicago, but that’s an aspiring teacher [who was] just getting out there. It was challenging to, I won’t say lead, but sort of guide veteran teachers. You know, to stay on point, to not forget our goals, etc. So, that was a challenge.”

Last, UEI and the Ounce labored to precisely calibrate the most beneficial supports and resources. Donoghue literacy coordinator Teyona James-Harris recalls,

“We tried to—for lack of a better word—‘fix’ the problem [by] giving [some PLCs] more support, but that wasn’t necessarily the issue. Support wasn’t

necessarily the issue. The issue was the clarity around our expectations.”

At the start of the third PLC leadership training on April 26, 2012, Carrie Walsh asked PLC leaders to write one word each on whiteboards that captured their current thoughts or feelings about their PLCs. This turned out to be a watershed moment. PLC leaders held up their white boards so that others could see their words. The spectrum ranged from “confused,” “overwhelmed,” and “uncertain” to “excitement,” “hope,” and “promise.”

As LeAnita Randolph recounts,

“When Carrie saw everyone’s response[s], she was like, ‘okay, let me clear this up right now,’ and that made everybody just breathe.”

UEI and the Ounce took steps to clarify expectations. Getting to know each other, developing working relationships, learning from each other, co-constructing knowledge, and trying new practices with the highest potential to close the achievement gap by accelerating student learning were all affirmed as the work of PLCs.

The Ounce and UEI made explicit their lack of demand for the design and implementation by PLCs of new BTC products and systems. Clarifying expectations became known among UEI and Ounce leaders as the “reset” of PLC start-up.

As Rena Johnson explains,

“As PLC leaders, we feel that we are there to guide the discussion—guide the group—as far as setting goals and figuring out what is going to be the product for our PLC. So, it was a bit overwhelming, initially, because—just like we’re learning more about the process—everyone else is learning more about the process. So, our administrators on the objective teams are learning more and, as they grow and learn more, they’re sharing that information with us.”

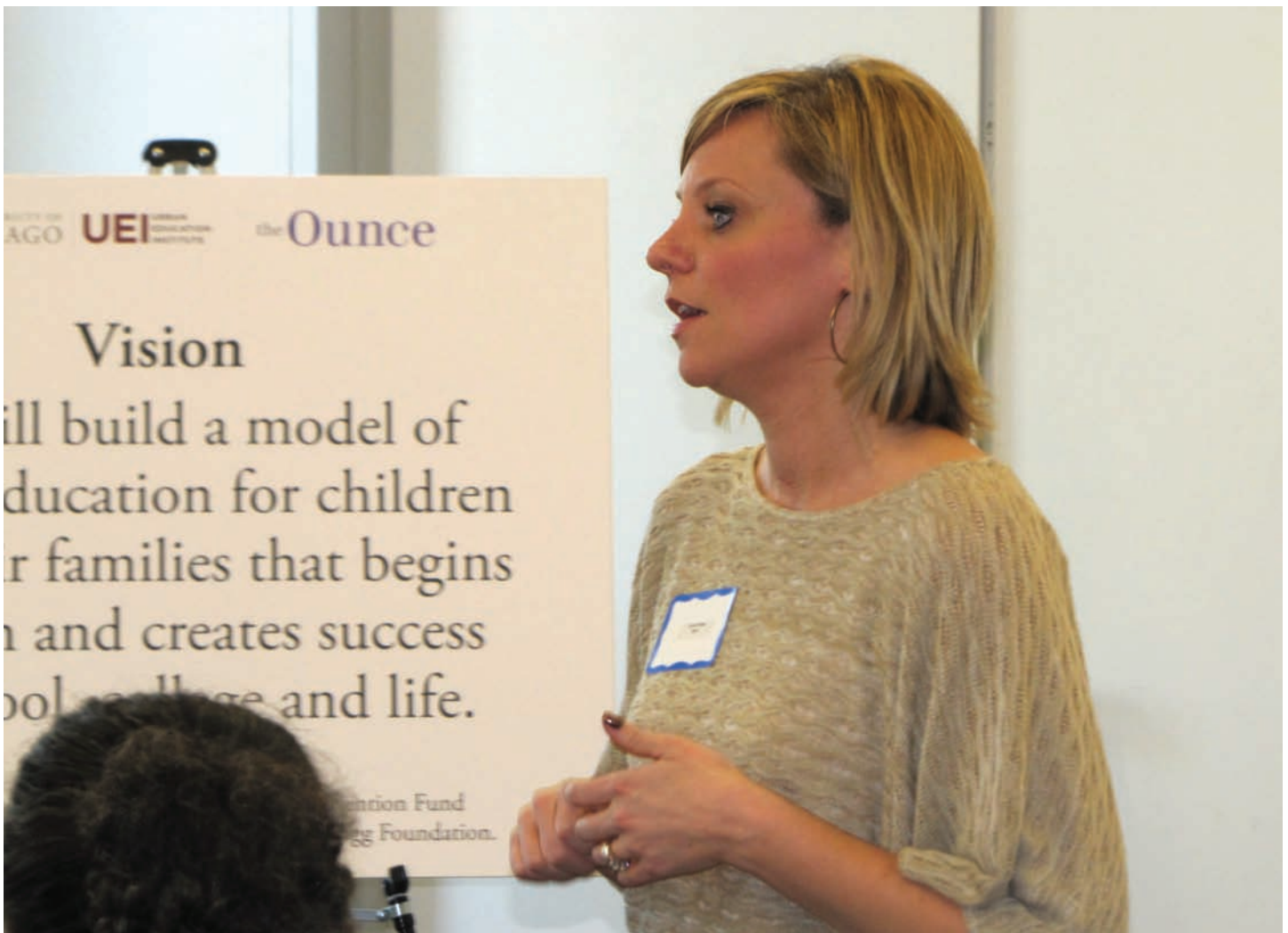


In May 2012, eight leaders of the BTC partnership attended a preK-to-3 Institute at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. They took the opportunity to think deeply about their work, specifically the steps needed to take PLCs to the next level of development. Three major structural supports were born of this experience: 1) a PLC logic model<sup>10</sup> intended to make explicit the expected outcomes, and impact of PLCs, given supportive inputs, activities, and outputs provided by the Ounce and UEI; 2) a PLC survey,<sup>11</sup> aimed at obtaining feedback on participants' experiences that could be used for continuous improvement; and 3) a protocol for the conduct of PLC meetings that gives weight to reflection on learning from each

other, thinking about how practices across the learning continuum could be made more consistently and coherently effective, and planning next steps.

Brenda Eiland-Williford reflects on the value of the Harvard experience for giving BTC leaders the time they needed to conceptualize and develop these supports,

“We’re thinking more about the infrastructure to support this work of the PLCs. What we’ve done in our progression is to figure out a way to help support it—through our leaders, through our facilitators, through our tools that we provide, [and] through our training that we are giving the leaders and the co-facilitators.”



<sup>10</sup> The PLC Logic Model may be found in Appendix E.

<sup>11</sup> The PLC Survey may be found in Appendix F.

## Looking Ahead

A Community of Practice meeting to close out the inaugural year of BTC PLCs was held at Educare on May 24, 2012<sup>12</sup>. PLC members used this experience to reflect on how far they had come in five short months of working together.

Teyona James-Harris closed this meeting. She did so by reminding PLC members of the following: 1) the urgent need for the building of the BTC model in order to close the achievement gap, characterized as a “moral imperative;” 2) the power that teachers and family support staff have to affect children’s lives; and 3) their individual importance to this work. A reading of *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown followed these comments. Lastly, all members were given a copy of the book as a reminder of the enormity of the mission at hand, as well as their role in the ultimate success of the work.

In summary, building a Birth-to-College Model of Public Education is ambitious. It is developmental work. The Ounce and UEI have formed a solid partnership based on commitment, trust, critical thinking, and discussion. More importantly, the partnership believes in the expertise and commitment of teachers and family support staff, investing in their growth and development to learn and lead the way to a Birth-to-College Approach to educating children at high levels in collaboration with their families. The relationships born of these experiences provide a safety net for the intense discussions necessary for evaluating and changing beliefs and practices. As Rena Johnson, Educare pre-K teacher, explains,

“[When we realized] the goal of the PLC was really just for us to learn about each other and our practices, then, [in] my experience, it started to become a bit more relaxed. We now understand that it is more about the process of us learning about each other and our practices. Less tense!”

Linda Wing echoes this notion when she explains,

“One of the most important things that they [i.e. PLCs] did was to give themselves permission to get to know each other. I heard that at least three times and I thought, ‘That’s really important that they realize that that sense of community needed to be built, as part of—or even before—they could really talk about their practices, aspirations, problems, and challenges’.”

Teyona James-Harris conveys some additional lessons learned to policymakers and practitioners interested in organizing PLCs as a means of transforming education for children and families.

“[It’s important] to have discourse and dissonance and continue to work through the issues because, in the end, everyone wins. Everyone comes out knowing more [and] perspectives are different. You see things differently and, as teachers, that’s our main goal. That’s what we strive to do every day. To teach a kid something that actively changes how they think.”

## Epilogue

A preliminary analysis of the responses by PLC participants to an online survey issued in late May 2012 shows that 82 percent of the PLC members who responded to the survey indicated that their PLC involvement had impacted their thinking about their practices. 45 percent said they had changed their practices. Virtually all believed that children and families would be better off in the future due to their PLC work.



**Closing the Achievement Gap Through the Creation  
of a Birth-to-College Approach to Education**

# Teaching Notes

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## Overview

This teaching case study is the second in a series that, together, provide a descriptive narrative of the building of a Birth-to-College (BTC) Approach to Education by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund (the Ounce). The goal is to close the achievement gap that plagues public education. The first case study focuses on the cultural work undertaken by the Ounce and UEI in 2009-10 to cross the structural divides between early learning and elementary-secondary education. With the help of an expert facilitator, UEI and the Ounce worked to form a partnership built upon trust, a shared vision and mission, and common values. The present case study describes UEI and the Ounce's subsequent work to raise resources, build an infrastructure, and launch Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that are engaged in the research and development of a Birth-to-College Approach to Education with an initial focus on birth-to-grade three. The PLCs consist of teachers and family support staff from the Ounce's Educare School for children from birth to age five and teachers, pre-K to grade three, from the North Kenwood/Oakland and Donoghue campuses of UEI's University of Chicago Charter School.

This teaching case study consists of four unique, but complementary, components. These components are a written case study, a video, teaching notes, and supplemental materials. The components are intended to be used together, not to stand alone. The written case study and video provide analytical narratives in text and visual forms. The supplemental materials consist of key documents, referenced in the footnotes of the written case study, which were used or created by UEI, the Ounce, and/or the PLCs. The teaching notes provide suggestions for weaving the case study components together to structure a multi-part discussion on the promise and perils of PLCs as the primary means by which UEI and the Ounce are constructing a Birth-to-College Model.

### Discussion Guide

Discussion facilitators should read the written case study, watch the video, survey the supplemental materials, and study the discussion prompts provided below in preparation for leading the case discussion. Discussion participants should read the written case study. It is recommended, although not essential, that the discussion facilitators and participants review the first case study and video in the series on the BTC model and visit the websites of UEI ([uei.uchicago.edu](http://uei.uchicago.edu)) and the Ounce ([www.ounceofprevention.org](http://www.ounceofprevention.org)).

To begin the discussion, the facilitator should show part one of the video, entitled “Rationale,” and use the discussion prompts pertaining to the “Introduction” and “Background” sections of the written case study to scaffold an analytical conversation. These steps should be repeated for parts two and three of the video and the relevant sections in the written case.

### Prompts for Discussion: Part One

These prompts correspond to part one of the video (00:00 to 04:53), as well as the “Introduction” and “Background” sections of the written case.

1. UEI and the Ounce aim to close the achievement gap through the building of the BTC Model. Is this goal reflected in their vision and mission statements?
2. How, if at all, would a BTC Model work to close the achievement gap? What is the supporting research?
3. What are the foundational pieces of the BTC Model? Specifically, what steps did UEI and the Ounce take to lay the groundwork for PLCs to begin making the model real in terms of mindset, standards, and practices? What were the most salient moves made, especially considering the structural divides between early learning and K-12, as well as the different organizational cultures and structures of the Ounce and UEI?
4. What are the roles of organizational, school, and practitioner leadership vis-à-vis BTC PLCs? Are these roles similar or different from those played by organizational, school, and practitioner leaders with which you are familiar?
5. How do BTC PLCs compare to other forms of professional development? To other methods of incubating an educational innovation?

### Prompts for Discussion: Part Two

These prompts correspond to part two of the video (04:53 to 07:48), entitled “Start up,” as well as the section called “Building Birth-to-College Professional Learning Communities” in the written case.

1. What does the literature say about the elements of effective PLCs? How do the BTC PLCs, particularly the Language and Literacy PLC and the Foundational Mathematics PLC, compare? What are their salient characteristics?
2. Are there risks inherent in PLCs? In BTC PLCs in particular? How can these risks be anticipated and managed, if at all?
3. Describe the series of activities used to ‘set the stage’ for the launch of the PLCs in February 2012. How did these activities help prepare practitioners to author the PLCs and to lead the PLCs?
4. Danielle James, an infant-toddler master teacher, says the power of BTC PLCs resides in their ability to take practitioners outside of their “concept worlds.” Carrie Walsh, a literacy coach, states that BTC PLCs enable their members to “own knowledge” by “creating knowledge.” Why are different concept worlds and creating/owning knowledge important?
5. Educare, NKO, and Donoghue teachers and family support staff are not only members of BTC PLCs, but also members of three different school communities engaged in intensive school-specific professional development programs. What are the incentives for teachers and family support staff to engage in both? The benefits? The costs?

### Prompts for Discussion: Part Three

These prompts correspond to part three of the video entitled “Emerging Knowledge of the Birth-to-College Learning Continuum” (07:48 to end), as well as the sections named “Reset,” “Looking Ahead,” and “Epilogue” in the written case.

1. What were some issues that impacted the work of the PLCs at the start?
2. How were these issues addressed and by whom?
3. How did the PLCs close out their inaugural year? What were views on the PLCs held by their members? By the Ounce and UEI?
4. What are your lessons learned from the work of UEI and the Ounce to build a BTC model through the organization and support of PLCs?
5. Is the BTC concept and/or PLC approach generalizable to other contexts? Why or why not?

**Closing the Achievement Gap through the Creation of a  
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# Supplemental Materials

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## **Appendix A: Birth-to-College Partnership Mission, Vision and Core Values**

### **From Birth To College**

Ounce of Prevention Fund and  
The University of Chicago Urban Education Institute

#### **Vision**

We will build a model of public education for children and their families that begins at birth and creates success in school, college and life.

#### **Mission**

Our mission is to align and create instructional approaches, and academic and social supports, to accelerate student learning, while honoring and building upon the strengths of the families we serve.

#### **Core Values**

To every child, the deepest dedication is due.

We honor families as their children's best advocates.

We believe in the expertise of teachers and staff.

We respect our current models of education.

We are committed to change that is driven by data and assessment.



## Appendix B:

# Birth to-College Model Concept Paper

University of Chicago Urban Education Institute and  
Ounce of Prevention Fund

## The Birth-to-Eight Project Three-Year Objectives

### Introduction

The Urban Education Institute (UEI) and the Ounce of Prevention Fund (Ounce) have formed a new partnership designed to improve student outcomes by creating and implementing new systems to provide vulnerable children and their families with an effective, cohesive continuum of education and support during the first eight years of life. This continuum will lay a strong foundation to accelerate children's development, learning and achievement as well as facilitate parents' engagement with and advocacy for their child's education through college entrance. The long-term, overarching goal of the Birth-to-Eight Project is to collaboratively and continuously align and create instructional practices and academic and social supports across early childhood, elementary, and secondary schools. Our project will directly benefit the children and families in our programs, while also demonstrating a new public education model that can be sustained and adapted, thus seamlessly and successfully preparing children for college, beginning at birth.

### Statement of Need

The achievement gap reflects a disparity in school readiness skills between low-income children and their more advantaged peers, and can be measured as early as nine months of age. Once established, these gaps in school readiness skills are difficult – and more costly – to remedy, leading to distinct differences in academic achievement: low-income

students consistently underperform on school coursework and on standardized tests, graduate high school at lower rates, and are less likely to attend college. Illinois has one of the worst achievement gaps in the nation – the eighth largest disparity in educational attainment.<sup>1</sup> In the City of Chicago, only half of total high school students graduate, and of those who do graduate, only 35% go on to attend four-year colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup> This percentage drastically shrinks for children who are African American, Latino, and low-income. Consequently, far too many students are illprepared to meet the challenges of today's employment market, forcing them into low-skilled, low-paying jobs that will perpetuate – rather than help them break – the cycle of poverty.

Attempts to close the achievement gap during the K-12 years are both costly and largely ineffective.<sup>3</sup> And while we know that high-quality early learning programs are proven to narrow the achievement gap, sustaining the gains of early education can be challenging. Some studies have documented a gradual “fade out” of cognitive and academic skills as children advance in school. Many experts believe that the “fade out” effect is a direct result of the disconnect between early education and the K-12 system, particularly in the early elementary school years. There is growing momentum around ideas to align and improve experiences across this continuum in order to address these concerns. Specifically, a variety of important new tables, including Illinois' P-20 Council, the Early Learning Council, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, and the Leadership to Integrate the Early Learning Continuum (LINC), are providing forums for discussions about standards, assessment, and professional development efforts at the systems level. However, UEI and the Ounce believe that establishing a comprehensive

1 Public Agenda for College and Career Success (2008) Springfield, IL: Public Agenda Task Force and Illinois Board of Higher Education.

2 <http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/citywide.html>

3 The Condition of Education 2004 (NCES 2004-077), Indicator 8 (2004). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

framework is essential to guide the alignment – and, ultimately, the implementation – of standards, instructional practices, assessment, data use strategies, and professional development models that will be necessary to promote lasting improvements in student achievement, and to the educational continuum. This work is unprecedented for field of early childhood and K-12 education. Moreover, our approach is distinctive in recognizing that parents play a core role in promoting student achievement, and the success of a birth-to-eight framework must incorporate the critical contributions of family support and outreach staff.

### **Birth-To-Eight Project**

Recognizing the need to develop innovative new approaches to closing the achievement gap, UEI and the Ounce began an effort in 2009 to establish a partnership with the goal of developing a new model of public education that creates a cohesive educational experience for children starting from birth. In partnership, UEI and the Ounce are leveraging our collective knowledge, strengths and commitment to develop a continuum of learning for young children and their families that begins at birth and extends through college. Over the last year, leaders from both institutions have shared their respective birth-to-five and K-12 experiences and expertise. Through an intentional, relationship-based approach and in the context of a series of meetings and site visits, our team began the significant task of building mutual understanding and trust among program administrators, researchers, teachers, special education staff, and family support staff, that was critical to co-creating a shared vision, mission, goal and action plan for our partnership from birth to third grade. We also successfully arranged to coordinate our independent admissions policies in a way that allows kindergarten-bound Educare students to directly transition into one of UEI's two elementary charter schools (North Kenwood/Oakland (NKO) and Donoghue). Twelve of Educare's 32 kindergarten-bound children enrolled at UEI elementary schools this fall. This component of our Project will provide an increasing number of children and families with a continuum

of high-quality education, while allowing us to implement, evaluate and demonstrate the potential of our model.

While we are encouraged with our progress to date, we know that our work is not finished. We must transform our shared vision into a tangible model of a seamless educational continuum for children from birth to age eight that can inform broader efforts in the field. This will require that we go deep into the work of aligning standards, curriculum, pedagogy, assessments, and family support practices. The next three years (July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2014) will serve as the “research and development” phase of our efforts to develop, implement, evaluate, and refine a model that can be sustained and adapted over time. We have prioritized four primary objectives that will demonstrate the impact of our birth-to-eight approach on the children and families we serve, spur birth-to-eight models in other areas, and inform larger education policy reform efforts in Chicago, throughout Illinois, and across the country through the dissemination of key findings and strategies from our shared work.

***Objective 1:** Develop and engage in a comprehensive, transformative approach to professional development that results in a new, shared belief system and set of values, behaviors and practices that will demonstrably improve outcomes for children during their first eight years of life, and their families.* The core of our Project is the on-the-ground collaboration among UEI and Ounce administrators, teachers, special education staff, and family support staff to translate our shared vision and beliefs into practice. While the first phase of site visits and meetings helped Ounce and UEI teachers and staff begin to develop greater awareness of their joint role in promoting children's and families' success across the educational continuum, we know that these were only the very first steps toward building an aligned and shared birth-to-eight system. Changing staff thinking, belief systems, and practices will be an arduous process; it will take time, and require an intensive focus on building knowledge, trust and skills that can be leveraged to improve student and family outcomes. Significantly, we believe this process will

result in a viable, new professional development model that will help inform larger education reform efforts over the long term.

In the years ahead, we will leverage our relationships to design, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive professional development framework that incorporates training, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), observations, and ongoing coaching. We will convene a number of PLCs to bring together various groups of UEI and Ounce staff, including early childhood, kindergarten, primary and special education teachers, family support staff, and administrators. We will also host “cross-collaborative” PLCs that will bring staff together from all these groups. These PLCs will provide our staff with a structure through which they can co-create a cohesive learning model from birth to third grade that addresses and aligns key areas, including standards, curriculum, instructional practices and methods, progress monitoring and data use, transitions, special education service delivery, and family engagement and supports. We will design and implement an evidence-based staff development curriculum to facilitate participants’ exploration of shared readings, lesson study, and video footage (to view and reflect on staff practices) that provide a framework for in-depth discussions and decisions on key issues related to instructional practices from infancy to age eight (e.g. teacher identity and efficacy, pedagogy, brain research, intervention research etc.). We expect that the learning and deliverables resulting from the PLCs will inform the design of our model’s professional development framework. Additionally, they will inform the specific content of training to support teachers and staff in implementing these new aligned systems and practices in their work with children and families. Recognizing that lasting behavior change requires ongoing support and accountability over time, we will provide our staff with intensive, hands-on coaching to help them integrate and sustain these new aligned practices and measure their progress. Finally, given our focus on long-term reform, we will package key elements of our professional development framework into a toolkit that consists of protocols, rubrics, lesson

studies and a database, which can be used by other schools and school districts interested in aligning early learning with kindergarten through third grade.

Our specific three-year professional development activities include:

1. Developing and refining our PLC approach for classroom teachers and administrators that ensures review and reflection of the latest research in child development, education and special education, and guides a process whereby trust and a shared understanding is established among UEI and Ounce staff across the infancy to third grade continuum.
2. Implementing multiple PLCs to nurture staff’s professional development, and to provide opportunities to jointly align teaching and learning practices from birth through grade three.
3. Integrating the PLC approach within a larger professional development framework of training, coaching, and reflective practices to support implementation of aligned systems and practices over the long term.
4. Documenting activities from PLCs, training, and ongoing coaching to create a professional development toolkit that will be disseminated to educational leaders and professionals to support wider efforts to align systems and practices for working with children and families from birth to age eight.

**Objective 2:** *We will launch and refine a coordinated, high-quality, birth-to-age-eight model of public education that establishes consistent expectations for children’s development and learning, standards, curriculum, assessment, and family supports from birth to grade three.* The PLCs will provide the forum for Ounce and UEI staff to look vertically across grade levels as we co-create and align standards, curriculum, instructional methodology, and assessment/progress monitoring approaches for key learning areas (e.g., social-emotional development, literacy, math, science, etc.). Ultimately, these systems and

framework will form the basis for a cohesive set of practices that result in a seamless education experience for children, families, teachers, and staff. Drawing on our knowledge and input from outside experts, as well as the tools that already exist (e.g. early childhood education and K-12 learning standards, literacy assessment protocols for four-year-olds, etc.), we will develop an integrated education model for children from birth to age eight. This approach will provide administrators, teachers, and staff with access to consistent expectations for children's development and learning, curriculum maps, assessment methods, and effective teaching methods that will inform instructional strategies across the birth-to-third grade continuum. Coordinating these systems will allow us to intensify data sharing across our organizations in order to address current data gaps, systematically measure student growth, drive individualized instructional activities, and improve teacher effectiveness. As evidence of our commitment to a new model of public education, we plan to hold initial conversations with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) about the possibility of applying for joint accreditation of our early childhood education programs. In our conversations with NAEYC, our goal would be not only to seek what we believe would be unprecedented joint accreditation, but to also ask NAEYC consider developing accreditation standards and structures for models like ours that address the entire continuum of education for children from birth to age eight.

While this on-the-ground work will be critical to establishing a birth-to-eight approach, we also recognize the need to develop our model within the context of other important education reform initiatives. Notably, the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has led an extensive investigation over the last two decades of how the organization of schools and local communities affects their capacity to improve student engagement and learning. CCSR's Five Essential Supports for School Improvement are based on empirical evidence, and include: school leadership, professional capacity, parent-community

ties, studentcentered learning climate, and instructional guidance. Studies show that schools in disadvantaged communities that build and leverage these elements are significantly more effective in improving student achievement than those schools that do not embrace this framework. All of the UEI schools were designed with the Five Essentials as the framework for organizing their school culture and community, and there is growing interest in this model from schools districts in several states, including Maryland, New Jersey, and Texas. Moreover, the Five Essentials are gaining momentum among key K-12 education reform initiatives; for example, Advance Illinois has incorporated these Five Essentials into their annual report card of Illinois' public education system. However, the Five Essentials framework only addresses K-12 schools. UEI has already incorporated these elements into their pre-k classrooms, and the Ounce plans to begin to implement the framework into its program as well. Working in collaboration, we will explore the application of the Five Essentials across the birth-to-five years and we expect that there will be opportunities to inform the continued enhancement of this framework to address key elements of early childhood education (e.g. a significant focus on children's socialemotional development and parent partnership and engagement). While this will require an intensive, multi-year effort, we believe that this work is particularly relevant to current school reform conversations and will, in turn, increase the impact of our model.

As with our professional development framework, we will carefully document our model of aligned standards, curriculum, assessment, and family practices to help inform the efforts of other schools and partnerships interested in creating a cohesive educational experience from birth. We will actively seek opportunities to share our system and the accompanying roadmap for implementation.

We plan to undertake the following activities to accomplish our objective:

1. Creating integrated systems, standards, curriculum, instructional methodology, and progress monitoring approaches into a cohesive birth-to-eight approach to teaching and learning.
2. Creating new family engagement, involvement, and support approaches into a cohesive birth-to-eight approach.
3. Meeting with NAEYC to advocate for joint accreditation and the development of accreditation standards for birth-to-age eight models.
4. Incorporating the CCSR's Five Essential Supports for School Improvement into the Ounce's program, as well as explore to possibility of expanding this framework for applicability to early childhood education, birth to age five.
5. Clearly articulating our approach into a roadmap that can be disseminated to the early childhood and K-12 education fields, as well as key education reform leaders.

**Objective 3:** *We will provide our families with a coherent set of experiences from birth to grade three, including intensified supports for parents of children with special needs, while at the same time honoring and building upon our families' strengths.* Nearly all children and families experience stress before, during, and after a transition to a new school. For the majority of middle- and high-income families, parents are able to successfully navigate what can often be a challenging process – particularly in large and extremely complex systems as in Chicago and other large, urban school districts – to provide their children with a smooth transition into a quality elementary school. Unfortunately, many parents in low-income families do not have the skills, knowledge or quality options available and, therefore, require resources to successfully navigate these transitions. As a result, supporting transitions into K-12 education for these children and families falls on early childhood educators, many of whom do not have the resources, systems or partnerships with quality elementary

schools in place to support children and families effectively. Consequently, the most disadvantaged children and families – who already face myriad obstacles toward their healthy development and school success – bear an additional burden as they enter and try to adjust to a new and different learning environment, thus significantly decreasing their chances for success in school and later in life.

Recognizing that children and families are the beneficiaries of our project, we will develop and implement strategies to improve their experiences throughout their education career. UEI and the Ounce have strong track records of prioritizing the needs of children and families; for example, both our programs have dedicated family spaces that signify our commitment to supporting parents in their role as a child's first teacher and as an advocate for their lifelong success. The Ounce's Educare program employs several Family Support Staff who – in collaboration with teaching staff – address children and families' needs, and actively solicit parent involvement and leadership through the Head Start Policy Council, other advisory committees, and discussion groups. Moreover, unlike many other K-12 schools, UEI has put a structure in place to strengthen parent involvement in its charter schools: a Director of Family and Community Engagement (and not an Assistant Principal) is responsible for strengthening parent and local community involvement within their schools. Much of our shared work to date has focused on putting in place the necessary structures to ease children's and families' transition to kindergarten. Our efforts in the coming years will deepen these efforts by elevating the coordination of existing services and supports as well as co-creating new systems for the at-risk children and families we serve. In close partnership with our families and with respect for their values and culture, we will strategically refine and expand upon our efforts to create a cohesive set of structures around the following approaches: supporting Educare families' applications to UEI charter schools; providing individualized transition support to families; hosting joint meetings and events; and coordinating effective communication approaches

around expectations, curriculum, instruction, assessments, and transitions. Through these efforts, as well as additional parent focus groups, we plan to discern additional types of supports that our families need in order to assist them to best support their children's success in school and in life.

Another significant focus for Family Support Staff from the Ounce and UEI will be to create structures that improve the coordination of supports for children with special needs and their families, who require additional, more intensive supports in all aspects of their education including transitions. Transitions are particularly difficult for children with special needs as parents have to understand and navigate through the complex regulatory and legal process to secure and ensure continuity of special education services and supports. And like many other schools, both UEI and the Ounce struggle with how to coordinate and provide effective special education supports and services. Designing and refining a comprehensive system of supports that provides children with special needs and their families with a higher frequency and intensity of services that help them understand and successfully access these critical supports will be a key priority of our work in the years ahead. In addition, we also recognize the importance of streamlining – and increasing families' access to – supplemental supports (e.g. vision, health, mental health screenings) and other family services (e.g. housing, employment, health, etc.).

We believe our more unified approach will allow our parents to better meet their children's needs and give them tools to support their success over the long term. We will illustrate the procedures and structures of our family engagement system as part of the Project's dissemination efforts.

Specifically, over the next three years, we plan to complete the following activities:

1. Establishing and refining a set of family engagement and support structures that connects families to school professionals and children to teachers to increase continuity and ease families' transition to kindergarten and elementary school.
2. Creating a coordinated approach to providing children and families with supplemental supports and comprehensive family services, as well as additional resources to help them better support their children's learning and development.
3. Developing a shared system to increase communication to parents about the Project, and to encourage their involvement.
4. Establishing a system to provide an array of intensive, high-frequency supports and services to children with special needs and their families, incorporating these strategies into our larger alignment efforts as appropriate.
5. Recording and integrating our family engagement procedures and structures into our overall birth-to-eight framework as part of our dissemination efforts.

**Objective 4:** *We will document our efforts to develop a birth-to-eight education model, and disseminate best practices and lessons learned from the Project to inform initiatives in other school communities and influence broader educational reform.* Both UEI and the Ounce are deeply committed to building a model that can demonstrate education reform and inform policy efforts in Chicago, across Illinois, and throughout the country. While our partnership is unique, the process we must undergo to align and create coherent learning experiences for children and families is not: it can be replicated by organizations and entities across the country. Embedded in our other three objectives are plans to document and disseminate best practices from our Project. These activities will be essential to fulfilling our broader

goal of ensuring this model can be adapted and sustained over time. We will develop and implement a deliberate, strategic communications plan to disseminate our learnings and deliverables and are considering a variety of communications vehicles (e.g., Project Web site, case studies, toolkits, research studies, a conference, social media, and newsletters) that can reach a variety of audiences, including parents, educators, policymakers, funders, and the general public.

At the same time, given UEI's particular strengths in research and the Ounce's expertise in advocacy and systems-building, we will seek further opportunities to leverage our Project to create broader program and policy change. Both UEI and the Ounce have established national networks (e.g., through the adoption of UEI's STEP assessment in a growing number of school systems, and the continued expansion of the Ounce's Educare model nationwide) through which we will disseminate lessons learned, and create valuable opportunities to further test the viability of our model in diverse educational settings. Given increased focus on alignment with early elementary, we believe that Head Start and NAEYC will be interested in the Project as will schools and school systems implementing the CCSR's Five Essentials.

Our dissemination activities over the next three years include:

1. Developing and implementing a deliberate, strategic communications plan to share the products of our Project (i.e. professional development toolkit, an integrated birth-to-eight model, and family engagement and support structures and procedures).
2. Identifying opportunities to share our model with local, state and national audiences.
3. Building support for our model among key leaders and decision makers in order to drive larger educational alignment policy change.

## Conclusion

UEI and the Ounce are well-respected leaders in the fields of K-12 and early childhood education, and both institutions are committed to narrowing the achievement gap by improving student achievement and college readiness. Our innovative Birth-to-Eight Project has the potential to significantly improve the educational experiences of at-risk children in Illinois and across the country and prepare them for success in school and in life, while also profoundly impacting the field. New investment from the private sector will be essential to our efforts in the coming three years to create a model that we ultimately envision will be widely implemented and primarily sustained through public funding sources. We look forward to continuing discussions with the McCormick Foundation around our plans for this important work.

## **Appendix C: Selected Affirmation Statements**

### **Selected Affirmation Statements From Baruti Kafele's book *Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School & in Life***

#### **Teacher Motivation**

1. I have a vision for what I expect my students to achieve.

#### **Student Motivation**

2. I have high expectations and standards for my students and believe that they will reach them.

#### **Classroom Climate and Culture**

3. I maintain a classroom climate and culture that are conducive to learning.

#### **Building Relationships**

4. I have a love appreciation and respect for my students and know them beyond their academic side.

#### **Classroom Instruction**

5. I differentiate my instruction based upon the different learning styles, ability levels and needs of my students.

#### **Cultural Responsiveness**

6. I learn all that I can about the history and culture of my students toward making me culturally aware of who they are.

#### **Teacher Accountability**

7. I conduct daily self-reflection and self-assessment of my practice as a teacher.

#### **Planning and Organization**

8. I plan for each day and use achievement data to develop my lessons.

#### **Professional Development**

9. I am a life-long learner while always striving to become a better teacher.

#### **Parental Engagement**

10. I treat my relationship with my students' parents as a partnership.



## **Appendix D:**

### **Document 1: PLC Leadership Expectations**

#### **PLC Leader Expectations**

All leaders of PLC groups will receive an additional \$50.00 per meeting for taking on additional leadership responsibilities including but not limited to:

1. Facilitating PLC discussions
2. Organizing dates/times for meeting participants
3. Notifying participants of meetings
4. Maintaining and compiling deliverables (agenda, shared readings, etc.)
5. Reporting out work to the larger group
6. Being the point person for communication at his/her organization
7. Communicating supports/resources needed to PLC facilitator

#### **Facilitator Expectations**

All facilitators are members of the larger working group. Their other responsibilities include:

1. Support PLC leaders.
2. Bring questions/concerns to the larger working group.
3. Are available as a resource when necessary.
4. Empower and encourage the PLC leader to lead.

## **Appendix D:**

# **Document 2: Effective Leadership in Education**

### **Effective Leadership in Education**

Teyona James-Harris

January 19, 2012

Being an effective leader is synonymous with being an effective teacher in a PLC. The skills for leading are already embedded in the process itself.

#### **Big Idea: Focus on the Mission of the PLC**

Create a focused mission and set high expectations that further the work of the PLC

#### **Big Idea: Create a Collaborative Culture**

Recognize and encourage good practices that motivate, support and lift the thinking of others

#### **Big Idea: Focus on Results**

Use and organize time and resources in productive and meaningful ways

#### **Big Idea: Be innovative and active**

Actively participate and engage in the work and keep abreast of new research and educational practices and policies

## **Appendix D:**

### **Document 3: Qualities Of A Successful Team**

#### **The 5 Qualities of a Successful Team:**

##### **1. Building a Foundation for Trust**

- Be genuinely open with one another about mistakes and weaknesses

##### **2. Welcome Conflict**

- Engage in unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas

##### **3. Commit to a Clear Plan of Action and Decisions**

- Be sincere when you agree (or disagree)

##### **4. Solicit Accountability**

- Hold members accountable for actions and behaviors that seem counterproductive to the good of the team

##### **5. Pay Attention to Results**

- Team goals take precedence over individual needs

1 The working group continues to meet to help guide the work of the partnership.

2 Additional information about interviewees is provided in Appendix D.

## Appendix D:

### Document 4: Sample Meeting Norms

#### Sample Meeting Norms

- ❖ Start on time, end on time
- ❖ Stick to agenda
- ❖ Assign note taker
- ❖ Be fully present
  - Show interest
  - Participate
  - Concentrate on what is being said
- ❖ Engage in one conversation at a time
- ❖ Two before me, Four before me.
- ❖ Practice is public, stories are private
- ❖ Presume positive intentions
  - Resolve problems without blaming
- ❖ Pay attention to self and others
- ❖ Pause, Paraphrase, Pose questions
  - If you don't understand something, ask for clarification
  - Don't jump to conclusions
  - React to ideas, not to the person
- ❖ Send an acknowledgement in response to important email messages
- ❖ When you've made a commitment you can't keep, let the other members know as soon as possible.
- ❖ Treat other people's issues and concerns as valid even if you don't agree with them.
- ❖ Focus on the positive: what's working well, not on what's going wrong
- ❖ End with a reflection
- ❖ Agree on next meeting date

#### Communication Roadblocks

- ❖ Directing
- ❖ Interrupting
- ❖ Judging
- ❖ Name Calling
- ❖ Moralizing
- ❖ Persuading
- ❖ Ridiculing
- ❖ Warning

## Appendix D:

### Document 5: The Checking Temperature Protocol

**Rationale:** The Checking Temperature Protocol can be used to gauge how participants in a group are feeling about the current dynamics and/or work. Writing down a word allows the participant to perhaps share a feeling that might be hard to say out loud. It also encourages the person to think clearly about his/her own strongest feeling by having to narrow it down to one word. In addition, everyone's opinion is heard and valued, allowing people to feel validated. Ultimately the honest feelings can lead to bonding people together and initiating changes that can benefit all members of the group and help move along the work.

**Materials:** Whiteboards, Expo markers

**Protocol:**

- 1) Pass out a whiteboard and marker to each participant.
- 2) Ask each person to write down (without talking) one word to describe how he/she is feeling.
- 3) Encourage people to be honest and open about what that feeling is. Remind people that the purpose is to make things more effective for them.
- 4) Ask people to share their feelings and ask those that would like to elaborate on what they were feeling to do so.
- 5) Then talk about how to use the new information to move forward in a more effective way.

# Appendix E: Birth-to-College PLC Logic Model

**Purpose**

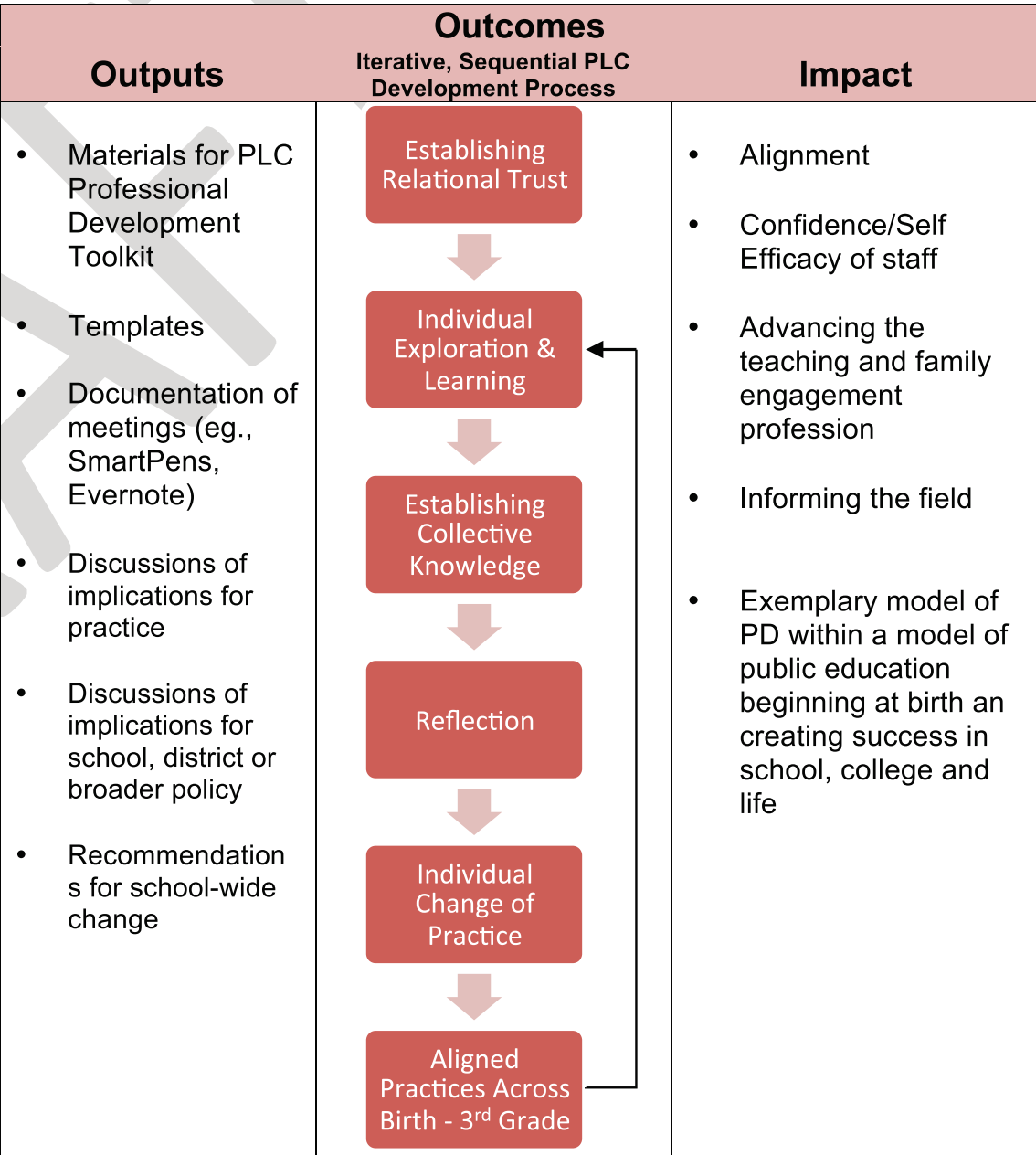
1) PLCs are the primary mechanism for change in knowledge, beliefs, practices, and policies related to classroom interactions and instruction and family support and engagement at the following levels: individuals, groups of staff, schools, and systems.

2) PLCs create change through an innovative and evidence-based format for professional development that promotes a line of sight from infancy through third grade (and eventually college) for all staff.

Inputs	Activities	
	Preparation	Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People/Human Capital</li> <li>• Knowledge, skills, passion, and expertise of professionals</li> <li>• Space to meet</li> <li>• Time for professional development</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Time for planning and support from leadership</li> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set clear expectations for PLC facilitators, leaders, and members</li> <li>• Intentional Representation of PLC membership:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from across organizations,</li> <li>- across job roles,</li> <li>- across ages of children served</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identified 6 essential content areas</li> <li>• Members able to identify preference</li> <li>• Developed PLC leaders and facilitators</li> <li>• Provided a beginning set of materials: protocols, resources, shared readings, etc.</li> <li>• Leadership supported and monitored progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 Content-Centered PLCs:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Assessment</b></li> <li>- <b>Family Engagement &amp; Social Support</b></li> <li>- <b>Foundational Mathematics</b></li> <li>- <b>Language &amp; Literacy</b></li> <li>- <b>Social Emotional Learning</b></li> <li>- <b>Transitions</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meeting frequency</li> <li>• Meeting duration</li> </ul>

**Assumptions**

- PLCs are shaping alignment from birth through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.
- PLCs will engage in reflection and continuous improvement.
- All PLCs are a priority to realizing the vision and mission of Birth-To-College
- PLCs will provide opportunities for autonomy & empowerment
- This is not a “project” or short-term initiative; we are committed to long term-change and growth.
- Coordinated admissions is a necessary but not sufficient component of our Birth-To-College model.



## Appendix F: PLC Survey

### Introductory Questions

\* required

1. Which best describes your current role?

- Teaching Staff
- Family Support/Engagement Staff
- Coach
- School Leadership
- Other

Other (please specify)

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\*2. At which location do you work?

- Ounce/Educare
- UCCS/NKO
- UCCS/Donoghue
- Other

Other (please specify)

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\*3. Which PLC are you on?

- Assessment
- Family Engagement and Social Support
- Foundational Mathematics
- Language and Literacy
- Social and Emotional
- Transitions

\*4. Why did you choose this PLC topic?

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### Questions Corresponding to the Iterative, Sequential Process of PLC Development:

#### Individual Exploration and Learning

\*5. Is there anything that has happened as part of your PLC that has changed your thinking about your work or led you to explore something new? If yes, please describe. If no, why do you not think this has occurred?

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#### Establishing Collective Knowledge

\*6. What kind of information have you shared about your knowledge, skills, practice, experience, or expertise with your fellow PLC members?

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\*7. In what format have you shared that information?

- Anecdotally/Storytelling
- Document
- Work Sample
- Demonstration
- Data
- Video
- Articles
- Books
- Websites
- Other
- Other (please specify)



## Appendix F: PLC Survey

### Questions Corresponding to the Iterative, Sequential Process of PLC Development:

#### Reflection

\*8. What was most valuable and/or meaningful experience, discussion, or learning that you have had in your PLC thus far?

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\*9. Do you feel like you sufficiently learned about each other's schools practices in your content area? If not, how could this have been better accomplished?

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#### Individual Change of Practices

\*10. From your PLC discussions, have you gone back and implemented anything in your practice? If so, what have you implemented and how did you implement it?

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#### Aligned Practices across birth through 3rd grade

\*11. Was there anything in your PLC discussions, activities, or experiences that moved you towards becoming more similar/aligned in practices across organizations?

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### General Impressions of PLC Involvement and Recommendations for Modifications to the PLC Processes

\*12. What kind of follow up or additional supports would you like to see happen for your PLC?

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\*13. What suggestions do you have to make this process more effective and meaningful?

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### Next Steps and Reflections on Impact of Birth-To-College Work

\*14. Where do you see your work in this PLC going in the future?

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\*15. Why do you think you're part of the Birth-to-College work?

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\*16. Do you think children and/or families will be better off in the future because of your PLC work? If so, why and in what way?

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**Questions Specific to PLC Leaders and Facilitators**

**17. Are you a PLC Leader or Facilitator?**

Yes

No

**\*18. Do you feel like you have received the kind of support that you needed to be effective in your role as a leader or facilitator? If so, what was beneficial? If not, what other supports do you think you needed?**

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## **Appendix G:**

# **Document 1: Community of Practice Meeting Share Out**

### **5.24.12 Language & Literacy CoP Share Out**

**What do you understand better as a result of your PLC conversations?**

- we understand each other better
- our group's objectives
- the work that is done at Educare and how it aligns with the work at NKO & Donoghue

**Share a PLC story about how the PLC has impacted your practice, thinking and what you believe.**

- eye opening to see the standards of Educare and how it evolves into elementary school learning

**What do you think we could change to help us become more consistent across organizations and age groups?**

- knowing the standards
- sharing common language

**What are the next steps for your PLC? What supports or information do you still need?**

- bring in artifacts
- create a map that aligns the inferring standards from birth to 3rd grade
- read an article and reflect, other supplemental resources

**How does the work of my PLC align with the work that I do everyday?**

- we better understand the progression

## Appendix G:

# Document 2: Birth-To-College Newsletter Highlighting COP

### THE BIRTH TO COLLEGE (BTC) EXPRESS

News from the collaboration between NKO, Donoghue and Educare

September 2012



Staff at the BTC Community of Practice, May 23, 2012

### Welcome to the Birth To College Express!

The Birth To College (BTC) *Express* is a newsletter for the collaboration between NKO, Donoghue and Educare schools. We are partnering to build a model of public education for children and their families that begins at birth and promotes academic and life success through college.

The purpose of the newsletter is to keep members of our school communities informed of our work, and specifically to highlight the learning, changes in practice and instances of alignment taking place within our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Our PLCs are made up of teaching, family engagement, special needs, research, and administrative staff working with babies, toddlers, preschool children and students up to 3rd grade. They focus on these school practices: Assessments, Transitions, Family and Social Support, Social-Emotional Learning, Math, and Language and Literacy.

Several times a year, PLCs come together to share and learn from each other in our Community of Practice (COP). The photo above from our final Community of Practice of the school year is of the lovely and talented members of the Language and Literacy PLC.

*The work we are doing is a moral imperative. Our PLCs are the primary mechanism of change. We want our children to have a high quality education starting at birth all the way to college. We want our children and parents to have a line of sight where poverty is no longer an issue, the belief gap is no longer an issue, the opportunity gap is no longer an issue, the achievement gap is no longer an issue. We have to believe every single day that our work is important for our kids. What we're doing is important. It is achievable. We can do it.*

-Teyona James Harris, BTC PLC Team Leader

Questions? Comments? Please email  
erothkopf@ounceofprevention.org or  
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### UPCOMING EVENTS

September 4<sup>th</sup> Educare's First Day of School

September 11<sup>th</sup> PLC Leader and Facilitator Training, 4-6 pm @ Donoghue

September 19<sup>th</sup> Community of Practice, 2-4pm @ Educare

#### Photo Flashback:

Kindergarten Shadow Day  
June 4, 2012

Educare preschool students visited Donoghue to experience what kindergarten is like.



of the Ounce of Prevention Fund

## THE BIRTH TO COLLEGE (BTC) EXPRESS

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September 2012

### PLC Survey Highlights



77% of PLC members completed the survey circulated in May 2012.



82% expressed that their involvement in a PLC has impacted their thinking about their practice.



Virtually all respondents feel that their involvement in the partnership between Educare, NKO & Donoghue will ultimately benefit children and their families.

### The top 5 most valuable experiences shared in the survey by PLC members are:

1. Getting to know each other or building relationships
2. Looking across the grade levels and the birth to third grade trajectory
3. Discussing and learning what we do with families
4. Discussing social emotional learning of our children
5. Classroom observations and visits to each other's schools

### Survey Quotes From Your Colleagues

→Bringing the importance of family engagement back into the picture. It has been put on the back burner with so much emphasis on academics I will be bringing it back and putting more emphasis on family engagement.

→I think about the work that we do with infants and toddlers as the foundation for later development. When talking with our group members, it was difficult aligning our goals for the group, because it was hard to describe, or have something concrete that tells us what social emotional development looks like after preK. So after our visits to the schools, we started sharing stories. Our story share and resource share (screenings, standards, etc.) became guides to our exploration, and made us all think about how important social emotional development is to school readiness and success.

→I learn something new from the members of my PLC every time we meet that helps me to think about my work in the classroom. I love the opportunity to share and get ideas from our team of professionals.

→I learned that Educare has breakfasts with the parents of their special needs kids, and that NKO is going to do the same. My plan is for that to happen at Donoghue, too.



### EVERNOTE TIPS

Evernote is the shared digital space where members of the collaborative share articles, pictures, artifacts from our work, record our meetings, and document just about everything we do. The following are interesting recent additions to Evernote (look in the BTC notebook!) that we think PLC members should be aware of.

- A link to Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke's recent address when he touted the big return on investment for early childhood programs
- Slides from a study, "Lifetime Impacts of a Kindergarten Classroom" that validate our work

**Did you know** that you can click and drag a note you use often to the favorite toolbar for easy access all the time?

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