

Early Childhood Landscape Analysis Tool For Connecticut Schools and Districts



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

Connecticut State Department of Education
and the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

Contents

Introduction	1
Demographics	5
Quality of Education and Care Prior to Kindergarten Entry	8
Student Learning and Achievement	11
Family and Community Engagement	14
Next Steps	16

*This landscape analysis was written with the input and feedback of
a number of representatives of Connecticut's early learning community.*

Introduction

Why a landscape analysis?

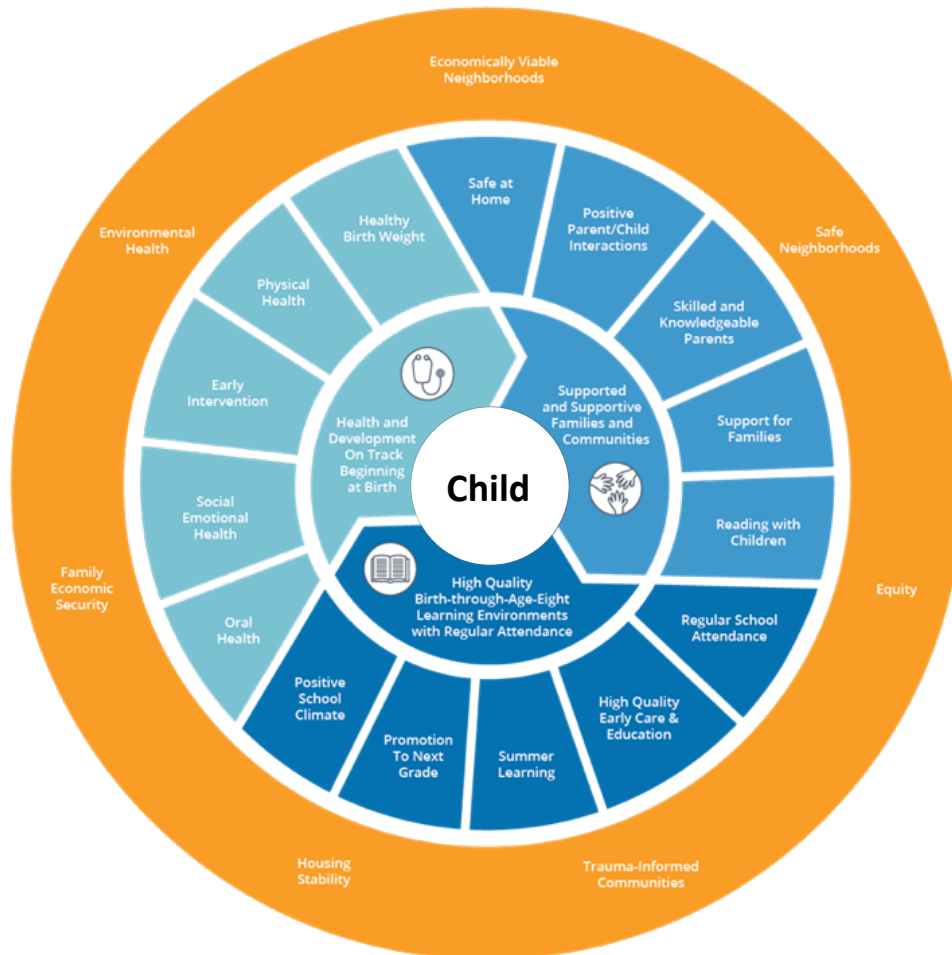
This guide is meant to identify ways for school and district leaders to describe the characteristics of incoming kindergartners to help craft new and individualized approaches to teaching and learning, as well as identify needed supports for children and families in classrooms, schools, and districts. It is intended for use by school and district leadership and staff who seek to make data-informed decisions to grow and improve the services and resources available to support the full range of developmental outcomes for children. There are key data points that can be used to paint a picture of our children, identify the skills with which they enter classrooms, and develop plans to help all children meet and exceed their learning goals. As the graphic below demonstrates, identifying the risk factors in a community and then acting to address those risks can help promote positive outcomes for children. A landscape analysis can help identify these risk factors as well as individual and community-based assets to act upon these needs.



Source: *A Portrait of Disadvantage: Understanding Poverty's Influence on Child Development*, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Spring, 2018

The ultimate purpose of districts engaging in a landscape analysis is to drive school/community-level action that draws on collective will that is designed to tell the story of how (and how well) the community is serving young children and their families, and to identify ways to better serve them by understanding community assets and identifying gaps in services and opportunities. This guide is a tool for districts and presents a framework of data points that districts can gather to better understand young learners, and how teachers, districts, and school leaders can respond to their needs. The guide is also designed to help promote cross-sector collaboration to identify, leverage, and maximize the resources available to support the development and achievement of young children. Each section includes an example of the information available in a district; we encourage each district to look for data that best represents their community.

Why it's important, and why it's important to you



Adapted with permission from North Carolina Pathways to Grade Level Reading

All children need support across the range of development. While assessments are often given to young learners, it is unclear whether teachers are able to use this information to design effective learning environments and instruction. Schools struggle to describe an “ideal” early learner and to identify the characteristics and skills young children need to be successful. Besides cognitive skills, there are critical social-emotional and developmental characteristics that are necessary for children to be able to build strong foundations, like physical health, safety, feeling engaged and happy, etc. Many students experience a gap when they enter kindergarten that is reflective of the needs of their community environments. For some students, adverse childhood experiences that begin at birth can cause a chain reaction that impairs their social, emotional, and cognitive development. How can we know if our students are developmentally on-track before kindergarten, and what are the systemic shifts that should happen to accommodate learners’ needs and make schools ready for young learners? How can we build school readiness for all children, ensuring that families, communities and schools have what they need to support children’s success?



What is SCHOOL READINESS in Connecticut?

"School readiness includes the readiness of the individual child, the school's readiness for children, and the ability of the family and community to support optimal early child development. It is the responsibility of schools to be ready for all children at all levels of readiness."

– American Academy of Pediatrics

Early learning and growth is an ongoing process that begins before birth and is influenced by many factors. Often, attention is given to children's skills at transition points, such as kindergarten entry, however, no one set of skills at any given time can determine school readiness. When families, communities and schools work together to support children's early learning and growth:

- Families have the resources and knowledge to support their children's health and development beginning before birth.
- Communities support families, schools, early caregivers and children in a coordinated way.
- Schools and early learning settings support all children, no matter their background or skill level.
- Children are eager and ready to learn and grow.

SCHOOL READINESS:
It's not just a program.

Must Have, Good to Have, Nice to Have

We organize the information we want to know about early learners into three categories:

1. ***Must have*** – the data that is essential for a school community to know about children, birth through third grade, across the district and throughout districts in the state. Districts should include all of these data points.
2. ***Good to have*** – the next level of data is not essential, but is good to know for continuous improvement of early learning services. Many districts will include some/all of these data points.
3. ***Nice to have*** – the last level of data is not essential or necessary for continuous improvement, but represents factors unique to specific settings and provides a greater depth of information about children and families. In some cases the data may not be available yet. A few districts will include some of these data points.

The following characteristics and categories of data were identified as critical to include in a landscape analysis; each has data points that fall into one of the three categories above:

- Demographics
- Quality of education and care prior to kindergarten entry
- Student learning and achievement
- Family and community engagement

The chart below lists the must have, good to have, and nice to have data points in each of the four categories above. This is meant for your district to use as an organizational tool to start gathering data and is not prescriptive. Each section ends with three questions to help you get started. The data and questions are designed to start a conversation. Any starting point a school or district chooses that paints a picture of the children, their needs, and next best steps, can guide resource and implementation decisions.

	Demographics	Quality	Student Learning and Achievement	Family and Community Engagement
Must Have	• Rates of children with disabilities (infants and toddlers, pre-K) • Race and ethnicity • Family income/Poverty rate • Home language • Parent needs • IEPs/IFSP	• Early childhood providers serving the school/district community • Workforce credentials/certifications • Type of curriculum • Transitions between programs	• Participation in early childhood experiences • Suspension/expulsion data (K-3)	• Information about early childhood experiences • Information about parent engagement opportunities in the early childhood community
Good to Have	• Chronic absenteeism (pre-K–3)	• Access to nutrition services • Access to transportation	• Vision/hearing screenings • Child assessment data • Number of early childhood slots by quality • Incidents of suspension/expulsion (birth-5) • Formative assessment information	• Asset map of community resources
Nice to Have	• Duration and intensity of early childhood participation • Health status (lead exposure rates, obesity, asthma) • Community participation in public benefit programs (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], Medicaid, WIC) • Level/amount of subsidies available for early childhood	• Access to medical/dental care • Community safety	• Developmental screenings • Availability of professional development (PD) pre-K-3	• Coordinating bodies (e.g., School Readiness/early childhood councils)

Demographics

Gathering information and vital statistics about the population of students in early learning programs can help districts in several ways. This data provides important information about the often unseen experiences of students, and it can help identify gaps in education and care. Although some data may not be available at the individual school level, all demographics data will be useful to schools, districts, and communities in the landscape planning and analysis process.

Must Have

- **Students enrolled in special education:** It is important to include both the number of students with identified needs through an IEP or IFSP (must have), and the type of learning needs they are identified with (nice to have).¹
- **Race and ethnicity:** Understanding basic information about the diversity of the incoming student population can help a district to understand the community and whether services, staff, and materials are reflective of children and families' race and ethnicity.
- **Income:** Family income and socioeconomic status are associated with risks that affect children's development.
- **Language spoken in home:** This information is most often self-reported by families and can help educators and school leaders understand the communities they serve, changes in dominant languages, and inform preparation of welcome and orientation materials in appropriate languages.
- **Parent needs:** This data is important to use when developing services around parent needs. For example, groups of military families who might be single parenting not by choice could signal the need to think about different support services such as home visiting and before/after school programming.

Examples of demographic information		
	Connecticut	Bridgeport
Students enrolled in special education	12.7%	14.2%
Ethnicity	• Total ages 0-9: 399,369 • Black/African American: 50,228 • Hispanic/Latino: 97,277 • Asian: 19,245	• Total: 20,370 • Black/African American: 7,681 • Hispanic/Latino: 9,888 • Asian: 575
Income	• Median household income: \$71,755 • Children living in poverty: 14.1% • Eligible for FRPM: 36.71%	• Median household income: \$43,137 • Children living in poverty: 32.9% • Eligible for FRPM: 51%
Language	• Non-English language learners: 502,105 (~55%)	• Non-English language learners: 18,102
Parent needs	• Single-parent families: 233,567	• Single-parent families: 15,965

The information in this chart was gathered via the [Connecticut Data Collaborative](#) and [Kids Count Data Center](#).

1. Note that many young children with disabilities are likely to be categorized as having "developmental delay," a non-specific category. This is typically how 3-, 4-, and 5-year olds are categorized on their IEPs.

Good to Have

- **Chronic absenteeism:** According to the Connecticut State Department of Education, 50,376 students were chronically absent during the 2015-16 school year. Obtaining information about chronic absenteeism among children and families within a district can be good to have in order to determine children's needs, especially during the transition to kindergarten. This data can provide an opportunity within districts for professional development and training, identification of ways to work with families to reduce absenteeism, and to start conversations about the anxieties and fears of children entering the kindergarten classroom. (Source: Connecticut State Department of Education, [Chronic Absence](#)).
- **Access to transportation:** This data can complement chronic absenteeism data and help districts identify pockets where families might have difficulty accessing consistent and reliable school transportation.

Nice to Have

- Duration and intensity of early childhood participation (e.g., length of day, full-day full-year, number of days/hours of program)
- Health status (Lead exposure rates, obesity, asthma)
- Community participation in public benefit programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, WIC)
- Type of disability (if possible, as companion to "must have" number of children with disabilities)
- Level of subsidy available in community for early childhood to demonstrate whether and how families have supports for affordable, quality child care options.

Where can this data be found?

- [The Connecticut Data Collaborative](#) collects and publishes data, by state and by school district, across categories including education and demographics.
- [Care 4 Kids](#), administered by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, helps low to moderate income families pay for child care and publishes data on the number of families receiving subsidies by age and setting.
- The Office of Head Start within the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, collects data on the level of subsidy available through Head Start in communities through their [Grantee Service Profiles](#).
- The local [School Readiness Council](#) has information about high-quality pre-K experiences that are funded by the council as well as a variety of information about early childhood services and opportunities specific to the community. [Representation from the public schools and community providers is required on the council](#).
- [Special Education Data Application and Collection \(SEDAC\)](#) collects information about students identified with special needs across districts. Each district has a login to access this information. Contact information for the staff who coordinate this at the Connecticut Department of Education can be found at the link provided.
- [KidsCount Data](#) (from the Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- [U.S. Census data](#)
- [National Center for Education Statistics](#)
- [Connecticut State Department of Education: Chronic Absence](#)

Example of how this data can be used in a needs assessment

Each data point signals a set of conversations and actions about early learning services that district leaders should consider. We include sample questions below for districts to use in their needs assessment conversations.

Data	Questions for Districts
Students with identified special needs	• Has this number increased or decreased from the previous school year? • What are the resources your district has in place to serve these students? • Does the data suggest ways that the school or district could leverage or maximize resources in a new way? • What professional development is needed for pre-K to third-grade teachers and how are needs identified and addressed in conjunction with community-based early childhood providers?
Race/Ethnicity	• Are there demographic shifts in this community? If so, do teachers and support staff reflect the children they serve? Are professional development resources and school supports culturally appropriate? • How do orientation materials and activities reflect and respect racial and ethnic differences across the community? • Are classroom materials/environments reflective of the children, families, and community?
Income	• Has the percentage of children in poverty, including those living in deep poverty, increased or decreased? • How is the school addressing issues of poverty, including supports through partnerships with other organizations for food, clothing (e.g., cold weather clothing)? • Are additional resources (e.g., transportation subsidies, before and after school services) needed to better support families with limited resources?
Language	• Are assessments available or administered in the primary languages of the children served? • Do you provide information and supports for non-English-speaking parents and families? Have teachers received training to be culturally responsive to families?
Parent needs	• What are the support services and community partnerships available for parents and families? • How do these support services include engagement opportunities for non-traditional families (e.g., single parent, military)?

Get Started Today

- What data has already been collected?
- What analysis and actions can we take today based on data?
- Who are the partners needed to expand the landscape analysis?

Quality of Education and Care Prior to Kindergarten Entry

Information about the education and care accessible to young learners in the community provides a picture of the experiences available before they enter school, and can create opportunities to learn about the resources and supports children have received.

Must Have

- **Early childhood providers serving the community:** This creates opportunities to establish connections between programs and schools. This is significant as some children may be enrolled in multiple programs over the course of a day, week, month, or year. Collecting information about multiple transitions can inform districts as they create a picture of the students entering Kindergarten.
- **Status of the early childhood workforce:** This can be gathered through data on workforce certification/credentials and can show a picture of a community's early learning workforce, as well as help identify the continuing education of teachers and staff and collaborative professional development experiences with community-based teachers.
- **Type of curriculum used:** Kindergarten and first-grade teachers need to know the range of curriculum being taught to kids coming into their classrooms.

	Connecticut	Bridgeport
Early childhood providers serving the school community	• Licensed preschool programs: 1103	• Licensed preschool programs in Bridgeport: 44
Quality of the workforce (credentials as of 2011)	• Number of pre-K teachers with a bachelor's degree or more, plus 12 early childhood education (ECE) credits in 2010: 716 • In 2011: 775	• Number of pre-K teachers with a bachelor's degree or more, plus 12 ECE credits in 2010: 49 • In 2011: 59
Type of curriculum (not exhaustive lists—others may be in use)	• The Creative Curriculum, OWLS, HighScope, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, teacher/district/program developed.	• The Creative Curriculum, district created curriculum, Splash into PreK, Doors Into Discovery.

Good to Have

- **Access to nutrition services:** There is a strong correlation between children's nutritional health and academic achievement. It is good for districts to be aware of the nutrition services provided to children in their community, including areas of need, and places where schools and districts can support students and their families.

Nice to Have

- **Access to medical/dental care:** Children having access to regular and routine medical and dental care can substantially affect whether they are able to attend school, be receptive to learning opportunities, and meet developmental milestones. Districts can raise their awareness of the health resources and gaps in the community and work with partners to improve access for all families, especially those with special needs, mental or physical health issues, or language barriers.
- **Community safety:** Families who feel unsafe in their community may be less likely to experience quality early experiences or to regularly attend school. Identifying areas of needed improvements and working with others to identify interventions can increase school attendance, build better connections between families and schools and increase trust and family engagement.

Where can this data be found?

- [The Connecticut Data Collaborative](#) collects and publishes data, by state and by school district, across categories including education and demographics. The collaborative keeps track of data about teacher and workforce credentials.
- [KidsCount Data](#) (from the Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- [National Center for Health Statistics](#) and the [National Institutes of Health](#) include data on health and dental needs.
- [National Center for Education Statistics](#) includes data on early childhood and parent engagement activities.
- [CT 211 Childcare](#) is Connecticut's statewide child care resource and referral agency and has data on community based childcare programs.
- The local School Readiness Council has information about high-quality pre-K experiences as well as a variety of information about early childhood services and opportunities specific to the community. Representation from the public schools and community providers is required on the council.

Example of how this data can be used in a needs assessment

Each data point signals a set of conversations and actions about early learning services that district leaders should consider. We include sample questions below for districts to use in their needs assessment conversations.

Data	Questions for Districts
Early childhood providers	• How many early learning programs are available to children and families in your community before they arrive in kindergarten? • Who are the different providers? Do they serve different populations of children? • How can the school and district better connect with providers serving children in the district? • How can the school and district connect earlier with families and children in early childhood settings?
Quality of workforce (credentials/certification) <i>Connecticut issued general policy guidance from the Office of Early Childhood regarding Qualified Staff Member legislation that will require all programs to have staff with bachelor's degrees in every classroom by 2020. (Source)</i>	• How many teachers hold a bachelor's/associate degree with early childhood education credits or a child development associate (CDA)? • What in-service pathways are available to current educators to help them obtain more and higher levels of credentials? • What opportunities are there for joint professional development to increase understanding of best practices, model programs, transitions, and data and develop common expectations and language?
Type of curriculum used	• What are the types of standards <i>used by</i> early learning providers in your community?² • What are the areas of focus (literacy, math, social-emotional development) of the various curriculum in use across the community? • What types of curriculum do early learning providers in your community use?

Get Started Today

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2. Connecticut has adopted the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) and they are required for all state funded programs. [More information](#)

Student Learning and Achievement

Schools and districts can work with early childhood providers to develop a common understanding of what children should know and be able to do at the beginning of kindergarten. Together they can explore how those skills and abilities are supported by their early experiences at home and in early childhood programs.

Must Have

- **Participation in early childhood programs:** Gathering information on whether children have participated in an early childhood program (for at least the year prior to kindergarten) and for how long, can help schools design teaching and learning environments that build on those early experiences and support children who have not had those experiences.
- **Suspension and expulsion (pre-K, and K-3):** Identifying when and which children are suspended and expelled can identify professional development needs for staff, help promote the value of early identification and assessment, and support differentiated classroom instruction and design.

	Connecticut	Bridgeport
Participation in early childhood programs	• Percentage of children with pre-K experience (2013-2014): 79.2%	• Percentage of children with pre-K experience (2013-2014): 65.9%
Suspension/Expulsion, 2013-2014 (K-3)	Suspension rate (EdSight) • K: 1.6% • Grade 1: 2% • Grade 2: 2.5% • Grade 3: 3.3%	Suspension rate (EdSight) • K: 3.4% • Grade 1: 4.7% • Grade 2: 7.7% • Grade 3: 9.2%

Good to Have

- **Vision/hearing/dental screenings:** Knowing whether these services are available throughout the community is important, since many parents have not been informed that their children may need glasses or a hearing device. Difficulty seeing and/or hearing can adversely affect a child's classroom learning experience. Relatedly, dental screenings can yield a wealth of broader health information for children and parents. It is also important to ensure that parents are educated about follow-up after these screenings, including an explanation of results and resources in the community to address any identified needs.
- **Type of Assessment:** Gathering information assessments given by early childhood providers can help schools and districts understand the areas of focus in those programs, align information from kindergarten assessments with information from prior assessments, and evaluate how these assessments gather information across domains of development.
- **Number of early childhood slots by quality and access:** It is good for districts to have awareness of the quantity and quality of preschool experiences available to children coming into their schools. This information can complement and add background knowledge about children's early learning experiences prior to entering kindergarten.
- **Formative assessments:** Sharing this information (within the limitations of FERPA) can help schools and districts identify goals for kindergarteners and prepare the environment and instruction to best meet children's needs from the beginning of the school year.

Nice to Have

- **Developmental screenings:** Children's adverse experiences can affect their ability to take in information and benefit from their learning environment. Information from developmental screenings prior to kindergarten entry can help early childhood providers, medical professionals, and school leaders identify the need for evaluations, supports, and professional development and inform decisions about learning environments that will best support children's learning.
- **Availability of professional development (pre-K–3):** Knowing the availability and types of professional development available to educators within your district, school and community can help align academic, curricular, and developmental needs.

Where can this data be found?

- [The Connecticut Data Collaborative](#) collects and publishes data, by state and by school district, across categories including education and demographics.
- [The State Education Resource Center \(SERC\)](#) collects and reports data about schools that have received training in Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) as well as other early intervention programs. SERC works in collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Education to provide resources, professional development, and a centralized library to educators, families, and community members.
- [EdSight](#) is an education data portal that integrates information from over 30 different sources, some reported by districts and others from external sources. Information is available on key performance measures that make up the Next Generation Accountability System, as well as dozens of other topics, including school finance, special education, staffing levels and school enrollment.
- The local School Readiness Council has information about high-quality pre-K experiences as well as a variety of information about early childhood services and opportunities specific to the community. Representation from the public schools and community providers is required on the council

Example of how this data can be used in a needs assessment

Data	Questions for Districts
Participation in early childhood programs	• What percentage of your incoming kindergartners participated in an early learning program? What was the average duration of participation in early childhood programs? • Are the programs serving children coming to an individual school or district clustered in a particular neighborhood?
Suspension/Expulsion	• How many children, pre-K through grade 3, were suspended or expelled? How many times have students been expelled (this data for public schools can be found through the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, EdSight K-3)? • What percentage of these students has special needs? • What process does your district have in place to prevent suspensions and expulsions in pre-K through third-grade? Does it include community-based providers? • What professional learning opportunities are available to teachers and administrators to help them provide positive classroom experiences?

Get Started Today

- What data has already been collected?
- What analysis and actions can we take today based on data?
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Family and Community Engagement

There is a difference between support and engagement – support does not always translate to authentic engagement in which families experiences are respected and included in the ongoing process of development and improvement of programs and services. Knowing the breadth (or lack) of opportunities available for families to engage with the community can help districts plan.

Must Have

- **Information about early childhood experiences:** What kinds of programs, including specific family and community engagement opportunities, did children and families experience?
- **Information about family engagement opportunities within the early childhood community:** This could include examples of family leadership programs that are available. If these opportunities exist, then it will be easier to galvanize public will around birth–3rd grade issues.

	Connecticut	Bridgeport
Information about early childhood experiences	• Number of Head Start providers: 18 • School Readiness Communities: 67 (more than 320 programs) • CDCs: 51 contractors, some with multiple sites (100+ programs)	• Number of Head Start providers: 1 (4 sites) • School Readiness Programs: 14 (39 sites) • CDCs: 4 contractors (13 sites)
Family engagement opportunities	• Head Start parent councils • PTA/PTO/ Head Start Association	• Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) in Elementary Schools • School Governance Councils in Elementary Schools

Good to Have

- **Asset Map:** It can be hard to find information about the level and quality of interactions between families and the community. An asset map can be useful to show where there are opportunities for families to be engaged and to begin to identify gaps, ideally based on the needs identified in the demographics section (e.g., UCLA's [Asset Mapping](#) and Advancement Project/Healthy City's [Participatory Asset Mapping](#)).

Nice to Have

- **Coordinating bodies:** These represent places where families can be informed, involved, and have a voice in decision-making. These coordinating bodies are required in Connecticut's 67 School Readiness communities and are required to have a School Readiness Council.

Where can this data be found?

- [The Connecticut Data Collaborative](#) collects and publishes data, by state and by school district, across categories including education and demographics. The collaborative keeps track of data about teacher and workforce credentials.
- [United Way of Connecticut](#) reports data by region about childcare capacity, availability, and enrollment. They also offer a community asset mapping service to help compile information about the experiences of children and families in their respective communities.
- [The State Education Resource Center \(SERC\)](#) works in collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Education to provide resources, professional development, and a centralized library to educators, families, and community members.
- [Connecticut Head Start Association](#) provides information about the Head Start program in general and demographics and other data on providers in Connecticut.
- [Connecticut School Readiness Program](#) is a state grant program to provide spaces for eligible children in priority school districts and competitive grant municipalities in high-quality programs either accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or Head Start approved.
- [Head Start](#): provides information about where grantees are located and demographic and programmatic data.
- [Capitol Region Education Council \(CREC\)](#) - provides early childhood professional development with a focus on special needs.
- [National Association of Education for Young Children](#) (NAEYC) includes information on accredited programs.
- The local School Readiness Council has information about high-quality pre-K experiences that are funded by the council as well as a variety of information about early childhood services and opportunities specific to the community. Representation from the public schools and community providers is required on the council.

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Next Steps

Now get started!

Here are some immediate and best next steps to get started on this work in your district:

1. Determine high-leverage strategies
 - a. Which “must have” data points are essential for your district?
 - b. Which “good to have” and “nice to have” data points are most useful?
2. Identify sources of data
 - a. Based on your “must haves,” “good to haves,” and “nice to haves,” which data sources will be most valuable to you (from the resources included in this guide, and/or others)?
 - b. Which data points do you anticipate needing, but might not know how to access?
3. Determine what partnerships are needed
 - a. Who are the right partners, both inside and outside the district to champion this effort?
 - b. What roles can partners play in developing and considering the results of the landscape analysis?
4. Gather your team and act!