



Illinois Pyramid Model Implementation Guide

Message from the Illinois Pyramid Model State

We are pleased to offer you the Illinois Pyramid Model Implementation Guide. The Illinois Pyramid Model State Leadership Team envisions an early childhood education and care system that is committed to promoting and supporting healthy social-emotional development for all children ages birth through five and their families across home, community, classroom, and center-based settings. By actively implementing the Pyramid Model, an evidence-based framework proven to be an effective approach to building social-emotional competence in early childhood education and care programs, you become one of the many programs in Illinois to carry out our vision and achieve our goals.

Social-emotional well-being sets the foundation for the development and learning of infants, toddlers, and young children. Illinois early learning community understands the need to better support and teach young children, teachers/providers, administrators, and family members social-emotional strategies to benefit all children. To that end, in 2017, Illinois formed the Illinois Pyramid Model State Leadership Team to promote the statewide use of the Pyramid Model in all early childhood education and care settings, becoming the 31st Pyramid Model State.

We hope this Guide provides the information you need to become informed about Pyramid Model implementation. Feel free to contact us at ILPyramidModel@gmail.com with any questions or concerns along the way.

This Implementation Guide was updated by Sharon Doubet, Beth Knight, Donna Nylander, and Callie Silver with guidance from the IL State Leadership Team in March 2023.

Thank you for your commitment to the Pyramid Model. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

The Illinois Pyramid Model State Leadership Team

Acknowledgements

Donna Nylander, former Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development Illinois Pyramid Model Implementation Director, for her vision to create this Guide and for her endless dedication to the children and families in Illinois.

Callie Silver, former SRCD State Policy Fellow at Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, for her hard work and dedication, working alongside Donna's vision to create this Guide.

Allison Lowe-Fotos, Beth Knight, Deborah Chalmers, Jenny Metcalf, Libby Mitchell, Lori Orr, Rob Corso, and **Sharon Doubet** for their contributions to content and editing.

Members of State Leadership Team for reviewing and providing insight and feedback.

Illinois Pyramid Model Implementation Guide

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I. Overview: Setting the Vision



Our Mission

Early childhood education and care systems in Illinois are committed to promoting and supporting a racially equitable, inclusive, and diverse society that embraces healthy social-emotional development for all children ages birth through five and their families across settings.

Our Vision

Illinois envisions a racially equitable, inclusive, and diverse integrated system of professional development across early childhood education and care programs to provide ongoing information, resources, and supports for young children’s social-emotional development.

Goals and Outcomes

The broad **goals** of the Illinois Pyramid Model State Leadership Team include:

- 1) Increasing access to a high-quality early childhood education and care system that builds on each child’s unique individual and family strengths, cultural background(s), language(s), abilities, and experiences, and eliminates differences in educational outcomes.
- 2) Equipping early childhood leaders, practitioners, families, and community members to maximize collaboration around the promotion of social-emotional development, mental health, and equitable multi-level systems of support.
- 3) Prioritizing recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce across early childhood education and care settings that is representative of the communities in Illinois.

The desired **outcomes** of the Illinois Pyramid Model State Leadership Team include:

- 1) Enhancing the capacity of the teacher and practitioner workforce to adopt Pyramid Model practices.
- 2) Increasing the number of high-quality Pyramid Model trainers and process coaches.
- 3) Expanding the number of high-fidelity program-wide and community-wide implementation sites.
- 4) Partnering with families to enhance skills and strategies to support their children.
- 5) Increasing children’s prosocial skills and reducing challenging behavior.
- 6) Preventing and significantly limiting expulsion and suspension in early childhood setting.

Four Essential Structures

The Pyramid Model is based on implementation science and the four essential structures (depicted above) that have come about over the past two decades. The State Leadership Team supports the Master Cadre (Process Coaches and Trainers) who guide Implementation Sites, and Data is used at each of these levels to inform decision-making.



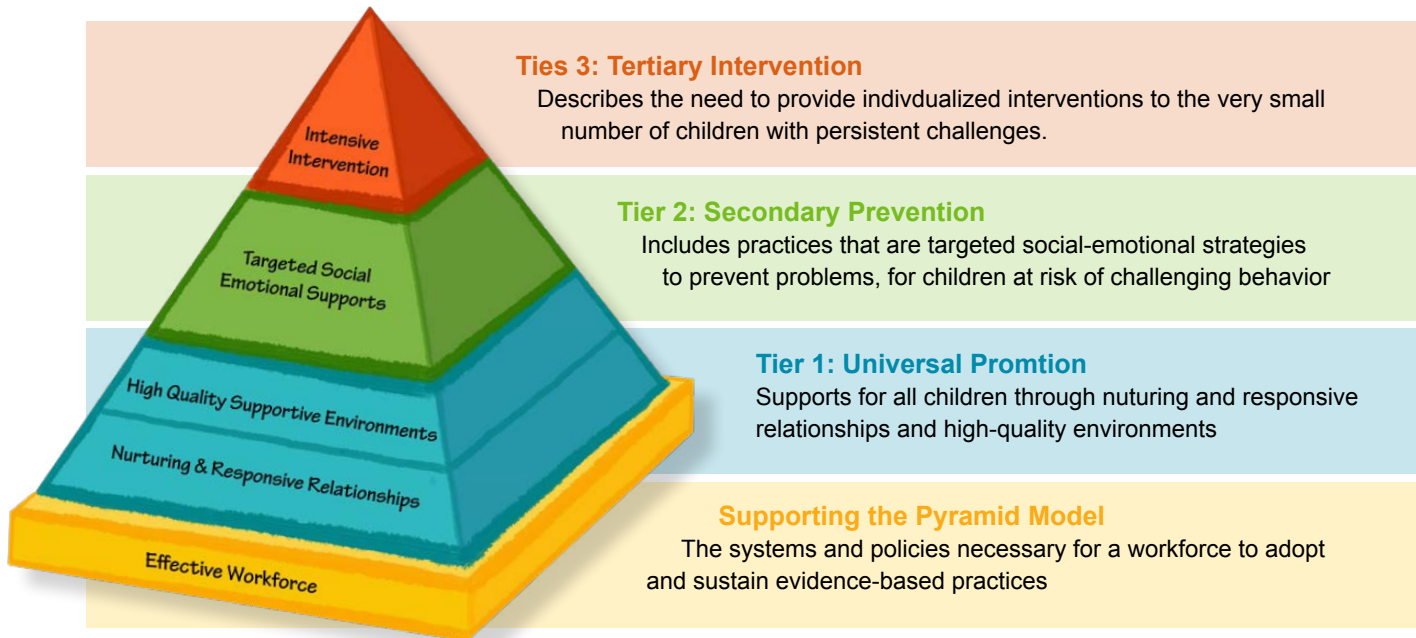
The Impact

The Pyramid Model Consortium has evaluated data from years of implementation across multiple states, leading the field to regard the Pyramid Model as a sound framework for early childhood education and care systems. In the state of Illinois, there are [several data reports and infographics](#) that speak to the Pyramid Model’s effectiveness.

II. Introduction: Pyramid Model Foundation

Pyramid Model Framework (birth to age six)

The Pyramid Model is a framework and a way to organize evidence-based practices to support children’s social-emotional development and prevent challenging behaviors. The Pyramid Model is a nationally recognized framework that is currently being implemented across the United States and the world. It is most often used by early childhood educators, though it can also be employed by families and other professionals who interact with young children. The Pyramid Model builds upon a tiered public health approach outlined in more detail below.



Pyramid Model History

In 2017, Illinois became a “Pyramid Model” state, Illinois is one of the birthplaces of the Pyramid Model. Faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign led a multi-institutional endeavor that created **the Center on the Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)** in 2001. CSEFEL began as a national resource center funded by the Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care to disseminate social-emotional evidence-based practices to early childhood programs nationwide. Beginning in 2005, CSEFEL was based at Vanderbilt University, but as previously mentioned continued to include collaborators from various institutions, including University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. CSEFEL’s funding ended in 2012.

Somewhat simultaneously in 2008, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs funded the **Technical Assistance Center on Social and Emotional Interventions (TACSEI)** to support the inclusion of children with disabilities through implementation of the Pyramid Model.

Given that CSEFEL and TACSEI funding ended, but demand for the Pyramid Model has only increased, a new non-profit was created in January 2014, called the **Pyramid Model Consortium (PMC)**. The Pyramid Model Consortium now consists of founding members of CSEFEL and TACSEI. In 2016, federal funds became available again and were used to create the **National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)**, which partners with PMC to provide technical assistance and training to states implementing the Pyramid Model.

In sum, while the origins of the Pyramid Model can be traced to CSEFEL and TACSEI, the most current and up-to-date information and resources can be found through the following websites:

- **PMC:** <https://www.pyramidmodel.org/>
- **NCPMI:** <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/index.html>



State of Research/Outcomes

Evidence from randomized controlled trials has taught us that the Pyramid Model works!

- Children have **better social skills** and **fewer challenging behaviors** in Pyramid Model classrooms.
- Teachers implement Pyramid Model practices better if they receive training and **practice-based coaching**.

Links to the evidence base:

- [Pyramid Model Evidence-Base](#)
- [Brief Summary of 2014 Pyramid Model Study](#)
 - o Academic article from the [study](#): Evaluating the Implementation of the *Pyramid Model for Promoting Social-Emotional Competence* in Early Childhood Classrooms

Suspension and Expulsion

In Illinois, and across the country, the Pyramid Model has been utilized as a measure to [prevent suspension and expulsion](#). It is worth noting that as of January 1, 2018, Illinois' Public Act (P.A.) 100-0105 prohibits early care and education providers from expelling young children (ages 0-5) from their program because of the child's behavior. Providers have been required to document steps to address the child's behavioral and other needs in order to keep the child in care, and if ultimately necessary, providers can work with the family on a 'planned transition' to a more appropriate setting; this 'planned transition' process is not considered an expulsion. For more information about suspension and expulsion in IL, please see this [Q&A on P.A. 100-0105](#).

III. Illinois Pyramid Model State Leadership Team

Illinois' Path to Forming a State Leadership Team

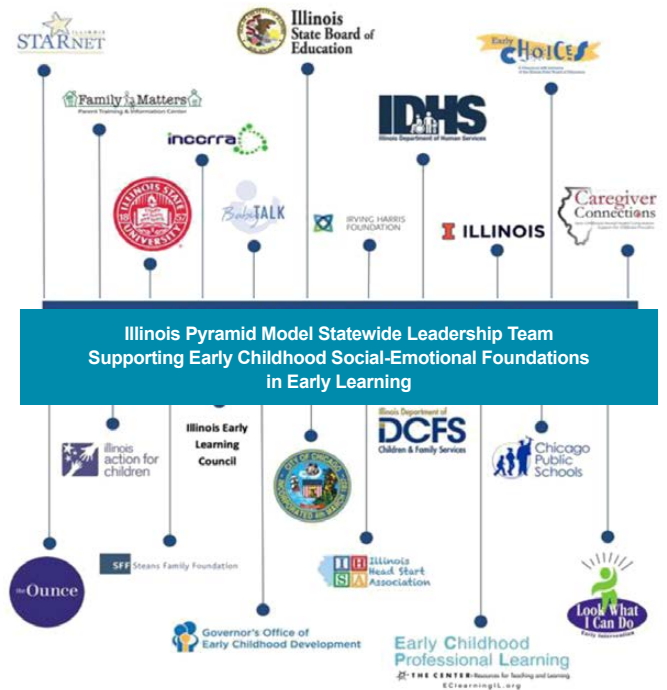
In April 2017, a small group, with members from STAR NET and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, attended the Pyramid Model National Training Institute to meet with other states about their implementation of, and results from, the Pyramid Model. Later that same month, professors of Early Childhood/Special Education at the University of Illinois hosted a meeting to discuss offering Pyramid Model Training of Trainers (TOT) and Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) for statewide systems of professional development across Illinois.

In May 2017, the three systems providing early care and education, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Head Start, and child care (INCCRRA: Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies), collaborated with University of Illinois professors to execute a TOT of the Pyramid Model. ISBE was the primary funder of the trainings, with Head Start and INCCRRA also contributing. The initial training held from May 23-25, 2017, was on five Pyramid Model modules and was delivered to 40 participants from ISBE, Head Start, and child care. On June 6-7, 2017, 20 of those trainers were trained on the TPOT as well. This officially began the journey to become the 31st Pyramid Model State under the Pyramid Model Consortium.

While the training was being planned, stakeholders were recruited to build the State Leadership Team (SLT) who decided to form a collaborative, cross-agency team to develop policies, procedures, resources, and other mechanisms to plan, implement, evaluate, and sustain a statewide professional development system that supports the high-fidelity use of the Pyramid Model. The primary goal of the SLT is to resolve state-level barriers (with training for various professional development systems based on a common model); facilitate access to necessary interventions at the local level; and ensure that supports and resources are available to programs in order to adopt the Pyramid Model with fidelity. These structures include training, coaching, data systems, demonstration programs, behavior specialists, and the necessary financial and technical assistance. The SLT is composed of approximately 20-25 people who are passionate about the Pyramid Model and who can make decisions on behalf of their agency/program, meeting every other month to:

- Increase children's social skills
- Reduce suspensions and expulsions
- Reduce children's challenging behaviors
- Enhance social-emotional skills of staff through professional development
- Create a cross-sector statewide system to implement the Pyramid Model

At each SLT meeting, workgroups share a report of their tasks accomplished. Over the years, the vision grew to be broader and to incorporate the full community of ECEC within Illinois. Originally, the group thought of the Pyramid Model as just being classroom-based, but have since transitioned to include home visiting, early intervention, community systems, and other partners beyond traditional early childhood education.



The SLT recognizes that the Pyramid Model conceptual framework emphasizes strong relationships, support for social competence, and the prevention of challenging behaviors, and is congruent with its social-emotional foundations for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children. The SLT collaborates with the Pyramid Model Consortium to train and build the capacity of the Illinois Professional Development Network (PDN) of trainers and coaches, made up of early childhood professionals in professional development systems across the state. The SLT also informs the implementation of the Master Cadre.

Having a common vision for social-emotional development across all statewide training efforts creates a cohesive and effective approach to addressing all levels of need of very young children, including those with challenging behaviors and special needs. The common vision aligns with Illinois' Social-Emotional Early [Learning Standards](#).

Since 2018, SLT meetings have been occurring quarterly, either virtually or in-person. Action plans, agendas, and minutes from SLT meetings are archived.

SLT Membership

Membership consists of representatives from early childhood state sectors and/or program representative in Illinois who are relevant stakeholders (e.g., non-profit and advocacy agencies) interested in promoting the Pyramid Model in their work. These members were invited to join the SLT and it is important that each sector has a representative. A list of current SLT members can be found [here](#).

To ensure that relevant stakeholders are represented, if a SLT member leaves the team, there is an application and onboarding process for replacement of that member. New members are paired with a mentor from the SLT, to support them as they navigate through the PM SLT. To ensure the quality of our leadership team, we have a [New Member Application](#) and [Membership Team Policy](#).

SLT Workgroups

The SLT is made up of three separate, interconnected workgroups with membership based on members' knowledge and areas of expertise. SLT members are typically part of one workgroup. The workgroups include data, implementation, and professional development.

Workgroup	Vision and Goal
Data Workgroup	Ensures the needed data are available to effectively evaluate the impact of the State Leadership Team and cross-system implementation. This workgroup assesses what data already exists in the State and what data the State Leadership Team seeks to obtain. In addition, this workgroup coordinates the development of additional data tools and procedures as needed.
Implementation Workgroup	Supports the infrastructure needed to develop and create high-fidelity implementation sites that are committed to Program-wide and/or Community-wide Implementation. This workgroup develops processes for recruiting and launching cohorts of agencies developing high-fidelity sites across the state's mixed delivery system. They also provide guidance on Pathways to Access and how to access professional development and/or become an implementation site.
Professional Development Workgroup	Develops processes for the provision of training and coaching across the three levels of the Professional Development Network (PDN) of trainers and coaches : Level 1: Master Cadre, Level 2: Statewide Professional Development Systems, and Level 3: Job-Embedded Professional Development. This workgroup works to strengthen interagency and cross-system collaboration for an integrate Pyramid Model professional development delivery and ultimately to improve outcomes for the children and families being served. Collaboration may occur among public agencies or between public and private agencies, communities, or families. Additionally, this group works to coordinate with higher education.

IV. Professional Development Network (PDN) of Trainers and Coaches

The Professional Development Network structure involves a collaborative effort of Pyramid Model training and coaching delivery to ultimately improve outcomes for the children and families being served across ECEC programs.

Professional Development Roles & Responsibilities

Master Cadre

Master Cadre is an umbrella term that encompasses both process coaches and trainers. Master Cadre (MC) members are carefully selected professional development experts who are responsible for delivering training and providing process coaching to Program Leadership Teams and for training the program's internal coaches to build internal capacity for establishing and supporting the high-fidelity implementation of the Pyramid Model. MC members work across Illinois' ECEC mixed delivery system, in many different settings (e.g., homes, centers, and schools) and under varied auspices (public school systems, not-for-profit, and for-profit providers). MC members can engage in both coaching (as a Process Coach) and Pyramid Model training, or just one of the roles depending on expertise, interest, and availability.

To become an MC member, early childhood experts must understand Pyramid Model practices and have attended Pyramid Model trainings. The State Leadership Team announces MC opportunities as needed, and the application goes out to all SLT members and early childhood contacts for dissemination. Criteria for Master Cadre selection include but are not exclusive to: (a) experience and skills as trainers and providers of TA and coaching; (b) experience and expertise with young children, family support, and disability;

(c) availability of time and ability to commit (d) interest and commitment to the Pyramid Model; (e) geographic distribution within Illinois; (f) and a three-year commitment. All members of the Master Cadre must participate in training on all elements of the Pyramid Model and Pyramid Model implementation. More information about the Requirements and Qualifications for Master Cadre can be found [here](#).

The Master Cadre will become the central driver for Pyramid Model implementation for building capacity within Illinois, primarily through training of other trainers and coaches as early childhood programs begin and maintain implementation of the Pyramid Model.

Ongoing support for the Master Cadre:

Master Cadre members receive continuing education on current research through ongoing training, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and communities of practice, mentoring opportunities, and co-facilitation of other MC members and national experts.



Process Coach

The Implementation Process Coach guides and supports a Program Leadership Team through the phases (the process) of fully implementing the program-wide use of the Pyramid Model practices with fidelity. A Process Coach has Pyramid Model content and implementation process knowledge and prepares to lead/guide/facilitate the Leadership Team meetings and subgroups (small workgroups, committees). More information on the Requirements and Qualifications for Process Coach can be found [here](#).

Pyramid Model Practice-Based Coach

Practice-based coaching guides practitioner use of evidence-based practices for promoting positive child outcomes. Pyramid Model Practice-Based Coach supports Level 3 Pyramid Model professional development. More information about the Requirements and Qualifications for Pyramid Model Practice-Based Coaches can be found [here](#).

Pyramid Model Trainer

Trainers deliver high-quality trainings on the Pyramid Model to adults who work with young children. Pyramid Model Trainers support Level 1 and Level 2 Pyramid Model professional development. More information about the Requirements and Qualifications for Pyramid Model trainers can be found [here](#).

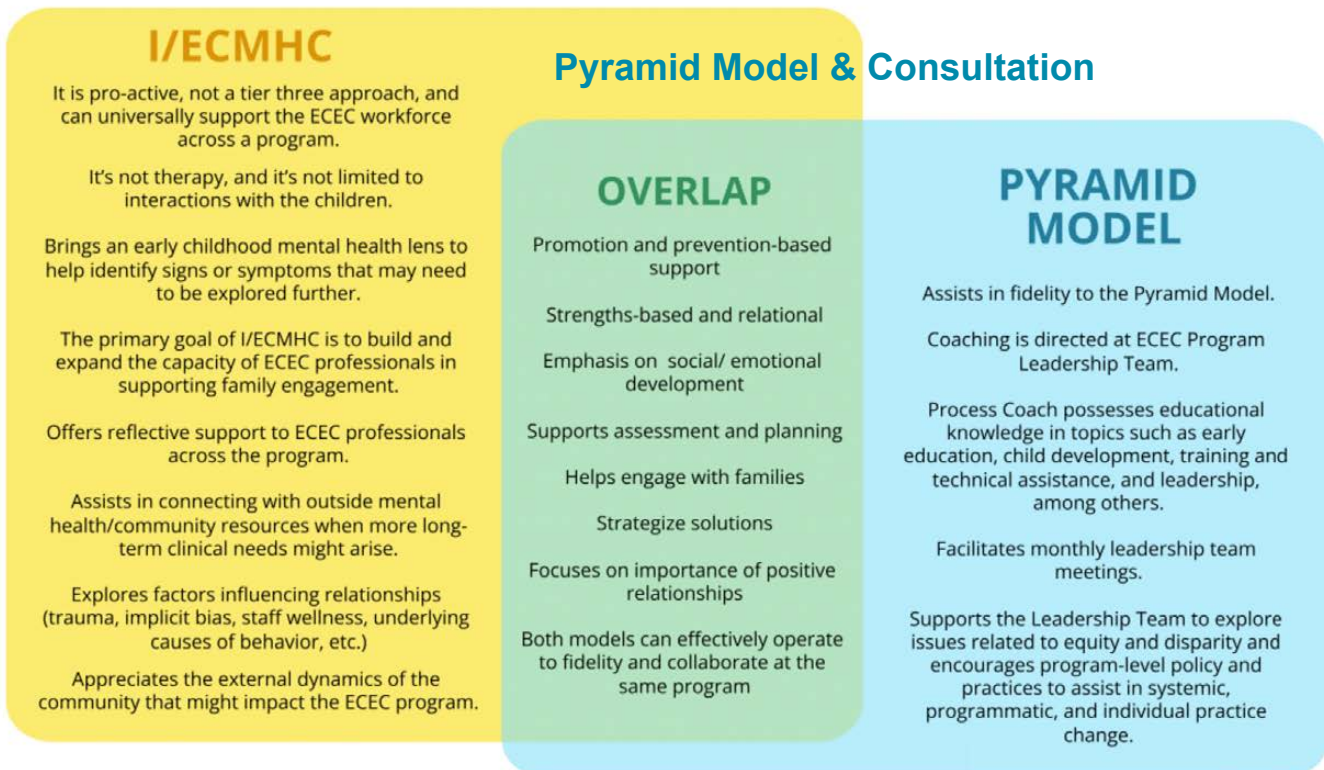
Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Professionals who provide [Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) are critical partners in the implementation of the Pyramid Model. Both Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and the Pyramid Model have a strong focus on the critical importance of positive relationships in the early years of a child's development. Additionally, these approaches focus on building the capacity of leaders, practitioners, and families to create levels of sustainability for the ongoing promotion of infant and young children's healthy social-emotional development.

Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation is a multi-level, multi-disciplinary, proactive approach that pairs an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (I/ECMHC) with families and practitioners who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as child care, preschool, and their home. The aim is to build practitioners' capacity to strengthen and support children's social-emotional development and overall health and well-being early before intervention is needed.

I/ECMHCs are valuable partners with Process Coaches in supporting Pyramid Model implementation. The I/ECMHC and Process Coach work alongside each other across the tiers of the Pyramid Model.

The Venn diagram below illustrates how the Pyramid Model and I/ECMHC work together!



V. Program-Wide Implementation

How to Become an Implementation Site

Since 2017, Illinois has worked across early childhood education and care systems to create implementation sites throughout the State. If you are a program director or staff member looking to understand the process to becoming an implementation site within your specific system, you have come to the right section! [Learn More.](#)

Program-wide implementation of the Pyramid Model or Program-Wide Positive Behavior Support refers to a systematic effort within a program to implement the Pyramid Model with fidelity. In program-wide implementation, an external Pyramid Model Implementation Coach supports the program. In concert with a program-based leadership team, the Process Coach guides the process and develops the supports and infrastructure needed to ensure the adoption of the Pyramid Model. Leadership Teams focus on the ongoing process of supporting the implementation of the Pyramid Model and using data-based decision-making to guide these efforts and monitor outcomes.

Pyramid Model Implementation Phases-Classroom- Based Documentation

Based on Implementation Science (IS), the IL Pyramid Model Implementation Phases document provides guidance to classroom- based programs (EHS/HS, Child Care, Family Child Care, Early Childhood Special Education, ISBE State funded Preschool for All) as programs move toward fidelity in program-wide implementation. As a program moves through the 6 stages of IS: Exploration & Planning, Installation, Implementation (initial to full), and Sustainability. This document is used by an Implementation Process Coach (IPC) and Leadership Team (LT) with support from the IPC booklet, the LT Implementation Manual and IL Pyramid Model Implementation Guide.

An important component of implementation is the [Benchmarks of Quality](#), which include the following critical elements:

- **Leadership Team**—The leadership team meets regularly and guides the implementation of the program-wide approach. The team consists of a Process Coach, a program administrator, educators, an individual who can provide coaching and support to educators, an infant/early childhood mental health consultant and/or behavior specialist, family educator (some individuals might fill more than one of these roles), and family members. The team ensures the following are in place: a process for providing individualized behavior supports to children with behavior challenges, professional development/support to educators, a plan for family participation, and a process for using data to make decisions to guide implementation.
- **Staff buy-in**—All staff (e.g., cook, teaching assistant, and teachers) must agree that they are willing to participate and become involved in the implementation. The leadership team monitors and supports staff buy-in on an ongoing basis.
- **Family involvement**—A variety of mechanisms are used to establish partnerships with families during the adoption of the model, including inviting them to join the leadership team, sharing information, providing families with information and support in guiding children’s development of social-emotional skills, and collaboratively teaming to support individual children.
- **Program-wide expectations**—The adoption of program-wide expectations provides a shared focus and shared language for describing behavior expectations to children, staff, and families. Program-wide expectations are posted in program settings and are also provided to families. Staff engage in reinforcing expectations by providing developmentally appropriate feedback to children.
- **Classroom implementation of the Pyramid Model**—Teaching staff are supported to understand and implement Pyramid Model practices in their classrooms. A fidelity observation tool is used to identify teacher strengths and needs followed by action planning to identify goals for supporting teachers in reaching fidelity.
- **Staff professional development and support plans**—All staff have the training and coaching supports needed to effectively implement Pyramid practices. The leadership team also develops strategies to provide ongoing support to staff as they implement the model.
 - **Practice-Based Coaching**—Practice-based coaching is a cyclical process for guiding practitioners’ use of evidence-based practices for promoting positive child outcomes. Practice-based coaching is an evidence-based coaching model that involves the following components: collaborative partnerships, shared goals and action planning, focused observation, reflection, and feedback.
- **Behavior support procedures**—The leadership team develops policies and procedures for providing support to staff to address challenging behavior, which includes providing a mechanism for promoting healthy social-emotional development for all children, supporting crisis situations, developing a problem-solving process for children with emerging challenges, and providing a system for identifying children who need a behavior support plan to be developed by a team of relevant stakeholders.
- **Data based decision-making**—Data based decision-making is a pivotal component of the program-wide approach. The team will gather and review data on implementation and outcomes using Pyramid Model tools.

VI. Data and Evaluation



Why should we collect data?

Data collection, as it relates to the Pyramid Model, serves many important purposes. Simply put, we want to collect and utilize data to improve our ongoing implementation of the Pyramid Model, as well as to measure the overall impact of the Pyramid Model for programs and children. A major component of the Pyramid Model is teaching programs how to collect and utilize data to inform their decisions and practices. It is our hope that Pyramid Model programs feel empowered by data.

Illinois also collects data as part of our ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The IL Pyramid Model SLT sees it as imperative that data on the diversity of Pyramid Model participants and implementation sites across the state be reported. We also hope to understand how our work is reducing inequitable practices, such as suspension and expulsion. For more information on equity in early childhood, why we collect data, and how we hope to contribute to equity through the Pyramid Model, please refer to our Data & Equity Brief.

Data Systems in Illinois

At the end of 2022, Illinois began using the Pyramid Implementation Data System (PIDS). PIDS was created in 2018 by the state of New York, using federal Preschool Development Grant funds. Currently there are 12 states, including Illinois, who use this secure web application to store all Pyramid Model data. The data system is organized by state, hub, cohort, program/site, and classrooms. Each layer within the PIDS structure provides security access to keep confidential information de-identified.

Within the state of Illinois there are several other data systems and initiatives that we are proud to support and partner with, including the [Illinois Longitudinal Data Systems](#) and [Gateways](#). An ongoing goal of Pyramid Model in Illinois is to partner with existing structures to create a unified and integrated data system.

Types of Pyramid Model Data

Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ)

State BoQ

State Benchmarks of Quality, or BoQ, is a tool used by a State Leadership to assess progress and plan future actions to implement the Pyramid Model statewide. NCPMI provides additional information regarding how to implement the Pyramid Model Statewide using State Benchmarks of Quality. The Illinois State Leadership Team is committed to updating their BoQ on an annual basis.

Program-wide BoQ

The Benchmarks of Quality is designed to help programs evaluate their progress toward implementing the Pyramid Model program wide. This checklist is completed by each program's leadership team to assess progress along the nine critical elements of implementation. The initial administration of the Benchmarks provides teams with a baseline on team status and a framework for completing their start-up action plans. Teams then use their plans for ongoing guidance for implementation progress and fidelity to the model, as well as for evaluation use.

TPOT/TPITOS

Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT): Developed by highly respected creators of the Pyramid Model for classrooms enrolling children between two and five years of age, the TPOT™ is an in-depth tool that provides information on how well teachers are implementing practices related to universal, targeted, and individualized supports. A trained administrator of the tool conducts a classroom observation and teacher interview, uncovering detailed information about the quality of 14 key teaching practices, noting areas of improvement that indicate areas for immediate support and observing how teachers respond to challenging behaviors. TPOT™ results show which practices are being implemented successfully and what teachers need to focus on to ensure positive social-emotional outcomes for young children.

Teaching Pyramid Infant-Toddler Observation Scale (TPITOS): Modeled after the [Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool \(TPOT™\)](#) for Preschool Classrooms, TPITOS is for early childhood settings caring for infants and toddlers from birth to three years of age. Focusing on teacher practices and classroom environment variables, TPITOS measures how well your program's staff is fostering responsive, nurturing relationships with children and promoting strong social-emotional development in their earliest years.

BIR: Behavior Incident Reports

The [Behavior Incident Report System \(BIRS\)](#) provides early childhood education and care programs and classrooms with a system to collect and analyze behavior incidents in their program. The system provides an efficient mechanism for gathering information on elements related to behavior incidents that can be used analytically to make decisions about providing supports to teachers and children within the program. Teachers within programs collect data on behavior incidents that are not developmentally normative or are a cause of concern to the teacher. These data are summarized monthly to provide formative data for examining factors related to behavior incidents (child, teacher, activity, behavior type, behavior motivation, and responses to the behavior). In addition, these data provide summative information on the frequency of behavior incidents over time and an analysis of potential equity issues by calculating disproportionality related to race, ethnicity, IEP status, gender, and dual language learners.

Training Evaluations

Following Trainer of Trainer events or trainings on the Pyramid Model modules, surveys are collected from participants on their level of satisfaction, as well as what they learned. This data is used for evaluation purposes, as well as for an iterative quality improvement process.

