



SLDS Topical Webinar Summary

Prioritizing Early Childhood Data

Early childhood data are a key component in developing robust P-20W data systems. This webinar focused on how states can design early childhood data systems that a) address key issues, on the local, state, and national levels; b) are improvement-driven as opposed to compliance-driven; and c) can be coordinated with K-12 and other key program data. Elizabeth Laird spoke about the work of the Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC), and Elliot Regenstein of EducationCounsel LLC and the Illinois Early Learning Council reviewed the process of developing early childhood (EC) data systems in three states. The information presented in this webinar can help to guide states as they develop early childhood data systems—systems that will then be integrated with K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data.

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative

With the current state budget crisis, there is greater pressure to document program effectiveness and justify preschool expenditures. Consequently, states are increasingly looking for ways to incorporate EC data into their P-20W data systems. This can be a difficult task because these data are rarely collected in unified systems. New state and federal funding programs are assisting with this process, and states can also draw on the work of the ECDC. The ECDC provides support for the work of state policymakers with regard to EC data systems.

The ECDC encourages states to begin data system design by working with stakeholders to determine the policy questions the system will address. Through work with states and partner agencies, the ECDC has identified a set of key policy questions that focus on children, programs, and the EC workforce. While these questions may not vary greatly from state to state, the ECDC encourages states to go through the process of identifying their own key questions. This process is critical in terms of driving data systems and engaging stakeholders to ensure that states are on the right path to building a system that will meet their needs.



ECDC Key Policy Questions

1. Are children, birth to age five, on track to succeed at school entry and beyond?
2. Which children have access to high quality early care and education programs?
3. Is the quality of programs improving over time?
4. What are the characteristics of effective programs?
5. How prepared is the workforce to provide effective education and care for all children?
6. What policies and investments lead to a skilled and stable early childhood workforce?

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For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program or for support with system development, please visit <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds>.



An overview was provided of the ECDC's ten fundamental characteristics of coordinated state early childhood education (ECE) data systems. Once a data system is implemented and operational, providing timely, user-friendly, and appropriate access to the data will aid in promoting its use. Additionally, data systems should have the flexibility to accommodate future modifications or improvements.

The 10 Fundamentals of Coordinated State ECE Data Systems

1. Unique statewide child identifier.
2. Child-level demographic and program participation information.
3. Child-level data on child development.
4. Ability to link child-level data with K-12 and other key programs.
5. Unique program site identifier with the ability to link with children and the ECE workforce.
6. Program site structural and quality information.
7. Unique ECE workforce identifier with ability to link with program sites and children.
8. Individual-level data on ECE workforce demographic, education and professional development information.
9. State governance body to manage data collection and use.
10. Transparent privacy protection and security practices and policies.

The webinar also reviewed the ECDC's work surveying states on their ECE data systems, and the ways in which the results of that study will benefit states as they progress in system development and use. The goals of the survey include 1) providing public transparency on state progress towards building coordinated ECE data systems; 2) informing states' policies, plans, and implementation of coordinated ECE data systems; and 3) informing states' progress towards building, aligning, and using P-20W data systems. More information on ECDC's State Analysis of Early Care and Education can be found at www.ecedata.org.

State Approaches to ECE Data System Design

Illinois's, Georgia's, and Oklahoma's approaches to ECE data system design were shared during the webinar. The following are strategies that some or all of the states found helpful in the system design process:

- *Begin by defining policy priorities: what information should the data system be able to provide?* In Illinois, this discussion occurred in conjunction with the committees of the Illinois Early Learning Council. Georgia and Oklahoma each held data roundtables, which included a designated data workgroup and other stakeholders from within the state. The roundtables broke into smaller groups, which then discussed priorities and reported out to the full group. In both cases, the ECDC's suggested key policy questions were used as background material/conversation starters; however, conducting this process at the local level helps to create ownership and customizes these universal principles to each unique setting.
- *Perform an inventory of existing databases/elements.* Are the key data already being collected? If so, where? To what information do you already have access, and at what agency is it being housed?
- *Focus on the overall scope of your project before addressing governance or technical issues.* Be aware of issues that will need to be dealt with before implementation of the data system, but first focus on clearly defining top data priorities. A contractor may be added to the team later on to address technical issues and help turn the list of key elements into a unified system.