

Call to Action Series | Data Story

State and Local Leaders Need Analytic Tools to Tell their Data Stories

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State and Local Leaders Lack Effective Tools to Communicate Data

While states developing Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) understand the importance of making data available to inform decision-making, many are still exploring strategies to convey information so that policymakers can derive meaning from the data and use it to make decisions. Data stories are an effective tool for communicating ECIDS information. They create a shared understanding of the context and most important information, target issues that require decisions, improve transparency, and provide consistent and useful outputs for state administrators and policymakers.

ECDataWorks developed the [Data Story Framework](#) to guide states in bringing together comprehensive data and informing action steps. The framework includes four key elements: conclusions, narrative, visuals, and key takeaways.

Minnesota Kids Explorer: Using a Standard Approach to Data Stories to Better Communicate Information

Minnesota's [ECIDS website](#) was built to maximize a user's filtering preferences and it takes a bit of time to learn. State and local leaders have limited time to access data on their own and may lack the familiarity with programs and policy needed to interpret that data. Busy leaders need concise information to inform their decision making. Responding to the need for ready-made communication tools to support all levels and types of users, the Minnesota ECLDS team partnered with ECDataWorks to design a standard approach and format for early childhood data stories in a new section of their website, the Minnesota Kids Explorer.

Why a Call to Action?

State agencies are being charged to create tools and reports that better leverage integrated data to support program and policy decisions. ECDataWorks, in partnership with state agencies, identified the need for analytic tools in four critical policy areas: school readiness, community assessment, data stories, and data governance.

The Call to Action Series examines common challenges and highlights states' successes in using topical frameworks to build tools to address these policy issues. These briefs charge other states to develop similar analytic tools to guide evidence-based program and policy decisions.



The first data story, "[Nourishing Our Children for Success](#)," focuses on the landscape of state-funded early childhood programs and includes six "chapters."

1. Value of Early Education
2. Services Provided
3. The Kids We Serve
4. Participation
5. Trends
6. Opportunities

The content for this data story was based on a need clearly identified by state and local leaders. The Children's Defense Fund in Minnesota had developed a report with similar information but didn't have the capacity to refresh data annually or provide data at the level of granularity requested by stakeholders. The ECLDS team knew that publishing this content would serve a large audience, so they chose to model their first data story on the Children's Defense Fund report. The story supports users new to the early childhood field by introducing the landscape of services available and the degree to which targeted children and families are accessing services. It will serve as a reference for those working at the state and local levels who need up-to-date and localized information to support their work.

Now that their first data story is published, Minnesota ECLDS leadership will initiate a standard process for gathering input from their stakeholders to determine the focus for future stories, establishing an informed and continuous approach to prioritizing and publishing new information. Over time, audiences will become familiar with the intuitive, standard format of the data stories, allowing them to efficiently read and take action from them.

The Minnesota ECLDS team hopes that using the Minnesota Kids Explorer will yield the following benefits:

1. Provide access to a comprehensive resource for decision-making regardless of a user's prior knowledge of the topic.
2. Increase collaboration across county programs, school district programs, and community-based organizations.
3. Establish a model for interpreting and communicating findings when data are shared with others.
4. Sustain information on key content originally captured in "Nourishing Our Children for Success" which can be used as a baseline of information from the regional and local perspective about who Minnesota's early childhood system is serving and how.



Are You Ready to Take Action?

If you are interested in using the [Data Story Framework](#), ECDataWorks and their state partners recommend three steps. First, engage your state/community partners to determine their interest in developing a tool or report using the framework. When engaging your partners, consider using the following prompts.

- Do your ECIDS stakeholders struggle to communicate ECIDS findings, including articulating key takeaways, in a manner that is actionable?
- Do your stakeholders express a need for tools to help communicate ECIDS findings?

Second, to determine the feasibility of developing and implementing a data story process and tool or report using the Data Story Framework in your state. Third and final, visit the ecdataworks.org to access more resources on this topic.

