ECDataWorks

Building Capacity to Implement an ECIDS
LEVERAGING STATE RESOURCES

Missy Coffey, Phil Sirinides, Ellory Dabbs, Ali Havrilla

Over the last decade, significant investment of federal, state, and philanthropic funds has helped some states develop an early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS). State leaders continue to ask questions about the capacity needed to implement an ECIDS, as well as to sustain these systems over the long term. In response, ECDataWorks conducted a national study of state capacity to implement an ECIDS. This series of briefs is designed for state leaders to inform resource decisions necessary to build the capacity to implement and sustain an ECIDS.

Leveraging State Resources

From the earliest efforts to integrate early childhood data, states have required resources, services, and expertise across multiple agencies. This included learning from their counterparts in the statewide data initiatives as well as leveraging resources and services, such as technology and legal from the lead agency as well as the partner agencies. Yet, over the last decade, other state resources have been identified as critical in the implementation of the ECIDS.

This brief provides four findings from the ECDataWorks 2022 National ECIDS Survey, which collected feedback from state administrators and policymakers on the implementation of an ECIDS. These findings are focused on the state resources needed to implement an ECIDS.

STATES LEVERAGE KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY FROM OTHER STATEWIDE DATA SYSTEMS INITIATIVES.

ECIDS' have long leveraged the work of other data system initiatives, such as the State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS), to learn what works in their state, share technology platforms, and establish similar data governance practices. Of the states in the development phase, or that have an operational ECIDS, only 30% are linked longitudinally to the K-12 system, 20% to the SLDS, and only 3% were connected to workforce/employment data systems. States report learning from the other data system initiatives in three ways:

- From understanding how and why technology decisions were made for other data system initiatives

- By leveraging the SLDS technology to increase technological capacity

- Working with their state partners on data governance practices

Most ECIDS teams reported some relationship with other state data governance bodies; 17% are, or will be, directly related (e.g., a subgroup of the larger committees) to other state data governance bodies; 37% of ECIDS and statewide data governance body are, or will be, coordinated, but

independent; and only 3% are unrelated. It is notable that when the ECIDS and the SLDS were both housed at the Department of Education, the states did not indicate that there was a direct link between the early childhood and statewide data system governance bodies.

State level work requires substantial resources that are often limited (e.g., staff time, finances, technology) or protected (e.g., data records) which creates an environment of competition between projects. One state described the challenges associated with partnering with other data system initiatives in their state saying, "We've been able to share the vital records data, which is a wonderful first step with the state's SLDS. But, our SLDS has recently moved from one agency to another, and our Department of Health and Human Services recently went through consolidation. And so, there's been just a lot of competing priorities, a lot of the legal and privacy and security, finance, all of the resources that you also depend upon to launch and maintain an ECIDS and share data. We're busy with these other priorities, moving agencies, consolidating, moving lots of data, the cloud modernization projects."

ECIDS TEAMS ARE USING RESOURCES FROM ACROSS STATE AGENCIES AND PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION.

ECIDS teams need access to at least five state services: human resources, procurement, finance management, legal counsel, and communication. Survey findings indicate that ECIDS teams primarily use resources from the ECIDS lead agency. This finding is unsurprising but highlights the importance of choosing an agency to lead the ECIDS that can provide robust services. Most states (27%) reported having access to all five types of support services from within their lead agency.

Encouragingly, we find that states who do not have all of the services in the lead agency use multi-agency models for accessing services. Another 45% of states reported access to all five service types through a combination of ECIDS lead agency and other state agencies. The service which most often was provided by another agency was communications and marketing. Communication support was also the only service that was not available in some states, with 14% reporting it was unavailable. Access to such services are critical for ECIDS teams to effectively and efficiently articulate the value of the ECIDS. Without these services, including but not limited to communications and marketing, ECIDS implementation and use are weakened and less sustainable. Given the variety of agencies across states which have been tasked with leading ECIDS, the availability of state resources and services is a pressing issue.

When services are difficult to access across any public agencies, states are leveraging established public-private partnerships. This model is used by 14% of states. One state discussed how a public-private approach was helpful for procurement, "We wouldn't be here if we had had to go through a formal procurement process. It would've taken a very long time. There's a lot more components once you go through that formal procurement process. So having that state partner that's a public entity (universities and quasi-governmental agencies), has been really helpful as far as moving quickly."

STATES ARE LEVERAGING THE FEDERAL INVESTMENTS IN COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) SYSTEMS TO CREATE PROGRAMMATIC USE CASES THAT ALIGN WITH STATE POLICY PRIORITIES.
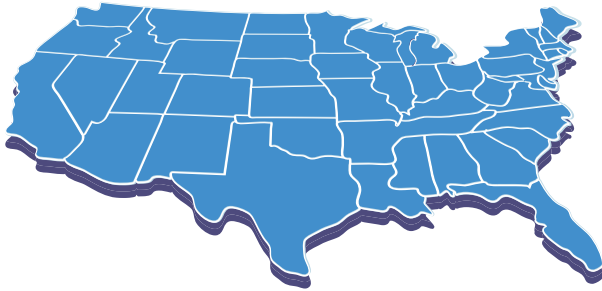
Implementing a sustainable ECIDS requires producing and sharing data across agencies that can be used to inform decisions related to the state policy priorities. Aligning the ECIDS analytics to the state priorities, often established under cross-agency governance[1] that oversees the statewide ECE systems building initiatives,[2] is critical to sustainability of the implemented ECIDS. A majority of states have, or are in the process of establishing, a comprehensive ECE system. Almost 40% of states reported that they are planning an ECE system, 37% are in the process of establishing an ECE system, and 23% report an established ECE system. States which align their ECE systems and ECIDS report that they can produce analytics from their ECIDS that are increasingly relevant and can be used inform program and policy decisions.

As statewide ECE system is a resource to the ECIDS teams. ECE systems model the opportunities and advantages realized by data sharing across agencies. These learnings inform a state's ECIDS use cases. Using Preschool Development Birth through Five (PDG B-5) funding, states are both establishing comprehensive ECE systems and developing strategic plans for their ECE system. As more states establish strategic plans and comprehensive ECE systems there are now more opportunities for ECIDS teams to align their priorities with ECE systems. For example, 60% of states used ECE systems strategic plans to inform the development of their ECIDS use cases. In addition to strategic plans developed as part of comprehensive systems building initiatives, states also reported using ECIDS purpose and vision statements (43%) and research agendas (30%) to inform the programmatic use cases.

A MAJORITY OF STATES ARE USING STATE PROCESSES TO ESTABLISH AUTHORITY TO WORK ACROSS STATE AGENCIES ON AN ECIDS.

As states begin to wrap up Preschool Development Grants Birth through Five (PDG B-5), state leaders are reporting an increased need to establish authority for the ECIDS across agencies. ECIDS leads shared that their partners use lack of authority to challenge the creation of the ECIDS. One partner stated, "it [an ECIDS] is not a requirement of the state so why are we creating an ECIDS." States have many policy and regulatory levers available to establish authority for the ECIDS, including but not limited to memoranda of understanding, charters, executive orders, and legislation. To make ECIDS sustainable beyond the life of a single grant, 60% of ECIDS teams further in the process of developing an ECIDS reported the use of legislation. ECIDS teams in earlier stages of development reported using memoranda of understanding (MOU) (60%), and charters (50%) to establish authority. No ECIDS team reported using executive orders to establish authority.

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1   System-wide governance, "the processes and structures that are created to support and organize the work of governments, organizations, and groups. (Kagan, S.L. (2015). Introduction: Why governance? Why this volume? In S.L. Kagan & R.E. Gomez (Eds.) Early childhood governance: Choices and consequences (pp.3-8). Teachers College Press.)

2   A comprehensive early care and education system "includes early care and education and the early elementary grades and also extends to embrace comprehensive services for young children, including health and mental health services (Kagan, S.L., & Kauerz, K. (2012). Early childhood systems: Looking deep, wide, and far. In S.L. Kagan & K. Kauerz (Eds.), *Early childhood systems: Transforming early learning* (pp.3-17). Teachers College Press.)

States that had legislation in place reported that they had more authority for the development of their ECIDS. One state shared, "So, we're actually named in the statute to monitor [the state's] Early Childhood System, which gives us a little bit of that leverage and authority to partner with the different data stored [across agencies], to be able to capture and summarize the information." And while executive orders provide authority, if it conflicts with legislation on data then the legislation supersedes the executive order. For example, in one state "...the governor established an executive order for early childhood data integration, so that moved the work forward." However, that state ECIDS team ran into obstacles, sharing that "we have really strict state legislation around data sharing, especially within the Department of Education, so that makes it challenging [to implement the executive order]."

States in the planning stage often (more than 80%) reported no use of authorizing documents that influence their ability to continue the work beyond their current federally funded projects. These ECIDS teams reported an increased need to establish authority for the ECIDS given the cross-agency work of the ECIDS and the current funding model. Several states mentioned a push to have an MOU in place so that their work may continue across agencies, "...there's a lot of work left to do. The consent forms and the MOUs to get more people into the system, that'll be a lot of next year's work as well. And creating some of those so we can keep expanding that for programs outside of our department."

Conclusion

Leveraging state resources to support an effort such as an ECIDS is not a new idea, but knowing which resources and where to leverage them when there are multiple agencies involved is important. Each state has a different structure and context for implementing an ECIDS, which makes state resources critical to ensuring that the time spent planning and launching leads to a system that can be used to support early childhood systems long-term. Fortunately, states have shared which state resources were necessary to implement and sustain the ECIDS.

Acknowledgements

Building Capacity Series

ECDataWorks is dedicated to developing helping state develop and use Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS). In 2022, ECDataWorks conducted a national study of state capacity to implement an ECIDS. This series of briefs is designed for state leaders to make informed resource decisions necessary to build the capacity to implement and sustain an ECIDS.

ECDataWorks provides innovative opportunities for collaborating states to improve the delivery and use of their early childhood data among state policymakers and practitioners.

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