The Early Childhood DATA Collaborative

STATE SPOTLIGHT: Vermont

Early Childhood Data Reporting System (ECDRS): Improving Outcomes for Young Children and their Families

Vermont has built a comprehensive early childhood system over the past two decades with a focus on enhancing outcomes for children, families and communities through improved program quality, service coordination and professional development. In 2010, Vermont's early childhood system work resulted in legislation[1] that established the Building Bright Futures (BBF) Council, a public/private partnership that includes 12 Regional Councils.

Vermont recognized early on that a coordinated, longitudinal data system was a critical and missing piece of Vermont's early childhood system infrastructure. Through participation in the National Governors Association's 18 month *Supporting Ready States* initiative, stakeholders were able to tackle this issue and create a roadmap for the **Vermont Early Childhood Data Reporting System (ECDRS) that would begin to help answer key policy questions.** When the ECDRS is fully developed, Vermont policymakers and practitioners will be able to track early childhood outcomes, measure the return on investments, inform program planning and policies, and drive continuous improvement.

Driving the Work with Policy Questions

Policymakers are consistently faced with important policy, funding and resource allocation decisions but often lack access to critical data to inform these decisions. From the beginning, BBF leadership spent time developing the key policy questions that would drive the design and development of Vermont's data reporting system. The following questions were developed through statewide meetings with diverse public and private stakeholders.

1. Are our young children achieving optimal health and development?

2. Are children ages birth to six getting the nutritious food and opportunities for physical activity to be healthy during their school years?

3. Is the quality of early childhood programs improving?

4. How skilled and stable is our early childhood workforce?

5. What approaches or curriculum models are implemented by adults in the environments where young children spend their days?

6. What is the relationship between attendance in various early care and education programs and children's success in life during their school years?

7. Are children ages birth to six spending their days in quality environments: home, early childhood programs and community?

8. Do our young children and their families have resources to meet their basic needs?

9. Do our young children and their families experiencing adversity have early, timely and highly skilled interventions?

ECDRS Vision

A comprehensive, longitudinal data system that can track child, family and community outcomes, stimulate dialogue and learning and shape policy and investments so that children's health, development and learning flourishes.

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[1] Vermont Act 104

10. What is the relationship between receipt of prevention or early intervention services and children's success in life during their school years?

11. Are we investing our early childhood dollars wisely?

Vermont has already begun to answer and share data on the quality of early childhood programs which has provided a template for answering other key policy questions and created a demand for filling remaining data gaps. The ECDRS also maximizes the use of open-source technologies to view (e.g., Google maps), exchange (e.g., application program interfaces) and access data (e.g., mobile device applications.)

The use of policy questions in guiding the design and development of the data system continues to open doors to new partnerships such as with the Jeffords Center for Policy Research at the University of Vermont, Common Good Vermont, Benchmarks for a Better Vermont and Gross National Happiness USA.

Engaging Partners in Building a Strong Data System Infrastructure

Much work has been done in Vermont to coordinate early childhood data[2]; however, accessing, linking and reporting the data remains a challenge. In response to this challenge, BBF developed a prototype for the ECDRS that included data on all regulated early care and education programs, data from the Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS), data from public school students eligible to receive free or reduced lunch, data from the Census Bureau on population and poverty, data on school readiness, and data on prenatal care, infant health and child obesity. BBF strategically used the prototype to engage data stewards and end users in a dynamic and iterative process that allowed them to see the value of coordinated data and provided an opportunity to give input into the design and development of the ECDRS.

Because early childhood data resides in multiple places such as state agencies and community based non-profit organizations, high level participation and buy-in is essential. Vermont leaders credit their focus on partnerships, relationship building, and engaging end users in the design and development of ECDRS as an important component of their success. Through the leadership of the BBF Data and Evaluation Committee, ECDRS data management policies and protocols are established to ensure quality, privacy, security, integrity and transparency of the data, analysis and reporting. The Committee fosters a culture of cooperation among organizational leaders through authentic partner engagement and continuous communication with data stewards and program managers. This spirit of cooperation has led to the development of a model data sharing agreement between the Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division and BBF that links key data elements across several data systems to provide answers to program quality policy questions and will report actionable data for policymakers, funders, practitioners and parents. The Committee includes state/local and public/private representation from the following organizations:

- Department of Education
- Department of Health, Agency for Human Services,
- Head Start Collaboration Office
- Vermont Business Roundtable
- Voices for Vermont Children
- Vermont Birth to Three
- Children's Integrated Services, Chittenden County
- Turrell Foundation

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[2] In 2005 Vermont launched a coordinated data system that included licensed child care, child care subsidy, quality recognition and professional development (Bright Futures Information System.)

■   Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative Project.

These stakeholders see the ECDRS as a valuable resource to bring data together and provide access to tools that help visualize, analyze and use the data.

Moving Forward

Vermont is a data rich state and with further investment in the development of the ECDRS, the state will be able to more effectively leverage this great asset. With BBF's laser focus on collecting, linking and analyzing data that helps answer the state's most critical policy questions, Vermont's early childhood development system will be able to achieve optimal performance, and the state will meet its strategic goals and priorities for young children. For more information go to http://buildingbrightfutures.org/.

ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA COLLABORATIVE (ECDC)

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC) supports state policymakers' development and use of coordinated state early care and education (ECE) data systems to improve the quality of ECE programs and the workforce, increase access to high-quality ECE programs, and ultimately improve child outcomes. The ECDC develops tools and resources to encourage state policy change and provide a national forum to support the development and use of coordinated state ECE data systems.

The ECDC is supported through funding from the Alliance for Early Success, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. ECDC partners include the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at UC Berkeley, Council of Chief State School Officers, Data Quality Campaign, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Pew Home Visiting Campaign, and Child Trends.