Update on Maine's Early Childhood Integrated Data System

Report to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services from the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future

January 15, 2024

Purpose of this Report

This report to the Joint Standing Committee of Health and Human Services outlines efforts over the last several years to plan for the implementation of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System.

What is an Early Childhood Integrated Data System?

An Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS):

> Collects, integrates, maintains, stores, and reports information from early childhood programs across multiple agencies within a state that serve children and families from birth to age eight. Typically, the data included in an ECIDS are related to the individual child, the child's family, the classroom, the program/providers, and other services that provide comprehensive care and education for young children.[1]

An ECIDS is not designed to replace existing program data systems. Rather, an ECIDS is designed to provide integrated data across systems, so that state agencies' staff and policymakers have the information they need to make statewide decisions in support of the early childhood goals and priorities within the state. The data included in an ECIDS and system model differ from state to state. It is up to the state's early childhood leadership team and policymakers to articulate, disseminate, and drive the purpose of the ECIDS to meet the state's early childhood goals and the information needs of their intended users.

Building an ECIDS provides state systems with data-driven insights to enhance program quality, inform policy and decision-making, and ultimately improve outcomes for children and families. An ECIDS can help Maine target resources to better serve vulnerable young children and their families by coordinating and aligning services, reducing duplication, and ensuring continuity of services.

Other states that have made progress on developing and implementing an ECIDS have identified numerous benefits of such systems. Launching an ECIDS has helped these states accomplish one or more of the following:

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[1] Coffey, M., Chatis, C., Irvine, S., Sellers, J, & Duarte, S. (2017). An early childhood integrated data system: What is an ECIDS? U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://slds.grads360.org/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=33126

- Identify and document the distinct count of children being served by different programs.
- Promote alignment and coordination among programs serving children.
- Support transitions (such as from childcare to pre-K, and pre-K to Kindergarten).
- Identify gaps and/or duplication in services and inform resource allocation.
- Support training and professional development to increase program quality.
- Use data to support outreach and enrollment across agencies.

The Purpose and Vision for Maine's ECIDS

The Maine Children's Cabinet is committed to working across agencies to support the healthy development of young children in Maine. Its Plan for Young Children sets a goal that all children will enter kindergarten prepared to succeed. Strategies are centered on three focus areas:

1. Increase access to affordable early care and education and preventive and early intervention services for young children and their families;

2. Raise the quality of Maine's early care and education system and supporting families to access quality programming; and

3. Recruit, prepare, and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

An Early Childhood Integrated Data System will provide important information on the wellbeing of children across Maine to advance policies and programming in support of the goal.

A team of cross agency staff at DHHS and DOE worked together to develop a purpose and vision statements for the ECIDS. These statements which may change and evolve as the state builds its system are as follows:

- Purpose Statement: Maine's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) will provide **state leaders across agencies** with information to make **informed decisions about programs and policies** that promote **access, quality, and a strong workforce** to support all Maine children ages **0-5**.

- Vision Statement: State leaders have the information they need to make strategic investments that produce the best outcomes for Maine's youngest children and their families.

The team worked to clarify the role of an ECIDS in Maine and explain what the ECIDS is not intended to do.

For the Maine team, an ECIDS is:
- Information for agency leaders, program managers, and policymakers about young children, their families, and the landscape of services available across Maine.
- A tool to promote alignment and coordination of the early childhood system through better information sharing and a clearer picture of needs, gaps, strengths of the system.

- A resource that provides data-driven insights that can improve short- and long-term outcomes.
- Focused on ages 0-5, with connection to K-3 outcomes through the SLDS.

An ECIDS is not:

- A replacement for individual program operational data systems.
- An all-encompassing data source on young kids and their families.
- An infringement of privacy and confidentiality.
- A real-time data system that can be accessed by providers and parents.

Status of Maine's Early Childhood Integrated Data System

Maine has been in various stages of planning for an Early Childhood Integrated Data System since the early 2010s. This effort has largely proceeded in parallel with state efforts to launch a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) within the State Department of Education (DOE). The SLDS – which is currently in the design phase – will eventually operate as a primary source for Pre-K-12 education data statewide that will be connected to other agencies' data (such as the Department of Labor, Department of Corrections, and the University of Maine System) to provide longitudinal information on the education and career outcomes of Maine students. The ECIDS is intended to link data from across agencies and programs related to children ages 0-5 and ultimately integrate with the SLDS to enhance the power of longitudinal analysis and inform program investments and policymaking.

Over the last decade, planning work for the ECIDS has occurred in fits and starts relevant to the funding landscape and changes in administration. Some progress was made in 2014 to articulate an IT structure for such a system. Maine participated in national-level conversations on planning for such a system.[2] Efforts stalled in 2015 when staff in the DOE were required to pull their funding application for consideration at the request of Governor LePage.

Planning for the ECIDS was reignited in 2019-2020 through the State's work on the original Preschool Development Grant (PDG), which was a year-long planning grant, and the reinstatement of the Children's Cabinet when Governor Mills took office. The PDG planning grant provided funding for Maine to conduct a pilot study that aimed to integrate data within a specific region in order to determine an unduplicated count of children participating in early learning programs such as pre-K, Head Start, Child Development Services, and the Child Care Subsidy program. Funds were also used to perform an inventory of data systems that housed data on young children in Maine. A needs assessment conducted for the PDG grant identified several challenges and needs related to data on young children, which led to renewed recommendations about building an ECIDS for Maine. The ECIDS became a core priority for the Children's Cabinet and features prominently in its Plan for Young Children.

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[2] Institute of Education Sciences. (2014) SLDS Topical Webinar Summary: Introduction to ECIDS System Design – The Basics 101. Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/ECIDS_System_Design_Basics-101_May2014.pdf

In 2021, the Children's Cabinet coordinator and staff from the Early Learning Team at the Department of Education worked with national experts to develop a road map for the implementation of an ECIDS for Maine. This road map is currently guiding the planning work for the ECIDS team in Maine which consists of staff from the Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS, the Early Learning Team at DOE and the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.

Originally with funding from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act and now with funding from the more recently awarded Preschool Development Renewal Grant, Maine hired a full-time ECIDS coordinator to lead the work to plan for, design, and implement an ECIDS. The ECIDS coordinator sits within the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future and works closely with staff in both the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education.

This position has been responsible for mapping the current early childhood data systems, working with the team in developing a purpose and vision for Maine's ECIDS, and conducting an ECIDS readiness assessment for the state. The coordinator identified 18 formal data systems that collect information on young children. Most data systems for early childhood programs are managed by DHHS with others, such as Child Development Services and Public Pre-K, falling under the Department of Education's responsibility. The Head Start Collaboration Office in the Department of Education has access to high-level data about children enrolled in Head Start for federal reporting, however, child-level data are only available in detail through each of the eleven regional Head Start grantees. Several other databases, such data for the Maine Families Home Visiting Program and the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Registry are contracted out to vendors where the State has relatively limited access to the data in real time.

In 2024, the ECIDS team will focus on conducting data use cases and piloting data integration across agencies both to answer key policy questions related to the goals of the Children's Cabinet and to inform an ECIDS system and function. The ECIDS coordinator will work with a cross agency team of staff as well as members of the Children's Cabinet to develop and prioritize "data use cases". A data use case includes program background information, key policy question(s), primary audience/user, expected actions when data are available, generalizability, functionality, access level, frequency, and required data sets. Conducting data use cases will support state leaders to better understand the elements that are needed for integration of data for early childhood programs across offices and agencies as well as the opportunities of data matching including answering key policy questions. Data use cases will also help staff to identify challenges and barriers to integrating data.

The following phases illustrate where the pilot data integration process fits within the overall development of an ECIDS for Maine.

- **Phase I: Assess** - understand current data systems, linkages, where integrated data would be beneficial. (Completed)

- **Phase II: Plan** – gather input on purpose and vision for the system, prioritize policy questions. (Partially completed)

- **Phase III: Pilot** – pilot data integration projects to inform ECIDS system and function. (In process)

- **Phase IV: Develop** – build out IT infrastructure, policies, procedures, governance functions; continue to pursue sustainable funding sources.

- **Phase V: Implement** – launch an integrated system, beginning with a few databases to answer priority questions. Build out over time.

In early 2024, the ECIDS team will work to prioritize policy questions to drive the use cases and pilot data integration projects for the year. This effort will be led by the ECIDS coordinator in GOPIF with support from policy and data staff from DHHS and DOE. Maine's Office of Information Technology will support the actual matching and integrating of the data. This effort will be funded by a combination of funding from the biennial budget and the Preschool Development Grant.

The team will use 2024 to complete at least two use cases and data integration projects to inform the development and implementation of an ECIDS in 2025 and 2026. In late 2024, the ECIDS coordinator will use the learnings from the initial data use case to begin to determine the governance structure for the ECIDS and to develop policies and procedures for an ECIDS. In 2025 and 2026, the team will work with the Office of Information Technology to build out the infrastructure for an integrated system and identifying which state databases will provide data for the initial ECIDS in Maine. These costs will be funded with the state's Preschool Development Grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

The ECIDS team will continue to consult with key stakeholders as it builds out the new integrated data system. These stakeholders include the cross agency Early Intervention Workgroup, the Children's Cabinet Early Childhood Advisory Council and the Collaborating Partners Advisory Group, which serves as the advisory group for the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant. These groups will support the team with decisions about key policy questions about Maine's early childhood programs and system that need to be answered as well as any public facing data dashboards.

Conclusion

Over the last several years, Maine has made progress in planning for the implementation of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System. Through the leadership of the Children's Cabinet, the implementation of an ECIDS has become a priority for the state. It is an integral component of the state's Preschool Development Grant. The Cabinet is hopeful that an ECIDS in Maine will provide policymakers with data-driven insights to enhance program quality, inform policy and decision-making, and ultimately improve outcomes for children and families.