

Illinois Learning Council
Early Childhood Data Work Group
Key Questions

The ten questions listed below are suggested as the highest-priority broad questions to inform the Work Group's study of creating a unified early childhood data system. We know that all of these questions are interconnected and overlapping, but we suggest these questions to help organize the work. The bulleted questions below each of the broad questions are provided as samples of the kinds of specific questions that would fall into these broader categories.

In this document we have tried to frame our questions as objectively as possible. We know that the Council's work focuses in many instances on answering subjective questions, including defining terms like "high quality" and "positive impacts." We believe that the data needed to answer these objective questions will prove extremely informative to the Council's discussion of the subjective questions.

1. Are children, birth to five in Illinois, receiving early care and education? What impact are those programs having?
 - What results have been obtained for children on validated instruments measuring cognitive and non-cognitive development?
 - What impact are early learning programs having on social-emotional development?
 - What indicators are being used to measure children's developmental progress? And what are the trends?
 - Do assessment trends over time indicate a closing of the achievement gap?

2. Which children have access to early care and education programs?
 - What are the demographics of children and families in the state? What are the demographics of children and their families in early learning programs?
 - Do at-risk children have access to programs?
 - What is the attendance pattern for each child?
 - What gaps in services exist for early learning programs? (across age, geographical region, and programs)
 - Which children are enrolled in multiple programs?

3. Is the quality of programs improving?
 - What metrics are being used to measure program quality?
 - Are an increasing number of programs meeting established quality standards?
 - Is the number of accredited programs increasing?
 - What is the trend over time regarding the number of programs that are externally evaluated?
 - How many programs administer self-assessments?
 - What technical assistance is being provided to programs?

4. What are the characteristics of programs?
 - What curriculums are used by programs?
 - What are the qualifications for program staff and providers (see #5 below)?
 - In what setting is the program delivered?
 - What are the costs associated with the program?
 - What are the funding sources for the program?
 - What is the staff to child ratio?
 - How are programs engaging parents and caregivers?
5. How prepared is the early care and education workforce to provide effective education and care for all children?
 - What are the qualifications for program staff and directors?
 - What education, preparation, and training have program staff and directors received?
 - What credentials do program staff and directors have?
 - What are the demographics of program staff and directors, and do they reflect the families they serve?
 - What languages do program staff and directors speak?
 - Are program staff and directors trained to deal with cultural differences?
6. What policies and investments lead to a skilled and stable early care and education workforce?
 - At what rate and for what reason does turnover occur? Which programs experience the most/least turnover?
 - What are the characteristics (see #5 above) of those staff who persist? Of those who leave the field?
 - What salaries and benefits does the program provide staff?
 - What technical assistance is provided for workforce development?
7. What child health and development services are being provided to children?
 - What percentage of birth mothers received prenatal and/or interconception care?
 - What percentage of children have medical homes?
 - What medical and dental services has the child received?
 - Where are services being provided? Are services connected to an early education and care program?
 - What developmental screenings has the child received? What were the outcomes?
 - Which children have been enrolled in early intervention programs?
8. What are the family circumstances of children in early learning programs?
 - What percentage of children in early learning programs are in foster care?
 - What percentage of children in early learning programs live with a relative other than their birth parents?
 - What percentage of children have moved within the last six months? How frequently are they moving?

9. What longitudinal information do we want to know about children enrolled in early learning programs over time?
 - How do children enrolled in early learning programs do in K-12? (test scores, attendance, drop-out rates)
 - Do children receive special education services in the public school system? Do children from high quality early programs have a reduced need for special education?
 - Are children enrolled in early learning programs less likely to end up in the juvenile justice system? In the child welfare system? In the mental health system?
 - What are the cost savings associated with early learning programs?

10. How is data being used to align, prioritize, and mobilize resources?
 - How are needs of children being identified in programs? When needs are identified, what follow-up occurs to ensure those needs are met? Are caregivers being provided with information about what services are available to address needs?
 - Have children been referred for medical and social services needs? Did they receive the services? How much time passed between the referral and receipt of services? Which agencies provided the services?