

**Illinois Early Learning Council
Data, Research, and Evaluation Committee
March 5, 2015
10:00am - 12:00pm**

Ounce of Prevention Fund
33 W. Monroe, Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60603

Call-in number: (888) 494-4032
Participant code: 7198518485

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Participants

In-Person: Elliot Regenstein, Teri Talan, Dan Harris, Anna Colaner, Lesley Schwartz, Carmen Garcia, Jonathan Doster, Dawn Thomas, Andi Irawan, Kate Moore, Sandy De Leon, Jon Furr, Edith Njuguna, Karen Freel, Cynthia Tate

Phone: Lisa Hood, Maria Kontoudakis, Joellyn Whitehead, Pam Bonsu, Cindy Zumwalt, Erni Pun, Reyna Hernandez, David Alexander, Brenda Klosterman, Bob Goerge, Pam Bonsu, Ben Xu

- 1. Welcome and Introductions**
- 2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

The minutes from the December 4, 2014 meeting were formally approved.

3. Updates

a. LDS/UECDS

Anna Colaner introduced Jon Furr from Northern Illinois University (NIU), who provided an update on the longitudinal data system (LDS). Background information was provided. The LDS governing board has not met recently. However, work on a signature project of the LDS governing board has continued. The project is the centralized demographic data set administrator. The central goal of the project is to establish a master client index across various agencies' data sets to work on the identity resolution issue. This problem is caused by the fact that multiple agencies use different identifiers. These identifiers need to be linked effectively to support a number of priorities. NIU Center for Governmental Studies was selected through a competitive process to take on the project. The contract with Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) should be executed by next month to allow NIU to move forward. The goal is to be fully operational by September 30.

A test project is occurring in anticipation of the master client index. A data merge between the ISBE's early childhood pre-K data and Department of Human Services' (DHS) child care data. Data sharing agreements were established to allow NIU to look at the unduplicated count of children across programs. NIU is looking at both the statewide count and a subset within Innovation Zones to identify the characteristics of students.

Jon Furr introduced Ben Xu to explain the test project. The NIU team is still working to match the data sources from ISBE and the child care assistance program from DHS. Next

Friday, the final report will be released on the early childhood study. Jon Furr or Anna Colaner can forward the information to the DRE committee once it is available.

The next phase of the project will review the transition of children from the child care assistance program into early childhood education programs. The cohort will be tracked to record how many children eventually attend Illinois public kindergarten. Data is still needed from ISBE in order to match children's information. There have been some issues related to identity resolution.

The goal of this test project is to take this foundational work to assess if it could be applied to other high priority data sets like early intervention and home visiting or even other student populations. The hope is to build off of this analysis going forward.

Elliot Regenstein made an announcement regarding the recent webinar hosted by Child Trends and The Early Childhood Data Collaborative on Head Start data linking with state data. The information on the webinar will be circulated to the group by the DRE staffer when it is available.

b. Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge

Anna Colaner provided an update. The Annual Performance Review (APR) was finished last week and should be posted shortly by the federal government. The federal government will likely pose follow-up questions after reviewing the APR.

Performance measures are going well and providers continue to sign-up for ExceleRate. Child care centers joining ExceleRate are regularly being added to the system. Regarding family child care centers, standards and applications will be available at the end of March and then family child care providers can sign-up. Applications for providers are now available for the Awards of Excellence.

c. REL Midwest Project

Pam Bonsu provided an update. In January and February, the qualitative interviews with states were coded and compared through document and literature reviews. The themes are being revised and summary reports created. A draft report will then be created. A report can be sent to the committee, when it is available. A program officer will review the draft report for acceptance. Then it will undergo a technical scan.

Carlise King from Child Trends has provided support and guidance regarding the technical scan. REL Midwest is exploring how states have invited various stakeholders across data systems in order to link multiple systems.

d. State Agency Data Advocacy

Elliot Regenstein provided an update. At the last DRE committee meeting, a resolution was adopted and forwarded to the Executive Committee of the Early Learning Council (ELC). At the last Executive Committee meeting, it was decided that the resolution would be paired into a larger set of recommendations. There has been no additional update, but the DRE committee will continue to review issues related to state capacity.

e. Federal and State Data Legislation

Elliot Regenstein provided an updated. At the federal level, the Strengthening Education Through Research Act (SETRA) was moving in the previous Congress. Language was identified to make longitudinal data system grants prioritized based on linkages created between early childhood data systems and other systems. There is now a new Congress in session. SETRA has passed the Senate HELP Committee with the exact same language as last session, but the House is moving a different version of the bill. It is likely that these two versions will be reconciled and moved forward, as it appears that the bill will have bipartisan support. Connecting early learning in longitudinal data systems has been identified as a priority.

Regarding state legislation, there was a work group producing holistic recommendations for data privacy. There have been several draft bills that are focusing on research, higher education, and third party vendors. Representative Drury has been the leader. The Illinois State Board of Education workgroup is still reviewing the language of the bills. Jon Furr also indicated that a similar bill has been introduced by Senator Connelly. It is not clear if these bills are reflective of the California model, which was the product of extensive negotiations between privacy advocates and data companies.

f. Research-Policy Partnership

Anna Colaner provided an update. The Office of Early Childhood Development is pushing data driving results. Therefore an idea has surfaced about developing partnerships between researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. Outreach has been done to other states that have formed similar partnerships. The thought is to review what Illinois can do to better form comparable relationships. A starting point could be to evaluate the strength of feedback loops between policy and practitioners. A shared space where researchers can get information that is of interest to the state needs to be fostered. The DRE committee must now assess the role it can play within this space.

Elliot Regenstein asked the group to think of ideas so a more planned discussion can occur at the next meeting.

Jon Furr added that the Illinois State Board of Education has worked to create a policy partnership. It was suggested as another partnership to explore. Anna Colaner explained that the ISBE group has focused specifically on Kindergarten-12 grade. In addition, she has spoken with the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

4. Data Dashboard

Elliot Regenstein provided a historical overview. Several years ago, as part of the ELC's strategic plan, an ad hoc metrics/dashboard committee was formed. The group was tasked to review what success meant for early childhood programs. The group met several times and created a high level dashboard. Secondary indicators were created to evaluate progress in depth. The secondary indicators would be specifically relevant for people who work within the field of early childhood. There was some consultation done by Child Trends.

The DRE committee discussed the contents of the two handouts presented: "Illinois Early Childhood Dashboard", which lists six high level indicators and an untitled document, which provides a more detailed review of secondary indicators within the six larger indicators.

Anna Colaner presented more information regarding the two handouts. The document titled “Illinois Early Childhood Dashboard” has six indicators that fall into three categories. The high-quality early learning indicator has been separated by infant and toddlers and preschoolers purposefully. The health and coordinated community systems metrics were created by partner committees. The ad hoc committee did not have the expertise in these two areas and input was received by the corresponding committees in the ELC. The KIDS indicator was added because the kindergarten readiness assessment is being rolled out in Illinois. The ad hoc committee mimicked Maryland because that state evaluates how young children are doing in kindergarten to better advocate for early learning services. There is a separate group that is looking at the KIDS indicator and how that data will be reported.

The second handout, without a title, has more detailed secondary indicators. These indicators unpack the larger six indicators. Feedback is being solicited for the secondary indicators. The DRE committee acknowledged the pros and cons of the data sources listed, and the challenges of developing consistent data from multiple sources with different reporting schedules.

Regarding access and high-quality early learning and infant and toddlers, at-risk children have been the focus, and therefore were chosen by the ad hoc committee as the denominator for that metric. The numerator is at-risk children enrolled in ExceleRate programs rated at a Gold rating or above, or enrolled in home visiting. Regarding the high-quality early learning for preschoolers, Illinois’ statutory framework dictates that all children should be served, so the denominator will include all children. The numerator again will be Gold rated programs in ExceleRate.

Various data sources could be used under each indicator, and the Committee discussed some of the pros and cons of different sources. Data could be used from the longitudinal data system once it is complete. The Illinois longitudinal data system looks at publicly funded programs and will produce an unduplicated count. Information about low-income children is also included. Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) also hosts a data tracking program. The information housed by INCCRRA would have a duplicated count and low-income is defined differently.

Teri Talan asked for explanation of the documents. After discussion, the DRE committee agreed that there are two audiences. One audience is the ELC. The second audience is policy makers and advocates. The one page document titled “Illinois Early Childhood Dashboard” is considered high-level and provides an overview for an external audience. The second document, with no title, provides more detail which is better suited for the ELC’s needs.

A discussion arose regarding the levels of geography available. There were several comments on how the dashboard would provide data to the public. Bob Goerge wanted more information on how data would be disaggregated for specific communities and how it may be better utilized if it could be separated by geographical areas. Elliot Regenstein and Anna Colaner discussed that this document was originally produced to impact state-wide policy change, but that the goal has always been for the state-wide data to be disaggregated in multiple ways, including by geography. Furthermore, as this process develops, state data could be reviewed first as that is more broadly available. Timelines will need to be flexible as data becomes available.

Teri Talan requested further clarification on the primary metrics listed on the “Illinois Early Childhood Dashboard” document. There are several qualitative words that muddle the document, specifically under High Quality Early Learning for Infants and Toddlers, the term “established” is used in reference to home visiting programs. Next under Coordinated Community Systems indicator, “successful” is used to describe community collaborations. Clarification was provided regarding the term “successful”. Elliot Regenstein stated that a rubric is being developed to define successful early childhood programs, which will be measured with data. Lastly, Teri Talan addressed that terms need to be used consistently throughout the documents. The terms “birth to three” and “zero to three” are used interchangeably.

David Alexander asked more about access, noting that if access is a theme, further explanation is needed to differentiate if the dashboard will evaluate publically funded or access issues as a whole, across all types of funding. Elliot Regenstein said that the original intent of the dashboard was to review where services were being provided in Illinois. It was agreed that reviewing publicly funded programs would be best as an unduplicated count would be available versus private dollars which would produce a duplicated count.

Lesley Schwartz and Dan Harris requested clarification surrounding home visiting programs. Under the primary metric, home visiting does also serve three- to five-year-olds, not just birth to three. Also, home visiting looks at prenatal services, so the Committee discussed adding language to that effect. It was agreed that the draft should be revised to note these facts to the extent possible.

Teri Talan addressed a point that sounds misleading. On page five of the untitled document, the metric regarding early childhood education practitioners needs to be more accurate. If a practitioner left the Gateways Registry, it does not signify that they left the field entirely.

5. Research Agenda Prioritization

Elliot Regenstein explained the exercise of prioritization and the process of developing the Research Agenda. The Research Agenda has been presented to various committees of the ELC. The document has incorporated the ideas of the committees. The next step is to prioritize the questions that the Early Learning Council really wants to see answered. Many of the questions are a variation of the same theme and vary in scope. Some questions may be in the process of being answered now, while others are a long way from having an answer. Regarding prioritization, two frames of thought were presented. Elliot Regenstein recommended that questions that allow for the most valuable actions should be ranked higher. Anna Colaner suggested that questions should be prioritized because there are currently no systems to answer them. Next, questions on the list focus on Illinois issues. The questions on Research Agenda may have implications for the larger United States, but Illinois shall remain as the focus.

Bob Goerge stressed the importance and necessity of program quality. High-quality is a term that is often used in the early childhood education field but very difficult to measure. There is often not a consistent definition of high-quality. Elliot Regenstein suggested the focus should be on what combination of programs provide the best outcomes for children. All programs provide very different things to children based on children’s needs and also program focus.

A discussion ensued regarding broad versus specific questions. The DRE committee agreed that it is important to have a healthy mixture of both questions in the Research Agenda. Points were raised that addressed both.

Andi Irawan suggested the importance of program attendance. It is a subject that affects so many other items, such as transportation, family working hours, spatial mismatch between a child's location and the location of their school. Therefore it is an important area.

Karen Freel stressed the importance of early care and education workforce, topics related to inclusion, special needs, social-emotional, and trauma are very valuable. Illinois needs a better picture of the training teachers are receiving in order to better identify any gaps and areas of improvement. In addition, Sandy De Leon requested clarification to the question related to the languages program staff and directors speak. If staff does in fact speak another language, the language they speak needs to be reflective of the language spoken by the children and families they serve. Karen Freel addressed the fact that there is question specifically related to home visitor supports, but that question should be elaborated to consider supports available to center staff, with the idea that all staff members should have supports provided.

Teri Talan asked for more information regarding program characteristics. She indicated a question needs to be added regarding organizational climate, because if an organization fosters support and good practices that would ultimately have a large effect on the organization.

Elliot Regenstein stressed that transitions are important and recommended a focus on what educators and staff are doing to help children transition from various early learning programs to school.

Anna Colaner suggested additional recommendations regarding program funding. Questions that are specific to the issues currently in Illinois should be made a priority. As the funding climate in Illinois changes, an assessment should be made on the impacts funding will have on the stability of programs.

Lisa Hood made a recommendation that the introduction needs to include parameters and a clear definition of early childhood education. In many circles, early childhood education refers to birth to third grade, but for the purpose of this agenda, the focus is birth to five.

6. Wrap-up/Additional Items

No announcements or additional items were presented.

Action items

- **The DRE staffer will forward the report from the Northern Illinois University test project on data matching between the Illinois State Board of Education and the Department of Human Services is available when it becomes available.**
- **The DRE staffer will forward the report from the REL Midwest Project when it becomes available.**
- **The DRE Staffer will email the committee information regarding the Child Trends/Early Childhood Data Collaborative's webinar on linking Head Start data to state data systems when it becomes available.**

- **The DRE committee will assess the role it can play in creating research-policy partnerships. The DRE committee members will think of ideas on how to strengthen relationships, especially related to the feedback loops. This item will be discussed again at a future meeting.**
- **The Data Dashboard will be updated with the items noted during the discussion and resent to the committee. If the group has additional suggestions, edits can be sent to Anna Colaner.**
- **The Research Agenda will be updated based on the recommendations made, including updates to the introduction.**