

Empower Families with Data



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This state highlight describes how North Dakota focused on the needs of families when designing their early childhood integrated data (ECID) system. As a result, the data system provides information about the mixed delivery options in the state's early childhood care and education system to help families make better-informed decisions for their children.

Introduction

Parents and families are children's best advocates. They make decisions for the well-being, development, and education of their children. One of the most important and difficult decisions they have to make is choosing early education and care settings that meet their families' needs and provide their children with high-quality experiences. Data systems are one method that states can use to inform parental knowledge and awareness of their choices in a mixed delivery system and empower them to make the best choices for their families. Historically, states have focused on the development of ECIDS to meet the needs of policymakers and researchers. Building data systems can be expensive and time-consuming, and it is often not possible to meet the needs of additional stakeholders, including families' needs.

This State Highlight demonstrates how North Dakota has leveraged their strategic planning to incorporate family voice into their ECIDS development and how the state plans to create a data system to meet families' needs, as an example of how to consider non-traditional stakeholders when developing an ECIDS.

Overview of North Dakota's Plan to Empower Families with Data

The needs assessment funded by North Dakota's Preschool development Grant B-5 (PDG B-5) initial grant identified that North Dakota's agencies and programs lacked the information they needed to make data-informed decisions (Early Childhood Education Needs Assessment, 2019). To address this data gap, North Dakota contracted with an outside research organization to develop a strategic plan for the creation of an ECIDS "to integrate data from multiple state agencies to promote greater collaboration and alignment, improve efficiency, and maximize resources to create a coordinated system of quality to meet the needs of North Dakota's children birth through age five and their families" (Nguyen & Coffey, 2020). When North Dakota included families as a priority stakeholder in their strategic planning, they needed to ensure that families had the data and information they needed to make decisions about care and education settings for their children.

North Dakota used strategic partners to understand families' information needs

As part of its needs assessment and strategic plan process, North Dakota worked strategically with the [Mainstreet ND](#) initiative to engage families, communities, business entities, and the [State Superintendent's Family Engagement Cabinet](#) in the planning of specific initiatives to understand families' needs. Through these engagement efforts, The North Dakota ECIDS project team determined that parents and families seeking early care and education services needed to be able to find information on program options that included location, eligibility, quality, and program characteristics.

North Dakota created use cases based on family information needs

The North Dakota ECIDS planning team identified five initial use cases for the ways the data system could support decision-making. One use case, based on needs highlighted during a North Dakota Early Childhood Education Council (ECEC) meeting, was to provide families with access to information about early care and education options. In particular, the goal is to provide information about program type (e.g., Head Start, home visiting, early intervention), program location, program quality (e.g., QRIS rating, evidence-based practice metrics), and a program's ability to offer specialized services to meet the needs of their child (e.g., early childhood special education, bilingual/English as a second language/dual language learners). As North Dakota continues their ECIDS work and completes this use case, they will be set apart from other states by focusing on the information that parents and families need to make the best choices for their children.

"Parent choice, helping parents understand that they have a choice and that choices exist. Once they know that, they can make good healthy choices for their children and their budget and their family and beliefs."

—Tara Fuhrer, Former Director,
Office of Early Learning,
ND Department of Public Instruction

North Dakota will use their parent portal to engage families

North Dakota will share the information with families through the Early Care and Education Parent Portal. As a result, families will be able to quickly identify programs based on their residence, work location, family needs (e.g., length of the day, after school care, child care subsidy), child needs (e.g., special education, language, early intervention), program type (e.g., Head Start, child care, preK, home visiting), and quality classifications (e.g., quality rating and improvement System, school readiness).

How Other States Have Used Their ECIDS to Inform Families' Decisions

North Dakota is among a small number of states that are designing their ECIDS with parents as one of the primary users. For example, states have provided data to inform the following: (1) programs where their children are eligible for services, (2) accessibility of high-quality programs, and (3) emergency care

services. Table 1 below includes examples from three states describing the information parents and families can obtain from their states' ECIDS (Argue et al., 2020).

Table 1. ECIDS Information Accessible to Parents and Families in Three States

Family Decision	State	Description
Identify programs where they are eligible to receive services	California	In 2018, California passed a bill (AB 2960) to develop, by June 2022, a public online portal referred to as the <i>Parent Portal</i> . The California Parent Portal will ensure that families have access to timely and accurate information about high-quality early learning and care (ELC) programs, how to enroll their children, and which program benefits they may be eligible to receive.
Identify the locations and accessibility of high-quality programs	Florida	Florida's Sunshine State Early Childhood Information Portal, called the "Sunshine Portal," provides a comprehensive and up-to-date view of Florida's early childhood mixed delivery system. Through user-friendly data visualizations that include maps, tables, and graphs, the Sunshine Portal links information at the child level and presents aggregate data summaries on risk factors, protective factors, service access, service quality, and outcome indicators.
Identify emergency care services	Minnesota	Minnesota's Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) portal links families to COVID-19 resources, allowing families to use the ECLDS Comprehensive Services Map to locate nearby COVID-19 emergency child care sites, available child care providers, and meals for children during COVID-19 closings. Also included in the ECLDS portal is Minnesota's Data Story Builder, known as "Nourishing Our Children for Success," which allows parents and families to easily interact with the data from the state's ECLDS. The Data Story Builder includes data visualizations, interactive dashboards, and video clips that bring early childhood data to life. Families can use this tool to access meaningful data and enhance their understanding of early care and education programs/services being provided to make informed decisions about their child's education, development, and well-being.

Conclusion

Making early childhood data available to parents and families allows them to select high-quality early education and care programs and services that meet their family's needs. Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) are a critical path that states can use to increase parental knowledge and awareness of the mixed delivery settings and assist them to make the best choices for their families. States have an opportunity to leverage the existing consumer education systems developed for parents and families through the Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) and connect them to their ECIDS plans. States should ensure parents' and families' needs are included in long-term ECIDS plans, and leverage those data systems when emergencies require the quick sharing of information about vital resources.

References

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