CHILD CARE
State Capacity Building Center

State-Local Models and Approaches Designed to Build Strong Early Learning Systems: What States Have Learned

Contents

Introduction

For more than 20 years States have tested a variety of state-local models of early childhood governance in an effort to improve the skills, abilities, and health and mental health of young children before they enter school. According to the *Framework for Choosing a State-level Early Childhood Governance System,* "In the United States, more than 60 percent of all children from birth to five spend time in the care of someone other than their parents. Early care and education services are provided by a wide range of programs with varying designs, purposes, and oversight. States have increasingly sought to develop new governance structures that align authority and oversight of early childhood programs and services." (Regenstein & Lipper, 2013)

Historically, early childhood planning for programs and services was generally managed at the state level, based on the guidelines for federal and state funding. The funding was then directed to the local level for designated programs that served specific categories of children and families. In order to create more effective systems and services for children and families, a growing number of States have begun to formally and deliberately link together state and local work, resulting in better coordination and greater results for children and families. States use different terms to describe the state-local approach, such as public-private partnerships, collaboratives, councils, hubs, transformation zones, and coalitions. Regardless of the name, all of these models share a common commitment to make connections to and among families, programs, and the state's early childhood governance system.

States may choose to develop a state-local model for a variety of reasons. North Carolina, an early pioneer in this area, began this approach in 1993 and articulated a clear rationale for developing a state-local approach, based on a needs assessment, which resulted in statutorily authorized regional-local partnerships covering all 100 counties. The following text box describes the conditions and needs that led to this approach, as described by key state leaders during a review of the state's work in 2004.

Table 1. State Example: North Carolina

The Need for a Local Component to the Early Childhood System
♦ Increasing children's school readiness requires comprehensive approaches and involvement throughout various sectors of the community, including early care and education, health, mental health; family support, and parent leadership
♦ Multiple systems impact young children and their families
♦ Multiple funding streams are in place, each with its own regulations and requirements
♦ Individual variations and unique situations exist among children and families
♦ Current services are both market-based and government financed
♦ The current situation lends itself to a lack of coordination as well as duplication of services and inefficiencies in service delivery (NC Early Childhood Leaders, 2004)

Despite different names—and variations in approach—there are some common purposes and strategies for the development of state-local partnerships. They are generally focused on advancing public policy and investment for early education, health, and family engagement and in getting better results for young children and their families through a variety of community-based programs and strategies. In order to actualize these lofty goals, one of the key strategies is building partnerships among the public and private sectors. Meeting these goals depends on both public and private funding as well as paid staff and volunteers to get the work done.

Creating formal connections and building partnerships between the state and local communities is a hallmark of the state-local systems work. Building strong partnerships between these communities and unifying their work on behalf of young children takes time and needs ongoing support. Most states that take this approach share some common characteristics to ensure that the model will be successful as listed in Table 2. Additional strategies and approaches are presented later in this document.

Table 2. Common Characteristics of State-local Approaches

Keys to State-local Approaches
♦ Advancing public policy and investment in early education, health, and family support
♦ Improving results for children and families through comprehensive, community-based resources and services
♦ Using public-private partnerships
♦ Using paid staff as well as volunteers
♦ Funding local coordination and planning
♦ Creating and maintain two-way feedback loops (state/local and local/state)
♦ Maintaining a well-defined communications system

Leaders in the States with the longest track records emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to their work. Twelve States with long track records (Arizona, California, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington) in creating a state-local model have taken a comprehensive approach, recognizing that children grow and develop in a variety of ways and need different kinds and levels of supports. "The common denominator at the state and local level is a comprehensive system that is dedicated to promoting the healthy development of and better outcomes from birth to age 5, and increasingly to age 8." (Cobb, 2014) This kind of cross-sector approach and planning acknowledges that children have diverse needs and develop at different speeds across the developmental domains: physical, social-emotional, communication and language, thinking and general knowledge, and approaches to learning.

> **Transformation Zones through the Early Learning Challenge**
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> The Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (ELC) played a significant role in helping eight States create or expand this work, often called transformation zones within the ELC States. These States were California, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, and Washington (Phase 1: 2012); Oregon (Phase 2:2013); and Georgia and Vermont (Phase 3: 2014). Some States designed their zones around a school district or community nonprofit organization. In these States, the school or nonprofit worked to bring together the early learning entities (including Head Start, child care, and public schools) together with other community leaders for joint assessment of needs and planning. Other States focused on coordinated training and technical assistance for all early learning providers. Others focused on outreach to underserved children and families.
>
> In some States, a broad group of stakeholders, families, government and community leaders, and early childhood experts were required to join together to oversee the work within the transformation zone. In these cases, the group focused on cross-sector needs assessment and planning, worked together to reduce duplication of services, developed common indicators, and created an action plan. In at least one State, the focus was on some already existing local partnerships in more impoverished areas that were not getting great results in their communities. These challenged areas used a specific regimen of strategies and programs and received a high level of input and support from the State. (Ponder, 2015)

Common Themes among State-Local Partnerships: Getting Started and Refining Your Approach

A Clear Vision

Those considering this approach or working to refine their models have much to learn from existing state-local partnerships. State and local leaders interviewed for the report *Nuts and Bolts* have been involved in their States' systems work for 10 to 20 years. The importance of developing a ***clear vision*** statement was underscored in all of those interviews. One local leader described its importance this way: "There are so many needs and issues to be addressed to best meet the needs of children and families and each of the stakeholders is interested in a particular area that is related directly to their own work. Having a clear vision for the collaborative was imperative and kept us coming back to our core work when we would start to go in all directions." (Cobb, 2014)

The leaders discussed the importance of the process for developing the vision and emphasized the value of having an outside, skilled facilitator work with groups to create the statement. The visioning work is tied to later outcomes while each stakeholder has a slightly different perspective and reasons for coming to the collaborative table. Because of these factors, it is so important to have someone lead the discussions who does not have conflicts or alliances related to the work. This helps ensure that the resulting vision statement represents a partnership everyone can own and work to achieve.

Table 3. Vision Statements from Eight States

Vision Statements
Arizona: "All Arizona's children are ready to succeed in school and in life."
Iowa: "Every child beginning at birth will be healthy and successful."
Minnesota: "Every young child in Greater Minnesota has the best possible start toward a healthy life of learning, achieving and succeeding."
Oklahoma: "All Oklahoma children will be safe, healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they

Vision Statements
enter school."
Oregon: "Children arrive at kindergarten ready and supported for success and families are healthy, stable and attached."
South Carolina: "Provide comprehensive services and support to young children and their families to enhance school readiness and optimal development and to mobilize communities to provide for the enhanced services and supports."
Vermont: "Aligning the work at the state level with the work of 12 regional early childhood advisory councils across Vermont to make improvements in access, quality and affordability of early care, health and education for families and young children 0–8."
Virginia: "To support school readiness through development of local early childhood initiatives and to serve as a nonpartisan steward for capacity building for advancing school readiness in Virginia."

Source: Cobb, 2014.

School Readiness

The single most prevalent theme that emerges from a review of mission and vision statements is an emphasis on *school readiness.* Most States started their state-local work as a way to address the development and learning needs of young children prior to school entry, including North Carolina—the first to take this approach in a formal way. North Carolina's vision statement, "Every child will arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed" made that explicit. The second most common theme is that all children are emphasized, while prioritizing based on the greatest needs and available funding. These two themes made it clear that a statewide early childhood system that included a state and local approach was created to prepare all of the states' young children for success in school.

Family Engagement

One of the highest values that state and local leaders describe in their work is *family engagement* or the importance of learning from families. Building local connections is a way to hear family voices, assess and address the needs and challenges of all children within a geographical area, and foster work between local communities and the State in order to share family feedback and help inform family-friendly policies and programs. Michigan's 54 Great Start Collaboratives have a unique approach to hearing family voices through Michigan's 40 Great Start Parent Coalitions. These state-supported coalitions are a formal mechanism for getting a customer perspective that can lead to better outcomes for children. Parent Coalition members also gain knowledge that helps them educate their communities about the importance of early childhood and provide information, education, and resources to other parents raising young children (Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation's Great Start for Kids, n.d.).

States focus on different age ranges in their local early childhood work. While most local partnerships begin their focus on prenatal care or children at birth, at the other end of the age spectrum there is more variation. Some focus their work on children up to prekindergarten entry or kindergarten entry, while others focus on children through third grade (8 years) (Cobb, 2014). Many States intentionally cover the years before kindergarten since children are tracked and supported in the public education system once they enter school. However, systematically tracking and supporting children until they are in third grade reflects a recognition of both the scope and the developmental framework of the early childhood years.

Existing Infrastructure

State-local models of early childhood systems are different across States due to the variations in States' history, context, political environment, and leadership. States have often found that because of the significant needs that exist, when creating a state-local model, it is best to acknowledge the parts of the system that are already working and to build on existing strong, effective structures and programs. The next step is working to fill gaps and address unmet needs. This approach saves time and money that would otherwise be spent recreating what is working well and also provides an opportunity to revise and expand where needed.

Staffing

Another important lesson is the importance of having paid staffing at the state and local levels to support and carry out the local work. "The primary responsibilities of state-level staff (in state-local systems building) are to support, monitor, and provide technical assistance to advocate for the systems-building changes, policies and funding needed to support local efforts" (Cobb, 2014). State staffing that directly supports local efforts varies widely. Iowa's system initiative, Early Childhood Iowa, is an example of an effective approach with limited funding for state staffing positions. While there are only three administrative state staff positions per se, six state agencies, including Human Services, Education, Public Health, Economic Development, and Workforce Development and Management, also have provided staff support for the local work throughout Early Childhood Iowa's 15-year history. Arizona, California, Michigan, and North Carolina have dedicated state funding sources and provide more staff resources. This allows for greater capacity to support state and local systems building efforts in more direct, intensive, and ongoing ways.

Having paid staff at the local level is critical to building sustainable local early childhood partnerships and systems. Recent interviews with local leaders in Connecticut, conducted during the development of a framework for the State's local partnerships, underscored this need. One local leader said, "Volunteers are wonderful and we couldn't do all we do for children without them, but they come and go. We have to have consistent, ongoing leadership to keep moving ahead and to keep partners engaged and working together. We need paid staff who coordinate the work, build relationships and manage ongoing administration duties as part of their job!" (Ponder, 2016). Some States that provide funding for local staffing also specify minimum qualifications and minimum levels of skills, education, and experience for the staff.
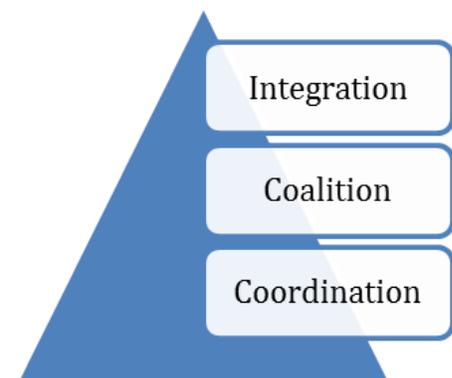
While staffing patterns at local partnerships range from minimal to larger numbers, based on funding and functions, States agree that having some level of paid staff is necessary. The authors of *Nuts & Bolts* summarized it this way, "If the goal is to create effective local early childhood systems on a statewide basis, resources dedicated to support staffing for these local collaboratives must be funded on a statewide basis." (Cobb & Ponder, 2014).

State-Local Models

There are no two state-local systems that are exactly alike, but in general, there are three basic models of state-local systems: 1) coordination, 2) coalition, and 3) integration. After outlining these three models, there will be a discussion of the commonalities across the models in the areas of integration and alignment (state-local) as well as feedback loops.

These models are not static. There is often a developmental continuum at work. For example, States that started their state-local work from the perspective of coordinating across the community often move to a decision-making coalition and then progress to an integration model with more functions that are added over time.

Figure 1. State-Local Models

Coordination Model

The coordination model was originally created to respond to concerns about community programs and services working in isolation from each other, sometimes serving the same children in different ways, with little engagement and without common goals and outcomes. Putting in place a local system that has coordination as its goal makes explicit that part of the state early childhood system's purpose is better coordination, reducing duplication and identifying gaps in services.

The coordination model is characterized by the creation of planning groups that may be school or community based. In Mississippi, for example, public schools are funded by the State as the convener of these groups and they are responsible for bringing together Head Start and child care programs in their areas for joint planning and learning. These groups are funded to coordinate meetings and share information, and they meet regularly, learn from each other, and consider ways to jointly fund and improve the outcomes for their children. Many coordination groups also focus on transitioning children from one system to another, such as from community child care and preschool to kindergarten. This helps ensure that children will be comfortable and adjust more easily when they start school.

Coalition Model

The coalition model builds on coordination. This model is characterized by formal planning groups with specific outcomes that are of mutual interest to the State and the community. Typically community coalitions receive some state funding and have specific functions related to ongoing early learning planning and implementation of program strategies. Some coalitions have formal authority, either legislative or regulatory, to carry out certain functions on behalf of the State. For example, Georgia's Early Education Empowerment Zones (E³Z's) were chosen to pilot new state initiatives, such as Georgia's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) work. Maryland's Transformation Zones were charged with providing professional development to early childhood professionals about the State's early learning standards and assessments.

Coalitions may be coordinated by community nonprofit organizations, school districts, or county governments. In some States, the coalitions receive funding for specific program activities. For example, Pennsylvania's Transformation Zones, based in public schools, receive funding for coordination as well as programmatic activities related to family engagement. These types of coalitions typically operate through a formal governing group or council and in most cases their council membership is defined by the State. (Ponder, 2015)

Integration Model

The integration model includes an administrative structure with statutory or gubernatorial authority granted to the locale for getting specific results and outcomes for children and their families. This model includes a local governing body, typically a board or council, and its members may be specified by the State in statute or rules. In some States, like Oklahoma, the structure is an independent council that operates through an organization that acts as its fiscal agent. In other States such as California, the structure is part of the local government. And in still others like North Carolina's Smart Start and Oregon's Early Learning Hubs, the local partnerships or hubs operate as nonprofit organizations.

Funding from the State may be provided for varying functions in this model. Funded functions typically include, at a minimum, a local needs assessment, coordination, planning, and collaboration to reduce duplication of services. Some States also fund these entities to plan, administer, and implement direct services. Colorado, for example, funds its local partnerships to provide support for the State's QRIS Colorado Shines, in addition to its local systems work. While some of the local entities actually provide direct services, others determine the most appropriate community entities to provide the services, allocate the funding to them for specific outcomes, and monitor them for results.

Commonalities across Models

Although there are variations in the models' scope, degrees of autonomy, and outcomes achieved, there are two areas that all three of them are committed to achieving: 1) better integration and alignment of all programs and policies, and 2) the creation of formal feedback loops between the State and local early childhood work.

Integration and Alignment between State and Local Communities

The two most common reasons that States began to consider formally connecting state and local work were (1) to address the challenges that stemmed from a lack of alignment between the State's programs and services and (2) to respond to the voices of parents and providers who were frustrated with trying to navigate the myriad programs and services that were operating with different rules and guidelines. The early pioneers in statewide systems building work found that a statewide early childhood system is better achieved and young children and their families are best served when there are direct linkages and alignment between the state and local systems.

Alignment is a key outcome of the state-local work. "In the states, system alignment begins with having common goals at the state and local levels, which are regularly reviewed and measured with the intention that policies be consistent at all levels" (Ponder 2015). This kind of coordinated system alignment includes having common, aligned data collection and reporting systems; building a continuum of child, program, and provider standards; and putting in place a statewide plan and measurement system for achieving common outcomes for children and families." Pennsylvania's Community Innovation Zones are required to align Pennsylvania's Early Learning Standards across the prekindergarten through third grade P-3 continuum in working with child care programs in their communities. (Ponder, 2015).

Feedback Loops between State and Local Partnerships

A feedback loop in an early childhood system is a communication mechanism that allows for input, feedback, and correction on an ongoing basis between the State and local level. Two-way feedback is used to adjust policies and practices at the state and local level so that more desirable outcomes are achieved. Feedback loops in States range in their availability and effectiveness. Over time it has become clear that in order to function well, these loops require a deliberate and well-communicated plan between the state and local partnerships. North Carolina created a practice-to-policy feedback loop to facilitate alignment between the State and counties. Counties in the State's Transformation Zone have successfully used this mechanism to ask for exceptions that better serve the needs of parents in their communities (Ponder, 2015).

Some States with local partnerships develop a network of local leaders who come together regularly for joint interaction and learning. In North Carolina, this network forms the basis for ongoing interaction between the State and local partnerships. State leaders attend the network meetings, share information about their state-level work, and ask for feedback on programmatic and policy issues. They also ask the local leaders to share local successes and struggles so that the State can be more helpful to them.

Another feedback loop that States are addressing in their local systems work is between consumers of the early childhood system, usually families, and the State and local partnerships. Consumers of services know best about what works for them and can be key informants of the early childhood system when given a chance to provide input. States have taken a variety of approaches to building these feedback loops. In some States, family members are required to participate in local partnerships and state planning groups and committees, which signals their importance in providing ongoing feedback and ultimately developing early childhood systems. In other States, family members are invited to join planning groups and committees to offer their opinions and advice.

Some States and local partnerships set up family focus groups so that family voices can be heard on policy and program development issues. In addition to families, some state and local partnerships also develop opportunities to get feedback from early learning providers on policy and program development. Recently in Mississippi, a new

entity named the Early Years Network, was created to better support providers throughout the State. The Mississippi Division of Early Childhood Care and Development set up sites across the State where staff from the Early Years Network met with providers from each geographic area to inform them about the new services to be offered. Early Years Network staff also listened to providers talk about their professional training needs and ways the Network can work best for them. These kinds of feedback loops have helped ensure that there is a higher quality of services that meet the needs of families and providers.

Promising Practices for State-Local Systems Building

State and local work that includes strong connections between state and local communities is an emerging approach in many States. There are a growing group of States that have been involved in the state-local collaborative models for a number of years and some practices are emerging that are promising for other States. These promising practices are in the areas of leadership, theories of change, technical support, and accountability and measuring outcomes.

Leadership

Everyone recognizes that leadership is important, at the state or local level. It matters a lot. When there are major struggles between the State and local communities, it is often the case that the right leaders are not in place. Here are some practices that state leaders believe make a difference in improving leadership for successful state-local partnerships:

♦ **Choose leaders strategically.** Be smart about filling gaps in leadership; take the time to assess the needs and match them with a person's skills so that the right work gets done.

♦ **Provide opportunities for leadership continuity**. Systems development occurs over time and needs leaders who have the experience to help ensure the early childhood agenda keeps moving along.

♦ **Engage strong, diverse leaders at the state and local level**. Build diverse leadership in multiple places, at different levels. Remember that different kinds of leadership serve functions both inside and outside the government and are needed for sustainability.

♦ **Engage leaders who value strong relationships**. Ensure that selected leaders have the ability to form and maintain strong working relationships. This requires an ongoing commitment to communications, inclusiveness, cooperation, and consensus.

♦ **Build and nurture leadership at all levels of the system**. Invest resources in leadership development both inside and outside government. Build strength all along the continuum—the governor's office, legislature, state agencies, advocacy organizations, local partnerships, local programs, and the public. (Wiggins, 2009)

Theories of Change

During their early planning stages, most state/local systems initiatives develop a theory of change to be sure that the strategies they determine will be best and will actually lead to the results they seek. Virginia's Smart Beginnings demonstrates how one State mapped out its theory. The following material from the *Smart Beginnings Theory of Change* is shared with permission from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, October 2016.

Theory of Change: Smart Beginnings for Virginia

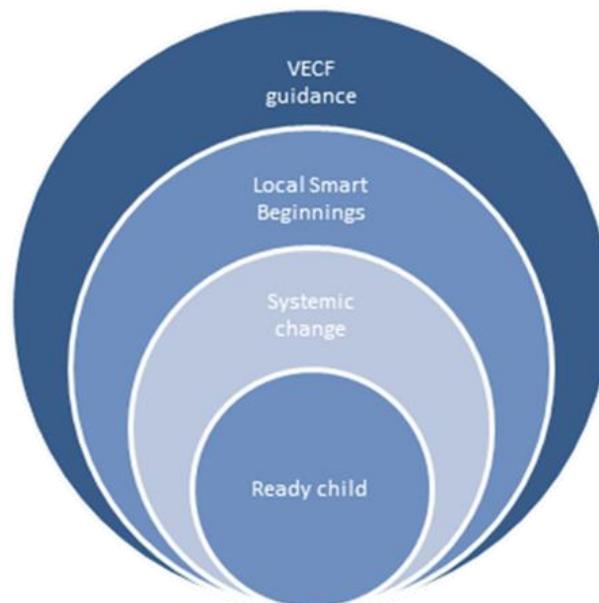**What Does It Take, Virginia?**

What does it take to build healthy, educated individuals who perform well throughout school and become productive members of society and the workforce?

It takes a smart beginning. Every child benefits from the following:

- A healthy birth and healthy development;
- Supported and supportive families; and
- Enriching early learning experiences.

How Do We Ensure Smart Beginnings for Virginia's Children?

If the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) guides/influences state-level conditions…	If Smart Beginnings promotes local-level conditions…	Then we see systemic change in communities evidenced by…	Resulting in these outcomes for children…
- Good policy - Standards - Effective measures - Financing - Data systems - Public will	- Coordination - Efficient integration - Effective service delivery - Quality assurance - Accountability - Public will	- Preventive health care - Empowered families - High-quality early learning	- Healthy births - Healthy development - School readiness

Source: Smart Beginnings Theory of Change, n.d.

Technical Assistance and Support

State and local leaders underscore the need for a state-level infrastructure that supports technical assistance for local partnerships. Almost every State called this out as a key to their success. Some local leaders thought their State's local partnerships suffered from not having that kind of infrastructure in place to provide the needed support to the local work.

"While communities naturally want to make their own decisions about what is needed for children and families, it is essential that they have the knowledge and expertise to support the development of a comprehensive local early childhood system." (Cobb, 2014). Community leaders vary in leadership skills, early childhood knowledge, and collaboration skills, and they want to make informed decisions about what is needed for their communities' young children and families. Because of these variations and differences, technical assistance needs vary by locality. Some partnerships need help with developing a comprehensive early childhood plan, while others need advice about specific early childhood programs and research-based strategies. Technical assistance and support that meets the varied needs of all local partnerships should be easily accessible to all partnerships and should address community needs assessments, collaborative planning, and cross-sector systems building, at a minimum. Technical assistance should also focus on best practices in program development.

The following are examples of specific technical assistance strategies from some States that appear to be delivering good results:

♦ **Iowa Empowerment.** The Community Empowerment Assistance Team provides support and technical assistance to Community Empowerment Areas. The team meets for 3 hours every other week to review technical assistance requests, discuss specific issues within local areas, and review annual reports and outcomes. Assistance in areas such as community planning, board development, and accountability are usually the focus, and individual technical assistance requests are provided via email, phone calls, or in person outside of quarterly meetings. In addition, Iowa Empowerment developed and made available the Iowa Community Empowerment Toolkit, which includes guidance in areas such as developing an early childhood agenda, developing community commitment, setting up an effective board, and achieving results. It also includes tools such as a collaborative functioning scale survey and information about the impact of open meeting laws at the local level.

♦ **North Carolina Smart Start.** Technical assistance and training needs across partnerships are broad and diverse, and a variety of approaches are in place by the North Carolina Partnership for Children. These approaches range from quarterly meetings of all local partnership directors to ongoing training and as-needed technical assistance. Topics include accounting, program development and monitoring, evaluation, organizational development, board development, strategic planning, collaboration, fundraising, and community outreach and engagement.

♦ **Smart Start Oklahoma.** Technical assistance is provided one-on-one to local sites as well as during the quarterly directors' meetings and during peer-to-peer opportunities (peer-to-peer is provided by sites that have shown success in specific areas and who can share with others). These meetings are held at a central location and are led by state-level staff. Local sites receive technical assistance in areas such as coalition building, public engagement, strategic planning, assessment and evaluation, grant writing, advocacy, subcontracting requirements, and collaboration. Because the local partnerships are all in very different places with respect to assessments, planning, and implementation, they have different technical assistance needs and the assistance is provided on an as-needed basis. (Cobb, 2014)

Accountability and Measuring Outcomes

One of Stephen Covey's seven habits of highly effective people can also apply to highly effective state-local early childhood systems: Begin with the end in mind. The question that must be answered early on when creating or reorganizing a statewide system of local partnerships is how to measure the success of the local coalition work, both as a collective whole and as individual partnerships. The ability to monitor and measure system, program,

and child outcomes that are part of a statewide system of local partnerships provides a mechanism to hold local partnerships accountable to families, funders, and state taxpayers.

Determining measurements or indicators of success can be done more easily at the beginning stage of developing local partnerships. It is especially challenging to put a measurement system in place once local partnerships are already involved in funding and managing a variety of strategies that are being measured in different ways. The need for a statewide measurement system is underscored when state leaders are educating policymakers and other funders about the State's early childhood work and are working to gain ongoing support for the local partnership structure. Having the ability to articulate the value of local partnerships' work, both individually and collectively, is critical for their sustainability.

In *A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives*, Julia Coffman makes the following points that should be considered when developing early childhood state and local evaluation systems:

1. Systems initiatives are not homogenous or static. They attempt to change different aspects of systems and focus on systems at different stages of development.

2. No one evaluation approach is sufficient or appropriate for all systems initiatives. Multiple evaluation approaches can be appropriate and useful, with different approaches "fitting" certain initiatives better than others.

3. Fundamental questions loom large in discussions about evaluating systems initiatives. These include whether experimental designs are appropriate or even possible in this context; under what conditions systems initiatives should be held accountable for demonstrating individual-level and systems-wide impacts for system beneficiaries; and whether the same evaluation methodologies can meet both the needs of funders and practitioners (Coffman, 2007).

Some of the approaches that States with local partnerships have taken so far focus on large long-term, statewide results such as improved school readiness, reduced drop-out rates, higher end of grade test scores, and higher graduation rates (Cobb, 2014). Other States measure outcomes though the evaluations of specific components of funded programs. Regardless of the chosen method, data collection, analysis, and reporting are key areas that should be addressed from the beginning of the development of a state/local early childhood system.

Some States are putting in place ways to measure systems outcomes. They believe that the true value of local partnerships being part of the statewide early childhood governance and system is their success in strengthening programs and services that are available to young children and their families. They also believe it is critical to make those services and supports available and accessible to all children, especially children with high needs.

The Early Childhood Iowa State Board adopted a single set of program measures for Early Childhood Iowa, and all local partnerships must annually report their results using these measures. This health and quality early learning data is compiled statewide and reported annually to the state legislature. Each local partnership is also involved in a rating process on a regular basis through what is known as Levels of Excellence. Each local partnership is rated either probation, compliant, quality, or model. This process allows local partnerships to grow and improve their functioning over time with support from Early Childhood Iowa, their state-level oversight and support agency.

Michigan's Great Start has a multi-pronged approach to evaluation, conducting both an annual evaluation of the Great Start systems-building efforts at the local level and also measuring progress toward direct outcomes of programs. The Great Start annual evaluation system has clarified key levers for positive change at the local level that appear to play the most important roles. The three most important levers that have been identified are a community's readiness for change, its intentional systems-change actions, and authentic parent leadership and voice.

In addition to more than 30 rigorous evaluations and studies of Smart Start done by the Frank Porter Graham Institute at the University of North Carolina, in 2000 the state legislature mandated that a system should be put in place to measure the progress of each local partnership's work. The North Carolina Partnership for Children, together with all of the State's Smart Start local partnerships and out of state experts, created a Performance

Based Improvement System (PBIS) in 2000. PBIS is an annual measurement of community progress in meeting specific benchmarks related to child health, family engagement and support, and early childhood learning. It is done on a county by county basis. This system sets standards for each local partnership, based on its current statistics, sets annual goals, and measures its progress toward reaching the goals and standards over time. PBIS data are collected from existing statewide data sources. For example, in the area of early care and education, each partnership has an annual target for the number of children who are placed in four- and five-star level programs. As importance result of this focus, all children who receive subsidies are now being served in four- and five- star programs statewide. In addition to PBIS, programs funded by local partnerships are held accountable for specific child and program outcomes.

State leaders who have created measurement systems such as those described in this section recommend that other States develop a clear set of desired outcomes at the very beginning of their efforts and make sure there is an adequate and user-friendly system in place for collecting and reporting data.

Closing

In *Early Childhood Systems: Transforming Early Learning*, Kagan and Kauerz document changes over time within the nation's early childhood systems and conclude with four recommendations needed to build a comprehensive vision and system of early care and education. They refer to these recommendations as a four-point approach:

1.   A comprehensive vision that is hallmarked by clear definitions and a clear conception of what young children need in order to thrive, prenatal to age 8;

2.   An operational focus within the vision to strategically achieve elements of the vision; (and they underscore the importance of a focus on the early care and education domain);

3.   An operational model or theory of change that sequences reform efforts that are designed to achieve the vision; and

4.   Emerging the vision and focus to produce a set of workable benchmarks that both guide and measure our systemic successes. (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012).

This four-point approach should give us food for thought as we review how our state-local early childhood systems are organized and working and consider changes needed to achieve better outcomes.

Although well coordinated and even unified state and local systems are relatively new approaches, they are showing promise as a way to systematically account for every child and to better understand each child's unique and diverse strengths and needs. The models that are now in place across the nation are continuing to strengthen their approaches and are demonstrating success in reaching children with the greatest challenges.

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