

A photograph of two young girls, one of Asian descent and one of African descent, smiling and painting on a wall. The girl on the left is wearing an orange shirt and has pigtails with yellow ties. The girl on the right is wearing a yellow shirt and has pigtails with blue ties. They are both holding paintbrushes. A yellow circular graphic with the text 'EXECUTIVE SUMMARY' is in the top right corner.

**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

Rising to the Challenge: Building Effective Systems for Young Children and Families, a BUILD E-Book

2015

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Preface

Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC) is the major federal funding initiative seeking to support states in developing high quality early childhood systems, especially targeted to children with high needs. Launched in 2011 as a joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, there have been three rounds of major grants under the ELC, with 20 states now participating and funding that totals just over \$1 billion.

This federal initiative had particular meaning to the BUILD Initiative and its founders, members of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative. For more than a decade, BUILD has served as a catalyst for change and a national support system for state policy leaders and early childhood systems development. Not only did BUILD's work help shape the federal initiative, but it was also the fulfillment of the founders' most fervent hopes—that states could create detailed blueprints for an early childhood system, with budgets to support significant infrastructure development. BUILD staff, consultants, and many colleagues in the field rose to the challenge and provided extensive support to states as they applied for, and now implement, the federal opportunity.

The Early Learning Challenge supports states in their efforts to align, coordinate, and improve the quality of existing early learning and development programs across the multiple funding streams that support children from their birth through age five. Through the ELC, states focus on foundational elements of a state system: creating high quality, accountable early learning programs through Quality Rating and Improvement Systems; supporting improved child development outcomes through health, family engagement and vigorous use of early learning state standards and assessments; strengthening the early childhood workforce; and measuring progress.

Thirty-five states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico applied for the 2011 round of the Early Learning Challenge grants with nine states initially and then five more selected from this pool for funding. Sixteen states plus the District of Columbia responded to a new 2013 third round of grants; six were selected.

Round 1: California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington

Round 2: Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin

Round 3: Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont

Since the launch of the ELC, grantee states have rapidly moved from concept to implementation. Through this E-Book, we share learnings from the initial implementation of the efforts, highlighting experience, trends, and reflections stemming from the significant federal investment in this strategic work. The chapters are authored by experts who have worked in tandem with state leaders to gather information. By documenting the experience of the states, captured through interviews with state leaders, *Rising to the Challenge* provides a source of learning for all fifty states and territories and puts into practice our leadership commitment to continuous learning in the best interests of the children and families to whom we are all dedicated.



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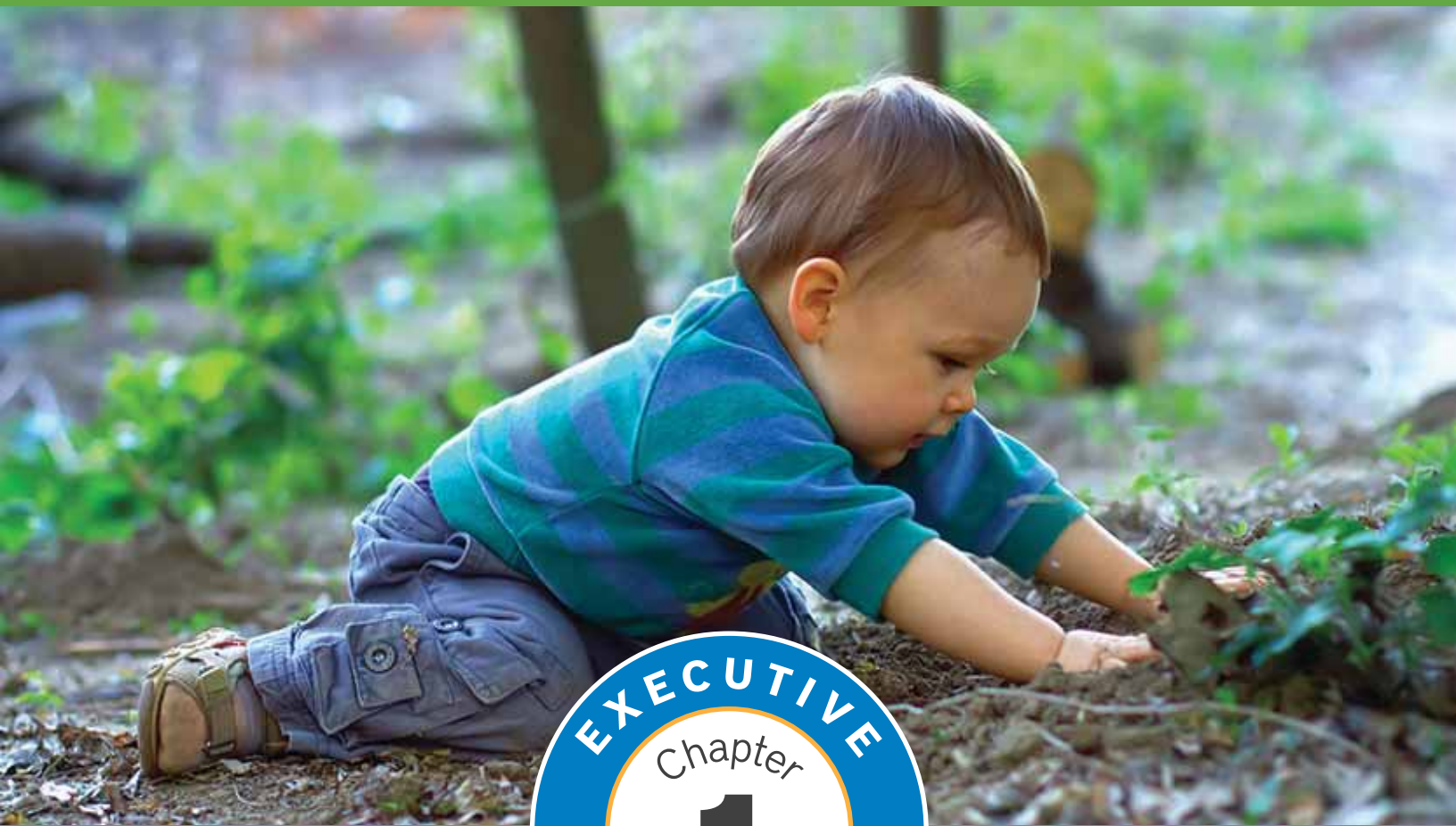
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**COMING
SOON!**
Chapter on
Quality Rating
and Improvement
Systems





EXECUTIVE
Chapter
1
SUMMARY

State Systems Building Through Governance

Harriet Dichter, J.D.
2015

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Executive Summary

States participating in the Early Learning Challenge (ELC) are actively using their governance structures to make sure that governance advances—rather than impedes—the mission to foster a strong early learning system that improves outcomes for low-income, at-risk children.

Harriet Dichter is an attorney and a long-time, nationally-recognized leader in the field of early learning. Late in 2014 she interviewed 14 representatives from ELC states Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Ohio, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin about their efforts to improve state governance.

The Early Learning Challenge came at a time when many state leaders had already recognized the importance of linking all early learning services to one another as well as to other early childhood services and were discovering gaps in their coordination of these services. The ELC did not explicitly require states to change their governance structures, but it did require that key executive branch functions work together. All the leaders interviewed for this chapter elected to work on governance because they believe it is essential to producing improved outcomes for children.

Three types of governance structure emerged in the states interviewed for this chapter.

The Governor's Office coordinates work across state agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illinois• Ohio
One Executive Agency coordinates the work of peer state agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colorado• Wisconsin
All work is consolidated in a single Agency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maryland• Oregon• Washington

The states that consolidated are convinced that their governance structures enable them to develop new and more robust strategies for early childhood, improved partnerships with health, higher education, and K-12, for example.

Some of the trends Dichter observed:

- **For states already moving to consolidate governance functions, the Early Learning Challenge accelerated momentum.**
- **Colorado** made progress toward its goal of consolidating governance functions in its Department of Human Services. **Ohio** created a new position for a policy leader in the Governor's office. Oregon consolidated eight independent stakeholder groups into one.
- **The ELC accelerated progress in connecting state and local leaders through local coalitions.** State leaders share a common understanding that the system as a whole benefits from having local stakeholders take on leadership roles and influence policy and program.
- **The ELC helped states expand stakeholder involvement, often in collaboration with the state's Early Learning Council.** All the states Dichter interviewed concurred that stakeholders add value to the process of improving outcomes for children and reported increasing the number and broadening the diversity of stakeholders.
- **Improved governance becomes a foundation for better service to children and their families by means of policy integration.** Integrating policies, i.e. eliminating duplicate policies and resolving conflicts between overlapping policies, is necessary and beneficial when a number of agencies have set policies independently of each other. Integrating policies and improving coordination among services for young children enables states to focus on the whole child and all the supports a low-income family needs. This section highlights four areas where improved governance facilitated policy integration and coordination:
 - o **Within their early learning systems,** states looked first to their Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to propagate improvements. **Washington** designed a strategic plan around families that need full-day, full-year care and learning for their young children. The state expanded the scope of its QRIS to include child care licensing, tuition assistance, and its pre-k program. **Colorado** scoured its QRIS for duplicate policies. A similar effort in **Illinois** made it possible to set universal standards rather than standards tied to funding source. **Maryland** designed incentives for child care providers to participate in its QRIS and improve the quality of their programs. **Maryland** is also rewriting its licensing standards to incorporate more quality predictors. Ohio is rewriting licensing standards, and it now has an integrated data set, which allows various agencies to present information to parents in a consistent way.
 - o **Higher education** is critical to developing a workforce that is skilled in providing high-quality early care and learning. **Illinois** and **Maryland** both invested in their state universities for the purpose of engaging faculty in the process of improving the education of early learning providers. **Illinois** is also articulating a training path for all early learning teachers that combines key elements from traditional teacher certification with early learning credentials.
 - o Some state leaders believe that families are better served when states **look at early education through a P-3 lens**—infancy through third grade—rather than the conventional birth-through-five and K – 12 approach. **Colorado** and **Maryland** are both taking this approach. In Maryland the early childhood office is part of the Department of Education. The state superintendent has mandated that early learning, elementary, and secondary offices all address issues such as standards, teacher effectiveness, and child assessments in order to create a coherent framework.
 - o Many states have launched projects to **link early learning with child health.** These efforts are the subject of Chapter 3. From the perspective of governance, **Oregon** and **Washington** brought together early learning and public health agencies to develop common goals; and **Wisconsin** used ELC funds to create a health and wellness staff position within the state's child and family agency.





- **The ELC helped states build the capacity for greater operating effectiveness.** The most common trend is the deployment of cross-agency management teams who are delegated the authority for making a variety of decisions. Because they are “close to the ground” and have diverse composition, these teams can make good decisions efficiently.

States have also worked to deepen their expertise and reset priorities in order to improve service delivery. Family engagement is one example. **Ohio** elevated family engagement by setting up a collaboration between the Governor’s office and an executive branch agency to oversee this issue. **Wisconsin** used ELC funds to create dedicated positions for family engagement policy and program analysis.

Maryland elevated its QRIS, which had been somewhat “buried” in its organizational hierarchy, to reflect the strategic importance of the QRIS to improved service delivery.

With respect to sustaining improvements in state governance after federal funding goes away, states expressed two concerns:

1. Those that used ELC funds to create new state leadership positions face the challenge of finding state

(or other) funds to sustain these positions. Some states, however, are cross-training agency staff so that all functions can be performed even if a position must be eliminated.

“ Leaders place a priority on their policy agenda—achieving quality services for children—and see governance as a means to realize their policy agenda.

2. Most of the states expressed frustration, of varying degree, that the ELC timeline is too short to allow for meaningful changes to take effect in state government and the broader community. Changes that states believe may exceed the four-to-five year ELC timeline:

- Completing the transformation of a fragmented state authority for early childhood to a centralized structure
- Bringing private child care businesses into a public-private partnership
- Cultivating state leaders with deep expertise in implementation and other strategic skills

State leaders noted that the ELC helped to change the conversation with the legislature, bringing significantly better awareness and understanding and, for some, early wins in terms of expanding investment in the early learning system. The ELC has already facilitated constructive conversations with legislators. Likewise, all the states expressed confidence that the ELC priorities had become state priorities and these priorities would be sustained beyond the grant funding.



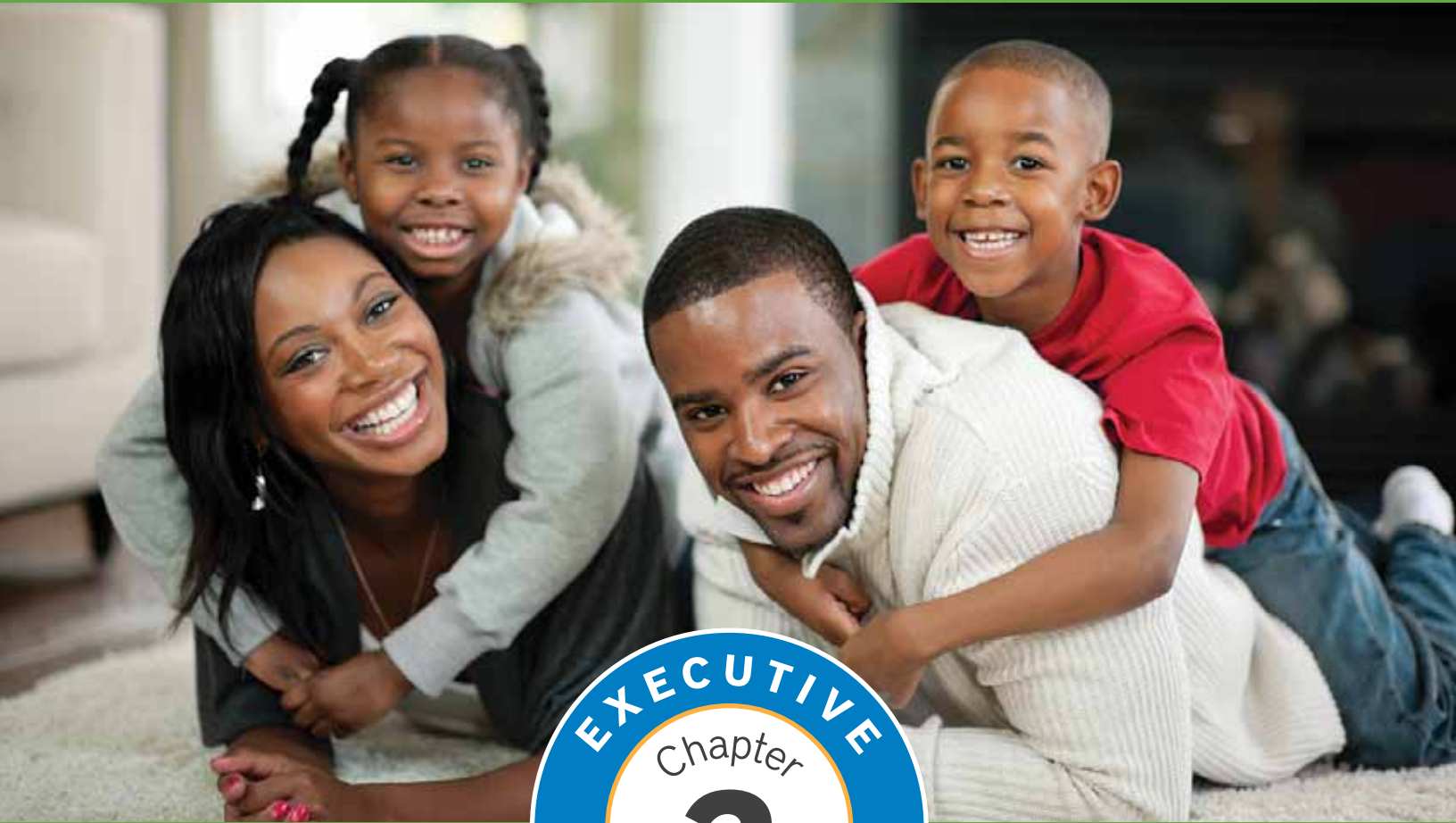
About the Author

Harriet Dichter has a multi-decade track record of innovation, partnership, and accountability in early childhood—at the local, state and national levels. As Pennsylvania’s founding Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development and Early Learning, she gained national attention for the state’s unique new solutions and partnerships. As founding Executive Director, Delaware Office of Early Learning, she accelerated the pace, quality, and accountability of the state’s comprehensive work in early childhood. In the national non-profit and foundation sector, she served as a leader for the Ounce of Prevention Fund and its policy advocacy affiliate, the First Five Years Fund, and worked as staff at the Pew Charitable Trusts. At the community level, she developed her policy, planning, implementation, leadership and advocacy skills in diverse organizations including local

government, where she directed the Maternal and Child Health Office of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health; United Way, a child policy and advocacy non-profit; and legal services. Harriet is a graduate of Yale (B.A. *summa cum laude*) and the University of Pennsylvania Law School (J.D. *cum laude*).

Author Acknowledgements

With thanks to the individuals who are doing work in the states and took the time to reflect and share their work: Colorado- Melissa Colsman, Stacey Kennedy, Sheryl Shushan; Illinois- Theresa Hawley and Julie Smith; Maryland- Rolf Grafwallner and Liz Kelley; Ohio- Alicia Leatherman; Oregon- Pam Curtis, Megan Irwin and Duke Shepherd; Washington- Bette Hyde and Heather Moss; Wisconsin- Amanda Reeve. Colleagues Joan Lombardi, Karen Ponder, Susan Hibbard, and Sherri Killins provided important guidance, review and input; their time and insight is appreciated.



EXECUTIVE
Chapter
2
SUMMARY

Local Systems Building Through Coalitions

Karen Ponder
2015

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Executive Summary

The overarching goal of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC) grant is to close the educational gap between young children with high needs and their peers, by supporting state efforts to build strong systems that provide better access to high quality programs for the children who need these most. This chapter examines eight states that engaged local leaders, through a coalition strategy, to expand local systems planning efforts and align local planning and service delivery with state goals.



Karen Ponder, an early childhood leader with intensive state and national leadership experience with all aspects of early care and education policy and service delivery, conducted interviews with leaders whose states represented all three rounds of ELC grants. Most already had local coalitions supporting state early learning and development initiatives. Three states created new local structures and partnerships as shown (New) below.

Year of ELC Funding			
2012		2013	2014
California	North Carolina	Oregon	Georgia (New)
Delaware (New)	Washington		Vermont
Maryland (New)			

One of the most important strategies for building sustainable local coalitions that Ponder observed is to engage the larger community to value and support them. States with formal local structures that have been in place for a number of years have seen that the interest and engagement of the broader community, including business leadership,

foundations, faith communities and others, can lead to joint investments, joint funding and local responsibility for the coalition's long term success.

Ponder also observed 12 additional strategies that states converged on.

Cross-Cutting Strategies in Local Coalitions									
Strategy	Total	CA	DE	GA	MD	NC	OR	VT	WA
1. Orient local coalitions to support state goals and objectives	All	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
2. Prioritize children with high needs, high risk	All	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
3. All sectors involved (families, ECE, K-12, health, human services)	All	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4. Educate and engage the public in local communities	All	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
5. Involve and engage families	All	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
6. Reach out to families to connect them with services	6/8	3	3	3		3	3		3
7. Coordinates services	7/8		3	3	3	3	3	3	3
8. Involve local coalitions in quality improvement	5/8	3		3	3	3		3	
9. Involve local coalitions in designing and/or implementing Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)	3/8	3		3	3				
10. Informs state of local lessons and makes recommendations	4/8		3	3		3			3
11. Use data for decision-making, quality improvement	3/8					3	3		3
12. Create links between early learning & K-12	2/8		3	3	3				

Four major findings characterize Ponder's observations about the work of the states.

Alignment Between State and Local Systems Leads to More Effective Services

System alignment begins with setting common goals at state and local levels and measuring progress against goals. Some states are creating local systems with administration and implementation responsibilities. Others are creating coalitions that bring together stakeholders to reach out to their communities and improve the coordination of services. States are devising a variety of tools and methods to establish and maintain alignment.

Coordinated Data

Vermont Local programs are required to update the state's comprehensive early childhood database (part of a data system still under construction) so that the state can track all young children to make sure they are holistically prepared for kindergarten.

Maryland requires local advisory councils to create annual action plans consistent with the state's priorities on supporting low-income children, children with disabilities, and English-Language Learners. **Oregon** conducts annual reviews of regional plans, checking for alignment with state plans and negotiating outcomes to be achieved by the regional hubs.

Vermont also reviews regional action plans for alignment with the state plan. **Washington's** Early Learning Coalitions are educating parents and early learning providers about kindergarten readiness and how to prepare children for WaKIDS, the state's kindergarten entrance assessment. The coalitions place particular emphasis on math skills because these were found to be deficient throughout the state.

“The success of local coalitions rests, in part, on the individuals who lead them, including their vision and the ability to translate that vision into action.”

Policy Feedback and Communication Loops

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. Georgia has established transformation zones and is in the process of creating a bottom-up system in which families will have input into the design of local practices so that state policy-makers will understand local needs.

Joint Meetings and Unified Policies

In **Maryland** local councils implement the policies and strategies set by the state's Early Learning Advisory Council. Local councils' bylaws are identical to the state's, and state and local councils keep in touch through joint meetings. **Delaware** wrote a strategic plan for the state that guides both state and local activities. Local consortia in **California** organized their action plans around ELC priorities and developed tasks and timelines similar to the state's ELC scope of work.

States Invest in Local Leadership Development

The success of local coalitions rests in part on the individuals who lead them. Local leaders must be able to articulate their visions, translate vision into action plans, and assemble diverse work groups to achieve common goals. Half of the states Ponder interviewed have created training and development opportunities for local coalition leaders. **Maryland** partnered with a private foundation to provide 10 days of leadership training for five to six people from each local council's steering committee. The in-depth training included results-based facilitation and accountability. **North Carolina** invests in an intensive Leaders Collaborative that offers specialized training in 1) driving results-based accountability; 2) leading for equity and closing the gap on disparities; and 3) building collaborative leadership. The Leadership Collaborative is available to all local leaders in North Carolina. **Vermont** has created a Technical Assistance Bank to provide technical assistance, training, and support for its 12 regional councils, with the goal of developing local leaders to act as neutral, non-partisan conveners, connectors,





collaborators, and communicators. **Oregon** and **North Carolina** both meet with local coalitions on a regular basis and allow time for skill building and two-way communications during these sessions.

Developing Local Capacity Requires Time and Attention

Infrastructure must be in place before local coalitions can deliver high-quality, evidence-based programs and services that improve child outcomes; and “infrastructure” includes the networks that connect local coalition members with each other and their counterparts in state governance. All the states using ELC funds to build and support local coalitions report that the structural development of these coalitions is one of their biggest wins to date. The process of organizing local coalitions, engaging or re-engaging partners, understanding the needs of young children in local jurisdictions and developing local plans of action all take time, tailored attention and strong support from the state level.

Two strategies are helping states develop local capacity. **North Carolina, Oregon, and Vermont** all have legislation in place that legitimizes and empowers local structures. Washington was able to codify its local coalitions as part of the State Advisory Council. All states consider the linkages between early learning and K-3 important for young children and families and are working to create those linkages. **Delaware** and **Maryland** view their ELC work as building an intentional foundation between early learning and K to 3 education systems.

Sustainability Requires Planning

Leaders in all the states interviewed by Ponder recognized from the beginning that thoughtful planning would be required to sustain the improved infrastructure they developed with ELC funds.

Engaging a Broad Constituency

Many state leaders expressed the hope that the coalitions which have been adopted by local communities are now perceived as a necessary and integral part of the equitable, comprehensive early learning systems in their states.

Creating Intentional Communication and Support

Public communication and local educational opportunities are key to engaging a broad constituency to support local early learning coalitions. In **North Carolina**, where a system of local coalitions has been in place for some time, community support enabled the local coalitions to implement the state’s prekindergarten program successfully and in a timely manner. **Washington’s** early learning coalitions are also playing an important role in that state’s pre-k program.

Funding the Ongoing Operations of Local Coalitions

States have pursued a variety of sources to fund the ongoing operations of their local coalitions. **Delaware** has secured private funding and is working to increase partnerships with the public school system that could result in joint funding. **Georgia** is going after private funding with the rationale that improvements to the early learning system are necessary to promote economic development. **Maryland** is helping its local councils embed their work more deeply into their communities as a way to demonstrate even more value. **North Carolina, Oregon and Vermont** have state budget line items to support the ongoing work of local coalitions. Washington also has state funding from a combination of sources including a public-private partnership. **California** has a stable funding source created through its Proposition 10.

Using Data to Demonstrate Progress

All the ELC states are working to improve the data systems that allow (or will allow) them to track children from prenatal to college and provide aggregate data to support decisions by policy makers. **Delaware** created a data dashboard that pulls data about the progress of ELC initiatives from multiple sources. It will eventually be populated from the state’s integrated early childhood database. **Vermont** has a plan to create a single longitudinal data system by the end of the ELC grant.



About the Author



Karen W. Ponder is an early childhood consultant whose work focuses on building comprehensive state early childhood systems. She is the former President and CEO of the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. She helped to create Smart Start and administered it at the state level and provided guidance to community partnerships for 15 years. Karen has been involved in all aspects of early care and education, as a teacher, center director, board member, teacher educator and government policy maker. She graduated *summa cum laude* from North Carolina State University and also studied at Anderson University and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

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Early Learning-Health Connections

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2015

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Executive Summary

Considerable state momentum exists to develop or enhance systems to link child health (including mental health) with early learning. Late in 2014, pediatrician Jill Sells interviewed representatives of the nine states that received Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC) grants and chose to address health promotion. This chapter describes the work of these nine states: California, Delaware, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, and Vermont. States indicated they focused on health promotion in the ELC for various reasons: a previous health focus in the state; prior experience developing cross-sector networks; and the leadership of pediatricians in public health.

Although each state developed a unique leadership strategy, all states pursued high level engagement of both state agencies and primary care providers. States used leadership groups to help guide or implement their ELC health projects. These were typically multi-disciplinary with both public and private partners. States described intentional cross-sector project management involving multiple layers, from early childhood advisory councils, to sub-committees, to cross-agency leadership.

Eight of the nine states launched projects to expand developmental screening and provide families with referrals and links to appropriate services. Efforts focused predominately on screening within primary care health settings and early childhood programs, with states often seeking to bridge these into one system. A variety of cross-system outreach, training, and implementation projects are being undertaken which demonstrate the challenges and opportunities with regard to supporting families and providers and moving a statewide system forward. Overall, the increase in screening rates is impressive. Oregon nearly tripled the number of children screened in its first project year, and California, Delaware and North Carolina report gains of 48%, 23%, and 9% over two years. Collectively, these four states screened 116,300 more children with high needs in the past year compared to project baseline.

Seven of nine states implemented or enhanced programs that provide consultations to early learning and child care providers. Other projects include expansion of Reach Out and Read, an evidence-based parenting and early literacy program implemented by primary health care providers; making developmental screening a rated factor in the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS); and expanding centralized community hubs to link families with infants and young children to health and other services.

” Oregon nearly tripled the number of children screened in their first project year, and California, Delaware and North Carolina report gains of 48%, 23%, and 9% over two years.

Health Project Highlights by State

CA	<p>Implementing the California Statewide Screening Collaborative to promote and deliver effective and well-coordinated health, developmental and behavioral screenings for young children, birth to age 5, through medical providers and early childhood educators.</p> <p>Distributing developmental screening kits with training for early learning providers.</p> <p>Incorporating health and developmental screening as rated elements in its Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).</p> <p>Implementing the Help Me Grow (HMG) model in 22 of its 58 counties.</p>
DE	<p>Implementing developmental screening with primary health care providers.</p> <p>Incenting developmental screening by early learning providers through trainings, free screening resources, and QRIS ratings.</p> <p>Establishing a central Help Me Grow telephone hub that families and providers can call for referrals and connections related to developmental concerns.</p> <p>Tripling the number of early childhood mental health clinicians who consult with early learning programs, prioritizing those in the QRIS.</p> <p>Improving social-emotional knowledge and skill of early learning providers.</p> <p>Using Health Ambassadors for community-based outreach to connect families to services.</p>
MD	<p>Providing online and in-person developmental screening training for child care providers.</p> <p>Expanding early childhood mental health consultation with early learning programs.</p> <p>Expanding the Reach Out and Read parenting and early literacy program in primary health care settings.</p> <p>Strengthening primary care providers' ability to support early childhood mental health in the medical home through telephone consultation and training opportunities.</p>
MI	<p>Using child care consultants to train child care providers in the importance of developmental screening, and encouraging them to talk with families about this.</p> <p>Deploying child care health consultants as part of the QRIS in communities of high need.</p> <p>Deepening use of social-emotional consultants through QRIS in communities of high need.</p> <p>Updating child care licensing standards relating to health and social-emotional health.</p>
NJ	<p>Expanding developmental screening statewide through both health care and early childhood providers; introducing developmental screening as a rated part of its QRIS.</p> <p>Ensuring that children have a medical home and appropriate referrals to early intervention; sharing developmental screening results with primary care providers.</p> <p>Leveraging existing early childhood services, such as Head Start/Early Head Start, to ensure follow-up referrals after developmental screening occurs.</p> <p>Implementing a new approach to sustain child health and mental health consultation by cross-sector statewide workforce training.</p> <p>Expanding community-based intake hubs as a single point of entry to link families with children to local supports and services (pregnancy to age 8).</p>

Health Project Highlights by State

NM	<p>Training early learning providers on developmental screening and how to connect families to primary care providers.</p> <p>Infusing early childhood mental health competencies into early childhood provider training and consultation models.</p> <p>Introducing mental health as a scored part of the QRIS.</p> <p>Training early learning providers to help families understand the role of primary care providers and the medical home and promote well-child checkups and dental visits.</p> <p>Working to increase infant and early childhood mental health competencies and looking at gaps in services when trying to refer families.</p>
NC	<p>Enhancing developmental screening and referral in primary care through a regional health network; incorporating developmental and autism screening into well-child visits.</p> <p>Enhancing its child care health consultation program by adding more staff, adding a new coaching model for its consultants, and developing a new app for data capture.</p> <p>Implementing a nurse home-visiting program in its Transformation Zone communities of high needs.</p> <p>Expanding the evidence-based Triple P parenting program to 17 counties, including training for physicians and child care providers.</p> <p>Expanding the Reach Out and Read parenting and early literacy program in primary health care settings in the Transformation Zone.</p>
OR	<p>Building a universal developmental screening system with coordination between primary care and early childhood providers.</p> <p>Using developmental screening as an accountability metric in both health and early learning with a goal of universal screening.</p> <p>Training early learning and home visiting providers in developmental screening.</p> <p>Supporting coordination between health, early learning, and education through a new state staff position.</p>
VT	<p>Implementing a universal developmental screening and linkage to services system by blending the silos of education, early intervention, and medical providers into one system.</p> <p>Making developmental screening an accountable health care outcome measure.</p> <p>Creating a shared developmental screening data base accessible to both child care and primary care providers.</p> <p>Funding a new position to coordinate the work of 18 nurses who provide child care health and safety consultation; training them in child development, nutrition, and physical activity.</p> <p>Using Help Me Grow as an umbrella to provide families with an integrated menu of health, social, and educational services.</p>

Notes on Terminology

Child Care Health/Mental Health Consultant A professional with health/mental health expertise who provides consultation to early learning providers.

Developmental Screening A method to screen young children for developmental delays using a standardized, validated screening tool. Examples include the [Ages and Stages Questionnaire](#) and the [PEDS \(Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status\)](#) screening tool, both of which rely on parent input.

Help Me Grow A comprehensive system to identify children at risk for developmental delays and connect them to needed services. Help Me Grow is a public-private initiative with a national center and state affiliates.

(Tiered) Quality Rating and Improvement System (T/QRIS) A state system to assess and support quality improvement in child care and early learning programs. Required for all states participating in the Early Learning Challenge.

Reach Out and Read A parenting support and early literacy program embedded in pediatric preventive care visits for children birth through 5 coordinated by a national non-profit organization with public-private partnerships and state affiliates.

While state leaders reported considerable challenges, particularly around cross-system collaboration and data systems, they also reflected on successes across their varied health projects. A core commitment to health; the engagement of cross-agency leadership and of primary care medical providers; and shared leadership and oversight with a commitment to common goals appear to be key factors for making progress at the intersection of health and early learning. State leaders also emphasize the importance of cultural context, supports for families, supports for providers, and supports to move state systems forward. States are seeing concrete results for children and families, with those far enough long in the ELC reporting impressive gains in child participation in developmental screening.

While it is too early to know the overall impact of the early learning-health work taking place within the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, the excitement about its potential is significant. These states are unequivocal about the importance of health in early childhood, committed to making progress in their own states, and eager to share their experiences with others. By strengthening relationships and building from existing work, these states are leveraging their efforts to assure the optimal health and development of all young children.



About the Author



Dr. Jill Sells is a pediatrician and innovative early childhood health, development, and systems leader. After practicing general pediatrics in the Seattle area, she has spent more than a decade working on population-level strategies to support the health and development of young children in the context of their families and communities. She supported the strategic planning of Washington's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant and State Early Learning Plan, and serves as an early childhood consultant to SRI International. As a non-profit executive she has created statewide systems to engage doctors in early childhood policy advocacy and integrate early literacy promotion into primary care through Reach Out and Read. Dr. Sells has unique expertise in early childhood systems, particularly at the intersections between health and early learning. She is a clinical associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Washington and serves in early childhood leadership and advisory roles at the national, state, and local levels. She is known for her skills at translating research into policy and practice, and facilitating cross-systems collaboration to improve outcomes for children and families.

Author Acknowledgments

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EXECUTIVE
Chapter
4
SUMMARY

Trends and Innovations in Early Childhood Education Workforce Development

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Randi B. Wolfe, Ph.D.
2015

Build
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Our Youngest Children



Executive Summary

A growing body of research over the past 30 years demonstrates that the quality of early childhood programs is largely determined by the quality of the providers. Ensuring adequate preparation, training and support for the early childhood education (ECE) workforce is thus the states' greatest area of leverage for improving the quality of children's experiences. Workforce development was one of five key areas of reform in the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC). Former professor and early childhood consultant Randi B. Wolfe, Ph.D., interviewed ECE leaders in seven states that received ELC grants. This chapter highlights five common design trends—professional development system capacity, career pathways, coaching for effective practice, accessibility to professional development, and cross-sector collaboration – among a wide variety of creative and innovative approaches to improving professional development opportunities. The states included represent various areas of the country, an array of demographics and size, and all three ELC funding phases, as noted below.

STATE	Total Challenge Award	Workforce Development Allocation (\$)	Workforce Development Allocation (%)
Colorado	\$44.9 million	\$6.6 million	15%
Illinois	\$52.5 million	\$13.1 million	25%
North Carolina	\$70 million	\$23.2 million	33%
Oregon	\$30.8 million	\$6.9 million	22%
Pennsylvania	\$51.7 million	\$8.7 million	17%
Rhode Island	\$50 million	\$14.6 million	29%
Washington	\$60 million	\$24.5 million	41%

Expanding the Capacity of Professional Development Systems

States are engaged in a variety of innovations to expand the capacity of their professional development systems.

Oregon provides a useful model of a comprehensive, integrated and aligned professional development system. Both the early childhood education workforce registry and the child care licensing system are integrated into Oregon's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The impact of this comprehensive integration has been significant. Rates of participation in the QRIS have sky-rocketed. In the past, an average of 200 early care and education professionals applied to the workforce registry annually. By contrast, recently, over 650 professionals applied in just one month. The increased interdependence between the QRIS and professional development systems has also fostered greater participation rates in training and professional development because staff have to be at higher steps on the registry in order for their place of employment to qualify at a higher QRIS tier.

A \$1.2 million Professional Development Information System (PDIS) now under construction in **Colorado** offers a promising model that other states can replicate. Early childhood professionals will be able to enroll in the state's workforce registry; post professional portfolios—including college transcripts, employment histories, and professional development activities; complete self-assessments with respect to the state's research-based Competencies for Early Childhood Educators and Administrators; and create professional development plans. Colorado's PDIS is linked to its QRIS, and programs receive credit in the QRIS when staff enroll in the workforce registry and complete the activities shown above.

Washington is making professional development more accessible and affordable primarily to attract a more diverse workforce. The state developed and now offers online courses and related scholarship programs that are aligned with its QRIS standards. As a result, it has seen increased participation by family child care providers and other non-traditional learners. Washington also developed a four-day, intensive "Early Achiever Institute," offered in English and Spanish to providers who participate in the state's QRIS. Institute participants study the observation tools that are

fundamental to the QRIS, learn about the research that supports high-quality instructional interactions, and focus on practical implementation of evidence-based strategies to improve child outcomes.

Rhode Island created its \$14 million Center for Early Learning Professionals to transform the way early childhood professionals are trained. Before the Center was established, providers trained their employees informally. Training provided by the Center is aligned with the state's workforce competencies for ECE professionals. The Center also works closely with state officials, enabling it to approve professional development activities toward training required for child care licensing. The Center has a central hub, satellite locations and offers training online, in Spanish as well as in English.

“A growing body of research over the past 30 years demonstrates that the quality of early childhood programs is largely determined by the quality of the providers.”

Stronger Career Paths Support Greater Professionalism

One important goal in the field of early childhood education is to see ECE professionals accorded the same respect as and receiving equitable compensation to other professionals who work with children and families: elementary school teachers, social workers, etc. Improving the quality of training for ECE professionals is critical to that goal. States have adopted a variety of strategies to improve professional development opportunities for the workforce. **Oregon** established a mechanism, through its ECE registry and community colleges, to give ECE professionals college credits for prior learning and work experience.

To help ECE providers focus on developing specific competencies, **North Carolina** shifted from awarding training hours to awarding Continuing Education Units (CEUs). The state also increased the number of contact hours required for approved trainings, establishing five contact hours (one-half a CEU) as the minimum. The content of training that carries CEUs must be evidence-based, research-based, and developed by university faculty.



Rhode Island extended its ECE competency framework to include early childhood special education and early intervention roles and competencies. The state also created new frameworks for family child care providers, administrators, educational coordinators, and professional development providers. The inclusion of the latter has expanded the pool of people qualified to provide professional development and technical assistance to the ECE workforce, thus accelerating the movement toward higher quality and professionalism.

Pennsylvania is in the process of developing competencies for home visitors. The state also recognized the need for continuing education of “knowledge mediators,” those who assist others in professional development activities, and is developing new credential programs for Peer Mentors and Master Consultants.

Illinois is in the process of piloting new credential programs for Family Child Care providers, Family Specialists, and Technical Assistance providers.

Coaching Supports Improved Practice and Efficacy

One-on-one coaching is becoming more prevalent as a professional development strategy. It can take the form of mentoring, technical assistance and/or observation. Colorado already had coaching competencies and a Coaching Credential in development when it allocated \$847,000 to build out an equitable state-wide coaching system. Based on a needs assessment, the state is planning a two-day training with follow-up webinars for 47 coaches around the state. The training includes a focus on reflective supervision. **Colorado** has also hired four regional coaching consultants to provide ongoing support, supervision, and regional training to coaches working toward their Coaching Credentials. **Washington** is investing \$17.5 million to develop a coaching network that can serve as a conduit for a variety of professional development offerings in the future. The state created a coaching and technical assistance framework—integrated with its QRIS—and solicited feedback on implementation from people across the ECE sector (e.g., Head Start, center-based and family providers, state-funded pre-K teachers). Prospective coaches must become proficient in the observation/assessment tools used in Washington (e.g., CLASS and Environment Rating Scales). They receive training in practice-based coaching and adult resiliency and wellness. Before earning coaching certificates, they complete an internship and demonstrate an ability to



improve program quality. They will eventually receive college credit for their training. Coaches and their protégés have access to an online video tool that the state developed with philanthropic investment called The Coaching Companion. Providers who receive coaching use The Coaching Companion to videotape themselves practicing new skills, then upload their videos for their coaches to review and give feedback. Coaches can also connect providers with each other in small groups so that they can learn to give peer feedback and offer support.

Incentives Make Professional Development Affordable and Accessible

A variety of approaches demonstrate the range of outcomes for which states are introducing incentives. **Washington** allocated \$12 million from its federal Child Care and Development Block Grant for scholarships to QRIS participants continuing their college education. The scholarship program has resulted in more individuals choosing to participate in the QRIS from an earlier point in their careers, more ECE workforce members attending institutions of higher education than ever before, and new faculty being hired to meet the demand created by increased enrollment. The state allocated another \$6 million to professional development incentives for individuals. Funding is used to encourage participants to join the ECE registry, reward participants who move up to higher levels on the registry, and support individuals to continue along their educational pathway. The investment has yielded a better understanding of the composition and needs of the ECE workforce and a better understanding of the educational pathways that they pursue.

Colorado is funding three incentive/scholarship programs to encourage degree attainment. The state invested \$345,000 in the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship program, increasing its investment by 300%. Colorado also offers dollar-for-dollar matched funds through the Colorado Community College Foundation to community colleges for students preparing for ECE careers. All 16 of the state's community college early childhood programs are participating, and a recent report indicated that almost 75% had raised the matching funds. Through its special education program (SPED), the state offers scholarships and loan forgiveness to students interested in early intervention and early childhood special education. Out of Colorado's \$160,000 investment in SPED, 50% was used for scholarships, 25% for loan forgiveness, and 25% for recruiting and retention.

In **North Carolina**, where 85% of centers are rated at 3 stars or above in the QRIS, the state incentivizes top quality by awarding professional development bonuses of \$500 to \$3,000 (based on center size) to centers that achieve 4- or 5-star QRIS ratings. To qualify for the professional development bonus, centers must meet several requirements, including that each staff member must have an annual, individual professional development plan. It is taking time for centers to qualify for the incentive program because addressing the developmental goals and needs of individual staff members is a new practice for most centers.

Cross-Sector Collaborations Support Innovation

Collaborations among various ECE sectors, other child-serving systems, and/or institutions of higher education can move the entire field toward greater professionalism and public recognition. In **Pennsylvania**, a five-day Governor's Institute brings together ECE professionals with K-12 teachers and administrators to form relationships and exchange information about the PreK – 3rd grade concept. **North Carolina** is making grants to 24 community colleges to support their ECE programs' applications for NAEYC accreditation. The Institute for Early Childhood Teaching and Learning at **Rhode Island** College targets the incumbent ECE workforce, offering BA-level courses along with targeted advising and remedial reading, writing and math support to help ensure that these students, many of whom are non-traditional students, succeed at their college studies. Courses are offered at night, on weekends and online. **Illinois** is funding collaborations between community colleges and four-year institutions

aimed at improving professional development for the ECE workforce. One example is a partnership that created flexible pathways that allow students to pursue degrees while taking some classes at a community college and others at a four-year institution.

Conclusion

ECE workforce and professional development systems are being successfully built, strengthened and expanded. Within these systems, the definition of quality is being clarified, formalized and extended to wider segments of the ECE workforce through the implementation of coaching models, the creation of new categories of professional credentials, and the articulation of competencies for an increasing number of specific roles, responsibilities and expectations.

Institutions of higher education are emerging as essential partners in ECE workforce and professional development. They are collaborating with state ECE leaders to address the needs of non-traditional students, including language needs and academic supports, and these efforts are guided by a common goal of valuing and retaining the diversity of the ECE workforce while simultaneously increasing levels of professionalism.

The state leaders Wolfe interviewed face common challenges. One is engaging all segments of the ECE community (e.g., center-based programs, family child care homes, resource and referral networks, Head Start, infant and toddler centers) so that the entire workforce is strengthened and all children benefit, no matter their age, socioeconomic status, location, or the ECE context in which they are served. Many states are finding it challenging to construct universal definitions of quality given the differences that exist among the participating sectors. Another common challenge derives from the language needs of the workforce as well as the young children being served.

Compensation, as well as workforce support, remains the elephant in the room. If the issue of adequate, comparable compensation is not remedied, ECE professionals with training and preparation equal to K-12 teachers will continue to migrate to the K-12 system. Similarly, until ECE reflects and expects an appropriately high level of professionalism, the field runs the risk of losing capable, creative people who elect instead to enter areas that proffer better pay, better benefits and greater respect.

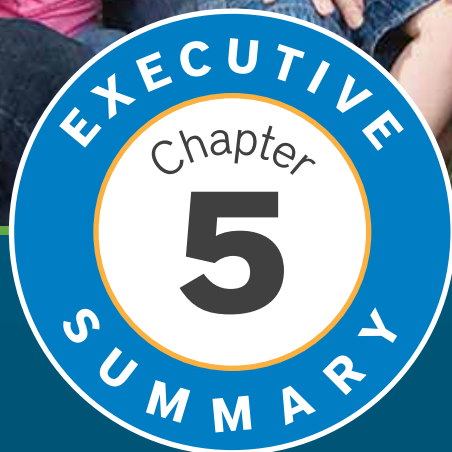
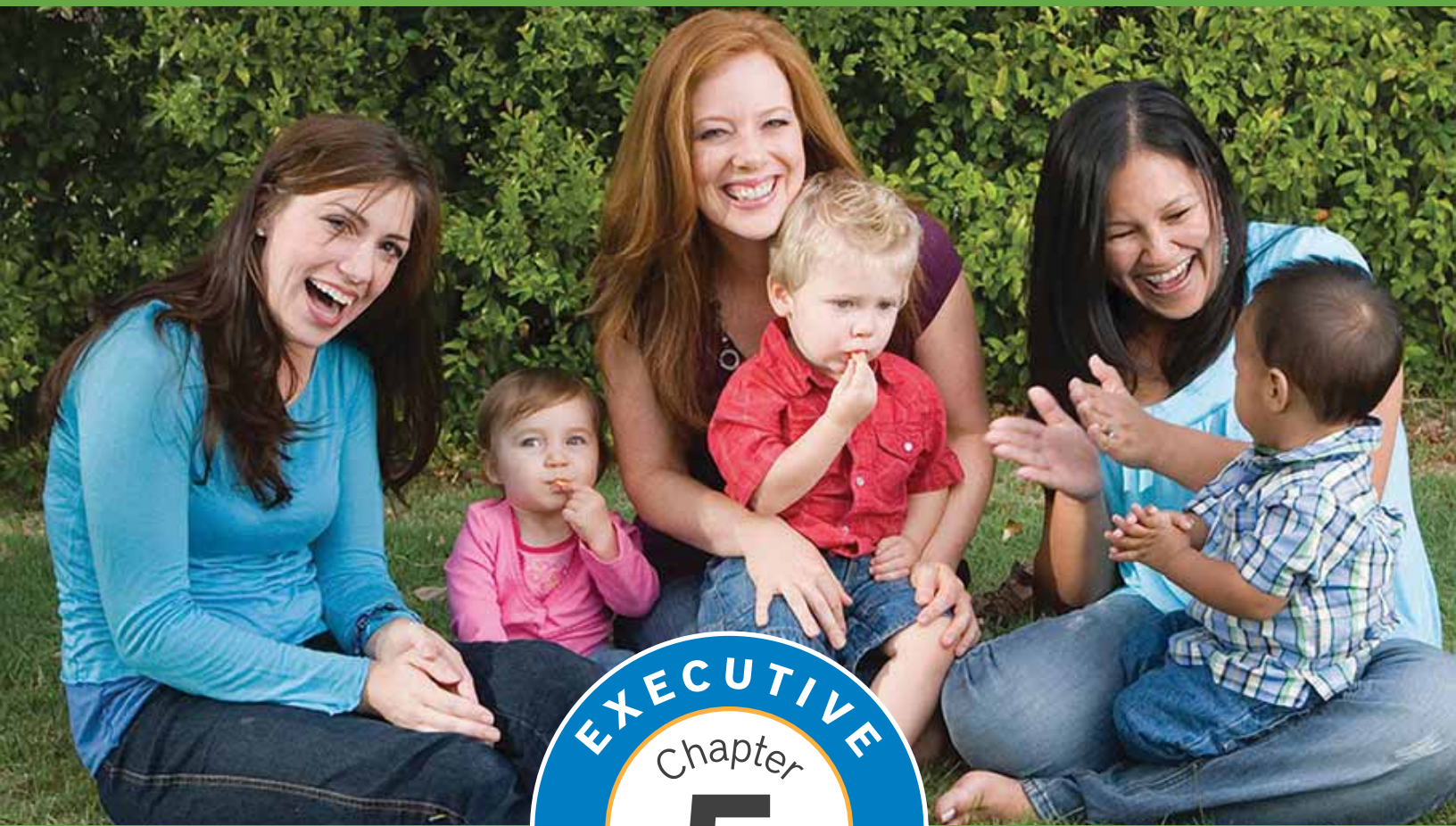
About the Author



Randi B. Wolfe, Ph.D., has worked in ECE for more than 35 years. She has taught preschool, directed a child care center, and developed a family support center. She was a professor of Early Childhood Education at Northern Illinois University for 10 years. Since moving to Los Angeles in 2007, Randi has focused on ECE workforce development and policy. She created an Early Care and Education Workforce Initiative that awarded grants to collaborations of community colleges, universities and feeder high schools aimed at removing barriers and creating pathways to ECE careers. She instituted an incentive program to provide stipends to ECE teachers completing college coursework and pursuing degrees. And she built the LA County ECE Workforce Consortium and secured \$37 million in funding.

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P-3 Reform in Vision and in Practice

Kate Tarrant, Ed.D.
2015





Executive Summary

Recognizing the many benefits of early childhood educational experiences, the Early Learning Challenge (ELC) encouraged state policymakers to design systems that carry these benefits into the early elementary grades. This encouragement grew stronger over the three rounds of ELC competition. In the first and second rounds of the ELC, initiated in 2011 and 2012, states were allowed to invest ELC funds to address early learning into elementary school years but did not receive any credit for developing a plan for this “invitational” priority. By the third round of the competition, released in 2013, this area was elevated to a “competitive preference priority area,” giving states the option to earn points for “creating preschool through third grade approaches to sustain improved early learning outcomes through the early elementary grades.”

Significantly, all the states that received funding in the third round of ELC competition wrote to this area.

A Note About P-3

“P-3,” as used in this chapter, represents educationally-oriented services for children from birth through third grade. Within the early childhood field, the phrases and terms “Pre-K-3,” “0-8,” and “birth to third grade” are used to represent similar constructs but may include different age spans and, therefore, a narrower or broader set of services.

” The nation’s Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge (ELC) competition has been an historic investment of federal funding to help states build systems and services that support children in their earliest years.

Kate Tarrant, Ed.D, an early childhood research and policy consultant who is an expert on comprehensive early childhood systems, researched 10 states that received ELC funds to implement P-3 innovations. Her research included the review of key documents and interviews with leaders in some of the following states: Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Washington.

All of these states implemented programs that have had broad impact. One state leader reported that the ELC P-3 work has transformed how leaders from all sectors conceptualize early childhood policy and practice. Tarrant’s analysis led to eight major findings.

P-3 Reforms Are Expanding ELC States' Early Childhood Systems

State leaders indicate that the ELC has provided key resources to help states build stronger connections between early childhood and early elementary school structures and services, thus expanding their conceptualization of early childhood policy and practice.

States Are Adopting a Localized Approach to P-3 Reform

Eight of the 10 states Tarrant researched devolved planning and implementation of P-3 initiatives to community-based early learning coalitions, recognizing that local coalitions would best be able to tailor solutions to their unique local cultures, resources, schools, programs, families, children and priorities. Most of these states required the local coalitions to demonstrate buy-in from stakeholders across community-based organizations, early childhood programs, public schools, and other child and family agencies. Several of the states addressed issues of equity in their implementation of ELC innovations. Taken together, the states Tarrant researched are providing funding and support to more than 100 local communities.

Many beneficial programs emerged from the localization strategy. In **Delaware**, 20 *DEL Readiness TEAMS* are charged explicitly with P-3 reforms. Many focus on transitions for families as children

move from early learning into kindergarten. A family member on one planning team suggested a bookmobile carrying titles appropriate for the P-3 age range. New partnerships formed to make the grassroots idea a reality, and now the community is raising funds to sustain the



Public-private funding partnerships have strengthened P-3 efforts.

bookmobile. In **Massachusetts**, 13 *Birth to Grade Three Communities* develop local plans and receive funding and technical assistance from the state. In Boston, the K1DS initiative, which combines ELC funds with philanthropic investments, has expanded prekindergarten to serve children in 14 communities. K1DS also provides professional development for Boston public school teachers to support continuity between early childhood and early elementary services. Lowell, Massachusetts has selected common improvement tools for family child care, community-based preschools, and elementary schools and is using these tools to inform unified professional development. The localized strategy has also helped to target ELC resources to reach children from families that have characteristics that place them at risk for poor school achievement. When **Georgia** established its *Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs)*, the first criteria was the density of children from disadvantaged families. **North Carolina's** Transformation Zones lie in relatively poor rural counties.

ELC States Are Engaging Instructional Leaders with Cross-Sector Professional Development

At least four of the ELC states have implemented professional development programs designed to bring together P-3 leaders, i.e. elementary school principals, leaders of community-based early childhood programs and other leaders invested in P-3 reform. Together they learn about best practices and opportunities to sustain early learning benefits into the early elementary grades. **Maryland** has reached about 600 educators who participate in teams of six (three from the school, including the principal, and three from early learning programs). In **Massachusetts**, 300 leaders have participated in its birth-to-eight leadership series. **Pennsylvania** expects to reach 3,000 educators by 2017 with its four-day leadership institutes. In 2014 alone, more than 500 education professionals participated in **Washington's** *Starting Strong Institutes*, which engage leaders in learning about the birth-to-eight developmental continuum.

States Are Aligning Formative Assessments

Through the ELC, states are developing and implementing comprehensive assessments in birth-to-five programs as well as Kindergarten Entry Assessments (KEAs). The concurrent development or expansion of these assessments creates an opportunity to align expectations between early childhood and the elementary school years.

States are investing in complementary early childhood and kindergarten assessments. For example, **Delaware's** KEA is a customized version of the formative assessment used in the birth-to-five programs. Additionally, the implementation of KEAs has generated meaningful and mutually beneficial dialogue among early childhood and elementary school leaders. The **Washington** Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) program has a goal of building relationships between early learning providers and kindergarten teachers so that children will have a smooth transition into kindergarten. **New Jersey's** KEA serves as the foundation for the state's "Kindergarten Seminar," a professional development series for kindergarten teachers and principals.

In the past, some early learning leaders have found it difficult to engage K-12 leaders; however, the successful rollout of the KEA depends on buy-in from K-12 stakeholders, including district administrators, principals, teachers and unions. In ELC states, the momentum of the KEA implementation seems to be breaking down barriers and building new bridges between the early learning and K-12 sectors.

Funding Partnerships Drive P-3 Reform

Several ELC leaders noted that public-private funding partnerships have strengthened P-3 efforts. Specifically, **Delaware, Maryland** and **Washington** are blending ELC funds with private philanthropic investments. Bringing public and private dollars together engages a broader group of stakeholders and increases the likelihood that the work will be sustained beyond the duration of the grant. The ELC encouraged states to develop KEAs using federal or state funds from outside the grant. **New Jersey's** Department of Education funds the state's KEA and a staff position devoted to directing P-3 work.

Experts Accelerate P-3 Knowledge Transfer

Partnerships with experts from national organizations are accelerating states' P-3 efforts. **Massachusetts** and **Pennsylvania** both report using materials, staff, and/or technical assistance from national organizations to support their P-3 work. With these resources, in-state leaders acquire the expertise to continue the reforms.

ELC States Document and Evaluate Their Work

Four ELC states are working with third-party researchers to document and/or evaluate the work of their local coalitions so that lessons learned can inform future policymaking. **Massachusetts** hired a consultant to develop a website to track, profile and analyze its "Birth-Third" initiatives. **Delaware** has an evaluation team capturing the successes of its local coalitions. **Pennsylvania** built research into its plans primarily to learn about the process of systems-building work. **Georgia** hopes its evaluation will help it learn how to scale the work of its birth-to-eight teams.

ELC States Are Building Capacity to Implement P-3 Reforms

ELC state leaders reported that they are working to develop capacity to implement P-3 reforms. States are developing capacity to address the challenge of dissimilar organizational structures. Early learning policies are usually set at the state level and involve multiple agencies while K-12 decision making is typically devolved to local school districts. ELC leaders are active in addressing this challenge through relationship building and flexible implementation. States report that they are fostering policy coherence. State leaders from **New Jersey** and **Washington** both expressed concern that stakeholders, especially those in public schools, might experience "initiative fatigue" in the absence of a clear picture about how Common Core, KEA, and new K-12 teacher evaluations all fit together and are actively addressing this policy challenge. The sustainability of P-3 reforms also presents a challenge but state leaders are hopeful, in part, because new partnerships have been formed to fund or otherwise support the innovations local coalitions put in place. Because the ELC laid out the expectation for KEAs to be funded outside the grant, some sustainable funding is already in place. The KEAs also lay the foundation for public school involvement in early education.



Looking Forward

Tarrant concludes with a call to action based on insights she gained from her investigation. To scale their innovations and use resources efficiently, states will need to engage in ongoing evaluations of the programs they implement and share lessons learned to discover the most effective strategies to sustain early learning into the elementary grades. States, too, will need to deepen their approach to equity within P-3 reforms. States will also need to assure appropriate state and local capacity to continue the development of the P-3 approach throughout their states. There is momentum among the states that took up the P-3 challenge. The ELC has helped to build the structures and forge the partnerships needed to connect the early childhood and early elementary school systems. Indeed, a broader vision of the early childhood system that includes early elementary school is taking hold at the federal level and in states and communities that have benefited from ELC support.

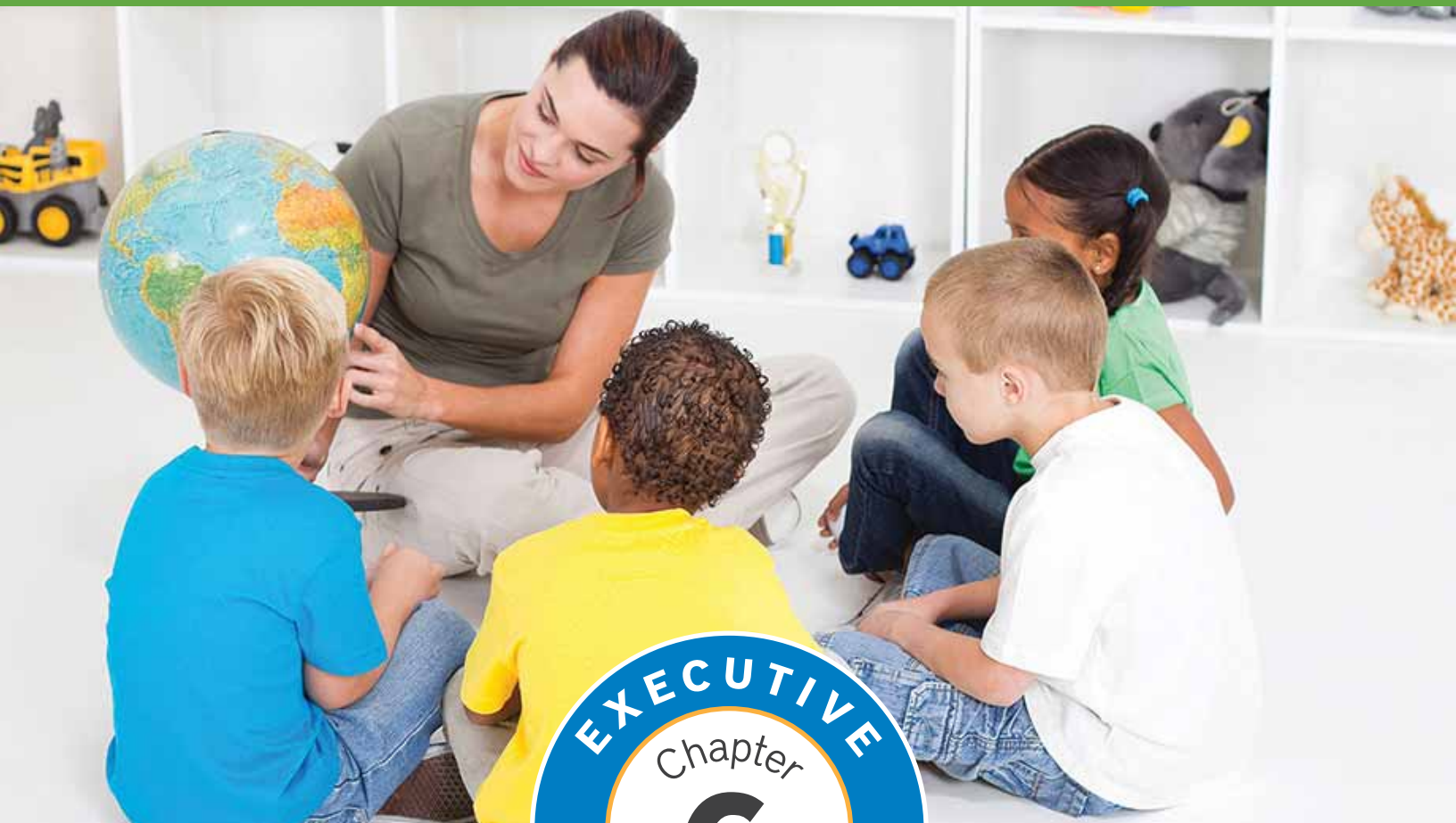
About the Author



Kate Tarrant is an independent early childhood research and policy consultant whose recent clients include the BUILD Initiative, New York State's Early Childhood Advisory Council, American Institutes for Research, and other national, state, and local organizations. Her work focuses on comprehensive early childhood systems, workforce development, and quality improvement policy. She has authored numerous policy briefs, book chapters, and articles on these topics. Tarrant earned a doctorate in education from Teachers College, Columbia University and a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

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EXECUTIVE
Chapter
6
SUMMARY

Improving Systems of Learning Through the Use of Child Standards and Assessments

Catherine Scott-Little, Ph.D., & Kelly L. Maxwell, Ph.D.
2015

Build
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Executive Summary

Together Catherine Scott-Little, Ph.D., Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Kelly L. Maxwell, Ph.D., Co-Director of Early Childhood Development at Child Trends, investigated eight states' development and implementation of child standards and assessments through the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC): California, Colorado, Delaware, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington.

Scott-Little and Maxwell have organized this chapter around findings and recommendations in two areas: 1) Standards and Assessments in the Birth through Five System, and 2) Kindergarten Entry Assessments. Their nine findings and three recommendations are highlighted below.

Standards and Assessments: Birth through Five

- 1. States' ELC efforts with standards and formative assessment build on their previous work.** Most states had already developed Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and were supporting, to some degree, the use of instructional assessment in some early childhood classrooms (e.g., in pre-kindergarten). The ELC work has focused on enriching ELDS professional development and expanding the use of standards and assessment
- 2. ELDS serve as the foundation of the early care and ECE system.** ELDS articulate the goals the state has adopted for children's learning and are, therefore, the underpinning of many components of ECE systems. For example, some state leaders described their standards as the "glue" that holds together all of their professional development or the "center" that is used to align their workforce competencies.
- 3. As a mechanism to promote the use of ELDS and formative assessments, states are infusing requirements related to standards and assessment into their Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).** States have incorporated requirements to promote the use of ELDS and formative assessments into their QRIS, such as requirements for professional development, use of aligned curricula, etc.
- 4. States are integrating standards and formative assessment through professional development.** Even though states may have developed their standards and selected their formative assessments through two separate processes, they are addressing implementation of standards and assessments together by covering both jointly in professional development.

5. **States are extending professional development to go deeper and reach broader target audiences.** Although awareness of the standards and formative assessment tools is an important first step in understanding and using them, state leaders recognize that more in-depth support is needed for teachers to use them to enrich instruction and support children's development. State leaders also recognize that the people who provide professional development and program administrators also need support to help teachers use the standards and assessment.
6. **States have used a variety of strategies to sustain the momentum of advances made through ELC.** These states have used several different strategies to maximize impact beyond the life of the ELC, including developing resources that will exist beyond the grant and blending ELC funds with existing funding.

Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA)

7. **State approaches to KEA vary in part because KEA sits as the intersection of two systems (i.e. early childhood and K-12 education systems).** Scott-Little and Maxwell observed three primary approaches to KEA development and implementation among the states they researched:
- KEA as an *extension* of the early childhood formative assessment system process, using tools in the KEA that have been used in early childhood settings;
 - KEA as the *beginning* of a K-3 formative assessment process to guide instruction from kindergarten through third grade; and
 - KEA as a transition process to support children's successful *transition* from early learning to public school.
8. **States' KEA efforts are advancing the field of assessment** through, for example, increased work to address the reliability and validity of assessment data, the expansion of existing assessment tools to cover a broader age range, and attention to developing tools that address multiple purposes.

States are rolling out professional development in phases. Many are focusing first on supporting kindergarten teachers' use of the assessment tool and then broadening the content (e.g., how to use the data gathered, the link between assessment and instruction) and the target audience (e.g., administrators as well as teachers).

10. **The use of assessment in the K-12 system is impacting the KEA.** Educators, policymakers, and parents around the U.S. are debating the growing role of assessment in the K-12 system. In this context, states face challenges as they develop and implement the KEA, an additional assessment.

Recommendations

Scott-Little and Maxwell offer three recommendations to states beginning or continuing work on standards and assessments. These recommendations incorporate their reflections on what they heard in their interviews as well as their prior experience working with states.

- 1. Take steps toward fundamental and long-term systemic changes to support effective use of standards and assessments.** Effective use of standards and assessments is not just about use of the tools. More fundamentally, the reforms related to the use of ELDS and assessments are designed to go deeper and to change instructional practices within the field. Therefore, it will take a long time and require significant and systemic changes to incorporate standards and formative assessments into practice.
- 2. Strive for continuity between formative assessments conducted in early learning settings and the KEA, but keep in mind the differences in the two systems.** The increasing focus on formative assessments to guide instruction prior to and at the beginning of kindergarten may boost efforts to adopt a birth-to-third-grade approach and encourage more individualized instruction. Coordinated planning will benefit children, but states should not lose sight of the fact that the B-5 and K-12 systems are structured differently and each has unique features, especially with respect to professional development.
- 3. Champion and safeguard the quality of KEA data.** Some KEA data are supposed to be entered into the K-12 State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). State leaders must ensure that the KEA data are reliable and valid before they are used to make decisions or entered into the State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). The authors suggest implementing the KEA for at least three years before entering it into the SLDS. Additional strategies are offered in the full chapter.



About the Authors



Catherine Scott-Little, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she teaches in the Birth through Kindergarten Teacher Licensure program. Catherine provided technical assistance to states developing ELC applications through the Early Learning Challenge Collaborative and has collaborated on numerous studies to document and evaluate how states have developed and implemented both Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and assessment systems. She also provides technical assistance to states on issues related to standards and assessments.



Kelly L. Maxwell, Ph.D., is a Co-Director of Early Childhood Development at Child Trends. She has 20 years of experience in early childhood policy, research, and evaluation. Her areas of expertise include early childhood policy issues, Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (TQRIS), school readiness assessment, evaluation of early childhood initiatives, and use of administrative data. Kelly provides support to North Carolina's early childhood advisory council as well as the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant. She is also a research partner supporting the 10-state K-3 Formative Assessment Consortium, led by the North Carolina's Office of Early Learning, Department of Public Instruction.

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EXECUTIVE
Chapter
7
SUMMARY

Stacking the Blocks: A Look at Integrated Data Strategies

Elizabeth Jordan & Carlise King
2015





Executive Summary

State policy makers need accurate, comprehensive data to decide how to develop and allocate resources for early learning and development in such a way that more children with high needs have access to high-quality programs. States need data about:

- Children (i.e. one unique record for each child).
- Early learning and development programs.
- The early learning and development workforce.

There are several common challenges associated with collecting this data and making it available to the various people in different roles who need access to it. Data that are collected are often gathered for different purposes and stored in different databases. A study conducted by the Early Childhood Data Collaborative in 2013 found that in 49 states and the District of Columbia, the data collected about children in early learning programs are often not linked. Likewise, many states are not capturing all the child-level, workforce-level, and program-level data they need in order to answer key policy questions about the children served by their publically-funded early care and education programs.

Developing an integrated data system can be daunting, but states that do clean up, supplement, and link their early learning and development data can use it to paint a fuller picture of their young children's needs and available services. For example, states with comprehensive linked data can take advantage of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology that provides a visual map showing (at a glance) where needs and/or resources are concentrated throughout the state.

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC) provides tools and other resources to help states develop integrated early childhood data systems. In the fall of 2014, ECDC's Elizabeth Jordan and Carlise King interviewed leaders from seven of the ten states that had prioritized data systems development goals in their Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (ELC) applications and completed at least one year of the grant cycle: Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. Jordan and King found that the states they interviewed had common goals and followed similar processes. The authors identified five "building blocks" or strategies that states have used to grapple with their early learning and development data and plan for improved integration.

Assess the Early Learning Landscape and Create a Vision for Data Use

The ultimate purpose of collecting early learning and development (ELD) is to improve the educational, health, and economic outcomes of children participating in the early learning programs states offer. Most states begin development of integrated data systems by articulating the policy questions they want their data to answer. **Minnesota** conducted a needs assessment to identify all the potential uses of its data. **North Carolina** created a feedback loop for end users, including agency staff, researchers, advocates, and early learning providers.

Generally, the states want to use their data to examine the quality of services available to families, assess the unmet need for services, understand how children across the state are doing, and efficiently allocate resources. They are also identifying strategic opportunities to communicate information gathered from data systems to all stakeholders.

Develop Interagency Data Governance Bodies

In most states, a variety of agencies and data systems are involved in the delivery of early learning and development programs, and states are creating governance bodies that determine who has responsibility for data, how and when data can be shared, and the purposes of the data use. They are also developing policies to keep the data secure and confidential. These bodies are usually composed of members from each of the agencies involved in service delivery. **Wisconsin** convened an inter-agency team to develop a data governance charter.

North Carolina and several other states developed tiered data governance bodies. **Maryland** and **Illinois** are both leveraging existing governance bodies by adding early childhood representatives to existing boards.



Identify Gaps in Data

States are finding gaps in data about children, programs, and their early learning and development professionals. **Illinois** and **North Carolina** are each trying to establish an unduplicated account of how many children are receiving multiple services. Most states are trying to link program data to their QRIS. **Wisconsin** is making plans to collect data about preschool programs for the first time. **Illinois** is also planning to use ELC funds to address gaps in its professional registry data system.

Build Links between ELD Data and Data from Other Data Systems

The development of an integrated early childhood data system requires structuring data so that it can be shared and creating data sharing agreements among the agencies that own and use various data.

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States are creating governance bodies that determine who has responsibility for data, how and when data can be shared, and the purposes of the data use.

Many states have redundant data about children. Creating a unique child identifier (UID) lessens this problem by allowing for information about children to be combined and unduplicated across systems. **Maryland**, **North Carolina**, and **Rhode Island** are using ELC funds to develop unique child identifiers. North Carolina is leveraging existing resources by using the same software and platform that its public school systems use to create K-12 UIDs. **Illinois**, **Minnesota**, **Oregon**, and **Wisconsin** are also leveraging existing systems, using existing K-12 technology platforms and governance bodies.

Most states are choosing between two types of data systems. **Illinois** and **North Carolina** are each building a federated data system in which data remain in existing agency databases but can be extracted and analyzed by users from other agencies and institutions. **Maryland** has chosen to build a data warehouse, a central hub that houses all ELD data.

States are also developing formal data sharing agreements. **North Carolina** succeeded in creating a single data sharing agreement for all agencies. **Rhode Island** tried this approach but ultimately created a separate agreement for each of its five agencies.



Plan for Long-term Sustainability of Data Systems

Although the funds from the Early Learning Challenge are time-limited, states are focused on the long-term. States that have incorporated ELD data into existing K-12 data systems plan to rely, in part, on K-12 funds. Several states planned to use ELC funds to build integrated systems that can be supported by the regular operating budgets of the agencies that own or contribute data.

Obstacles and Strategies for Success

The states interviewed by Jordan and King are all in the early stages of building integrated data systems. They have made notable progress and report some common obstacles they have encountered as well as strategies for overcoming these.

Obstacles to overcome: The three most common obstacles faced by states are:

Staffing. Identifying and hiring IT staff with the necessary qualifications has been challenging. States mentioned difficulties finding strong project leads and retaining qualified staff.

Program and data coordination. Changes in ELD program oversight and administration presented

challenges to states as data integration plans were adapted for new agency structures.

Longer timelines. Establishing data sharing agreements necessary for sharing and integrating data took longer than proposed timelines.

Strategies for success: Effective strategies that helped states overcome these challenges include:

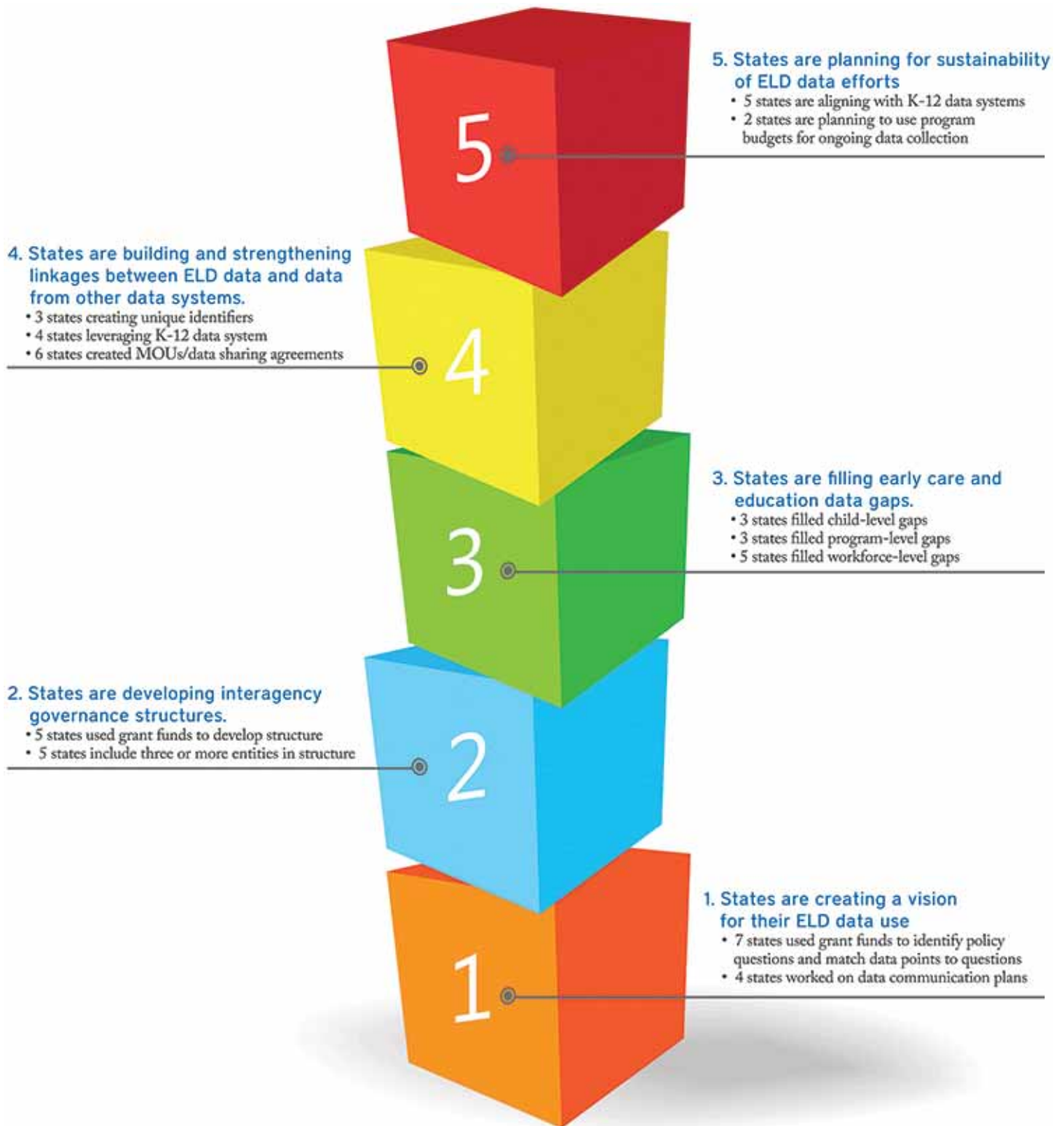
Technical assistance and support. Additional technical assistance and support can help states identify policy questions and data gaps, understand staffing needs, and address technical issues.

Stronger communication. States need effective communication strategies within the project and across agencies, to keep stakeholders informed.

Achievable goals. States should set clear, concrete, achievable goals to ensure that participating agencies and programs understand exactly what they are moving toward.



Figure 2. Early Learning Challenge Data System Building Blocks in Seven States



About the Authors



Elizabeth Jordan serves as a Senior Policy Analyst for the Early Childhood Data Collaborative. The Early Child Data Collaborative supports state policymakers' development and use of coordinated state early care and education (ECE) data systems to improve the quality of ECE programs and the workforce, increase access to high quality ECE programs and, ultimately, improve children's outcomes. In that capacity, she has analyzed states' processes and policies for developing early learning data systems to inform state and federal early childhood policies. Ms. Jordan previously worked at the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law where she conducted an in-depth, 50-state review of laws and policies impacting kinship caregivers. She also clerked for two judges with child welfare caseloads at the D.C. Superior Court.



Carlise King is Executive Director of the Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC). The Early Child Data Collaborative supports state policymakers' development and use of coordinated state early care and education (ECE) data systems to improve the quality of ECE programs and the workforce, increase access to high quality ECE programs and, ultimately, improve children's outcomes. ECDC partners with the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at UC Berkeley, Child Trends, Council of Chief State School Officers, Data Quality Campaign, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Pew Home Visiting Campaign to inform the development of products and guide its strategic planning based on current

trends in data systems development and policies. Child Trends serves as the hub for ECDC. Ms. King leads ECDC's national survey of states' early care and education data systems and directs the delivery of policy consultation and strategic communications that promote the development, implementation, and use of early childhood data systems. Ms. King has over 14 years of experience conducting state and national level research on early childhood issues and examining the impact of state and federal policies on parents' access to child care services, licensed child care supply, child care costs, and the child care workforce.

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