



# Using Data to Support a Comprehensive System of Early Learning and Care in California

Missy Coffey, Ph.D. Carolina Zamora, EdM and Jenna Nguyen

March 2020

An early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS) provides policymakers and educators with actionable information about how families are accessing and utilizing early learning and care services.

In July 2019, California approved the Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill (S.B. 75, 2019) to create a “[cradle-to-career](#)” statewide longitudinal data system to provide integrated information on children from infancy to the workplace. One of the goals of this coordinated system is to strengthen connections and collaboration across California’s education systems, which include early learning and care, the K–12 system, California Community Colleges, California State Universities, Universities of California, and private colleges and universities.

This bill offers California the opportunity to move forward with the development of an early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS). An ECIDS serves as the cradle portion of the cradle-to-career data system and also promotes conversations across the state’s early learning and care programs in service of improving outcomes for children and families.

## WHAT IS AN ECIDS?

An ECIDS “collects, integrates, maintains, stores and reports information from early childhood programs across multiple agencies within a

state” that serve children birth to age 8 and their families (Coffey, Chatis, Irvine, Sellers, & Duarte, 2017). It is designed to provide integrated data across programs that will help to inform state agency staff, policymakers, and communities on decisions about early childhood policies and practices. To inform these decisions, the datum in an ECIDS includes information about children, families, classrooms, program/providers, and other early learning and care services.

There are more than 30 states that are in process of creating an ECIDS, while eight states have an operational ECIDS. Each state has a different approach to which program data they include in their ECIDS (Figure 1). To build a cradle-to-career-data system in California requires the linkage of an ECIDS with the statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS), known as CALPADS—the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System.

The ECIDS is often led by early childhood state agencies such as:

- Department of Early Learning,
- Department of Health and Human Services,
- Department of Education, and
- Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT ESTABLISHED SYSTEMS:

- [How do states define an ECIDS?](#)
- [How do states use an ECIDS?](#)
- [How do states design an ECIDS?](#)

The ECIDS development process allows for a unique opportunity for these state staff to sit at the table with their agency counterparts, share information needs, and discuss strengths and barriers in using data across agencies. Using the integrated data provided by an ECIDS, they are better able to make data-informed decisions about program improvement, policymaking, targeted support, and resource allocation.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH AN ECIDS?

An ECIDS can provide information to those making decisions about early learning and care policies and practices. Although each state may have different priority information needs, most states have designed analytic tools to create data stories, dashboards, and reports that provide relevant information in formats that help their stakeholders understand and use data in decision-making.

ECIDS have been used to:



### Determine distinct counts of children.

State administrators need unduplicated, distinct counts of the number of children served in programs to understand how many children and their families have access to and are served by multiple programs. With this information, program directors and policymakers can assess the

FIGURE 1. COMPONENTS OF AN ECIDS

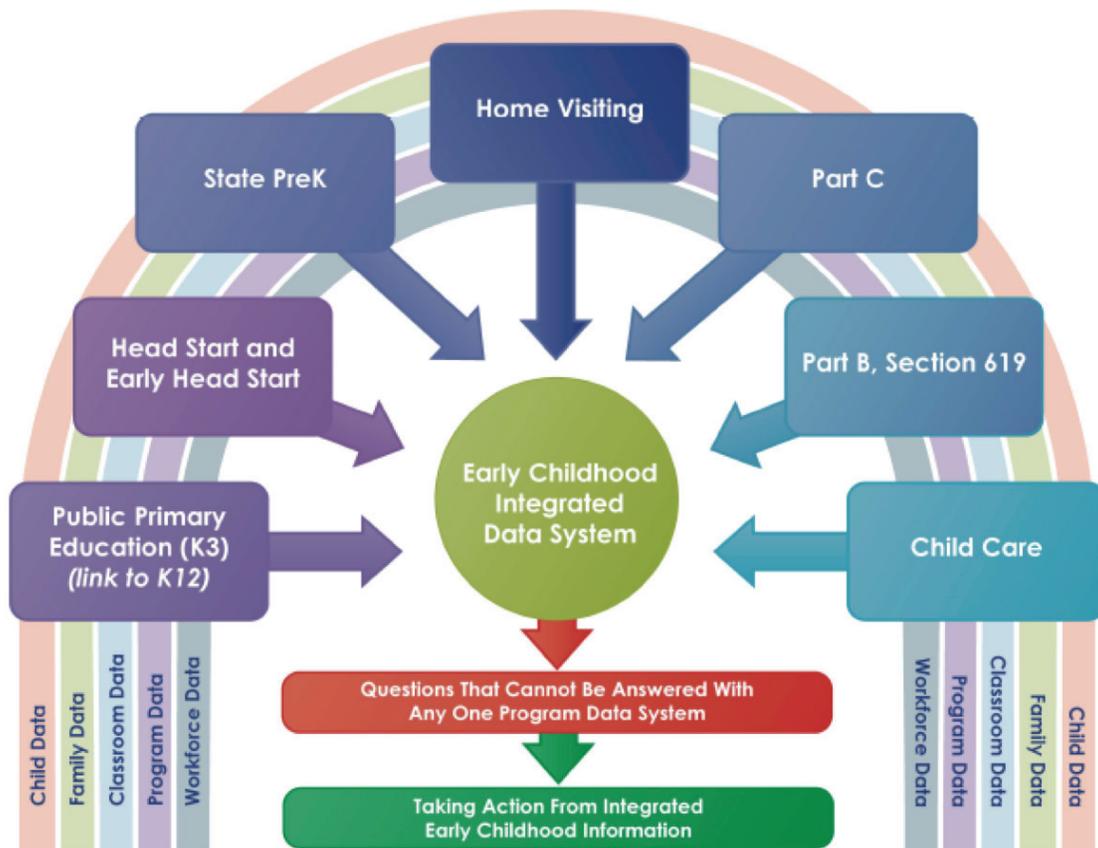


Figure 1. Components of an ECIDS. From Coffey, M., Chatis, C., Irvine, S., Sellers, J., & Duarte, S. (2017). *An early childhood integrated data system: What is an ECIDS?* U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics

degree to which systems are comprehensive and, potentially, create improved processes for enrollment integrated services.



**Assess community needs.** Many state and federal programs require that agencies perform comprehensive needs assessments prior to their funding and implementing services. Conducting needs assessments can place a great burden on agency resources, because data must be amassed from many sources, and updated demographic estimates can be costly. Utah's ECIDS system streamlines the community needs assessment process for their Head Start partners by providing automated needs assessment reports –replacing a time-consuming manual data linkage and integration process across sources (SRI Education, 2019).



**Inform staff development needs.** Child- and family-serving agencies must clearly understand their staff professional development needs to reduce costs, increase relevance, and deliver high-quality targeted trainings. For example, Texas integrates data across regions to identify teacher and provider professional development needs and to leverage training resources to support school readiness partnership opportunities.



**Coordinate transitions between services and programs.** To meet the needs and reduce the burden of families who require multiple services and/or transition to new services, programs must share access, enrollment, and outcome data. An ECIDS can track children and families across services, reducing duplication and paperwork and easing transitions.



**Advocate for increased access to and quality of care.** An ECIDS can monitor access to high-quality programs while also assessing local needs and parental preferences for care options. The system could be set up so that the data can be disaggregated and examined by geographic region, child and family

## TYPES OF ECIDS DATA ANALYTIC TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE USE OF INTEGRATED DATA:

- **Data Story Builder:** These tools help users to develop visual and narrative content by considering the purpose and audience of the data story. A template helps to organize comprehensive data within a four-element framework including narrative, visuals, conclusions, and key takeaways.
- **Community Assessment Tool:** Needs assessment reports help to guide communities across the state in the examination of early childhood data across four key areas: eligibility, access, services, and impact.
- **Expanded School Readiness Framework:** These tools take an expanded view of school readiness and provide data to examine the preparedness of schools, communities, and children for school entry and success.
- **Governance Dashboards:** These tools can help states and communities establish transparent and ongoing methods for gathering stakeholder feedback about data use and policy priorities.

For more information check out [ECDataWorks](http://www.ecdataworks.org) at [www.ecdataworks.org](http://www.ecdataworks.org).

demographics, and program characteristics to assess resource availability and disparities.

## WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AS A FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PROGRAM?

Stakeholder engagement is a vital part of creating and maintaining an ECIDS. Family and community agency staff can learn about priority information needs for an ECIDS by facilitating a dialogue with their stakeholders, and routinely seeking

“Without local communities’ involvement, we wouldn’t have known how to customize the tool to address unique community needs.”

- Howard Morrison,  
Texas Education Agency

stakeholder input leads to greater involvement in interpreting data results and formulating further questions. ECIDS stakeholder groups should include a variety of perspectives including state-level administrators, regional coordinators, program directors, tribal leaders, parents, and teachers. For example, Minnesota state agency leaders engaged program providers and families in regular feedback sessions to understand their needs, share ECIDS development and implementation progress, and respond to child and family data safety concerns.

If you are a:

- **Local program administrator or provider:** Share your information needs for state-level data and ensure your program is sharing high-quality data when contributing to an ECIDS.
- **Advocacy organization:** Inform Cradle-to-Career Workgroup members about the needs for an ECIDS and what data could support your advocacy efforts by submitting a public comment [here](#).
- **Parent or community member:** Join the Cradle-to-Career Data System conversation at <https://cadatasystem.wested.org/>. Use this [link](#) to find information about attending public meetings, sign up for the [listserv](#) or share your thoughts by filling out an [online form](#).

## SUMMARY

The cradle-to-career data system initiative provides California state agencies' leaders an opportunity to design and implement an ECIDS—linking formerly disparate early childhood data into an integrated platform. These data will not only provide families with more information about early learning and care options, but they will help administrators and providers assess the availability, quality, and comprehensiveness of the statewide early childhood program delivery system. Engaging community voices from the start and learning from the work done by other states is the critical first step to advancing early childhood policies and programs through strategic use of integrated data.

### TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ECIDS DEVELOPMENT, CHECK OUT:

- [ECIDS Toolkit](#)
- [Leveraging Early Childhood data for Better Decision Making](#)
- [What is an ECIDS?](#)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for this brief was provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation.



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### Silicon Valley

(SRI International headquarters)  
333 Ravenswood Avenue  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
+1.650.859.2000

[education@sri.com](mailto:education@sri.com)

### Washington, D.C.

1100 Wilson Boulevard,  
Suite 2800  
Arlington, VA 22209  
+1.703.524.2053

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