

# How Policymakers Can Support Early Childhood Data Governance

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**State policymakers regularly use data to determine which early childhood investments can help reduce disparities and improve health outcomes and school readiness for children.**

Early childhood programs serving children prenatally to age 8—such as child care, home visiting, Head Start, and preschool—provide care and education to an increasing number of children and their families. To evaluate these investments, policymakers and other stakeholders need access to data about the use and quality of early childhood services. Yet early childhood data are often disconnected, and housed within and across multiple state agencies. As a consequence, decision makers frequently lack the comprehensive information they need to evaluate the capacity of early childhood programs to meet children's needs. Data governance can facilitate the secure integration of early childhood data across state agencies to answer policymakers' questions about early childhood investments and track outcomes.

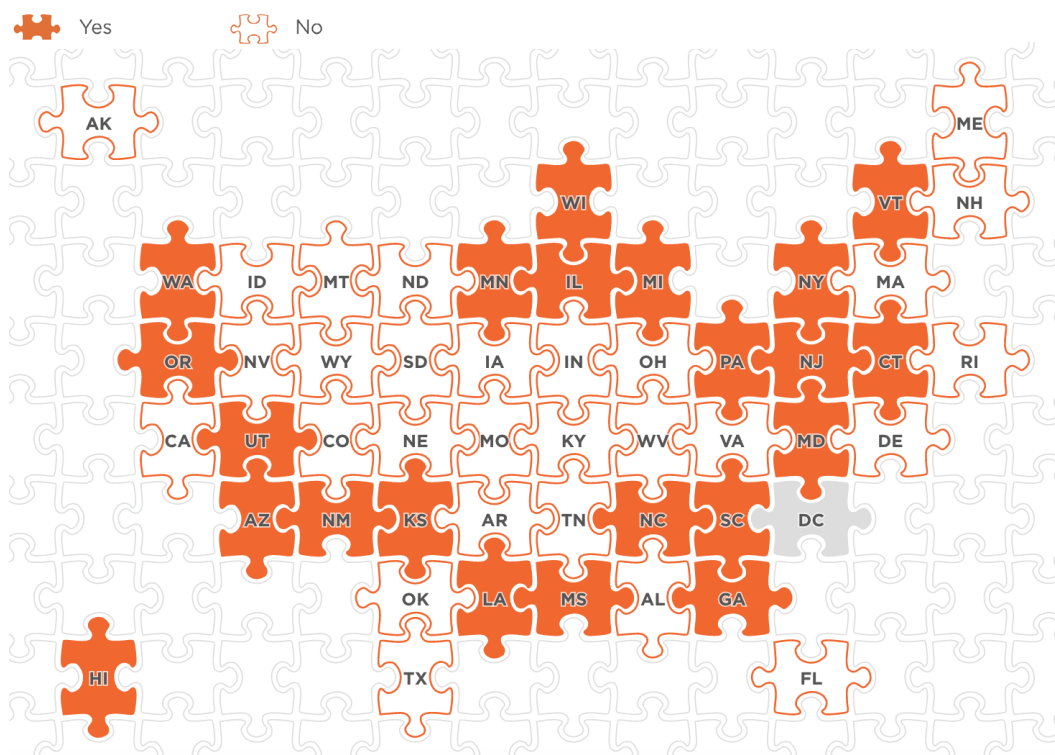
The Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC) supports state policymakers in developing and using coordinated state early care and education (ECE) data. In 2018, ECDC surveyed all 50 states to assess their ECE data integration efforts. View your state's results online at: <https://www.ecedata.org/>

**Strong data governance supports data integration.** Data governance bodies guide the management and use of administrative data. Through strategic planning, members coordinate data collection processes, security policies, and metrics to track progress toward state goals. Data governance functions include developing data sharing agreements to securely integrate disconnected data, and authorizing the use of integrated data for research and planning. For example, executive leadership from different agencies can jointly determine how integrated data will be used to examine agencies' shared goals and outcomes, making it easier for decision makers to see what combination of supports works best for children and families.

**Strong data governance supports data privacy.** Early childhood data systems house sensitive information about children and families that should be protected. Data governance bodies can manage data privacy policies, which determine who may access and use the data collected. When integrating data from multiple agencies with different privacy policies, members of a data governance body can collaborate to enforce a consistent set of policies that guide procedures regarding parental consent, disclosure of data to external parties, and appropriate use of data across early childhood agencies and departments. A consistent framework, with standards for securely sharing data, helps policymakers to be transparent and clearly communicate to families how their data are being accessed and used. Additionally, a governance body can respond to the public's questions and concerns about the use of their data.

## Fewer than half of states have an early childhood data governance body<sup>1</sup>

### States with a defined data governance body



Source: Early Childhood Data Collaborative [2018 State of State Early Childhood Data Systems Survey](#)

**According to the Early Childhood Data Collaborative's 2018 survey about state early childhood data systems, only 22 states (44 percent) reported having some type of early childhood data governance.** Most governance bodies consisted of representatives from more than one state agency where responsibilities for management of integrated data are shared. This finding aligns with other guidance<sup>2</sup> that a data governance body should include representation and decision-making authority from all agencies that are contributing data. Because early childhood services within a state are usually administered across the state's departments of health (e.g., home visiting), social services (e.g., child care), and education (e.g., preschool), representatives from multiple agencies are needed for greater coordination. Governance bodies can also be structured to receive input from researchers and program experts familiar with the child, family, and workforce data that are being integrated. Below are examples of state early childhood governance bodies that consist of more than one agency and early childhood program.

**Pennsylvania's** early childhood data governance comprises decision makers from the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services; both departments contribute data to their integrated data system, known as Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Children Across Networks (PELICAN). Responsibilities for data management and use of PELICAN are shared across the two departments or their agencies. PELICAN's data governance structures include executive leadership, programmatic subcommittees, and technical workgroups to guide coordination, technical decisions, and system enhancements.



<sup>1</sup> King, C., Perkins, V., Nugent, C., & Jordan, E. (2018). 2018 State of State Early Childhood Data Systems. Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Early Childhood Data Collaborative.

<sup>2</sup> Coffey, M., Chatis, C., Sellers, J., and Taylor, R. (2014). Early Childhood Integrated Data System Toolkit. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://slds.grads360.org/#program/ecids-toolkit>.

**Minnesota's** Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) governing body includes members appointed from the Department of Health, the Department of Education, and the Department of Human Services. Each department identifies an agency and community leaders to serve as representatives on the governing board. ECLDS's sources of data include, but are not limited to, birth records, economic assistance programs, early childhood programs, and K-12 assessments. A research and data committee, which is made up of data experts, advises members regarding research and policy questions the ECLDS can be used to answer.



**Wisconsin's** Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) governance, which was formed as part of a federal grant, is guided by a data sharing agreement among the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Public Instruction, and the Department of Health Services. The agreement establishes policies to support the development and security of data shared across agencies through the ECIDS. These data range from health services (e.g., immunizations) to foster care to special education services.



## Policies are key to prioritizing, supporting, and ensuring the establishment of strong early childhood data governance.

Policymakers are well positioned to advance the establishment of data governance structures that support integration of early childhood data. This is because policies play a key role in determining how early childhood data are collected and used. Policymakers can prioritize statutes that promote cross-agency data sharing, and they can develop policies that appropriately safeguard the collection and use of data on individual children and families. As they work to establish early childhood data governance, policymakers can learn from advances that other states have made in using integrated early childhood data to improve children's healthy development and school readiness.

## Actions steps for policymakers to support early childhood data governance

- ✓ Identify critical questions that integrated data can help answer in order to inform future policy and program decisions.
- ✓ Support an early childhood data governance body that includes:
  - Cross-agency representation from programs serving young children and their families
  - Authority to develop inter- and cross-agency data sharing agreements to align data standards and processes that support integration
  - Oversight of data privacy policies and use of integrated early childhood data
  - Decision-making power to identify priorities for data collection, uses of integrated data, and reporting requirements to inform policies
  - Responsibility to secure funding to implement data integration goals
  - Transparent and clear information for families about how their data will be used and protected
- ✓ Use legislative authority to define and maintain an early childhood data governance body that supports the integration and use of early childhood data across agencies to inform state policy. A codified governance body supports continuity of coordination efforts when administrative leadership changes.
- ✓ Learn from existing state efforts. View your state profile and find resources about the development and uses of integrated data at [www.ecedata.org](http://www.ecedata.org).