

Building collaboration to coordinate early childhood data: State spotlight on Wisconsin



Shared early childhood data empowers agencies and families

States provide a variety of public services to support the healthy growth and development of young children. These services are often administered by several different agencies within a state, and it isn't unusual for young children to receive services from multiple agencies simultaneously. This can lead to challenges for policymakers, agency decision-makers, and researchers in search of a complete picture of the services being accessed by each child. It can be difficult to understand exactly how each of these services help a child enter school happy, healthy, and ready to learn.

When agencies share information, however, the task becomes easier. By drawing on each other's early childhood data, state agencies can identify where services are available and where they aren't (i.e., "service gaps"), and ultimately measure which services and supports best help young children and their families. The answers to these questions can inform efforts to make early childhood programs more equitable and accessible for those who need them most.

Cross-agency goals for using early childhood data

Wisconsin agency leaders identified three goals for using early childhood data:

- conduct meaningful research to inform and improve early childhood education and services;
- improve services for children with the greatest needs, including those living in poverty and those contending with learning disabilities; and
- close achievement gaps between students in different racial and economic brackets.

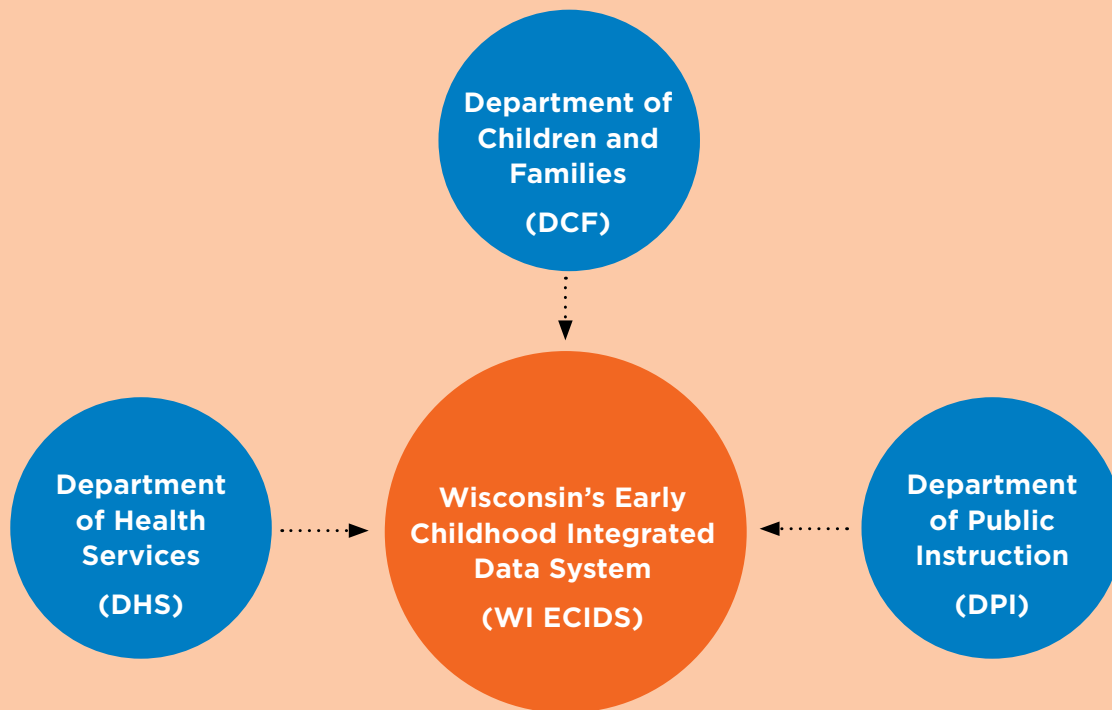
How they did it: Collaboration among state agencies

Leveraging funds from the federal [Race to the Top -- Early Learning Challenge](#) grant, leaders in Wisconsin expanded their data systems for early care and education programs, and connected early childhood data with the state's K-12 education data. The Departments of Health Services, Children and Families, and Public Instruction improved interagency communication and aligned their agency goals for using early childhood data. The central component of this effort is the [Wisconsin Early Childhood Integrated Data System \(WI ECIDS\)](#), which securely links information from each agency. The WI ECIDS will launch at the end of 2017, and is poised to make data-sharing faster and more reliable, while ensuring that all participating agencies follow the proper privacy regulations.

WI ECIDS connects the dots

Wisconsin's new data system draws on three agencies' data to provide a comprehensive picture of young children and families.

1. The Department of Health Services (DHS) runs several early care and education programs, gathering data on birth records, home visiting, immunization registries, early hearing detection, the state's IDEA Part B program, and the childhood lead poisoning prevention and remediation program.^a
2. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) administers programs including foster care, child care subsidies, and Wisconsin Works, the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.^b
3. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) oversees public education and curricula and has an Early Childhood Office tasked with supporting the early childhood community and the education of young children.^c



^a DHS website <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/>

^b DCF website: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov>

^c DPI Early Childhood website: <https://dpi.wi.gov/early-childhood>

Leaders in Wisconsin are excited about how their collaboration to share data through WI ECIDS will support their work. Each agency has identified pilot questions to test the new system once it is complete. For example, they are eager to know more about:

- the correlation between child care subsidy funding and early childhood suspensions;
- the behavioral health impact of hearing loss among schoolchildren who participated in birth-to-3 special education services; and
- the reading proficiency of 3rd graders who received a child care subsidy in the year prior to kindergarten, by types of care (i.e., home-based or center-based).

What strategies have supported Wisconsin’s success so far?

State leaders attribute much of their success to identifying and meeting the needs of each individual agency. The WI ECIDS draws on data from different agencies’ systems rather than requiring all agencies to adapt to one model. Leaders in Wisconsin said that this approach allowed each agency to be in control and know that their individual needs would be met because they designed their own data system first. It also allowed each agency to test its own database first, which led to a smoother connection between the departments and improved data quality. Strong communication was essential to the collaboration. By meeting regularly and defining terms and approaches, the agencies were aligned and able to work towards a common goal.

Building data-sharing collaboration in your state: Lessons from Wisconsin

- Establish a data governance body that is representative of your state or community’s early childhood programs, services, and parents. This group should support the development of a comprehensive early childhood data system that protects data confidentiality. Support the use of these data by programs, agency leaders, policymakers, and the public.
- Coordinate with existing data integration projects and workgroups to ensure that critical information about young children, their families, and early care and education services are included.
- Use the tools that have already been created to support early childhood data system development. Engage with federal technical assistance groups—such as the [State Longitudinal Data System State Support Team](#) (SST), the [DaSy Center](#) and the [Privacy Technical Assistance Center](#)—for assistance in developing a data system that will best support the work in your community.

For more information about state early childhood integrated data system, go to www.ecedata.org. You’ll find state profiles, stories, reports, and webinars on states’ progress.