

Impact of Data-Related Efforts Funded by the North Carolina Preschool Development Grant Birth to Age 5

Dale Richards, Cassie Simons Gerson, and Zipi Diamond

Guided by the [North Carolina Birth-5 Early Childhood Education Strategic Plan](#), North Carolina's Preschool Development Grant Birth to Age 5 (PDG B-5) supports children, families, and educators by funding a wide range of activities. One goal of the PDG B-5 focuses on strengthening North Carolina's early care and education mixed delivery system (ECE system). One of the objectives under this goal is to *improve early childhood data systems to facilitate the state's ability to measure progress toward its goals and to assist policymakers in ECE program planning and coordination*. To address this objective, the state funded several activities focused on improving data systems and data usage to support the ECE system.

The North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE) contracted with Child Trends to evaluate the PDG B-5. As part of this effort, Child Trends conducted a deep dive evaluation to learn more about data-related efforts funded by PDG B-5. Activities focused on data-related efforts included:

- Enhancing and expanding the North Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System (NC ECIDS)
- Increasing participation in NCCARE360 (a statewide coordinated care network that electronically connects families with identified needs to community resources)
- Supporting NC Pre-K programs with Teaching Strategies® (a digital platform for sending information about children's experiences in NC Pre-K to their future kindergarten teachers)
- Implementing the Local Data-Informed Strategic Planning activity, which built local capacity within the state to use early childhood data for strategic planning
- Convening the NC Early Childhood Data Advisory Council, which provides strategic direction around improving the use and quality of early childhood data

Child Trends conducted interviews and surveys with individuals who were administering state data systems ("administrators") and with individuals engaged in PDG B-5 funded data-related efforts ("data partners"). This brief¹ describes the extent to which administrators and data partners are aware of PDG B-5 funded data-related efforts, how they use data to measure progress and support program planning, and what data are still needed to improve ECE systems. We also highlight challenges with PDG B-5 funded data-related efforts, opportunities for growth, and recommendations to improve the sustainability of data systems.

¹ A Data Deep Dive report was prepared for internal use for DCDEE. This overview highlights the findings from the full report.

Key Findings

How are data being used to measure progress and support ECE program planning?

- Currently, data partners use data for strategic planning, decision making, and resource allocation, and to satisfy reporting needs.
- For the future, data partners reported wanting to use data to advance racial and ethnic equity, as well as geographic equity. For example, they mentioned wanting to examine surveys for cultural sensitivity and bias and to use data to equitably distribute resources across the state or across different populations of children and families. Data partners also want to use data to craft policy responses to complex problems.

What types of data do data partners still need to support ECE systems?

- The most common types of data that data partners still need include data on the ECE workforce (such as teacher retention, compensation) and child-level data from programs such as NC Pre-K, Head Start, and Children’s Health Insurance/Medicaid. For example, data partners need data on children’s social-emotional development and health.
- The majority of data partners need more or better data on attendance and participation, enrollment, family demographics, program capacity, and eligibility across their programs of interest.
- When asked about breaking data down into smaller groups (i.e., the disaggregation of data), data partners’ greatest needs include data that could be broken down by race and ethnicity, geographic region, income level, age, housing status, and disability status.

What are the challenges and opportunities for growth in PDG B-5 funded data systems?

- Administrators and data partners described challenges with using data systems to measure progress toward state goals or for planning and coordination purposes. Specifically, they discussed data quality issues and coordination and collaboration issues. Data quality challenges included issues with teachers using a consistent approach in rating their Teaching Strategies® GOLD observational assessments, a lack of data documentation due to staff turnover, and difficulty cleaning and interpreting self-reported demographic data. Administrators and data partners noted that fragmented and siloed existing data systems (where data are collected and stored in different places) limited their ability to link data from multiple sources to inform their service delivery or research.

Awareness of PDG-funded data systems

We asked interviewees about their awareness and knowledge of the three ECE data systems that received PDG funding (NC ECIDS, NCCARE360, and Teaching Strategies®). Most data partners were aware of or had engaged with NC ECIDS and NCCARE360. Fewer data partners had heard of Teaching Strategies®—possibly because this data system is primarily used by educators—not by local and state-level data experts like the data partners.

Interviewees thought NC ECIDS and Teaching Strategies® had a broad range of data-related uses (e.g., informing progress toward state goals, tracking child performance or outcomes, linking different sources of data). Interviewees thought the scope of NCCARE360 was narrower and rarely discussed using it for a purpose other than as a referral and case management platform.

Both administrators and data partners discussed future uses of these data systems such as aggregating child assessment data and determining areas of need for early childhood services. Across all three data system efforts, only Teaching Strategies® was described as useful in informing policy, legislation, and program planning.

How have PDG B-5 activities improved data capacity and supported the ECE system?

- PDG B-5 funding supported enhancements to data infrastructure (e.g., developing dashboards with data on programs, children, and families) and helped hire dedicated staff to oversee data systems and support data users.
- Funding also supported improvements to data systems, which has allowed administrators to conduct more analyses and expand reporting of state-level data. This, in turn, prompted more data-driven discussions for both administrators and data partners, such as using data to inform strategic planning at the state and local levels, address children’s needs, and plan for future initiatives. For example, administrators discussed the value of being able to look at statewide, district, and school trends.

What supports or resources are needed to sustain ECE data systems funded by PDG B-5?

- Administrators emphasized the need to increase data partners’ understanding and knowledge of data systems to support sustainability and use. For instance, administrators need more training for data partners, better communication about available resources, and accurate and updated documentation and information about available data. Similarly, data partners want more training and education on how to use data and what data are available.
- Administrators noted the importance of coordination and collaboration across data systems to support sustainability and growth and prevent duplication of efforts. They also noted the importance of ensuring that data systems meet data partners’ needs to promote ongoing use.
- To sustain data systems, administrators need permanent staff and funding. Due to the financial resources needed to maintain and expand these data systems, administrators suggested paring down the scope of the systems, finding alternative funding, or delegating and absorbing some work into existing structures.
- Data partners also need additional funding and resources to build their skills in collecting and using data. They also wanted more data on children and families from more programs to support planning and outreach efforts at the state and local levels, including the ability to track children across services and over time.

Recommendations

1. Develop and leverage existing resources—such as trainings, materials, and webinars—to increase data partners’ knowledge and understanding of available data and data systems to promote greater use of the data systems.
2. Solicit input from current and potential users to ensure that data systems are being designed to meet end users’ needs.
3. Build data literacy and data use skills among both administrators and data partners.
4. Increase access to disaggregated data available at the local level to assist with monitoring progress, and with planning and coordination efforts.
5. Establish requirements for documenting processes and decisions to ensure historical knowledge of data systems, which can support their sustainability.
6. Implement permanent structures, such as staffing and ongoing funding, to sustain and grow data systems and increase capacity for data use at the state and local levels.

Suggested citation: Richards, D., Gerson, C.S., & Diamond, Z. (2023). Impact of data-related efforts funded by the North Carolina Preschool Development Grant Birth to Age 5. *Child Trends*. 10.56417/2706s8288e

The production of this publication was supported by the Preschool Development Grant, Birth-Five (PDG B-5) number [90TP0056] from the Office of Early Childhood Development, Administration for Children and Families, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of the Office of Early Childhood Development, Administration for Children and Families, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Child Development
and Early Education