Oklahoma Early Childhood Data Priority Use Cases

Oklahoma has received a federal grant through the Preschool Development Grant-Birth to Five (PDG) program that is being used in part to support the design of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) that can link data across agencies. The state's design for its data infrastructure will be based on the needs of early childhood leaders. The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) has engaged two firms – Third Sector Intelligence (3Si) and Foresight Law + Policy (Foresight) -- to support the design process.

On July 8 and 9, a team from 3Si and Foresight met with leaders in Oklahoma to identify priority use cases. On July 8, OPSR hosted a meeting for more than 40 stakeholders to identify priority use cases and then dive deeper into each to identify what they would like to learn. On July 9, the 3Si and Foresight teams presented the findings from the stakeholder meeting to a small group of senior officials from the Governor's office and several state agencies. Based on those conversations, the team has identified two priority use cases to inform the design process:

1. Which children are in which programs?
2. What assessments are being done on children? How are assessment results being used to help children?

This summary report discusses each of those questions in more detail. It then discusses other priorities identified in the July 8 meeting, including:

1. What are the long-term outcomes of children who had access to early childhood programs in different combinations – and those that did not?
2. What is the impact on the Oklahoma workforce of early childhood education (ECE)?
3. What mental health services are being used by children, families, and early childhood professionals?
4. Are children making smooth transitions among programs, including within birth-to-5 years and into kindergarten?
5. Are the services we are implementing cost-effective?

The appendices include the agenda from the July 8 meeting, and the list of potential priority questions considered at that meeting.

Before discussing the priority use cases, some important process and background notes:

- The 3Si and Foresight teams will start their design work based on these two prioritized use cases. Part of that analysis will be about the feasibility of those use cases. If there are feasibility challenges with these use cases, the teams may draw on other use cases based on the conversations with Oklahoma leaders.
- The design work will start by focusing these prioritized use cases, but one of the goals of the system design is to create a system that can address an expanding number of use cases over time. Moreover, many of these use cases are interrelated.
- Oklahoma has already done important work to facilitate data linkages, including developing a Master Person Index and creating an interagency data sharing agreement. This project will take into account that work and seek to build on it wherever possible.
- While the ECIDS project is meant to facilitate interagency data sharing, another important benefit in many states has been improved *intra*-agency data sharing. Large agencies often maintain multiple

- data systems, and the process of linking data can help lead to each of those data sets being cleaned up and made more accurate.
- Several times during the conversations stakeholders raised questions about whether data collections were worthwhile to the people doing the collections, or to others. This process may yield valuable feedback on what information is most useful to stakeholders – and if data is neither useful to stakeholders nor required by federal law, the state may want to consider not collecting it.
- This stage of the process is focused primarily on generating data for use and analysis. In other states, the conversation about generating data has also sparked a conversation about the analytic capacity needed to make good use of the data. The 3Si and Foresight teams strongly encourage Oklahoma to have that conversation.
- Similarly, the ability of data systems to measure long-term outcomes can instigate a valuable conversation about what long-term outcomes are most important to stakeholders. In Oklahoma the PDG-supported needs assessment and strategic plan should contribute to that conversation.
- While much of the discussion of use cases focused on data about publicly-funded programs, some stakeholders raised the possibility of connecting this data to vital records data – or other sources beyond program enrollment data -- for a more complete picture of the early childhood population.
- Privacy and security are of paramount importance, and the final design will take into account the need for best practices in both of those areas. Privacy laws focus on which people have a legal right to access protected data and how protected data can be used appropriately, whereas security protocols focus on protecting data systems from outside attacks.
- Importantly for purposes of privacy, many of the use cases are focused on reporting aggregated data that can be used at the system level. When what is desired is system-level data, there are important privacy considerations in how individual data is linked to produce system-level data – but once the system-level data has been linked to produce aggregated reports, that information can be made publicly available. Use cases focused on the use of information about individual children raise a different set of privacy concerns.

Based on the use cases Foresight and 3Si will be conducting a data inventory, designing a system of data linkages, and proposing a governance structure to support the ongoing management of data.

Top Priority Questions

Stakeholders were asked to focus on the key questions that the state needs to answer to improve policy and program delivery – that is, information that if we had it, we could make better decisions for children and families. Stakeholders noted the importance of having some short-term wins to build momentum and trust for the system.

The two use cases that are serving as focal points for the design work are:

Which children are in which programs?

This question has been one of the keystone design questions in states across the country in developing an ECIDS. Currently the state knows which children are enrolled in which programs, but it does not know which children are enrolled in multiple programs at the same time (or over time). Moreover, it does not know which children are *not* enrolled in programs but might benefit from them, which stakeholders would also like to know. Having this data would allow for better analysis at multiple levels – including the community level – of what services are needed.

Topics that stakeholders would like to see explored in this use case include:

- Where children are not accessing programs, is it by choice or are there barriers to enrollment? What eligibility restrictions vary by program, region, or demographic that may be limiting enrollment?
- Are referrals for service being picked up?
- When children have been in SoonerStart, do they continue to receive IDEA-funded services in preschool and K-12? If not, what were the reasons they did not? What other services are children in SoonerStart receiving birth to five?
- How often do children move in and out of programs?
- Can we eventually incorporate information about engagement in less formal settings, such as libraries and community organizations?

What assessments are being done on children? How are assessment results being used to help children?

Stakeholders discussed the fact that children are being assessed many times, often in duplicative ways – and that the information gleaned from those assessments is not always traveling with the child to be useful to other providers. Improved data could help the state take a more holistic look at its assessment practices. Stakeholders are interested in understanding how and when an assessment is conducted, how the results are used, and how the system could be made more efficient to reduce duplication of effort for providers and families – including to support alignment among programs and supporting transitions.

There was an acknowledgement that some aspects of this use case would appear to focus on individual data, rather than aggregated data, and that those issues might be better addressed in later phases of an ECIDS buildout. There was also an acknowledgement that using assessment data across providers might require systems for maintaining consistent quality of data collection that do not currently exist.

Topics that stakeholders would like to see explored in this use case include:

- In what settings are assessments being conducted on children?
- How are assessment results being used longitudinally?
- What would we consider successful assessment results?
- Should we consider more standardization of assessment practice?
- What additional capacity do we need to successfully administer assessments and use the results?
- How are assessments supporting social-emotional development?

Other Use Cases Discussed in Depth at the July 8 Meeting

What are the long-term outcomes of children who had access to early childhood programs in different combinations – and those that did not?

Participants at the meeting were very interested in the idea that over the long term, the data system can help us understand the long-term outcomes of children – and analyzing the relationship between those outcomes and the experiences they had in early childhood. Developing the use case of linking information about children across programs will allow for this use case to be built out in the future. Ideally, information about long-term outcomes can ultimately be used to improve service delivery.

Topics that stakeholders would like to see explored in this use case include:

- What outcomes are most important to parents?
- What outcomes are most important to the early childhood field generally? This question will be explored as part of the state's PDG-supported needs assessment and strategic planning work.
- How will we be able to connect outcomes to specific programs?
- How will long-term data across multiple agencies help us understand the impact of SoonerStart?

What is the impact on the Oklahoma workforce of early childhood education?

Participants on July 8 recognized that the lack of access to early childhood services – particularly child care or full-day preschool – has an impact on parents in the workforce. If parents do not have somewhere for their child to go, that can affect their employment status. Many communities in Oklahoma struggle to maintain an adequate supply of child care.

Topics that stakeholders would like to see explored in this use case include:

- What are the supports needed by working parents of young children?
- What role can mental health services play in supporting parents in the workforce?
- How can we make sure access to early childhood matches workforce need in different communities?
- How can local businesses and child care providers collaborate to address this issue?
- What are some of the impediments to maintaining an adequate supply of child care to meet the needs of working parents?
- What role does early childhood play in attracting working families to Oklahoma – or causing them to look for work elsewhere?

What mental health services are being used by children, families, and professionals?

Participants believe that mental health services can play a critical role in supporting children, families, and professionals. The perception is that there is a significant gap in available services, and there are not enough trained professionals to meet the need. Participants would like to see the need quantified more specifically, and then met.

Topics that stakeholders would like to see explored in this use case include:

- What is the actual need?
- What barriers are there to providing services, and do those vary based on geography?
- Are there enough professionals to deliver needed services?
- How can mental health services be coordinated with other early childhood programs?
- How can SoonerStart and other programs provide more tailored care?
- How do Oklahoma ACES results compare to other states?
- How does the level of service provided in Oklahoma compare to the level of service in other states?
- What levels of reimbursement are needed to sustain mental health professionals?

Are children making smooth transitions among programs, including within birth-to-5 years and into kindergarten?

Participants are concerned that when children transition among programs, important information about them does not travel with them to new settings. Participants were also interested in what supports could be provided to parents and families that are navigating transitions, and what barriers exist that could be removed. Participants noted that the state has not clearly defined what makes for a successful transition.

Topics that stakeholders would like to see explored in this use case include:

- Can we design a data system where information follows the child, with appropriate privacy protections?
- How are we supporting parents and families through transitions? What capacity is there, and what barriers are there?
- Can we define what a successful transition looks like?
- Where are transitions failing because of a lack of available services?
- Where are transitions failing because of a lack of coordination?
- Who is falling into the gaps?
- How can the repetition of assessments be minimized when children transition among programs?
- How can we communicate to providers, teachers, and agencies about supporting transitions?
- How can we reach children and families who are not in services to help them transition into services they need?

Are the services we are implementing cost-effective?

This question is closely related to the question about long-term outcomes. It looks to establish what combinations of programs and services offer the best value in terms of long-term impact, with the expectation that the right combinations could look very different for children with different characteristics. This requires understanding the true costs of services – including which children are receiving multiple services – and then defining a set of long-term costs that might be impacted by services. This work requires data linking because in many studies the benefits of early childhood services are across multiple domains that are tracked by different agencies: income, reduced crime, better health outcomes, and more.

Topics that stakeholders would like to see explored in this use case include:

- What program combinations provide the best value?
- How does the value of program combinations differ depending on child characteristics?
- How will we sell the value proposition?
- How will we measure future savings?
- Are the services being implemented cost-effective?
- What are the best practices?
- How can Oklahoma measure the impact on the current workforce of early childhood services for working parents?
- What is the relationship between the initial cost of a service and its long-term impact?
- What savings for families is SoonerStart providing?
- Are there unexpected and currently unmeasured benefits (and economic impacts) of ECE, such as reduced health care costs associated with emergency room utilization?

Appendix 1
Oklahoma Priority Questions Meeting

Oklahoma History Center, 800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive, Oklahoma City, OK
July 8, 2019, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

9:30-9:45	Welcome and introductions
9:45-10:15	Overview of project goals
10:15-10:45	Priority Questions: Overview of what we have so far
10:45-11:30	Breakout conversations
11:30-12:15	Report out
12:15-1:30	Lunch
1:30-2	Easels: How will we use the answers to these questions?
2-2:45	Discussion of the easel results
2:45-3	Wrap-up and next steps

Appendix 2

The following questions were shared with participants in the July 8 meeting in advance, with participants asked to send in additional questions:

- Which children are enrolled in which programs, including children enrolled in multiple programs?
- How many children are enrolled in programs that are high-quality? What are the characteristics of those children?
- What strategies for quality improvement have been most successful? What measurements of quality are the most important?
- How is the state supporting community-level work among early childhood providers, including but not limited to local efforts to refer parents to services and fill service gaps?
- How are children with special needs being supported, including by connecting them to the full range of services they need?
  - What happens to children who receive special education evaluations but are not enrolled in special education services?
  - What are the long-term impacts of SoonerStart?
- What assessments are being done on children? How are assessment results being used holistically to guide a child's education and development across settings?
- Are children making smooth transitions among programs, including within birth-to-5 years and into kindergarten?
- What differences are there in the long-term outcomes – including education, health, and other outcomes -- of children who had access to early childhood programs and those who did not? What differences are there in the outcomes of who had access to different combinations of early childhood programs?
- What differences are there in the school performance of children who had access to early childhood programs and those who did not? What differences are there in the performance of children who had access to different combinations of early childhood programs?
- What mental health services are children receiving, and how are those services combined with other services?
- What mental health services are professionals receiving, and what impacts are those services having?
- What are the attributes (including demographics and credentials) of the professionals working with young children? What are the attributes of the professionals working with young children in the highest-quality programs?

The following potential priority questions were submitted by participants in advance of the meeting:

- How is the state supporting children who are experiencing trauma (identified by out of home placement, foster care, or a confirmed child abuse report)?
- Where do children served by SoonerStart attend preschool? What are the patterns by age, gender, race or location?
- Which SoonerStart exiters are most likely to receive services through IEPs at districts? Which students are more likely to receive private services? Which students do not receive any services at all?
- What early childhood outcomes are affected by SoonerStart and preschool involvement? What are the patterns for services received, length of program participation, location, gender or race? How do the results of this data impact SoonerStart services? Public School PreK?

- In what ways do (Birth through 5 year olds) Early Learning programs support Oklahoma's ESSA goal: "Align early childhood education and learning foundations to ensure at least 75% of students are ready to read upon Kindergarten entry."?
- At what rates do young children and their families participate in multiple health and education programs like Sooner Success, SoonerCare and SoonerStart? Other? What are the patterns by age, gender, race or location?
- How many 4 year olds in Full Day PK/Half Day PK/ Not in PK? How can we identify services students received prior to public school 4 year old programs? Other 4 year old programs?
- In what ways are tribes partnering with public schools for early childhood education transitions?
- In what ways are Oklahoma Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (OSRCL) grant schools partnering with community agencies to support early literacy for Birth through 5 year olds?

The following potential priority questions were generated in the meeting:

- What are existing partnerships and why did previous momentum regarding these partnerships change?
- What does it cost (what's most cost-effective) to serve a child?
- How does the exposure to risks (ACEs) affect outcomes?
- How will the gaps between systems be addressed?