

Introduction: What Are We Trying to Accomplish?

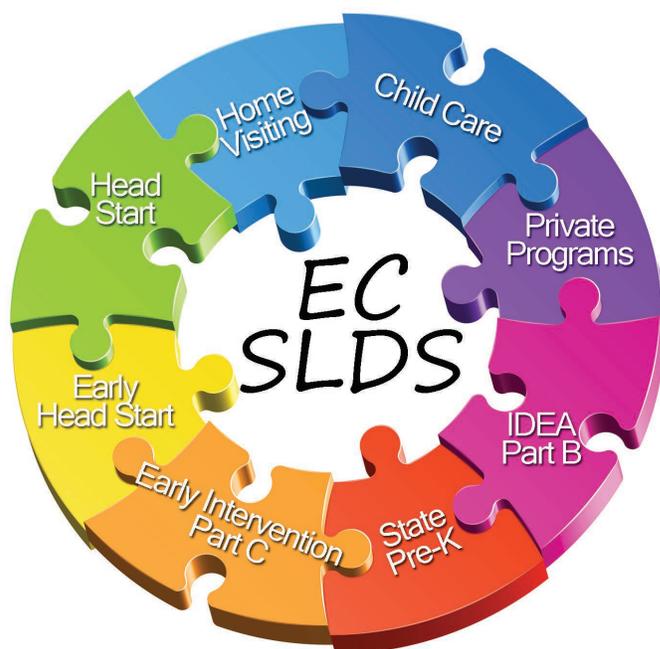
In a series of calls sponsored by the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Grant Program, state representatives shared experiences and offered tips on engaging Head Start in an SLDS. Topics addressed included, but were not limited to, communication and engagement strategies; vendor collaboration; pilot approaches; and what data to include. By engaging with the Head Start/SLDS working group, the SLDS grant program hopes to offer practical suggestions and resources for each step in the overall process of integrating Head Start data into an SLDS.

The SLDS Grant Program also sponsored an introductory webinar on integrating Head Start data into an SLDS. This webinar, “Head Start and SLDS: Getting to Know You,” and related summary are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/webinars.asp>.

Why Integrate Head Start Data?

Head Start programs are primary partners in SLDSs, and Head Start data are essential to inform research, policy, and practice. If an SLDS does not include Head Start it could be missing more than 25 percent of the early childhood (EC) population. Head Start grantees can benefit from Head Start integration, too: by proactively engaging with an SLDS, Head Start leaders demonstrate the effectiveness of Head Start programs, evidence the preparation of the Head Start teaching staff, and contribute to strengthening all early childhood education services to better prepare children and families for success in school.

Overall, Head Start should be considered one piece of the larger EC SLDS puzzle.



Potential Benefits to Joining the Data System Conversation

- Participation of Head Start in state data systems that results in an overall reduction in state-level reporting requirements and/or data entry (e.g., state training approval and tracking systems)
- Reduced amount of duplicate data entry
- Full knowledge/participation in any Head Start research/evaluation
- Increased research/evaluation to support Head Start
- Ability for Head Start to provide context/meaning to research/evaluation
- Increased supportive evidence for Head Start from research/evaluation results

Getting Started

Have a Clear Vision.

Defining the purpose for the inclusion of Head Start data in an SLDS involves developing a clear mission and vision for the work of the SLDS. This includes identifying the audiences who will be served; deciding who is leading the effort; determining how the end user might use Head Start data to inform decisions or change behaviors; gaining support from key leadership; and developing coordination across and between agencies, programs, data systems, and multiple funding streams. While all of these steps pose challenges, addressing these key components at the forefront will ensure that the next steps are strategic, coordinated, and efficient for all.

Defining a Vision: Kansas and Wisconsin



Kansas started the implementation of Head Start data into its SLDS by reviewing key policy questions developed by stakeholders. These key questions help to determine precisely what the state hopes to achieve by incorporating the data, and serve as a guide to ensure that the state is on the right track to developing a system that meets its needs.

In Wisconsin, the integration of Head Start and EC data into the SLDS started with a data survey across three state agencies. Wisconsin also looked to data readiness indicators and the Early Childhood Data Collaborative's "10 Fundamentals of Coordinated State ECE Data Systems" (available at <http://www.ecedata.org/the-10-ece-fundamentals>).



Who to Involve and When?

As with the planning of any project, the key stakeholders should be identified and engaged in the process as early as possible. Stakeholders may include:

- Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO)
- Regional Head Start Offices
- Head Start Associations
- Head Start Practitioners
- Vendors (see Appendix C for more on engaging and working with vendors)

Because Head Start program data are essential to inform research, policy, and practice, Head Start practitioners should be included in the SLDS conversation early on in the process. SLDS project staff should reach out to the HSSCO Director and invite Head Start grantee representatives to sit on data management and/or data policy committees. If Head Start stakeholders are hesitant to participate, arrange a meeting to address concerns and find solutions.

Missouri, Proactive in Soliciting Participation



In Missouri, although the Regional Head Start office could not mandate participation in the SLDS integration, the office did write a letter stating its support for the project. This letter was then presented at the Head Start Stakeholders meeting. The state education agency also presented at the Head Start Stakeholders meeting to ensure that the Head Start community understood the overall project.

Missouri also collaborated with other state agencies, which helped to ensure that other organizations would take part in calls and meetings. Missouri had their HSSCO follow up with unresponsive offices, which in turn garnered a higher RSVP rate.

Strategies for Engagement

Have Questions Ready... and Listen to the Responses.

When you initiate engagement with grantees, come prepared with a list of questions to guide your conversations. As various grantees will have different business processes, it is vitally important to listen: understanding grantees' processes and needs at the beginning of the relationship will make the work go more smoothly. Continue to be open-minded and hear what each Head Start grantee would value from such an opportunity.

See Appendix B for suggested questions to ask Head Start grantees.

Do Your Research.

Know and understand data collection methods used throughout the state—this is a vital step before all data can be collected in one system. Head Start grantees may use various vendors and internal data systems to collect program data. Understanding more about what data a Head Start grantee collects and their ideals for the benefits of using integrated data will help the SLDS meet the needs of this particular stakeholder group.

Researching Data Collection in Delaware



Delaware began the SLDS/Head Start conversation by researching the methods Head Start grantees use to collect data. This included all possibilities, from paper to aggregate information from Head Start Program Information Reports. At the same time, Delaware is reviewing the way they assign IDs to ensure that these IDs can be used to assist Head Start grantees. The goal is to eliminate duplicate data entry and make processes less burdensome on grantees overall.

Consider Providing Incentives.

To engage Head Start grants, some states use incentives. Incentives can be financial and non-financial for engaging new partners in the SLDS work, and may include:

- Stipends for participation
- Free data load/pull for Head Start grantees when they know that there will be a cost associated in the future
- Assistance in analyzing organizational data
- Data obtained to support grantees and help them demonstrate program successes

SLDS leads and Head Start grantees should have a conversation about the cost of integrating data early on—including both staff capacity and maintenance costs. Offering incentives that reduce the cost can be attractive to Head Start grantees.

An additional incentive could be offering assistance in analyzing organizational data for Head Start grantees. Many organizations are not equipped to perform data analysis. Any help a state agency or research consortium can provide will enable Head Start grantees to look at their data and decide what they want out of the data, reports, or general analysis.

In addition, as part of the Head Start Act of 2007, grantees have to compete for future grants. States can leverage the growing SLDS and partner with Head Start grantees to obtain data needed to show evidence of success in elementary school and to encourage grantees to share data to help demonstrate program successes.

Providing Incentives: Utah and Missouri



Utah decided to use an existing process to match early childhood records across multiple programs. Participating programs will be fitted with their own front-end “agent” that plugs into the existing infrastructure. As an incentive, all currently participating programs will be added to the infrastructure with project funds. Programs may join the data project in the future, but each new program will have to fund their addition to the infrastructure.

Missouri budgeted stipends as part of their data pilot. While the stipends do not completely offset the cost to each Head Start grantee, the state did offer an incentive to Head Start agencies. As an SLDS partner, the Registry (the early childhood workforce data agency for the state) facilitated the process and also collects training data for the state. A data download option from the Registry was developed, with assistance from Head Start directors, that could be uploaded into local Head Start data systems to support federal reporting requirements. This saves the Head Start grantees from having to collect these data on their own, reducing time and cost while ensuring high quality of data.



Consider Starting with A Pilot Project.

Pilot approaches allow the SLDS team and Head Start grantees to develop a relationship, and also provide quick value to address immediate needs. By starting with pilot projects, SLDS teams have been able to establish quality processes, identify the needs of the Head Start grantees, and then provide data to address immediate needs—thus showing the value of the data to the grantee.

Head Start Pilot Projects: Missouri and Hawaii



Missouri is currently in the process of preparing data elements, batching unique IDs, and facilitating data preparation processes for Head Start agencies for initial transfers to take place between mid-late October and mid-November 2012. Funding by the state’s Coordinating Board for Early Childhood (Missouri’s State Advisory Council) is designated for a minimum of 10 Head Start agencies (maximum of 20) to participate in two separate transfers. The Fall 2012 transfer focuses on attendance and enrollment elements, while the Spring 2013 transfer will focus on more sensitive, child well-being elements. The Registry is facilitating the batching of unique child IDs with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, another incentive for programs to participate. A second draft of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) is being prepared after receiving feedback from a Head Start Data Element Work Group, comprised of participating and non-participating Head Start agencies.

Hawaii is not using any incentives to get Head Start programs engaged. Instead, the plan is to establish an MOU first (the state is working on one blanket MOU with the Head Start Association of Hawaii that, if possible, would cover all six Head Start grantees in Hawaii). Once this MOU is established, the first phase of the pilot will be to match children from Head Start (e.g., HCAP Head Start program) to Hawaii Department of Education kindergarten demographics and assess the match rate. If not successful, more assessment will be required. If the match is successful (~75–80 percent), the next phase would be to produce aggregate reports based on agreed upon metrics.



Attend Head Start Association Meetings.

Part of incorporating Head Start into an SLDS requires that the SLDS team learn more about the Head Start program. Within a state there are opportunities to attend local, regional, and national meetings. Beyond learning about Head Start, these meetings provide an opportunity for the SLDS team to give an overview of the SLDS and related efforts. This allows face-to-face communication, garners interest, and builds support for additional data needs for Head Start grantees.

Include Head Start in the Early Childhood Data Governance.¹

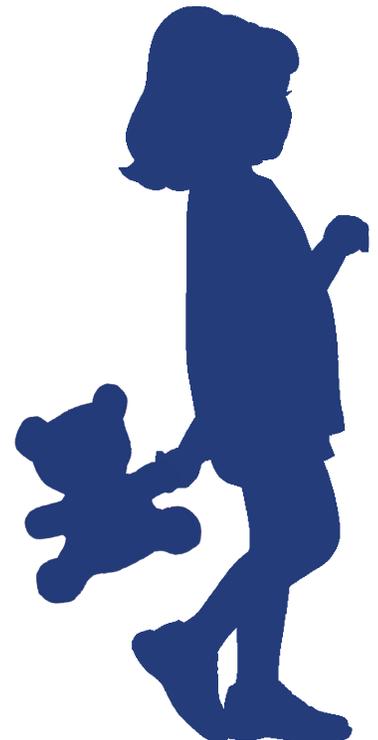
Incorporating new programs should be more than a one-way sharing of data. To help make two-way data sharing successful, each program should be included in the Early Childhood Data Governance. Including stakeholders that are contributing data to the SLDS is essential to ensure the data is appropriate and represented correctly both for the program and for SLDS reports. In order to determine how the SLDS message will be delivered to Head Start stakeholders, form a planning committee that includes state departments and the Head Start Director.

Potential Benefits to Including Head Start in Data Governance

- enhanced quality of data collected, reported, and used
- reduced staff burden
- improved communication, collaboration, and relationships with the various agencies, information technology (IT) staff, and program areas

Show Your Gratitude.

There are often so many stakeholders for early childhood that it is easy to become overwhelmed and become busy, but don't forget to say "thank you" to your stakeholders. Approaching this as a partnership will assist in developing relationships in which the SLDS team can learn from Head Start and vice versa.



¹ For more on Data Governance, see *SLDS Best Practices Brief: P-20W Data Governance*, available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/brief4_P_20W_DG.pdf

Appendix A: Resources

Webinar: *Head Start and SLDS: Getting to Know You*

Recording available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/webinars.asp>.

Summary available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/Headstart_and_SLDS.pdf.

Webinar: *Prioritizing Early Childhood Data*

Recording available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/webinars.asp>.

Summary available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/Prioritizing_webinar.pdf.

Vendor Engagement: SLDS Best Practices Brief, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/brief3.pdf>.

Stakeholder Communication: SLDS Best Practices Brief, available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/best_practices.pdf.

Appendix B: Guiding Questions

Questions SEAs should consider before engaging with Head Start:

- Why would we like to engage Head Start?
- What do we need to know in order to effectively integrate Head Start?
- Does our SLDS have the capacity to include additional programs?
- Is our SLDS flexible enough to meet the needs of other programs not administered by the state?

Questions SEAs should ask Head Start grantees:

- How do you currently collect child-level data?
- Do you have a vendor maintain the data? If so, do you mind sharing which vendor?
- How do you create your program information reports?
- What data do you commonly use for program planning or reporting?
- Do you feel that there are external data that would help inform decisionmaking in your program initiatives?

Appendix C: Working with Vendors

About Head Start Vendors.

- Work must be done through the Head Start grantees, as they are the vendor's client.
- Head Start grantees “own” the data; not the vendor.
- Vendors are selected by each grantee, and there can be many vendors within a state that must be coordinated.
- Although it seems intuitive to go directly to the vendor, the recommended approach both by grantees and vendors has been to work directly with the grantee.

How to Aid the Head Start Grantee/Vendor Relationship.

- Help grantees understand how they can request data from the vendor based on what data already exists.
- Help grantees understand the right questions to ask the vendor.
- Help grantees understand what data to request from the vendor—and in what format—as well as how data will be provided back (if that is within the scope of the vendor agreement).

Base the relationship on a solid, explicit framework, while striving for collaboration and partnership in practice.

If the vendor management processes are clearly defined up front, the goals of the grantee and the vendor should already be in alignment. This will allow for collaborative give-and-take, as both sides of the relationship are ultimately striving for the same outcomes. Additionally, document the relationship with the vendor on the front end, above and beyond the necessary legal documentation. Careful documentation will not only protect a grantee legally should a problem arise, but also provide clarity to the vendor about needs and expectations. This extra responsibility will help to ensure a successful engagement, as well as inform the vendor evaluation process.

Let IT guide the process in terms of what systems to seek to meet federal and state requirements, but also allow vendors to innovate and bring solutions.

Vendors should not be restricted to augmenting staff and solutions; let them propose their own innovations, not just commodities. Ensure that your RFP does not eliminate the vendor's ability to provide recommended solutions beyond the original proposal. While an education agency's staff will be very knowledgeable about its business, the vendor may outpace the staff in the areas of technology and system development. Allow vendors a platform to share their innovations and solutions throughout the project life cycle—not just at its inception.

Although the chosen vendor will host the data, data are always owned by the grantee.

In order to have a successful partnership with a vendor, a grantee must understand all fundamental aspects of its system and be aware of its status at all times, and ensure that the work is on course and will benefit the stakeholders. A deep knowledge of the system—even if the vendor has performed most, if not all, of the design/development—will ensure a more sustainable system once the contract has closed. Be hands on and fully engaged.²

² Source: *Vendor Engagement: SLDS Best Practices Brief*, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/brief3.pdf>.