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Title Slide: Introduction to the ECLS-K

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This module provides an introduction to the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99, or ECLS-K for short. The module provides users with basic information about the study's design, target population, sample design, the years in which data were collected, the different respondents included in the study, and the methods used to collect the data. The subsequent ECLS-K training modules contained within this system will discuss these topics in greater detail and address questions about how to effectively use the dataset for your analytic purposes.

This module also provides a broad overview of the topics for which data are available for analysis to help you answer the fundamental question... "Are ECLS-K data for me?"

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The ECLS-K is a study of children who were in kindergarten in the United States in the 1998-99 school year. The study includes data collected from multiple sources at multiple points in time. It began in the 1998-99 school year with a sample of more than 21,000 children attending more than 1,200 public and private schools. Data collections occurred in both the fall and spring of that first year, which is referred to as the base year. Subsequent data collections occurred in the fall and spring of first grade, and the spring of third, fifth, and eighth grade. In the base year, all children were in kindergarten. Although the study refers to later rounds of data collection by the grade the majority of children were in, children were included in subsequent data collections regardless of their grade level. For budgetary reasons, the fall first-grade data collection was conducted with a 30 percent subsample of the full study sample. Information was collected from the children, their families, their teachers, and their schools, though the specific respondents in each round of data collection varied.

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Though the ECLS-K is first and foremost a study of children who were in kindergarten in the United States in the 1998-99 school year, the data are nationally representative of several groups. In addition to being representative of children in kindergarten in 1998-99, both those who were in kindergarten for the first time and those who were kindergarten repeaters, the base-year data are also representative of kindergarten teachers and schools educating kindergartners in the 1998-99 school year.

After the base year, freshening of the sample resulted in the study being nationally representative of children in first grade in the U.S. during the 1999-2000 school year. Data collections after the first-grade round were not representative of children in the target grades because the sample was not freshened. That is, the sample did not include children who entered the U.S. school system after first grade. Therefore, the data are not representative of third-graders, fifth-graders, or eighth-graders. They are

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representative of children who were kindergartners in 1998-99 or first-graders in 1999-2000 when they were in third grade, fifth grade, and eighth grade. The data are not representative of schools or teachers in any year after the base year.

The study sample was selected using a complex multi-stage design in which children were sampled within schools that had been sampled within primary sampling units, or PSUs. The PSUs were counties or groups of counties that had been sampled from among all PSUs in the United States. Additionally, Asian and Pacific Islander children were oversampled to ensure that the study included enough of these children to make precise estimates for them. Oversampling was not needed for children in other race/ethnicity groups because the sample sizes for other groups were expected to be sufficiently large without oversampling. More details about the study's complex sample design are provided in the module titled 'ECLS-K Sample Design, Weights, Variance, and Missing Data' and can be accessed by clicking the underlined screen text on this slide.

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This table shows the data collection rounds and approximate numbers of completed child assessments and parent interviews in each round of data collection. To be considered a respondent in any given round, a child must have either participated in the child assessment or had a parent who completed an interview. This explains why the sample sizes listed here for fall and spring kindergarten are less than the total base year ECLS-K sample size of approximately 21,000. The samples are sufficiently large in any given round of data collection to support detailed analysis involving multiple characteristics or relatively smaller subpopulations, such as children with disabilities. The smaller sample size in the fall first-grade round reflects the subsampling that occurred for just that round of data collection, when data were collected from only about a third of the full study sample. Also, the sample size decreases over time for a variety of reasons, including the attrition that occurs in any longitudinal study and the subsampling of children who changed schools, which was used in the ECLS-K. While ideally the study would have followed all base-year respondents who moved from their original schools after the spring of kindergarten, it would have been expensive to do. To contain data collection costs, only a subset of the students who changed schools after one round were followed for continuation in the study into the next round.

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Information was collected from numerous respondents over the course of the study. This table shows in which rounds each component was included. Every round of data collection included child assessments and a parent interview. The child assessment took place during a school assessment visit in which data collection teams of about 2 to 3 assessors visited schools for about 2 to 4 days in order to directly assess all children in the school who were participating in the study. The same staff who assessed the children conducted interviews with the children's parents. Most parent interviews were conducted by telephone, but some were conducted in person when the parent did not have a telephone, was hard to reach by telephone, or preferred an in-person interview.

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General classroom teachers completed self-administered, hard-copy questionnaires in every data collection except for the fall of first grade. In every spring data collection, when sampled children had an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, on record with the school, their special education teachers and related service providers were asked to complete self-administered, hard-copy questionnaires. School administrators also completed self-administered, hard-copy questionnaires in every spring data collection. At the end of each school year from kindergarten through fifth grade, school staff recorded information from school records about children's school enrollment and attendance, IEP and disability status, and home language on a student record abstract form. Also, in each spring collection from kindergarten through fifth grade, field staff supervisors completed a checklist indicating the availability and condition of a selected set of school facilities, the presence and adequacy of security measures, the presence of environmental factors that may affect the learning environment, and the overall learning climate of the school.

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The topics that are covered within each of the data collection instruments are broadly listed here.

As can be seen from this list, the study has collected a great deal of information on many different topics over time. In order to enable analyses of change across the course of the study, many of the same or similar questions were asked in multiple rounds of data collection. There are differences in the exact sets of questions asked in each round because the questions needed to be both appropriate for and relevant to the children's age at the time of data collection.

Most of the study data collection instruments are available online for researchers to review the exact wording of questions asked of different respondents. Some instruments and questions are not available because copyright agreements prevent NCES from distributing them. Links to the study instruments, as well as additional details regarding data collection in general, are provided in the module titled 'Data Collected through the ECLS-K.'

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While information on many topics was collected in multiple rounds of data collection, there are a few topics for which information was collected in only one round. The base year included a Head Start Verification Study, the purpose of which was two-fold: (1) to identify which of the children reported by either their parents or their schools as having attended Head Start the year prior to kindergarten did indeed attend a Head Start program and (2) to evaluate the accuracy of identifying Head Start participation through parent and school reports. As part of this study, information about children's Head Start attendance first was collected from parents and school records. The name of the Head Start center the child attended was then checked against a database of all Head Start centers in the primary sampling units included in the study. If the center was found in the database, a questionnaire was sent to the director of the center. The questionnaire

asked the directors to confirm that the center was a Head Start center, to indicate whether they had a record of the study child having attended and, if so, when the child attended.

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The base year also included the collection of information about teacher and school administrator salaries and benefits. In each school, the business office administrators or head administrator completed a self-administered questionnaire on the salary and benefit rates of the head administrator and all kindergarten teachers in the school. Data were collected about head administrators' and teachers' base salary, merit pay, and benefits. These salary and benefits data can be combined with other ECLS-K data for analyses, for example to examine the relationship between student outcomes and school resource allocation and use.

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There are several features of the ECLS-K design that make it particularly well-suited for certain kinds of analyses. Assessments of children's knowledge and skills at the start of formal schooling provide a baseline against which to measure children's growth, development, and learning across the life of the study. Measurement of growth, development, and learning is made possible by the inclusion of assessments of the same children at several points in time. Use of baseline data in conjunction with data from multiple time points also allows for examination of the differences that children begin school with and a better understanding of how differences, in particular gaps in achievement by key background characteristics, may decrease or increase over time. Fall and spring assessments in both kindergarten and first grade allow for analyses relating growth and learning within a school year to children's school and classroom experiences, as well as the characteristics of their teachers, classrooms, and schools. The spring kindergarten and fall first-grade data can be used to examine summer learning, or summer learning loss. Measurement of children's growth and development in multiple areas, as well as the collection of information about children's experiences in multiple environments, allow for a more complete examination of the child. For example, analysts can investigate how the parent-child relationship, the child's growth, or the child's functioning in noncognitive domains are related to educational experiences. Lastly, the collection of information from multiple sources results in the collection of more reliable data, because the study asked for particular information from the people best able to report it.

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This module has provided you with an introduction to the ECLS-K and described the study's design, target population, sample design, the years in which data were collected, the different respondents included in the study, and the methods used to collect the data. Additionally, this module has highlighted topics for which data are available for analyses. Important resources that have been provided throughout the module are summarized in this slide along with the module's objectives for your reference.

The subsequent ECLS-K training modules discuss these topics in greater detail and address questions about how to effectively use the dataset for your analytic purposes.

You may now proceed to the next module in the series, or click the exit button to return to the landing page.