SOUTH CAROLINA EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA LEADERS
Draft Key Questions, Spring 2012

South Carolina is examining ways to strengthen early learning experiences for children. To deepen our understanding of current practices and outcomes, we are exploring data available to us through the Data Warehouse and other sources. We are working on a set of "key questions" to inform this work and need your input. Our goal is that policymakers and practitioners will be able to use data to improve policy and practice, and thereby improve child outcomes. We want to know what questions, if answered, would provide the information that would allow policymakers and practitioners to make changes for the better. Once the key questions are developed, the state will examine ways to update the Data Warehouse so that the key questions can be answered.

This document was developed by the South Carolina Early Childhood Data Leaders to help organize key questions and data points. Although Data Leaders are welcome to use it with external stakeholders if they choose, it is primarily a tool for the Data Leaders themselves to keep track of key questions they may wish to see answered. As discussed at our last meeting, it now includes a column for individual agencies to identify what data they collect that is relevant to the questions posed.

The draft provides some overarching questions, modeled on questions developed by the national Early Childhood Data Collaborative.[1] It also notes some key considerations relating to those questions in South Carolina. The draft also offers some suggestions for indicators (using the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative as an example[2]) that the state could consider tracking, and key questions that the state might seek to answer with its data system. Given the sensitivity of some of the data fields, it is important to emphasize that all indicators would be collected and utilized in a manner that rigorously preserves data privacy and security, in accordance with all relevant laws.

It is important to note that some of the data points identified here are already collected in the South Carolina Data Warehouse, but others are not. If data identified as critical is not currently collected, state leaders will evaluate whether or not it is feasible to collect the data, and if it is what strategies it will use for collection. In addition to existing gaps in the data, the state is examining how to take the data that is already collected and analyze it more effectively to focus on improving school readiness.

If you have questions, comments or feedback to the document, please send them to Betty Gardiner (bgardine@scfirststeps.org) or Elliot Regenstein (elliot.regenstein@educationcounsel.com).

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[1] http://www.ecedata.org/.

[2] The full report is available at http://www.gettingready.org/matriarch/MultiPiecePage.asp_Q_PageID_E_318_A_PageName_E_NationalSchoolReadinessIndicat.

Overarching Question and Key Considerations	Potential Data Points, and Questions Answerable by Data	Relevant Data Collected by [Agency]

1. What are the basic ecological influences that inhibit or promote young children to succeed when they enter school and beyond?
 	
• Ecological factors (influences, determinants, causes) are those people, organizations, and other things which affect children's readiness. The proximal influences directly impact one or more dimensions of readiness. Distal influences impact the proximal factors which directly impact child readiness.
• The domains of ecological factors include family, center-based and provider home-based ECE, health, economics, neighborhood, local and national culture, peers, and broader community organizations such as faith organizations, libraries, playgrounds, etc.
• Individual child factors may be considered, most narrowly as innate characteristics or, alternatively at a given point in time, current child readiness based on the impact of prior ecological influences.
• The most powerful influence on young children comes from those people who interact with the child for the greatest amount of time and the most intensively. These people are usually family, especially the mother. After family, the next greatest influences are
	Family
	• Social
	   ○ Ethnicity/Culture
	   ○ Primary Language Spoken in Home
	   ○ Education-Level of Parent
	• Economic
	   ○ Income
	   ○ Employment
	   ○ Housing
	   ○ Eligibility/Access/Use of Health Care
	   ○ Eligibility/Access/Use of Child Care/Early Education
	• Home Environment
	   ○ Child interactions with parents, siblings, and supportive adults
	   ○ Adult-to-Adult Interactions
	   ○ Stability of Living Arrangements
	   ○ Parental Expectations for and Involvement in Child Development and Education
	
	Community/Neighborhood
	• Social
	   ○ Student Achievement at various points including graduation and post-secondary
	   ○ Presence and Influence of Religious and Community Organizations
	   ○ Single and Teen Parents
	   ○ Property and Violent Crime
	• Economic
	   ○ Income	

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from adults and other young children in ECE settings. • **Children who spend large amounts of time not interacting with adults or other children may be affected by inanimate factors, especially TV.**	○ Percent of Persons Receiving Food Stamps and/or TANF ○ Employment Rates ○ Housing Values • Early Care/Education	
2. *Are children, birth to age 5, on track to succeed when they enter school and beyond?* • **South Carolina currently lacks a universal school readiness measure.** • **It is essential that assessments for children be research-based, be administered properly and for a clear purpose, and that the results be used only for appropriate purposes.** • **Over time, new research and newly developed tools may allow South Carolina to modify its indicators of early school success, in a way that provides continuity with previous analyses but takes advantage of emerging best practices.**	• The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative proposed the following indicators for Ready Children: ○ *Physical Well-Being and Motor Development:* % of children with age-appropriate fine motor skills. ○ *Social and Emotional Development:* % of children who often or very often exhibit positive social behaviors when interacting with their peers. ○ *Approaches to Learning:* % of kindergarten students with moderate to serious difficulty following directions. ○ *Language Development:* % of children almost always recognizing the relationships between letters and sounds at kindergarten entry. ○ *Cognition and General Knowledge:* % of children recognizing basic shapes at kindergarten entry. South Carolina could measure its performance on each of these indicators (linked to learning standards), both for the population as a whole and for specific populations. • Other potentially important metrics to consider: ○ Health and nutrition ○ Persistence and curiosity ○ Hyperactivity ○ Chronic health problems (e.g., asthma) ○ Mental disorders ○ Breast feeding and Gestational Age of 39 weeks	•

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	o Children who are expelled from kindergarten • South Carolina could add other medium and long term metrics aligned to the state's K-12, higher education, and workforce goals. What other metrics should the state consider?	
3. Which children have access to which early care and learning programs and services? • **Child enrollment data could be analyzed to ensure that individual children are accessing the right suite of services, rather than accessing too few or too many.** • **Families need to have information on all available programs which may meet the individual needs of their children.** • **South Carolina lacks a commonly-held definition of "high quality" early learning programs across all sectors.**	*Access for Children* • South Carolina, like most states, currently lacks reporting mechanisms to identify which children are enrolled in multiple programs, which would be helpful both for mobilizing resources and analyzing outcomes. South Carolina should strive to provide an unduplicated count of which children are in which programs. • What mix of programs and services that is most effective for improving child outcomes (with child outcomes measured by the indicators identified in #2 above)? Can we identify different mixes based on differing child needs? How can we provide the maximum impact with minimal interventions? • What children are not receiving any publicly-funded services? What results are those children achieving when they enter the public school system, if they do? What services are being provided to children in foster care? • Are we ensuring continuity of "wrap-around" supports and services that begin in the early childhood years and can/should continue through K-12?	

	Program Quality Elements
	• Key design elements of high quality programs may include:
	    o *The use of early learning and development standards;*
	    o *The use of appropriate learning activities and individualized instruction;*
	    o *The use of age-appropriate child assessments;*	

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	o *The use of appropriate program assessments;* o *The use of health promotion practices, including mental health care – including the availability and use of Mental Health and Child Care Health Consultants;* o *The use of family engagement and home visitation strategies;* o *The use of qualified early educators;* o *Support for children with special needs; and* o *The use of effective data practices.*	

	Possible Indicators
	• The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative proposes indicators in the following areas be considered for children under 6:
	Ready Services-Early Care and Education:
	    o *% Children Enrolled in an Early Education Program*
	    o *% Accredited Programs*
	    o *% Credentialed Teachers*
	    o *% Access to Child Care Subsidies*
	Ready Services-Health:
	    o *% Young Children with Health Insurance*
	    o *% Low Birthweight Infants*
	    o *% Mothers with Access to Prenatal Care*
	    o *% Children Under 3 Fully Immunized*
	• Other important services include:
	Provider supports
	    o *High quality technical assistance*
	Family Supports
	    o *Adult education and literacy programs*
	    o *Family strengthening services*
	    o *Support provided by neighbors*	

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4. Is the quality of early learning programs improving? • **This question should be answered with regard to the elements of quality identified under question 2.**	• Can we provide information about the quality of program implementation on an ongoing basis to help families make decisions about services, and to help providers drive continuous improvement efforts? • How are programs being evaluated, and how are those evaluation results being used for continuous improvement? • How can we organize cross-program learning collaboratives to help improve practices for all programs serving children and families?	•
5. What are the characteristics of effective programs? • **This question should be answered with regard to the elements of quality identified under question 2.** • **For now, the focus will be on design and implementation of existing programs – but over time South Carolina can consider how each program fits into a larger whole. Do we have the right services to meet the state's needs?** • **Over time, research should inform the updating of program design.** • **Whatever programs can do effectively on their own, they will be more effective if they connect to other programs.**	• Is the implementation of key elements of quality program design actually leading to improved child outcomes? • Are children in need of particular programs or services appropriately matched to them? • Beyond program design questions, how effectively are local providers implementing programs? • Can we identify a common core of information that is or could be gathered in the evaluations of all programs?	•

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6. How prepared is the early care and education workforce to provide effective education and care for all children? • In South Carolina, children spend significant time in family, friend, and neighbor care.	• What is the demographic profile of the workforce (age, gender, ethnicity, language capacity? • What level of education and training does the work force have? • How much variation is there in the quality of the workforce across different program settings? How much variation is there across geographic regions? How much variation is there across different ages of children served? • What attributes of the workforce lead to improved outcomes for children? Can South Carolina identify a set of workforce competencies that will ensure that personnel can provide the quality of services demanded by South Carolina's program recipients? • How well do the skills of the workforce match up with the needs of children? What are we doing to remedy any misalignment? If there is a move to increase the amount of assessment, are personnel prepared to administer those assessments?	•
7. What policies and investments lead to a skilled and stable early care and education workforce? • In South Carolina, like most states, there is a significant difference in workforce development efforts between public and private programs. • Over time, successful workforce development programs can be shared across sectors for maximum skill development and continuous improvement.	• What investments are we now making in the workforce, and what effect are they having? • What is the retention rate (length of time in the field and with their current employer)? What is the retention rate following the improvement of credentials? • What are personnel being paid? How does this vary in different program settings and communities? • What investments is the state making in training, and what impact are those investments having? • What, if any, additional workforce development investments is South Carolina making, to what effect?	•