

SOUTH CAROLINA EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA LEADERS
Draft Process for Data Gap Closure, Spring 2012

At our meeting on Friday, December 9, we discussed a draft process that would allow us to:

1. Identify key questions that would help inform policy and practice improvements in South Carolina early learning;
2. Perform a gap analysis to determine which of those questions cannot be answered using existing Data Warehouse data; and
3. Develop a work plan for closing that gap through a thoughtful sequence of activities in the coming years.

This document provides a draft process for completing these three steps by June 2012, which includes meetings of the SC Early Childhood Data Leaders in March and May. It is a companion to a separate document identifying potential key questions.

Time period	Activity	Key Considerations
Early March	Stakeholder Engagement: Solicit feedback on draft key questions from stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Data Leaders will circulate a simple survey to key audiences, and identify a handful of practitioners who would be willing to participate in a focus group.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Parents and practitioners will be a key audience for the key questions. Individual agencies should reach out to parents and practitioners as best they can.○ The ECAC, key policymakers, researchers, and others should also be asked for feedback.○ First Steps, supported by EducationCounsel, can take responsibility for organizing and synthesizing feedback.• A version of the key questions document will be circulated among the Data Leaders with an additional column that allows data leaders to note what data they believe their agency tracks.• Agencies will be asked to complete the table and provide suggestions for focus group participants by April 13.• The survey will remain open until April 20.• Focus groups will be conducted at the end of April.

DRAFT South Carolina Early Childhood Data Leaders Group Process for Gap Closure 3/9/12

Time period	Activity	Key Considerations
Late April	Consolidation of Stakeholder Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Data Leaders will meet in late April to consider a revised draft of the key questions based on stakeholder feedback.</i> • The Data Leaders will also at that time discuss what data they have available, to set up a gap analysis.
May	Gap Analysis and Presentation to Data Leaders: Analyze key questions to determine what the data warehouse can already answer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff from the Data Warehouse should conduct and present an analysis of which key questions can already be answered by the Data Warehouse, and which ones cannot (drawing in part on the responses provided by agencies in April). • In the case of the ones that cannot, staff will (to the extent possible) identify what new data collections or bridges to existing databases would be required to answer the questions. • The Data Leaders will discuss the results of the gap analysis as they begin to move into the development of the work plan.
Late May-early June	Work Plan Development: Develop a draft work plan to sequence the closure of the gaps identified through the gap analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Data Leaders discussed several key considerations that should be addressed in the work planning. Those principles are included in this document as Appendix A. • A draft work plan will be developed in late May based on these principles and the gap analysis. • <i>In early June, the Data Leaders will meet to consider the draft. (Meeting tentatively set for May 14 will need to be rescheduled.) The goal will be to get agreement on a draft that can be shared at the Early Childhood Advisory Council meeting June 21.</i>
June 21	Presentation: Work plan (and key questions) presented to ECAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The draft work plan (along with the updated Key Questions document) will be presented at the Early Childhood Advisory Council meeting on June 21. • Any feedback from the Council will be incorporated and addressed.

APPENDIX A: KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPING A WORK PLAN

Sequencing the Addition of Fields to the Data Warehouse

- Some questions will be more urgent than others. Where gaps are identified, the work plan should propose to close the most urgent gaps first.
- Some key questions may surface larger policy issues that need to be brought to the Council or other leaders for their attention. For example, some questions may call for information that simply does not exist right now (e.g. kindergarten entry assessment results), forcing a conversation about whether that information should exist or not.
- It may be wise to pilot new data collections with thoughtful, capable providers who volunteer for the opportunity. This will work out kinks with a friendly audience and create word of mouth about the benefits of data use.

Effective Utilization by Stakeholders

- The work plan must account for the field's ability to use new information effectively. Simply churning out data will lead to confusion, not policy and practice change. This should include attention to both pre-service training and ongoing professional development for early childhood personnel.
- The work plan must recognize the different needs of different users - policymakers, program managers, practitioners, parents, and others. Supports must be tailored to the audience.
- Information will need to be presented in ways that are sensitive to the needs of different populations within the state. Cultural differences within the state are important to consider in explaining to people the meaning of data.
- South Carolina may want to consider the development of a "neutral" entity to release policy-level data with appropriate explanations of what the data means.

Creating Ready Schools

- Could there be a standardized set of information about young children handed off to K-12 schools in the spring to help them prepare for their entering cohort?
- Could there be a profile of each child provided to their kindergarten teacher? A standard profile template could be developed in collaboration with kindergarten teachers and early childhood providers.
- These protocols would require privacy protections, likely including parental permissions.

Common Definitions

- The work group discussed creating a common set of data fields that would be collected in evaluations of all programs. This could be connected to the national effort to create Common Education Data Standards.
- Before attempting to create that common set of fields, program administrators will seek to determine what common data elements are required across programs by federal and state law. This will identify which data elements are identical, and also others that are similar. This information about commonly collected data elements will help in the gap analysis, and in potentially developing a common set of elements for program evaluation.
 - Where state-level requirements are conflicting or overlapping, legislation could be proposed to reconcile those requirements, which would lower the burden on providers and state government.

Privacy/Security

- Privacy and security must be accounted for in the system. Protocols can be developed for obtaining specific consents, based on an explanation to parents of how releasing information will benefit them and their child.

Program Evaluation

- The system should be set up to allow for careful study (with appropriate research designs) of program effectiveness, to help inform continuous improvement.