Opportunities to Incorporate Young Child Data into Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems through American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Funding

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ARRA. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provides $250 million to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the United States Department of Education to carry out Section 208 of the Education Technical Assistance Act. Under Section 208, the Secretary of Education is authorized "to award grants, on a competitive basis, to state educational agencies to design, develop, and implement statewide, longitudinal data systems to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, disaggregate, and use individual student data, consistent with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965."

Prior Grants and the 2008 RFI. Since 2005, there have been three rounds of awards to state education agencies to develop statewide longitudinal data systems (SDLS). Fourteen states were awarded grants in November 2005, and thirteen additional states were awarded grants in June 2007. Grants to additional states from a third round of grants, submitted by September 2008, were just awarded to twenty-seven states for an amount totaling $150 million. All fifty state educational agencies have applied for funding at least once and almost all states have received at least one grant

The first two rounds of grants were confined to developing longitudinal data systems for the K-12 system, but the third round of grants expanded the funding opportunity to incorporate both preschool data and postsecondary data. The Request for Applications (downloadable from the IES website) offers states the option to apply for either *foundation activities* or *expansion activities* or both. Since it is likely that the new RFI will draw from prior RFI's, the 2008 RFI is described in relation to the opportunity it provided to broadening the data system beyond K-12 data.

In the 2008 RFI, *foundation activities* involve developing a K-12 system that provides statewide student-level data over time, establishes efficient and reliable interoperability between state and local data systems, and meets federal reporting requirements, including a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate.

Expansion activities "may include, but is not limited to the following goals:

- The State sees a need to expand K-12 longitudinal data to include **preschool data**, teacher data, finance data and any other K-12 data not yet included in the system;
- The State sees a need to create interoperability with postsecondary data systems or create **consolidated P-16 data systems**, in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act;
- The State sees a need to import workforce data from other sources to assess the extent to which high school graduates are adequately prepared for work or further education; or
- The State sees a need to improve the capacity to send and receive transcripts of students applying to postsecondary educational institutions and/or moving across State lines."

  [bold-faced language represents emphasis added]

The RFI gives priority to *foundation activities* and has those awards ranging to up to six million dollars, with the *expansion activities* awards ranging up to three million dollars. The grant duration is from two to five years.

The RFI also requires that, "if the SLDS is to be expanded to include data from other systems, all involved institutions must agree to a shared vision for outcomes and objectives." The RFI further states that "a successful data system rests on a governance structure that involves both State and local stakeholders in the system's design and implementation" and that, "when expanding the data capacity … to include other educational data, an SLDS … should include a common understanding of data ownership, data management, and data confidentiality and access, as well as means by which to resolve differences among partners."

Prospects for State Funding under ARRA Statewide Longitudinal Data funds. Since there already will have been three rounds of funding and most states will have received prior funding for *foundation activities*, it is likely that a substantial share of the $250 million will be available for *expansion activities.* Further, if the size of the awards remains similar to prior years, there should be sufficient funding to support foundation or expansion activities in nearly every state. It is likely that any credible proposal from a state education agency will be funded.

Further, since twenty-seven states were just awarded grants of from $2.5 million to $9.0 million for projects extending from 3 to 5 years, this new grant opportunity under ARRA may come at a time when these states are receptive to additional ideas of how to build their statewide longitudinal data systems.

There clearly are a broad range of *expansion activities* that states could chose to pursue, including expanding information on the K-12 teacher base as well as including young child/preschool or postsecondary and workforce information. State education agencies, with or without legislative direction, will be making decisions on whether they will pursue funding and what type of proposal they will develop. State education agencies may or may not have knowledge about what data exists for young children

and preschool that could be incorporated into the statewide longitudinal data system or the benefits of having that information in the system. Developing this understanding and interest in incorporating young child/preschool data into the SLDS may require that early learning system builders reach out to and engage the state education agency.

Opportunities and Benefits for Expanding the Preschool Data Base. The SLDS has been established to enable tracking of students over time, with a unique student identifier, not for individual student identification but to assess trends, examine how well different subgroups of students are performing, and compare performance across schools and geographic areas. Since students are mobile and may move from one district to another, it allows examination of the effects of the system as a whole on students, as well as to examine the effects of mobility and the types of students most likely to move. An SLDS represents a tremendous opportunity for research and evaluation that can inform policy and practice, provided there are people who can conduct that research and analysis, either within state and local education agencies or outside them.

The expansion of the SLDS to include young child and preschool data has particularly potential benefit to building effective early learning systems and evaluating the impact of different early learning strategies. For instance, it could enable tracking children who have participated in high quality preschool programs through the early elementary years and determining their subsequent reading and math proficiency in the early elementary grades, their special education status, and their likelihood of grade retention. It could compare children who have had or not had a high quality preschool experience and do so by free-and-reduced lunch status (a measure of family income), race, and English-language learner status. It could determine preschool participation rates by both these demographic factors and by geographic location, helping to identify specific areas where further outreach and preschool programming might be most important. It could identify the intensity (part-day, full-day) and duration of preschool services (one year or two year) students receive and how these might impact future school performance. It could compare the impacts of different preschool programs (e.g. Head Start and other public preschool programs). To do so, however, at a minimum requires that all students in publicly-funded preschool programs (preschool programs funded through the school system, Part B preschool programs, Head Start programs, and other preschool programs identified as being of high quality that are not operated through school) be identified, either by establishing their unique student identifiers within those programs or through data acquired from parents at kindergarten entry.

The expansion also could include young child data beyond publicly-funded preschool student data, such as:

- child care data through state subsidy programs;
- child protective service information (particularly children in foster care);
- children receiving Part C early intervention services;
- children participating in home visiting, Early Head Start, or other programs designed to improve the development of very young children;

- teacher data for children enrolled in preschool programs (education background, bilingual teaching capacity, and ethnicity); and
- children with health insurance coverage and a consistent source of care.

While individual student confidentiality must be guaranteed in developing such data system interoperability, the potential benefits to having such information are pronounced. For instance, being able to track children who have received Part C early intervention services into school would help to understand the degree to which Part C reaches different populations and geographic areas and the extent to children receiving Part C services perform compared with similar students who have not received such services. Preschool teacher data could help to identify the degree to which both educational qualifications and language and cultural continuity needs are being addressed. While this teacher data could be collected from all publicly funded preschool programs, it typically has not been part of data collection requirements nor has it been incorporated into a data base.

Developing the young child/preschool components of a P-16 SLDS will require substantial work. Developing agreements and addressing confidentiality issues even in incorporating Head Start students into the P-16 SLDS can be a significant task, let alone expanding the data system to cover all range of early care and education experiences that young children may have. The grants, however, are designed specifically for the purpose building the SLDS and do recognize that, particularly when going beyond the K-12 system, substantial planning and cross-system negotiation will be needed.

Early Learning System Builder Roles in Building a P-16 SLDS. The ARRA funding provides early learning system builders with an opportunity to help develop their statewide longitudinal data system in a way that can forge stronger connections with the K-12 system and provide information that can support continuous improvement in early learning systems development.

Early learning system builders can begin to forge these relationships and, in particular, identify specific opportunities for expanding the SLDS to incorporate important young child/preschool data. Early learning system builders may be in the best position to identify both the data needs and the uses and benefits around young child/preschool data.

The following is draft intent language that could provide legislative direction to state education agencies to pursue such activities, in the context of building a system for early learning continuous learning and accountability:

> "The [State] Department of Education is encouraged to seek funding through the Institute for Education Sciences to expand the statewide longitudinal data system to include preschool data. The Department is encouraged to work with other agencies and public system data holders of early childhood data and early childhood researchers and evaluators and advocates in developing a long-term

plan for such expansion, as well as practical next steps. This plan should include, but not be limited to, ensuring all student preschool experiences are incorporated into the work, incorporating other young child programs and services related to learning and development, and incorporating preschool teacher and classroom characteristics. The plan shall identify specific uses for the data that can support program and system improvement to best meet the educational needs of children. The plan also shall identify ways that the research community can access and use the overall statewide longitudinal data system to further support continuous improvement and accountability, while protecting the confidentiality of all student information."

States do not need to start from scratch in this effort. Some states already have taken leadership in developing comprehensive early learning data systems and identifying how they can be incorporated into K-12 longitudinal data systems. Pennsylvania represents a state that was just awarded a $6.1 million grant that included early childhood as part of its expansion activities.