

The Schott Fellowship
in Early Care and Education



USING DATA to Create Change

for Young Children in the Commonwealth



A report of the 2004 Schott Fellows
in Early Care and Education

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Massachusetts, like other states, collects a great deal of data about young children and early education professionals. However, because this data is collected in multiple formats by several agencies, it is often overlapping, not easily accessible, and not optimally effective for program planning or policy. Further, families, providers, and administrators report that they spend excessive amounts of time completing duplicative forms from numerous sources without knowing their direct value. Finally, talented staff at government offices has neither the time nor resources needed to analyze or report all of the information that is, nevertheless, continually collected. More effective systems would address these challenges, enabling data to be a more potent tool for social change.

Currently, there is no comprehensive state-wide system for collecting data on the 396,758 children¹ under age five or the workforce that cares for them. In March 2004, a joint report issued by the Commissioners for Education, Public Health and Child Care Services recommended that the state “create an effective data collection system to inform policy program planning and development.”² However, planning or funding for such a system has not yet resulted from this recommendation.

5 Challenges

The 2004 class of Schott Fellows examined key data reports in Massachusetts,³ and interviewed key stakeholders (parents, educators, agency staff and policymakers) about their experiences with these data. The focus of this analysis was how to streamline the data collection process, identify gaps in the current system of data collection, reduce the amount of data entry performed by staff, and lessen the burden on families served by the early childhood system, particularly those receiving state sponsored subsidies.

Interviews and analysis revealed commitment to strong early education systems among all stakeholders. Five major challenges in Massachusetts data systems emerged.

FIRST: There is a Need for Greater Attention to Diversity

Massachusetts has increased in racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity over the past decade, a trend that is expected to continue, especially in our youngest populations.⁴ Nevertheless, there is a dearth of information about ethnically and linguistically diverse children, families, and workforce and how these factors impact child care settings. According to interviews and analysis:

- Information about teacher and student race, ethnicity, and language(s) spoken at home and in child care programs is either lacking or not analyzed and published.

- Most state forms are available in English only. Duplicative costs and inconsistencies result as individual agencies absorb translation responsibilities.
- Access to services is compromised by language barriers.

SECOND: Intake Systems are Complex and Duplicative

Currently, each child care funding source has its own intake form and requires different qualifying documents on different timelines with different renewal dates from parents and programs. Depending on family size and needs, the amount of paperwork increases exponentially.

THIRD: Data Collection Tools and Techniques are Redundant and Inefficient

One area of redundancy involves the *Child Care Market Rate Study* published by the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS). An outside firm is paid to collect data that already exists at an agency currently contracted with the state to collect that same data. Similarly, data collected from families often overlaps, is duplicative, and varies widely in methodology. Further, many providers report receiving five or more surveys annually requesting comparable information. Often providers indicate that due to time constraints they either discard those that are not mandatory or do not fill out surveys as accurately or completely as possible. The reliability and integrity of the data was questioned by some stakeholders.

FOURTH: Data Reports are Not Consumer-Friendly

Important data are either not easily accessible or presented in consumer-friendly formats. For example, the Child Care Development Block Grant requires intensive data collection that it does not report; access to this information could be useful information for program planning. *The*

Massachusetts Child Care Resource & Referral Data Report is concise, but the data presented needs more explanation to be useful for novices. The Child Care Market Rate Study might provide more consumer-friendly information by linking the report's findings to suggested ways this information might be used. Finally, the *Future Trends* report from the Department of Education, targeted towards decision makers, is overwhelming in its current format of over 100 pages. A frequently cited recommendation was the request for dialogue when reports are released. Such discussion could facilitate understanding of the usefulness and relevance of the report's findings.

FIFTH: The Accountability and Use of Data is Inconsistent

Currently, programs and the agencies that collect data are not held accountable to improve program planning and services after the reports are issued. Significant findings do not necessarily lead to timely or proactive action on the part of agencies or individual programs. Existing data focus largely on the reporting of specific programmatic activities rather than identifying needs, supporting planning, identifying best practices, or streamlining services.

While some efforts, such as the Community Partnerships for Children data analysis groups, focus on examining how the data can drive their programming, overall, there is a lack of reflection after data is analyzed. Communities that do have some type of network, such as Community Partnerships for Children and Director's Networks, often do not have data analysis as part of their agendas. In addition, they struggle with a lack of expertise and resources to take such measures.



RECOMMENDATION #1 Centralize Responsibility for Data Planning and Collection

Each agency has strengths in the area of data collection. What is lacking is an overall vision that directs and coordinates these efforts. *We recommend that an individual and agency should be vested with the responsibility and authority for leadership of our data resources.*

While we recognize that some flexibility in collecting information can be useful for informing specific community needs, there is room for greater collaborative integration among Massachusetts agencies. Further, a delicate balance of confidentiality and efficiency needs to be struck to best serve families in need.

Massachusetts is currently piloting two important interagency data sharing systems: The Virtual Gateway and the Massachusetts Early Care and Education Data Warehouse. Also, the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) is implementing a child and family data system (CCIMS) which collects a data set from the resource and referral agencies, and is beginning to do a web-based version (eCCIMS) with contracted child care programs. The Department of Education (DOE) is also beginning to use the same system to collect information from the community partnership local councils. Further, there are examples of OCCS and DOE beginning to work together to integrate data sets from many sources, including state administrative databases, census data, and state initiated research efforts. All of these efforts are steps in the right direction.

However, legislation ultimately will be needed to maximize the potential benefits of data sharing across commonwealth agencies. Legislation could potentially support: (1) outreach efforts that identify and enroll all eligible children; (2) common data reporting methods, techniques, and forms, reducing duplicative data entry and facilitating common definitions of terms; (3) program accountability; (4) capacity

to identify and communicate trends, concerns and “best practices”; (5) the adoption of uniform regional boundaries among state agencies so comparative analyses done by region are compatible; and (6) review of existing data before a state agency collects additional data.



ENDNOTES

1 U.S. Census Bureau.

2 Report of the Massachusetts Early Education and Care Council. Department of Education, March 2004.

3 Reports include: *Massachusetts Child Care Center and School-Age Program Salary and Benefits Report* conducted by the Massachusetts Child Care Resource and Referral Network, with Dr. Alan Bernstein, TEC Associates, 2000. *The Child Care Market Rate Study* for the Massachusetts Office of

RECOMMENDATION #2 Highlight Issues of Diversity

Explicit attention to issues of diversity is essential. *We recommend that the state data systems accurately document report and analyze population diversity in several ways.* The state should:

- Translate forms in various languages at an appropriate literacy level.
- Collect information about language(s) spoken at the child, family, provider and program levels.
- Collect specific information about ethnicities of children and providers; broad categories such as “Asian” should be avoided.
- Analyze the supply and demand of early education services in diverse communities across Massachusetts.
- Track the ethnic and language match between families and the providers who serve them.



**Effective leaders
use data to identify
and act upon the
NEEDS FOR CHILDREN
and families.**

4 U.S. Census Bureau.

5 National Child Care Information Center, a service of the Child Care Bureau, *Early Childhood Education Workforce Practitioner Registry System*, August, 2004.

6 Peter Quinn, Chief Information Officer, Information Technology Division, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. *A message from the CIO*, 2004.

Child Care Services, by Workplace Solutions, for the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services, 2000. *Securing Our Future, Future Trends*, Volume VI, Massachusetts Department of Education, 2001. *Child Care Data Reports* by the Massachusetts Child Care Resource & Referral Network Data Report, January 2004. Report also refers to the Office of Child Care Services Teacher Qualification Database and data collected for the Child Care Development Block Grant.

RECOMMENDATION #3 Create a Workforce Registry System

We recommend the creation of a Workforce Registry that includes both family child care providers and center based staff. In several states, registries are multifaceted components that support a professional development system. Personnel or training registries are databases that track completed training and support career ladders leading to qualifications, credentials, and degrees. These registries often include a continuum of training and ongoing supports and define pathways that are tied to licensure and degrees or credentials. Mentor or career counseling programs are often associated with registries. At least 23 states have implemented some type of registry system.⁵

Currently, OCCS maintains a Teacher Qualification Database (TQD) that tracks the course work required to achieve certification. OCCS licensing regulations require ongoing professional development for center-based staff, but this is not documented in the TQD. Family childcare

providers are also not included in the TQD.

Further, to maintain OCCS licensing, all early care and education professionals are required to have a minimum number of training hours each year. However, these training hours do not necessarily move educators toward degrees or increased compensation. A registry would allow for longitudinal tracking to assure that the investments made in the workforce are being retained and help move educators forward with career pathways and ultimately with their compensation goals. It is important that a Massachusetts registry is accessible to all providers online and that materials are available in multiple languages.



A Final Word

The 2004 Schott Fellows' study of Massachusetts data systems frames the possibility that Massachusetts might "breakdown the present agency-centric approach and implement a comprehensive... plan to consolidate and modernize the current landscape... where we share innovative solutions in order to make state government more responsive and better able to serve people of the Commonwealth."⁶ This possibility is enhanced by opportunities presented by the release of the Massachusetts Early Education and Care Council Report and the call by the House and Senate to establish a Board of Early Education and Care in April 2005. The three recommendations set forth in this report present specific action to support our state capacity to provide *all children* with quality education and care.

Conclusion

More effective data collection and analysis, coupled with no assumption of English language and literacy, could:

- Strengthen, adapt or change programs to meet the evolving needs of children and families and the early care and education workforce.
- Reduce the costs associated with duplication, focusing on agency strengths and identifying collaborative methods of sharing data.
- Strengthen communication between and among providers and state agencies.
- Improve services to diverse populations.

The 2004 Schott Fellows offer three recommendations to redress the five challenges identified.



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