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Coordination of Monitoring Systems for Early Care and Education

This resource was prepared in response to a request from a Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) State for a high-level summary of the March 2016 research brief, _Coordinated Monitoring Systems for Early Care and Education_, prepared by Child Trends for the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This resource highlights the main points of the research brief and lists additional resources related to coordinating monitoring systems. The italicized text on the following pages are taken directly from _Coordinated Monitoring Systems for Early Care and Education_.

Reflections on Monitoring and the Value of Coordination

- The report authors have reflected on monitoring with the following questions in mind. _Can we re-think monitoring, in order to better support children's health, safety, and optimal development?_
- _Instead of doing more of the same, can we approach monitoring in a more coordinated fashion that would reduce the burden on providers, move us closer to a unified early care and education system, and use resources more effectively and efficiently?_
- _Can we move toward a more coordinated monitoring system in early care and education that promotes adherence to basic regulations, fosters attainment of quality standards, and ultimately supports children's development?_ (p. 1)

An ultimate purpose of coordinated monitoring is to create a system that more effectively promotes children's health, safety and optimal development through clarity of goals and improved leveraging of available resources (p. 3)_._

Monitoring Systems

As noted in the report, _Monitoring, in general, is regular oversight or systematic review of something. In early care and education, providers may be monitored for compliance with basic regulations or for demonstrating markers of higher quality_ (p. 2)_._

Standards may address:

- _the physical environment (e.g., fire and building safety, indoor and outdoor learning environment);_
- _people (e.g., staff characteristics, family or child eligibility, ratios of children to adults);_
- _practices (e.g., caregiver- or teacher-child interaction, adequate supervision);_
- _policies (e.g., written contracts with families, provisions for children with special needs); and_

- *other provisions (e.g., administrative management, disbursement of funds).* (p. 4)

Eight major agencies and organizations that have responsibility for monitoring child care programs. These include State child care licensing; the Child Care and Development Fund (subsidy); individual State Quality Rating and Improvement Systems; State-funded prekindergarten; Head Start/Early Head Start; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, Section 619 and IDEA Part C; the Child and Adult Care Food Program; and Accreditation (pp 6-7). The report includes a table that briefly summarizes key features of these monitoring systems:

- The scope and purpose of the monitoring
- Who is monitored;
- Which standards are monitored
- The agency (or agencies) responsible for monitoring
- The tools that are used in monitoring and how often providers are monitored
- The consequences, if any, for noncompliance with required standards and the incentives, if any, to meet the standards. (pp. 5-6)

An appendix is included in the report that describes the major early care and education monitoring systems.

Goals of a Coordinated Monitoring System

The major goals of a coordinated monitoring system are to:

1. *Improve consistency across programs or funding streams*
2. *Reduce the burden on early care and education providers*
3. *Increase efficiency*
4. *Support continuous quality improvement* (p. 8)

Approaches to Coordinating Standards

States may choose to coordinate the standards that are being monitored using the following two activities:

1. **Align standards across monitoring systems –** *States can compare or crosswalk standards from multiple programs or funding streams to identify areas of duplication and inconsistency. Once inconsistencies or duplications have been identified, leaders can revise the wording of particular standards to eliminate or reduce problems.*
2. **Use or develop a single set of standards for multiple programs or funding streams –** *States can coordinate their monitoring by developing and applying the same set of standards across multiple programs. States that have built the QRIS into their child care licensing system have done this: the standards for licensing and QRIS are the same.* (p. 9)

Approaches to Coordinating Monitoring

Alternately, States may choose to coordinate the monitoring activities themselves, using the following four activities to change *how standards are monitored across multiple monitoring systems:*

1. *Staff in one agency monitor multiple programs within the agency.*
2. *Multiple agencies share responsibility for monitoring the same standards in different settings.*
3. *Monitoring data from one program are used by monitoring staff in another program.*
4. *One agency is responsible for monitoring all, or almost all, early care and education program standards.* (pp. 9-10)

Framework for Coordinated Monitoring

The authors described 11 dimensions that are important to consider in planning and monitoring coordination efforts.

1. **Goals and purposes** – *States/territories may find it useful to have an agreed-upon set of goals for a coordinated monitoring system... A coordinated system should be considered a strategy for reaching a particular goal, not a goal in itself.*
2. **Stakeholder recruitment, engagement, and communication** – *Communication and discussion among program leaders, monitoring staff, contractors, early care and education providers, and other stakeholders are critical to developing a coordinated monitoring system as they are to any early care and education system reform effort... Stakeholders' input throughout is necessary for encouraging buy-in, building trust, and ensuring the success of the system change*s.
3. **Governance** – *Governance should address not only the policies and procedures related to the what, how and when of monitoring but also the infrastructure, like data systems, needed to support the successful coordination of monitoring. Each state will need to consider its own broader early childhood system governance and determine the best leadership structure to use in moving forward to coordinate monitoring*.
4. **Standards that are monitored** – *Standards – or the what of monitoring – are critical to consider when moving toward a coordinated monitoring approach... When developing a plan to be more coordinated in monitoring, an important step is to review the various sets of monitoring standards to identify the similarities and differences in what is being monitored.*
5. **Measurement tools and procedures** – *Each monitoring system has its own tools and processes to collect data. Even when standards are the same or similar, the tools and procedures to monitor the standards may be different. Thus, it is important for leaders to discuss not only the what (i.e. standards) of monitoring but also the how (i.e. tools).*
6. **Planning and implementation** – *A team of leaders and stakeholders will need to develop a plan for implementing the selected strategies to move toward a more coordinated monitoring system. The plan will need to address items such as leadership, staffing, training, and supervision... Ensuring reliability of the monitoring system is critical and warrants*

special consideration when planning for implementation… Procedures must also be established to determine inter-rater agreement among monitoring staff.

7. **Monitoring staff** *– Monitoring staff from different agencies or programs may have different qualifications, areas of expertise, job requirements, and caseloads. It may be helpful to review these various aspects of staffing across various programs, with a goal of becoming more consistent in expectations for monitoring staff. It also may be useful to develop or revise job descriptions to ensure that newly hired monitoring staff have the skills and expertise needed to monitor across multiple systems.*

8. **Data Systems –** *Once strategies have been developed to coordinate monitoring, it may be useful to 1) review the data to be gathered, 2) identify the data elements that will be entered into a data system, 3) develop procedures for ensuring that the data are collected and entered as intended, 4) determine where the data will be housed, and 5) develop policies and procedures for accessing and using the data.*

9. **Accountability** *– Accountability should be addressed on two levels. At one level, it is important for the team working on a coordinated monitoring system to be accountable for its work … At another level, each program or funding stream that is part of a larger effort to coordinate monitoring needs to ensure that its own accountability responsibilities are met.*

10. **Sustainability** *– Sustainability is a key dimension to consider when planning strategies to coordinate monitoring efforts… When planning for improved coordination across the early care and education monitoring systems, it is important to also plan for the fiscal implications of a more efficient system… If there is an expectation that funds will be saved by particular strategies, it will be important to document any savings.*

11. **Evaluation and continuous quality improvement** *– State leaders responsible for overseeing the coordinated monitoring efforts will need time for review, reflection, and consideration of evaluation data as they continue to refine their efforts to move toward a coordinated monitoring system.* (pp. 14-20).

The report highlights lessons learned from the efforts of Ohio and Rhode Island in coordinating early care and educating monitoring within and across agencies.

The *Mapping the Early Care and Education Monitoring Landscape Tool* was developed by Child Trends as a companion tool to help State leaders document the status of monitoring in their individual States.

For questions about contact information for States that are mentioned in the report, contact Gladys Wilson, Early Learning Challenge State Support Team, at gladys.wilson@elcta.org.

References

- *Coordinated Monitoring Systems for Early Care and Education.* Research Brief OPRE 2016-20. Child Trends for the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. March 2016.

- *Mapping the Early Care and Education Monitoring Landscape Tool.* Research Brief OPRE 2016-20. Child Trends for the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. March 2016.

Resources Related to Coordinating Monitoring Systems

- Joint Monitoring Policy Statement. [Website]. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

- *Joint Policy Statement on Coordinated Efficiencies in Monitoring and Oversight of Early Care and Education Programs.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2016.

- Coordinated Monitoring in Early Care and Education: Benefits and Strategies. [Webinar]. National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). December 1, 2016.

Additional Resources - Publications

- *Best Practices for Human Care Regulation.* National Association for Regulatory Administration and the Office of Child Care, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. June 2015.

- *Innovation in Monitoring in Early Care and Education: Options for States.* Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. April 2015.

Additional Resources - Webpages

- Caring for Our Children Basics: Health & Safety Foundations for Early Care and Education. [Web page]. Office of Early Childhood Development. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. June 2015.

- The CCDF Data Explorer and State Profiles. [Web page]. Child Care State Capacity Building Center (funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

- CCDF Final Regulation and Related Resources. [Web page]. Office of Child Care, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Updated December 2016.

- Child and Adult Care Food Program Federal Regulations. [Web page]. Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Updated September 2016.

- [Child and Adult Care Food Program Handbooks](#). [Web page]. Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Updated September 2016.

- [The National Database of Child Care Licensing Regulations.](#) [Web page]. National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

- [National Program Standards Crosswalk Tool](#). [Web page]. National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

- [State Advisory Councils on Early Care and Education](#). [Web page]. Office of Early Childhood Development. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. September 2016.