Nebraska State Advisory Council (SAC) Grant

Project Period - 09/1/2010 - 08/31/2013

US DHHS American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funds
Coordinated by the NE Head Start-State Collaboration Office,
Nebraska Department of Education – Office of Early Childhood

Grant Objective

Develop recommendations for a unified early childhood data system that will inform the state regarding early childhood program effectiveness and children's success in school and in life.

The Nebraska State Advisory Council (SAC) grant is implemented on behalf of Nebraska's Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC), the designated State Advisory Council meeting federal regulations (US DHHS, P.L. 110-134).

Two priorities were chosen by the Council: 1) school readiness; and 2) unified early childhood data system. Selected grant activities address: "the development of recommendations for a unified early childhood (birth to age 5) data system that can inform the state regarding early childhood program effectiveness and children's success in school and in life." These recommendations aim to strengthen commitment from relevant state and local agencies and partners to use data in building awareness and to inform continuous improvement and ongoing policy development, as well as present practical steps to engage key decision makers in the creation of a unified data system. Note that the different state agencies and public-funded programs have already begun or even accomplished some efforts related to the following recommendations.

A unified early childhood data system may help breakdown programmatic silos, increase the opportunity for cross-agency and systems planning, address duplication of services, leverage resources and create understanding for program improvements and sustainable positive outcomes for Nebraska's vulnerable young children and their families.

The inaugural Early Childhood Data Summit was held June, 2011. Key stakeholders provided input into "what are the questions in the field of early care and education that data could help us answer." Those questions were grouped into three primary focus areas: child and family outcomes; program outcomes and environments; and workforce issues and needs.

Numerous efforts at the federal and state level, and indeed locally, have supported aspects of early childhood data system developments. See more at www.ECEData.org [Early Childhood Data Collaborative, March 2011] "10 Fundamentals of Coordinated State Early Care and Education Data Systems."

Nebraska Early Childhood Data Successes

- Nebraska Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting[1] (N-MIECHV) Program has begun to link various sources of data to assess maternal and child health, child welfare, school readiness, family self-sufficiency, and program quality processes and outcomes. The data will be utilized to demonstrate whether the programs are improving the quality of life in families being served, and show areas where adjustments are needed to improve service delivery.
- Nebraska Early Childhood Longitudinal Data Linking Pilot Study led by Dr. Helen Raikes, UNL, and Dr. Barb Jackson, UNMC, Munroe-Meyer Institute. This study queries the Nebraska Staff and Student Record System (NSSRS), Nebraska Department of Education, including some Head Start numbers, to link with program-level data in exploring enrollment patterns and child progress.
- Early Childhood Data Coalition tracking key indicators to support cross-agency efforts in areas of children, program, and workforce outcomes.
- United Way of Midland's initiative on hosting a comprehensive database of health and services.
- Head Start-State Collaboration Office accesses Federal Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) to accommodate data sharing among relevant state systems in creating better understanding of comprehensive services provided to young children and their families that are challenged by poverty.

[1] Home visiting programs offer a variety of family-focused services to expectant parents and families with new babies and young children to help cultivate strong parent-child relationships. They are one part of a comprehensive, high quality early childhood system that promotes maternal, infant, and early childhood health, safety and development.