



Indicator: School has a system in place for determining the nature and extent of early learning opportunities each student has experienced prior to school entry. (5125)

Explanation: Early learning experiences obtained through high-quality child care, Head Start, early intervention, or pre-Kindergarten can influence children’s school readiness. Federal policies require the collection of data about children’s early learning experiences (Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2013). Yet, these data are often not compiled at the school level, and thus educators have an incomplete picture about children’s early learning prior to school entry. It is important for principals and teachers to know about student’s early learning experiences prior to school entry, including whether, what types, and the extent of experiences in pre-Kindergarten and other formal early learning settings (Bornfreund & Severns, 2010).

Questions: For each incoming Kindergarten student, does the school have a system in place for determining:

- Whether the student has participated in child care, Head Start, early intervention, and/or pre-K?
- The extent of participation (in terms of years of participation and whether participation was full-day, full-year, part-year, etc.) in formal early learning opportunities?
- The nature of early learning opportunities (e.g., child care versus early intervention, etc.)?

Principal Trujillo was recently asked by the Superintendent of the district to answer questions about the number of entering Kindergarteners who had participated in child care, Head Start, early intervention, and pre-K. She contacted the five Kindergarten teachers in her school to determine what data they collected.

One teacher asked the families of all entering Kindergarteners to complete a questionnaire about early learning experiences. This teacher quickly provided the principal with a report showing that over 70 percent of all children in one classroom had participated in classroom-based early learning, and 18 percent of all entering Kindergarteners had received some types of early intervention. The report showed that many children participated in Head Start and pre-K, some participated in pre-K and child care, but that nearly 30 percent of children had not participated in any classroom-based early learning opportunity.

When Principal Trujillo reached out to the other teachers, she found that three of the teachers did not have a process in place for systematic data collection of children’s early learning experiences, and had a very incomplete picture of children’s early experiences. The remaining teacher had a transition plan in place for students who attended Head Start, and could provide information about the number of students that received Head Start services. The principal thought there must be a better way to figure out what is going on in children’s lives prior to the day they started Kindergarten.

The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force recommends that educators develop and implement a comprehensive, standards-based assessment system to inform policy decisions, investments, and improvement efforts for early education program curriculum, assessments, and program improvement efforts (National Early Childhood

Accountability Task Force, 2007). Data about children's early learning opportunities can be used to address the school readiness gap and ultimately can be used to improve educational achievement (Early Childhood Data Collaborative [ECDC], 2010). Policymakers at the state and district levels can use data on early childhood program experiences to better understand incoming Kindergarten's early learning opportunities (ECDC, 2010). Head Start, early intervention, child care and many state-funded pre-K programs collect data regarding children's participation, but in many instances districts do not have a complete picture regarding whether each entering Kindergarten student has participated in formal early learning, the dosage of participation, and the nature of participation (Zaslow, Anderson, Redd, Wessel, Tarullo, & Burchinal, 2010).

A number of national experts recommend the creation and use of a unique child identifier—a single, non-duplicated number that is assigned to and remains with a child throughout participation in early learning programs and services and across key databases (Data Quality Campaign, 2006). By using a consistent child identifier that stays with a child as the child enrolls in different services or moves, stakeholders can obtain a complete picture of the formal services and early learning opportunities a child has accessed across systems (Data Quality Campaign, 2006).

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative also recommends linking early childhood data with K–12 and other key data systems to better understand relationships among early learning opportunities and later outcomes. Linked data systems can

- Provide two-way communications between early childhood education (ECE) programs and K–12 so that ECE programs know how children progress in K–12 and K–12 programs can tailor instruction to meet individual children's needs when they arrive at school (ECDC, 2011).
- Improve the coordination of services with other providers and the ECE workforce to target and improve services for individual children based on their access to other supports (ECDC, 2011).
- Help with referrals, such as the federal mandate in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, to refer any child under age 3 who is involved in a substantiated case of abuse and neglect to Early Intervention Services (Gillis, West, & Coleman, 2009).

References and resources

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