

Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS)

An Overview of ECLDS Governance

History

The ECLDS project was launched during 2012 through the support of a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant from the federal Department of Education. The RTT-ELC grant required the state to coordinate an early learning longitudinal data system with the existing state longitudinal data system¹ that (a) has all of the essential data elements, (b) enables uniform data collection and easy entry of the essential elements by all partners, (c) facilitates the exchange of data among agencies by using data structures, data formats, and data definitions such as Common Education Data Standards to ensure interoperability among the various levels and types of data, (d) generates information that is timely, relevant, accessible, and easy to use, and (e) meets the data system oversight requirements and complies with the requirements of federal, state, and local privacy laws.

While initially funded with RTT-ELC grant funds, the system has grown and expanded with support from several federal IES SLDS grants, as well as private grant funds. In July 2019, the ECLDS was included in Minnesota Statute alongside its partner system, Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS). Minnesota's Office of Higher Education has financial and administrative authority over the ECLDS, however through a partnership between the agencies, the coordination of the system is housed at the Minnesota Department of Education.

Legal Authority

As of July 2019, the ECLDS is included in Minnesota Statute alongside its partner system, SLEDS.

[M.S. 127A.70 Subd. 2\(b\)](#) Under the direction of the P-20 Education Partnership Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System Governance Committee, the Office of Higher Education and the Departments of Education and Employment and Economic Development shall improve and expand the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS) and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS)

¹ This is known as the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System, or SLEDS. SLEDS contains data from K-12, post-secondary (college and university), and wage records. Partner agencies involved in SLEDS are MDE, OHE, CORR, and DEED.

to provide policymakers, education and workforce leaders, researchers, and members of the public with data, research, and reports to:

(1) expand reporting on students' educational outcomes for diverse student populations including at-risk students, children with disabilities, English learners, and gifted students, among others, and include formative and summative evaluations based on multiple measures of child well-being, early childhood development, and student progress toward career and college readiness;

(2) evaluate the effectiveness of early care, educational, and workforce programs; and

(3) evaluate the relationships among early care, education, and workforce outcomes, consistent with section 124D.49.

To the extent possible under federal and state law, research and reports should be accessible to the public on the Internet, and disaggregated by demographic characteristics, organization or organization characteristics, and geography.

It is the intent of the legislature that the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System inform public policy and decision-making. The SLEDS governance committee and ECLDS governance committee, with assistance from staff of the Office of Higher Education, the Department of Education, and the Department of Employment and Economic Development, shall respond to legislative committee and agency requests on topics utilizing data made available through the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System as resources permit. Any analysis of or report on the data must contain only summary data.

Objectives

The ECLDS contains child-level data from early childhood, education, health, and human services systems to enable educators, stakeholders, and policymakers to answer a range of program and policy questions to better understand child and family experiences and outcomes. As the ECLDS will likely eventually link to SLEDS, the state will, once sufficient historical data is added and time has passed, have the capacity to answer questions of long-term human outcomes related to public investments in programs and services.

Specifically, the ECLDS has the following two goals to support research and best practices in the early childhood field:

- **Create a linkable data repository** managed by a Governing Body to identify, organize, and analyze disaggregated early learning data. The ECLDS contains selected data elements from Minnesota state agencies, linkable to Minnesota's SLEDS, to fully support early childhood initiatives. The system contains multiple mechanisms for keeping identified data safe and in most cases, data that is used for analysis will be anonymized.
- **Create data analytic tools** for early childhood research and evaluation to provide timely and relevant information to inform policy and practice. Analytic tools include a public, web-based

portal that allows users to select data sets and view specific data elements for populations of children. The public portal suppresses small Ns and engages in other data masking techniques to eliminate the ability of users to determine identities of children. Reports are designed to be supportive of a variety of stakeholder needs.

The ECLDS is intended to facilitate the state's ability to answer questions about how young children and families are faring in Minnesota. These questions can be wide-ranging and include examining the short- and long-term outcomes of children who were served within single systems or across multiple systems and programs, and over time. Questions ideally align to not only program and service delivery systems, but also to what is known from the research about meaningful short- and long-term outcomes for children. In particular, the framework jointly agreed to for setting the structure of research objectives is Shonkoff and Garner's (2011) publication *The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress*. Shonkoff and Garner (2011) establish an ecobiodevelopmental framework that takes into account the components of specific systems that guide policy and program levers for innovation, caregiver and community capacities, foundations of healthy development, the biology of health and development, and outcomes in lifelong well-being.

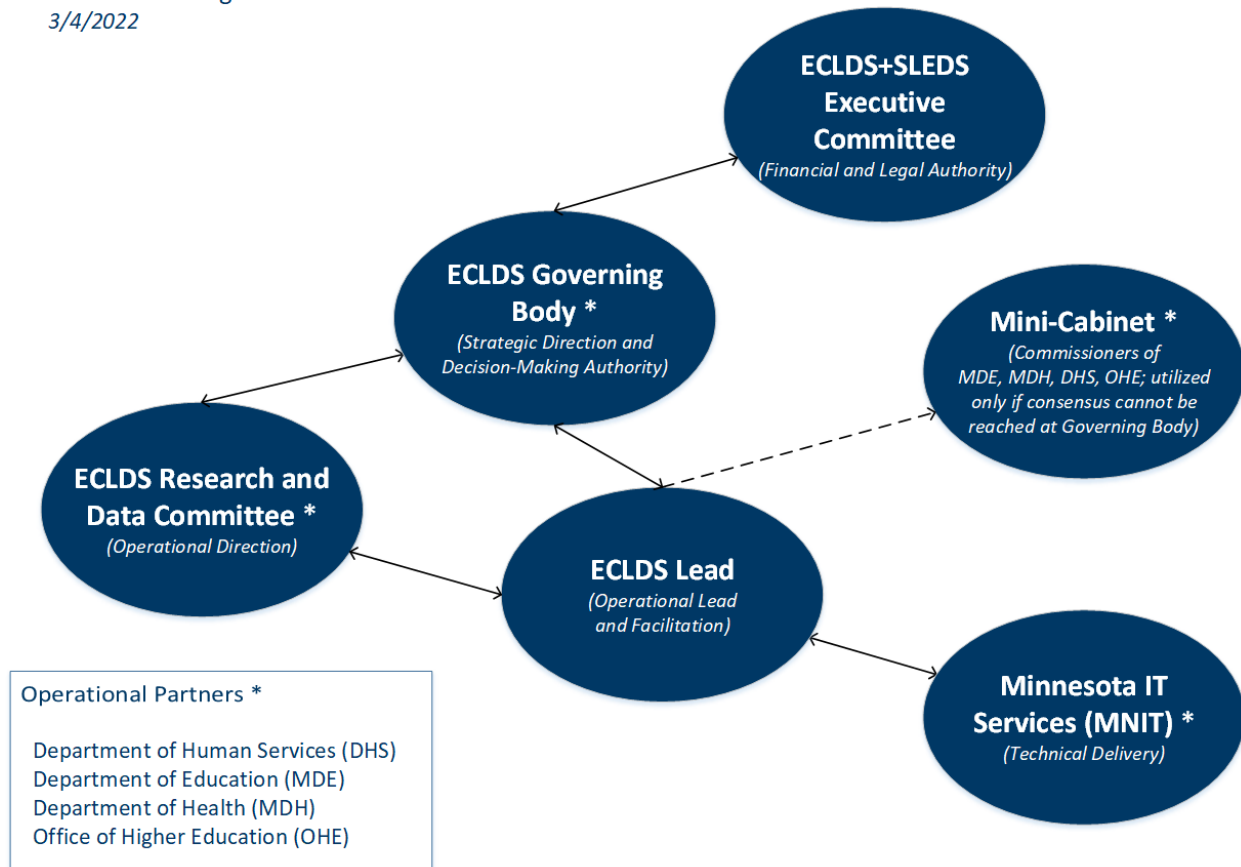
States across the country are focusing efforts in early childhood education, health, and social service programs to ensure that all children are prepared for school and life. Data and information about those programs are needed to improve policies and practices to provide a solid foundation so that every young learner has the tools to excel in the classroom, in our communities, and in life. In Minnesota these services are segmented across multiple state agencies, federal programs, school programs, and community education programs. These data are ultimately intended to be linked with data in Minnesota SLEDS to create indicators needed to understand how early experiences in health care, social services, and education lead to later successes in K-12 and beyond.

Overview of Governance Structure

Minnesota Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System

Decision-Making Structures

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The figure above depicts the entities involved in constructing the ECLDS governance structure. Operational partners are shown with asterisks, constituting members from the state departments of Health, Human Services, and Education, as well as the Office of Higher Education. Strategic direction and decision-making authority is held by the ECLDS Governing Body. Details of this group's purpose and duties are described below. In general, it is the Governing Body's role to make decisions about research questions, data elements to be included in the ECLDS, discuss and approve data access protocols, and understand project progress. It is the responsibility of the ECLDS Lead to facilitate the Governing Body.

Operational direction is provided by the ECLDS Research and Data Committee, which is appointed by members of the Governing Body. The Research and Data Committee, whose full duties are described in greater detail below, are responsible for recommending research and data direction for the ECLDS. These individuals are expected to be both policy and data experts with relevant experience working with administrative data in their respective agencies. This group is also facilitated by the ECLDS Lead.

MNIT, the department responsible for technical support and system construction, is a critical partner in the construction of the ECLDS. MNIT will work closely with the Research and Data Committee, the ECLDS

Lead, and the Governing Body as needed. (Note that MNIT also has membership representation on the Governing Body although the diagram does not overtly state this.)

The Mini Cabinet, consisting of the Commissioners of the departments of Education, Health, and Human Services, and the Office of Higher Education are only consulted in the event that the Governing Body cannot make a consensus decision. This consultation has not yet been needed.

Administration of ECLDS and SLEDS relies on the ECLDS+SLEDS Executive Committee to make financial and legal decisions. Members include the Chair and Vice Chair of the SLEDS Governance Committee, and the Commissioners of OHE, MDE, DEED, MDH, DHS or their designees.

Decision-Making Process

Both the Governing Body and Research and Data Committee use consensus decision-making. A decision-making body's overarching objective is to make a decision that is the best reflection of the group's thinking. Some guidelines for consensus decision-making are as follows:

- **Consensus is a process.** Consensus allows everyone to have their say and divergent views are heard and processed in the group. Through this expression of divergent views, individuals have the opportunity to modify their positions in the pursuit of a general agreement.
- **Consensus is also an outcome.** As an outcome, a consensus decision is one that team members can support. It may be the alternative most preferred by members. A modified consensus decision is one in which the group asks itself "*what can be changed so that we can live with this decision and publicly support it?*" (Smith, 2009).
- **Consensus is not complete agreement.** This means that while not all members may agree with every aspect of the process or outcome, all or most members can support it. It is common that not everyone will be completely satisfied, but that members can accept and live with the group's prevailing view. This does not mean that the group should allow decisions to be watered-down to the point of ineffectiveness.
- **Consensus is not hierarchical.** Therefore, decisions are not made by a team leader in isolation.
- **Consensus is not majority rule.** Voting for the majority only reflects what the majority is happy with. When each member has an opportunity to air their views, they technically have veto power, and at minimum, the power to urge other group members to modify their positions.
- **Consensus is imperfect.** Think of it as somewhere between perfect agreement and total discord in a group – it is in these two extremes where poor decisions are made.

A typical facilitated consensus decision-making process will look something similar to that described below.

In group, the facilitator/chair will:

- Prompt all members to provide their perspective on an issue at decision time even if they have not yet shared a viewpoint.

- Encourage those who are critical of a proposed decision to elaborate on risks and/or cons. (This may include identifying alternatives or solutions.) Likewise, those who are strong proponents of an option should be prepared to say why.
- Urge the group to develop multiple alternatives that may be palatable, and either decide among them (systematically, or through discussion).

Another decision-making process tool recommended by a member of the Governing Body is the Kaner Gradients of Agreement Scale (Kaner, Watts, & Frison, 2008) which include the following agreement scale points:

- Endorsement: *"I like it."*
- Endorsement with a minor point of contention: *"Basically I like it."*
- Agreement with reservations: *"I can live with it."*
- Abstain: *"I have no opinion."*
- Stand Aside: *"I don't like this, but I don't want to hold up the group."*
- Formal Disagreement but willing to go with the majority: *"I want my disagreement noted in writing, but I'll support the decision."*
- Formal Disagreement with request to be absolved of responsibility for implementation: *"I don't want to stop anyone else, but I don't want to be involved in implementing it."*
- Block: *"I veto/do not support this proposal."*

ECLDS Governing Body

The ECLDS Governing Body has the authority to make decisions for the system's structure and operation. These decisions relate to relevant research questions, the data elements to be included in the system, as well as review and approve various protocols related to data access and use. As such, members of this body have generally held positions of some authority within their organizations.

Mission

The mission of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) Governing Body is to oversee the development of Minnesota's ECLDS that facilitates Minnesota's ability to answer policy and research questions about outcomes for young children over the life course and builds upon current work, maximizes resources, and preserves data privacy.²

Goals

The goals of the ECLDS Governing Body include guiding the development and growth of a longitudinal data system that:

² Agreed to at Governing Body meeting of July 23, 2013.

- Maximizes efficiencies with current available system architectures (while simultaneously maximizing grant resources);
- Includes data elements as needed to respond to relevant research and policy questions and reporting needs;
- Keeps private data safe and only allows those authorized access to data; and
- Meets the needs of stakeholders (agencies, parents, the public, researchers, and policymakers).

Scope and Responsibility

The purpose of the Governing Body is to articulate the specific parameters for the Minnesota ECLDS. Specific duties include:

1. Set state goals and priorities for research and reporting using ECLDS,
2. Approve requests for new data elements to be included in the system,
3. Approve data security protocols,
4. Appoint ECLDS Research and Data Committee members,
5. Approve requests for accessing data,
6. Ensure data access within data privacy laws, and
7. Approve designs for analytics and portal access.

Governing Body Membership

Given the objective of this group, members should have some authority in their agencies to make decisions about the appropriateness of research and policy questions, the inclusion of particular data elements from program data into the LDS, and the knowledge to comment on and approve data access protocols and research requests. Representation is comprised of state agencies as well as professional associations and intersections with SLEDS. Typical organizational positions held by members include directors, managers, section managers or directors, executive directors, or agency members with the obligation to bring back decisions to the broader member body.

Member Expectations

- Attending and participating in scheduled Governing Body meetings in person or sending a designated representative.
- Reporting to the Governing Body on data issues in their agency including new policies or law changes.
- Communicating with their agency regarding activities and decisions of the Governing Body.

Meetings and Housekeeping

Frequency. Meetings are expected to be held every two months during the first year (2013) and approximately quarterly thereafter. Meetings will be held by telephone when possible to accommodate non-metro members and minimize travel.

File Sharing. Documents will be shared electronically.

Facilitation. The ECLDS Lead has responsibility for preparing agenda items, completing updates to other stakeholders between meetings, and otherwise maintaining Governing Body progress in relation to the activities going on elsewhere among partners including legal, MNIT, and technical project management; managing timelines and project milestones. The ECLDS Lead communicates with the Governing Body approximately one week prior to the next meeting to confirm agenda and content.

Minute-taking. The ECLDS Lead makes every effort to keep a written record of all meetings and decisions.

Discontinuance. If members need to end participation at any time, members are asked to have their agencies reappoint a new member.

As noted elsewhere, most decision-making authority for the ECLDS rests with the Governing Body. Decisions will not be elevated to the level of the Mini Cabinet (see figure on page 3) unless the Governing Body reaches an impasse on a decision using the processes agreed upon here.

ECLDS Research and Data Committee

The ECLDS Research and Data Committee is charged with making recommendations for research questions, data elements, and a variety of protocols for data access and use to the ECLDS Governing Body. Research and Data Committee members are individuals uniquely qualified, possessing both policy and research knowledge as well as data quality (reliability and validity) knowledge. Research and Data Committee work is integral to the relevance and success of the LDS.

Goal Statement (in lieu of Mission)

The goal of the ECLDS Research and Data Committee is to ensure that the state has relevant and timely early childhood data to answer relevant policy questions so that all children achieve healthy child development and have opportunities to reach their full potential.

Strategies include recommending policy research questions and corresponding data elements to be included in the ECLDS, advise in the development of the public portal, review protocols for research and evaluation, provide technical expertise and consultation on research methodologies, recommended protocols for state staff access to the ECLDS, establish and review requirements for research proposals, and develop protocols for maximizing validity and reliability of ECLDS data.

Goals

- Make recommendations to the ECLDS Governing Body that support relevant research questions and corresponding data elements from systems that enhance Minnesota's ability to answer questions about short- and long-term outcomes for young children.

- Recommend data access and use protocols to the Governing Body that accommodate researcher and stakeholder use of the ECLDS while adhering to data privacy laws and human subjects protections.

Scope and Responsibility

Duties for the Research and Data Committee include:

1. Review proposals for ECLDS-branded research and evaluation web reports, print reports, and other deliverables.
2. Develop research and evaluation proposals for utilizing the ECLDS data to further state research goals set by the ECLDS Governing Body, including identifying policy questions and data elements;
3. Provide technical expertise and consultation on research methodologies;
4. Develop protocols for maximizing the validity and reliability of ECLDS data;
5. Recommend protocols to the ECLDS Governing Body for allowing non-MN.IT staff access to ECLDS data;
6. Evaluate research proposals and make recommendations for approval to the ECLDS Governing Body; and
7. Provide technical expertise and consultation on data structure and data linkages for existing and new data.

Research and Data Committee Membership

Members of the ECLDS Research and Data Committee are appointed by members of the ECLDS Governing Body. Research and Data Committee members are expected to have knowledge of relevant policy research questions as well as knowledge of data validity and reliability for data elements for inclusion in the LDS. This knowledge likely includes having an understanding of how data is entered into systems, by whom, and under what circumstances.

Member Expectations

- Attending and participating in scheduled Research and Data Committee meetings in person or sending a designated representative.
- Reporting to the Research and Data Committee on data issues in your agency including new policies or law changes.
- Communicating with your agency regarding activities and decisions of the Research and Data Committee.

Meetings and Housekeeping

Frequency. Meetings are held quarterly, although more frequent meetings are possible depending on ECLDS activity. Remote meeting access is available to accommodate non-metro members and minimize travel.

File Sharing. Documents will be shared electronically.

Facilitation. The ECLDS Lead has responsibility for preparing agenda items, completing updates to other stakeholders between meetings, and otherwise maintaining Research and Data Committee progress in relation to the activities going on elsewhere among partners including legal, MNIT, and technical project management, managing timelines and project milestones. The ECLDS lead communicates to the Research and Data Committee at least one week prior to the next meeting to confirm agenda and content.

Minute-taking. The ECLDS Lead makes every effort to keep a written record of all meetings and decisions.

Discontinuance. If members need to end participation at any time, members are asked to have their agencies reappoint a new member.

New members. Members are asked to always be mindful of whether there are gaps in expertise on the Research and Data Committee, particularly as new data becomes available for inclusion in the ECLDS.