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EVENT BRIEF

NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION DISCUSSES EARLY CHILDHOOD DATA SYSTEMS

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On Friday, October 1, the New American Foundation (NAF) held an event titled, “Many Missing Pieces: A Frank Discussion about Early Childhood Data and State Longitudinal Data Systems,” to examine the many challenges associated with linking early childhood data to K-12 and K-20 data systems and to learn about state progress in creating early childhood data systems. The New America’s Early Education Initiative also released an issue brief titled, *Many Missing Pieces: The Difficult Task of Linking Early Childhood Data and School-Based Data Systems*, which provides information on what state data systems are lacking in terms of ways to analyze student progress over time.

Lisa Guernsey, Director of NAF’s Early Education Initiative, opened the forum by explaining that data is an integral part of education. The event featured three topics of discussion: 1) a presentation of the new report, *Many Missing Pieces: The Difficult Task of Linking Early Childhood Data and School-Based Data Systems*; 2) statewide data systems highlights; and 3) a discussion among leaders in early childhood policy.

SPEAKERS

- Laura Bornfreund, Policy Analyst, Early Education Initiative, New America Foundation
- Maggie Severns, Program Associate, Education Policy Program, New America Foundation
- Elizabeth Laird, Program Manager, Data Quality Campaign
- Jennifer Stedron, Member, Early Childhood Data Collaborative
- Rolf Grafwallner, Assistant State Superintendent, Maryland State Department of Education
- Harriet Dichter, National Director, First Five Years Fund
- Danielle Ewen, Director, Childcare and Early Education Policy, Center for Law and Social Policy

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SUMMARY

Report Findings

Laura Bornfreund and Maggie Severns

The authors of *Many Missing Pieces: The Difficult Task of Linking Early Childhood Data and School-Based Data Systems*, Laura Bornfreund and Maggie Severns, highlighted the report findings and offered several recommendations to both federal and state policymakers. The document identifies \$515 million in federal funding, allocated over the past five years, meant to help states create and expand longitudinal data systems to collect data throughout a child's educational experience. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), \$250 million was granted to 20 states in May 2010, with the requirement that states utilize funding to link early childhood program data to K-12 data systems. Severns argued that even with funding to encourage the development of linked systems, "There are no examples of states, to our knowledge, that have incorporated data from the diverse array of early childhood programs into their K-12 longitudinal data systems." Bornfreund noted an expected trend of significant improvement from states that have received the maximum number of early childhood grants, whereas states receiving fewer grants continue to struggle. Federal policy recommendations include declaring data-system development a priority for the forthcoming Interagency Policy Board comprised of staff from the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. State policy recommendations include providing relevant and timely information on PreK-12 students to all stakeholders such as teachers, principals and families; expanding data sharing responsibilities among state agencies to include a wide range of both education and social service data; and allowing public access to long-term aggregate data regarding the impact of early childhood education on student success.

Statewide Data System Update

Elizabeth Laird and Jennifer Stedron

Elizabeth Laird and Jennifer Stedron provided an overview of states' progress and also emphasized the importance of linking early childhood data to K-12 data systems. Laird highlighted the "10 Fundamentals of Coordinated State Early Childhood Education Data Systems", which was created to collect data that would help state policymakers answer a number of questions including: 1) Are children ages 0-5 on track for success as they enter school and beyond; and 2) Is the quality of early childhood education programs improving over time?

Stedron shared an analysis of grantees' planned progress using funds from the U.S. Department of Education's Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant program. Specifically, 13 states out of 20 are planning to implement unique child IDs; 11 states are working toward collecting child-level demographic and program participation information; 5 states are planning progress in child-level data on development; and 13 states are focusing on linking early childhood data with K-12 systems. These represent Fundamentals 1-4, respectively. Unfortunately, Fundamentals 5-10 are not currently

included in the planned progress of many states. The state plans indicate that states are in various stages of development, and more time is needed to evaluate their successes.

Panel Discussion

Rolf Grafwallner, Harriet Dichter, and Danielle Ewen

Each panelist was presented the opportunity to highlight key challenges to linking early childhood data to other longitudinal systems. Rolf Grafwallner noted that having many school districts in a state was often an obstacle to creating the link due to difficulty tracking the students and a lack of shared data between districts. Harriet Dichter stated that funding is a challenge because multiple resources are necessary to implement an effective and efficient system. All of the panelists agreed that privacy issues impede the success of these systems because explicit parental consent is required for the release of student information in programs such as Head Start. Additionally, Danielle Ewen urged that data collected should go beyond cognitive data to include analysis of access to food, immunizations and other basic needs of children.

QUESTIONS

To address a central concern regarding how individual child care centers can obtain data about their children, Dichter offered that the centers' leaders should develop relationships with the research community, including institutions of higher education, to facilitate evaluations. A question was raised around the inclusion of family providers, and Ewen stated that good data will include all providers, certainly including family providers.

CONCLUSION

While all of the speakers indicated that progress is being made in creating and linking early childhood education data to state longitudinal data systems, each speaker also stressed that there is still much work to be done. Identifying K-12 systems in place provides hope that it is only a matter of time before early childhood education data systems are afforded the same implementation.

For more information, go to:

http://www.newamerica.net/events/2010/many_missing_pieces and the report can be found at:

http://earlyed.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/NAF_ManyMissingPieces.pdf.