



Interagency Data Sharing

Improving Outcomes for Youth

Our country faces persistent, pervasive challenges in preparing young people (ages 0-24) for college, work and life. The absence of consistent, clear and compelling data that tracks their progress, as well as leaders' progress in assisting them, presents a particular roadblock to overcoming this challenge.

Sharing data across systems creates the capacity that allows decision makers at all levels, from the governor to a caseworker, to have access to the right data to make informed decisions about youth at both the aggregate level and the individual child level. It also creates a pathway for continuous service improvement, while approaching youth in both a holistic and efficient manner.

In the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Congress took bold steps to include funding for the integration of state data on children and youth in education systems. This unprecedented infusion of resources for systems reform can best be maximized by using existing state interagency structures, which are making strides to integrate data relevant to children and youth.

Under the provisions of this Act:

- The Secretary of Education is required to carry out section 208 of the Educational Technical Assistance Act, \$250,000,000, which may be used for statewide data systems that include postsecondary and workforce information, of which up to \$5,000,000 may be used for State data coordinators and for awards to public or private organizations or agencies to improve data coordination.

In addition to this infusion in the Recovery Act, there are many existing federal efforts underway to support quality data collection and its effective use as well as sharing across systems. Implementation of the Medicaid Information Technology Architecture (MITA) and the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) are just two examples of this work.

If aligned these efforts would create a strong foundation for a comprehensive integrated child and youth data system that drives toward improved outcomes for children and youth. Such a comprehensive system would:

- **Integrate data across systems.** A comprehensive data system would allow education, child welfare, early childhood, juvenile justice, workforce development, health and other systems to better track and understand how well youth are doing across systems.
- **Integrate data across levels and boundaries.** Data sharing conversations are occurring at many different levels, national, state and local. Within states themselves there are different geographic

boundaries such as municipalities, school districts, counties and service regions that need to be aligned.

- **Integrate data across age groups.** As President Obama called for in his Address to Joint Session of Congress, we need a system to support young people “from the day they are born to the day they begin a career.”
- **Integrate data across common outcome areas.** We must pay attention to the full range of ways young people grow and develop, including academic development, vocational development, social/emotional development, physical development, and civic/cultural development.
- **Integrate multiple types of information.** A complete data system would include information on:
 - *Children and Youth Outcomes*
 - child and youth demographics (e.g., census data)
 - child and youth well-being (indicators of well-being)
 - child and youth enrollment and participation data
 - *Available Supports*
 - quality or performance level data
 - program availability and participation rates
 - provider workforce capacity data
 - resource and investment data
- **Find proactive solutions to preserving confidentiality.** Many states are being stalled in their efforts by concerns over HIPPA and FERPA guidance. However, some states are finding creative solutions to address the issue head on and ensure confidentiality while sharing data to improve outcomes for youth.

Work toward a comprehensive data system is already underway. The Federal Youth Coordination Act, which calls for the development of a National Youth Strategy, contains similar elements (data on the educational, social, emotional, physical, vocational and civic development of youth, data on the quality and quantity of youth services, and the size and allocation of Federal resources). And at the state level, the Data Quality Campaign has been assisting states to integrate data vertically from early childhood education systems up through higher education. At the community level, the National Ready by 21 Partnership is developing tools for communities to track data about youth and the supports available to them.

Children’s Cabinets have been thinking about the horizontal integration of data through the range of agencies that serve children and youth. For example:

- The **New Mexico Children’s Cabinet** creates an annual child report card (indicators of child well-being) and children’s budget (size and allocation of state funding) using a common set of results, indicators and service categories across more than 12 state agencies.
- The Commissioner of Education in Maine recently created a single student identifier and is now looking to utilize that identifier within the **Maine Governor’s Children’s Cabinet** across the other state agencies. In addition, the Maine Legislative Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs passed LD 1356 An Act to Improve the ability of the Department of Education to conduct longitudinal data studies, the purpose of which is to compile, maintain and disseminate information concerning the educational

histories, placement, employment and other measures of success of participants in state educational programs through the use of social security numbers. This is the first step in supporting the development of an interagency data “hub.”

- **Florida’s Children and Youth Cabinet** is in the midst of an intensive planning process to implement a data sharing system among the 8 participating state agencies. The system builds off their Office of State Courts advanced electronic system and as a pilot will include eight data pieces from various agency sources including: Agency for Workforce Innovation, Department of Children and Families, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Health, and Agency for Healthcare Administration.

We are at a critical crossroads. The requirements in the Recovery Act could be met narrowly, by creating a federal data system to track education information, while simultaneous efforts are underway to track youth in transition, Medicaid recipients and other outcomes for children and youth. Or a bolder vision could be set to use these funding streams toward a bigger goal: the creation of a comprehensive integrated child and youth data system. The issue is not a lack of technology; it is a lack of leadership support for a coordinated approach.

This is an historic opportunity for leaders to act boldly on behalf of children and youth. Specifically, we recommend:

Forging an inter-departmental approach. Connect the various federally supported and state driven efforts to improve youth outcomes through a unified child and youth data system. Federal agencies and existing cross departmental efforts should support states as they innovate and integrate their technologies for tracking child and youth outcomes, participation rates and resources.

Promoting a comprehensive child and youth data system. There is a powerful opportunity for leadership, using the bully pulpit to call for the creation of a comprehensive system by states and localities.

Broadening allowable uses of the Recovery Act funds. Issue explicit guidance to states instructing them that the elements of the comprehensive system described above are allowable and encouraged uses of the Recovery Act funds.

Engaging a broader set of partners. Beyond the traditional education organizations stands a set of child and youth systems eager to help align data and develop a broader system. Invite these other systems into work groups to help develop the framework for this broader system.

Engaging state and local officials. Many states and localities have developed significant expertise in developing interagency data systems. The members of the Children’s Cabinet Network and the Ready by 21 Partnership would welcome the opportunity to work with federal officials to help develop an integrated federal-state-local data system.

This statement was developed by the Forum for Youth Investment with input and support from the Children’s Cabinet Network and the Ready by 21 National Partnership. For more information contact Elizabeth Gaines, State & Local Policy Director, at elizabeth@forumfyi.org.