

# Early Childhood Information Data System

## Implement Early Childhood Information Data System (ECIDS)

Performance period 4/2024–12/2025

Data play a central role in how states understand and support young children and their families. State agencies rely on data to describe populations of young children, plan for resource allocation, and monitor access to early care, education, and early intervention services. However, these data are typically housed within separate programs and agencies, limiting their usefulness for addressing cross-cutting policy questions. An integrated data system enables information from otherwise independent systems to be used together, preserving the integrity of existing data while supporting more comprehensive, system-level analyses that individual data sets cannot support on their own.

The **Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS)** initiative is designed to support the analysis of data drawn from multiple agencies serving young children and their families. With funding from the Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R), the state advanced preliminary work begun under earlier grant rounds by establishing a formal, replicable process to enable data sharing and integration across agencies. As part of this work, the initiative supported a targeted use study to test and refine this process, generating practical learning about governance, data sharing, and cross-agency collaboration needed to support future integrated analyses.

This report presents **findings from outcome-focused assessment activities** conducted in fall 2025 as part of Maine’s Preschool Development Grant–Renewal (PDG-R) program. Drawing on diverse data,<sup>1</sup> the report examines the ECIDS initiative with respect to the following PDG-R outcome areas:

- **Impact**, including intended system-level outcomes related to feasibility, governance, data readiness, and the establishment of a replicable process for cross-agency data integration.
- **Communication and cross-sector coordination**, including collaboration among state agencies, data stewards, legal offices, and centralized analytic partners involved in integrated data work.
- **System building**, including contributions to statewide capacity for using integrated data to address cross-agency policy questions related to young children and their families.
- **Supports and access**, including design features that supported agency participation, adaptations made to support engagement, and barriers identified.

<sup>1</sup>Data sources for this report include interviews with the initiative leads, review of initiative-generated documents shared by the initiative leads, monthly initiative reports, and review of an external process evaluation.

The **ECIDS initiative** focused on establishing the organizational and technical foundations needed to support cross-agency data integration. The work was undertaken in support of the Children’s Cabinet and was managed through the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF), led by the state lead, Ana Hicks, with day-to-day coordination provided by an ECIDS project coordinator hired for

this role. Data integration and analytic work were conducted within the Office of Information Technology (OIT).

The initiative initially planned to conduct two use studies and ultimately implemented a single, targeted use study. As implemented, the selected use study—*Understanding Access to Early Care and Education in Maine: Settings and Eligibility*—examined the types of assistance young children, particularly children with disabilities and children in low-income families, receive to access care and education and the settings in which those services are delivered across multiple programs. The use study was designed to test the end-to-end process for requesting, sharing, integrating, and analyzing data across agencies.

In addition to conducting the use study, ECIDS carried out foundational infrastructure work to support secure data sharing. This included identifying agency data stewards, documenting available data sources and parameters, and establishing Memoranda of Understanding and Data Use Agreements to enable analysis. An external process evaluation was also funded as part of this work.<sup>1</sup>

## EARLY CHILDHOOD INFORMATION DATA SYSTEM FEATURES

**Hired and onboarded** key staff to oversee ECIDS development.

Identified **critical sources of data** related to young children and their families across state agencies.

Planned and completed a use study to **test processes and systems** for integrating data across agencies to address a critical policy question.

Established necessary **Memoranda of Understanding and Data Use Agreements** to allow the Office of Information Technology (OIT) access to data to integrate and analyze.

Conducted a **process evaluation** to learn from the initial use study and inform future development of the ECIDS.

## What was the impact of the ECIDS?

This section summarizes outcomes associated with the ECIDS initiative during the PDG-R performance period. Consistent with PDG expectations for system-building initiatives, the assessment focuses on foundational and process-level outcomes rather than downstream service or child-level impacts.

The ECIDS initiative was designed to achieve the following **intended outcomes** during the PDG-R period:

- **Demonstrated proof of concept** for cross-agency data integration that is technically and politically complex.
- **Established a formal, replicable process** for integrating data across state agencies.
- **Strengthened cross-agency governance, coordination, and shared understanding** related to data use and data sharing.

<sup>1</sup>The evaluation was performed by Heuristic Strategies with Melissa Coffey, Ph.D., as lead. Dr. Coffey had been engaged in the earlier ECIDS work. The final report, *Maine ECIDS: Developmental Evaluation Report*, was submitted to The Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future on December 31, 2024. Its findings amplify and are consistent with data collected as part of the overall PDG evaluation.

- **Increased clarity** regarding available data sources, data parameters, and requirements for secure data access.
- **Assessed the feasibility** of integrated data analysis through a targeted use study.
- **Documented learning** about governance, coordination, and technical requirements to inform future ECIDS development.

The findings below describe the extent to which these intended outcomes were realized during the PDG-R performance period. Evidence is drawn from the targeted use study and the accompanying external process evaluation and reflects outcomes appropriate to a system-building initiative at this stage of development.

**Evidence from the targeted use study indicates that ECIDS demonstrated the feasibility of a structured, end-to-end process** for integrating data across state agencies. The work confirmed that cross-agency data integration is achievable using existing state roles and infrastructure and that a defined analytic process can be replicated to address future policy-relevant questions requiring integrated data.

Findings also indicate **strengthened governance and coordination related to cross-agency data use**. Leadership through the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) and the Children’s Cabinet set shared expectations for participation and clarified roles regarding data ownership, access, and analysis. Over the course of the initiative, agencies developed a more common understanding of responsibilities and decision-making structures associated with integrated data work.

The initiative contributed to **increased clarity regarding available data sources and the conditions under which those data can be accessed and used**. Evidence from the use study and process evaluation indicates improved shared understanding of data definitions, formats, privacy protections, and limitations across agencies. This increased data readiness represents a foundational system-level outcome that supports more informed consideration of integrated analyses.

Finally, the targeted use study and external process evaluation **generated documented learning about governance, coordination, and technical requirements** associated with cross-agency data integration. These findings underscore the importance of central leadership, early engagement of data stewards and legal offices, and clear communication about data availability and constraints. **Together, this learning provides an evidence-based foundation** to inform future decisions about the scope and sequencing of ECIDS-related work.

## How did ECIDS support coordination and communication across agencies?

Evidence from the targeted use study and external process evaluation indicates that **ECIDS supported the development of cross-agency collaboration necessary for integrated data work**. Rather than creating new structures, the initiative focused on **strengthening relationships among existing offices and staff**, including agency leadership, data stewards, legal teams, and the OIT.

Through **coordinated engagement** led by the ECIDS coordinator and state leadership, agencies strengthened working relationships and increased trust in data sharing and use. Findings indicate **that**

**regular, multi-channel communication and a deliberate meeting cadence supported shared understanding of data availability, data governance, and agency roles.** Over time, participating staff developed greater clarity regarding how data are collected, housed, protected, and used across agencies, supporting more effective coordination for integrated analysis.

ECIDS also reinforced OIT's role **as a central, neutral mechanism** for data integration and analysis across agencies. Evidence indicates that this positioning supported cross-agency collaboration by providing a consistent pathway for articulating data requests and conducting analyses, while maintaining agency control over their data. Together, these coordination and communication outcomes **reflect progress toward building the collaborative conditions necessary for future cross-agency data use.**

## How has the ECIDS contributed to building a strong statewide early learning system?

ECIDS contributed to statewide system building by establishing and testing a structured process for using integrated data to address cross-agency policy questions related to young children and their families. As a systems-focused initiative, the work did not seek to create a centralized data repository or produce immediate analytic outputs across multiple policy domains. Instead, it **demonstrated how existing data, governance structures, and technical capacity can be coordinated to support system-level inquiry.**

Evidence from the targeted use study indicates **strengthened state capacity to link policy questions raised through the Children's Cabinet with coordinated data requests, integration, and analysis across agencies.** By situating governance within existing cross-agency structures and relying on the Office of Information Technology (OIT) as a central analytic mechanism, the work reinforced **durable pathways** for system-level data use while preserving agency ownership and control of data. These contributions represent **foundational system-building** outcomes that support more coherent use of data across the early learning system.

The work also increased **shared understanding across agencies** of what data are available, how those data are governed, and what is required to use them responsibly for integrated analysis. This increased data readiness—including clarity about data definitions, access requirements, and limitations—supports more informed decision-making and reduces barriers to future cross-agency analysis. Together, these outcomes position ECIDS as an enabling systems tool that strengthens the infrastructure and conditions needed for coordinated early childhood policy analysis in Maine.

## How did ECIDS support participation and access?

ECIDS was not designed as a family- or provider-facing initiative; therefore, participation and access outcomes are reflected primarily in the extent to which agencies engaged in cross-agency data integration processes. As described in the Coordination and Communication and Systems Building sections, ECIDS incorporated design features intended to reduce barriers to agency participation, including narrow scoping, reliance on existing governance structures, and centralized analytic support through OIT.

## Sustainability and Continuation

During the PDG-R period, the work established a viable approach for integrating data across agencies to address policy-relevant questions. Sustainability depends less on maintaining a discrete initiative and more on whether the processes tested through this effort continue to be used within existing state structures. Leadership emphasized the importance of the Children’s Cabinet and the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) in providing governance and ownership of this approach. To the extent that these entities continue to articulate cross-agency policy questions, the process is positioned for continued use.

The work was intentionally designed as a process for integrated analysis rather than as a centralized data system. Data remain housed within their originating agencies, preserving existing data architecture and ownership and reducing barriers to continued participation. The use study reaffirmed the Office of Information Technology (OIT) as the central mechanism for integrating data and conducting analyses—a function that aligns with OIT’s ongoing responsibilities and supports sustainability within current state capacity.

The initiative will continue with funding from a one-year Preschool Development Grant. This funding will allow a team focused on the early care and education workforce to develop and implement a data use case to answer policy questions about Maine’s ECE workforce. The team will receive technical support from ECDataLab to participate in a data analytical cohort with counterparts from other states. Together, this team will develop shared use cases, data dashboards, and code to support data integration. This technical assistance will build the capacity of the program and technical staff to support greater sustainability for the continued integration of data across early childhood programs.

While core components supporting this work—including the Children’s Cabinet, agency data stewards, and OIT—are supported through ongoing state funding, certain activities would require additional resources beyond the next one-year Preschool Development Grant. These include coordinating data integration requests, supporting analytic work at OIT, and producing reports or visualizations. Findings from interviews and the process evaluation indicate that continued funding would also support further documentation of processes and clearer communication about scope and purpose.

## What were the lessons learned from the ECIDS initiative?

- **Strong central leadership is essential for cross-agency data integration.** Executive-level governance through the Children’s Cabinet and leadership from the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) provided clear authority, coordination, and ownership, while supporting champions across agencies, reducing ambiguity, and fostering participation.
- **Regular communication sustains relationships, understanding, and progress.** A critical driver for cross-agency work is building and sustaining relationships, understanding the roles and responsibilities of participants within their own agencies, and developing the ECIDS. Regular communication, including regularly scheduled meetings and email, created the conditions for these relationships and provided a means of sharing progress.

- **Narrowly scoped use studies support feasibility and buy-in.** A single, well-defined use study enabled testing of governance, legal, and technical processes while limiting burden and perceived risk for participating agencies.
- **Relying on existing structures reduces barriers to participation.** Locating the work within established governance and technical systems, including the Children’s Cabinet and the Office of Information Technology, aligned data integration with existing state capacity and minimized disruption to agency operations.
- **Clear communication about scope and intent matters.** Misunderstandings about the purpose of the work—particularly concerns about creating a centralized data system—affected buy-in, underscoring the importance of clearly distinguishing integrated analysis processes from data storage.
- **Documentation supports continuity in a staff-dependent system.** Clear documentation of workflows, data definitions, and agreements is critical for maintaining continuity and preserving institutional knowledge amid staff turnover.

## Summary

ECIDS represents a system-building effort focused on enabling the use of integrated data to address complex, cross-agency policy questions related to young children and their families. Through a targeted use study and accompanying process evaluation, the initiative demonstrated the feasibility of coordinated data integration across agencies, strengthened governance and collaboration structures, and increased shared understanding of data availability and constraints. Together, these outcomes reflect foundational progress toward a more coherent approach to data-informed decision-making within Maine’s early childhood system.