Unique Identifiers (UID) in Florida

For more than a decade, the evolution of Florida’s early learning system has taken us from a focus on supporting the workforce of today to building the workforce for tomorrow. However, even with the perception of early learning changing, there have been serious questions about the quality of many of Florida’s early learning programs.

Policymakers often struggle to obtain answers to basic questions about their states’ public early care and educations (ECE) systems:

· Are children, birth to age 5, on track to succeed when they enter school and beyond?

· Which children have access to high-quality early care and education programs?

· Is the quality of programs improving?

· What are the characteristics of effective programs?

· How prepared is the early care and education workforce to provide effective education and care for all children?

· What policies and investments lead to a skilled and stable early care and education workforce?

Answering these critical policy questions requires data to be collected over time at the individual child level and to be linked to data on ECE programs and the ECE workforce. These systems also require structures and policies that can ensure appropriate access to and use of data, along with security and privacy protection. By ensuring that data are accessible and stakeholders have capacity to use data appropriately, coordinated state ECE data systems will promote data-driven decision-making to improve the quality of ECE programs and the workforce, increase access to high-quality ECE programs, and ultimately improve child outcomes. One of the ways to link child level data across systems is to create a unique identifier (UID). UIDs are computer generated random numbers which protect the confidentiality of the data across ECE systems.

Florida is beginning to have state and local conversations about these questions. In September 2016, the Head Start State Collaboration Office formed a taskforce of key early care and education professionals to discuss what an early childhood integrated data system might look like in Florida. The taskforce learned that the Florida Department of Education (DOE), as part of their Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) and K20 Data Warehouse, has developed a process to create UIDs for children enrolled in Florida’s statewide education system. Briefly, the system receives student identification numbers, assigned by the school districts, and creates a Florida Identification Number (FLEID) which follows a child throughout his or her education, even into college. Florida’s Office of Early Learning (OEL), which is under the DOE, met with the FLEID Team to discuss the FLEID assignment process and to brainstorm ideas for how DOE would incorporate the data collection & assignment of OELs early childhood data records. This would enable OEL to link children enrolled in school readiness and Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) with the SLDS.

The taskforce met again in January 2017, to continue learning about data systems and begin the planning process for an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS). Future steps include engaging additional stakeholders, including parents; creating a list of data questions, such as identifying data we want to collect; taking an inventory of existing data projects; presenting to the Children and Youth Cabinet; and forming a Leadership Team to look at planning and management, stakeholder engagement, data governance, system design and sustainability.