

MICHIGAN COORDINATED ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT LANDSCAPE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



AUGUST 2021



INTRODUCTION

The earliest years of a child's life represent an important opportunity. Children who have positive early experiences are more likely to succeed in school, lead healthier lives, and contribute to creating stronger communities. High-quality early childhood programs and services are among the experiences that can make a difference for young children. Children's development is further supported and enhanced when their families have access to opportunities and resources that help them thrive.



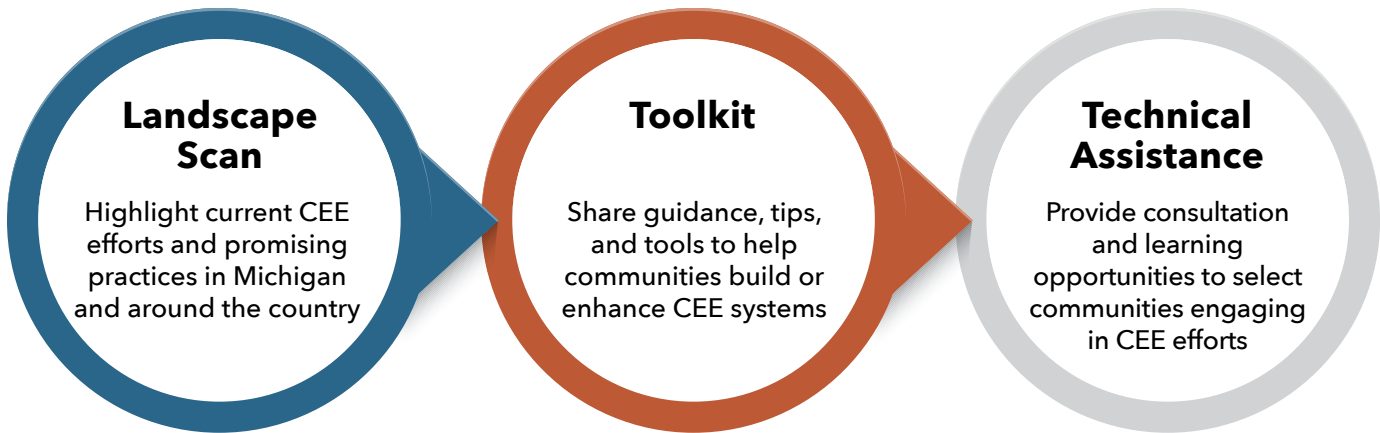
"I think that the importance of finding ways to reduce stress and to help our parents navigate these systems ... by us working, advocating for our parents and trying to figure out a way to get around all of this paperwork, all of this waiting or wondering, it directly affects our children."

– **Program Director**

Coordinated eligibility and enrollment (CEE) is a systems-building approach that aims to address the current fragmented nature of early learning and family support systems to ensure that all young children and their families can benefit from the full range of services and supports available to them. CEE systems have several important goals:

- Better meet the needs of children and families
- Help ensure equitable access to programs and services
- Allocate limited resources more efficiently
- Promote effective service delivery

The Michigan Office of Great Start (OGS) has partnered with School Readiness Consulting (SRC) to implement a project focused on supporting local communities in building and enhancing systems to coordinate eligibility and enrollment. This project is supported by Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five (PDG B-5) resources awarded to Michigan in 2019 and renewed for 2020-2022. The project consists of a series of activities to support CEE efforts across the state.



As the first step of this project, SRC has developed a Landscape Scan of Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment (“the Landscape”). The Landscape was developed to serve as a guide for the state and for local communities to support the development and expansion of community-based CEE systems. The Landscape was informed by publicly available resources, resources provided by OGS, and interviews with Michigan state agency leaders and individuals from other states with innovative approaches to CEE.

The Landscape provides an overview of CEE and how it is being successfully implemented in local communities in Michigan, as well as in other states. The Landscape sets out a framework for applying comprehensive CEE efforts on the ground in communities and discusses the role that state-level policy can play in developing successful CEE systems. Finally, the Landscape identifies key considerations both for the state and for communities as they work to advance CEE. The Landscape is intended to provide insights and ideas that can assist state and local leaders in understanding how CEE can help ensure that all young children have early experiences that provide a strong foundation for healthy development, joyful learning, and lifelong success.

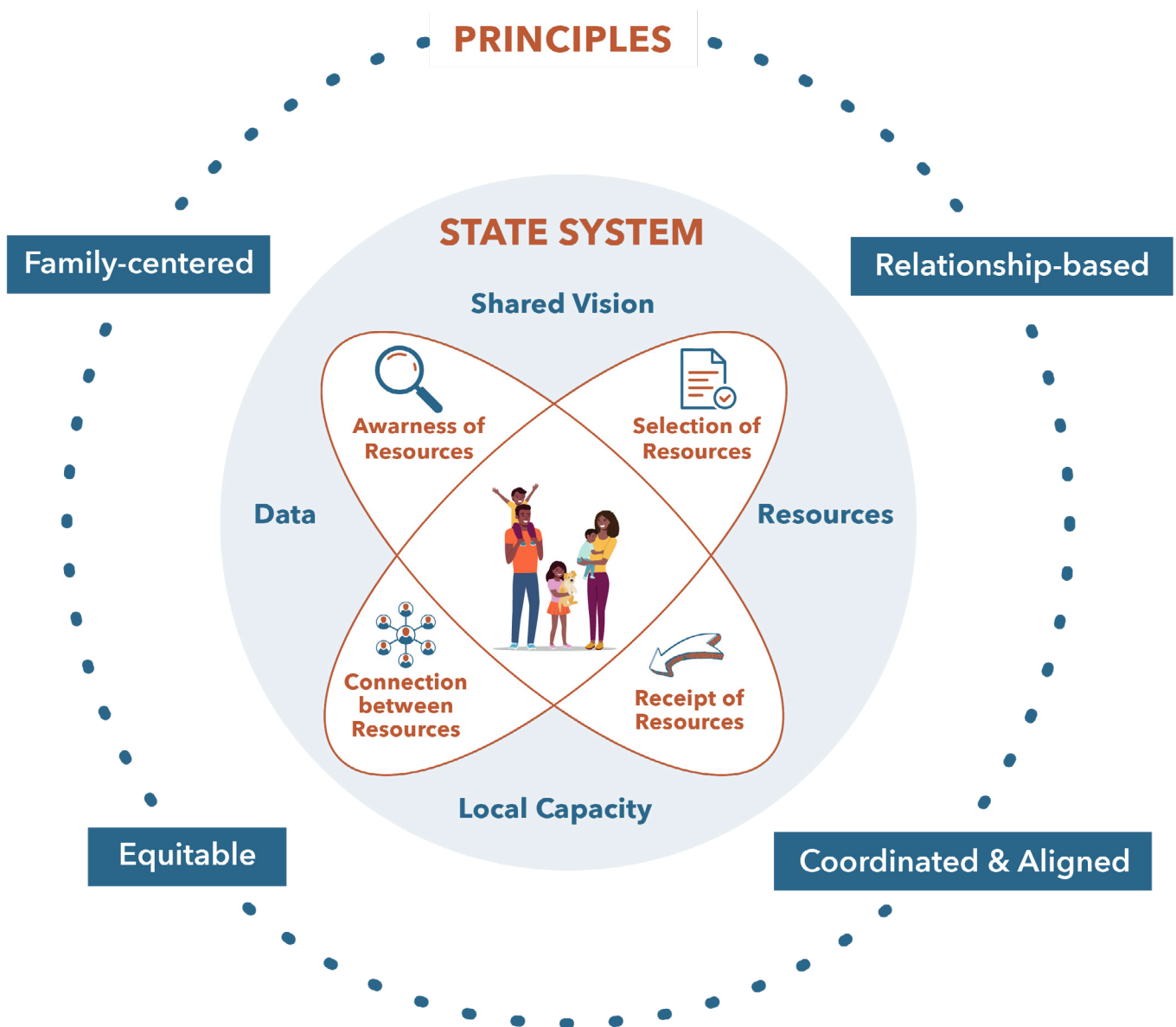


MICHIGAN COORDINATED ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT FRAMEWORK

The Landscape is organized around a framework that incorporates the key components of creating successful CEE systems. The framework provides a method for the state and communities to approach CEE work in a comprehensive way. The framework has three components:

- Foundational principles of CEE
- Areas where state policy can best support local CEE efforts
- Key elements that constitute successful on-the-ground CEE approaches

All of these components center around families, who are the focus of all CEE efforts.



PRINCIPLES OF COORDINATED ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT

The Landscape identifies four foundational principles for CEE. These are core values that should guide CEE efforts in any context.

Family-Centered

Focus on parent choice and voice

All efforts must consider the needs of children and families first and foremost.

Relationship-Based

Leverage relationships between all early childhood stakeholders

Relationships are a cornerstone of successful CEE efforts.

Equitable

Ensure the system works for ALL families

Services should be provided and resources allocated according to the needs and experiences of each child and family, while centering and building on the strengths and assets often overlooked in children, families, and communities.

Coordinated and Aligned

Prioritize effective collaboration between stakeholders

For CEE systems to achieve their goals, stakeholders cannot work in silos.



KEY ELEMENTS OF COORDINATED ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT

The Landscape identifies four key elements that are integral to successful CEE systems. Communities that are implementing CEE approaches may be focused on all or some of these elements, and communities may be in various stages of implementation across the elements. These elements can be used to both create new CEE systems and to improve what is already in place.

Build Family Awareness of Resources and Services

A foundational component of CEE systems is increasing families' awareness of resources and services. This component is important because existing outreach and communication systems often do not reach or meaningfully connect with families. Strategies to maximize family awareness fall into two general categories: creating online resources and fostering community-driven communication and outreach.

Creating online resources. Michigan and communities across the state have developed online resources that increase family awareness of the mixed delivery system and services that can support children and families. States around the country have undertaken similar efforts. As an essential part of this work, recent efforts in Michigan have focused on ensuring that online resources are accessible to all families, including translating websites and addressing barriers families may face in accessing a computer or the internet.



"For programs that do exist, some parents are overwhelmed and don't know where to turn as there is not a single clear resource that they can turn to. A one-stop resource that says what is available and what they could be thinking about in communities just isn't available."

– Local Leader

Fostering community-driven outreach and communication efforts. Michigan has also prioritized improving its understanding of the communication needs and preferences of the state's diverse families. Key findings include the need to tailor messages and customize communication materials to better reflect families' unique cultures, context, and experiences, as well as the vital role that community collaboration and trusted messengers play in conducting successful community-based outreach to families.

Help Families Select Available Resources And Services

Helping families select the available resources that best meet the family's needs and preferences is another key element of CEE. These efforts are critical because of the variety of available child and family-serving programs, many of which have complicated eligibility processes. CEE systems seek to strengthen family and provider capacity to navigate these complexities while also simplifying eligibility processes whenever possible.

Developing aligned or consolidated eligibility determination and verification processes. Michigan and other states have pursued several types of strategies to reduce the burden that eligibility determination and verification processes pose for families and providers. These include developing technology solutions to verify eligibility more easily between systems, increasing coordination through systems-building, and implementing regulatory changes to help streamline eligibility and verification for families.



"At my center currently, we try to do whatever we can to foresee issues, tell parents about how to apply, how to navigate that. We print off forms that they're going to need. We fax things in, we email, we scan things to the emails for different caseworkers. And sometimes we even will give caseworkers a call ... So we just use our resources to make sure that their child can get in ... That's one less thing they have to worry about."

– Program Director

Strengthening family and provider capacity. States and communities have also worked to increase family and provider capacity to navigate these processes. In Michigan, families can use an online self-service portal to apply for benefits in certain assistance areas. Numerous other states are working to create similar single points of access or "one-stop shops" for child and family services. Local communities have also developed online tools for families and providers to use and have invested in dedicated staff to help families navigate these processes.

Ensure Families Receive Resources and Services

The overarching goal of CEE is to ensure that young children and their families receive resources and supports that help them learn, grow, and thrive. Yet because of the different funding streams, eligibility requirements, and limited available spots, applying for and enrolling in these programs can be complicated and burdensome for both families and providers. Successful CEE systems seek to mitigate these barriers through two approaches: improving the application experience and managing the enrollment process.

Creating streamlined and accessible application processes for families. Examples of strategies underway in Michigan and other states to make application processes less burdensome for families include developing common applications, providing multiple methods to submit application materials, and matching families to the program of their choice.



"So thinking back at the beginning of this adventure, our enrollment process included several organizations. So it wasn't just the ISD [Intermediate School District] saying, 'Let's make an online application for our programs.' It was working with other programs to ensure that our application met the needs of what we needed to ask families or they needed to ask families."

– Program Director

Developing shared processes to track enrollment in programs and wait lists. Michigan and other states have worked to develop a unique child identifier and expand data systems to track enrollment in a wide range of child- and family-serving programs, increase capacity to access real-time data about slots and vacancies, and create unified waiting lists. Several communities in Michigan have developed their own processes to track enrollment and manage wait lists for various early childhood programs.



Keep Families Connected and Supported

Young children and their families have the most opportunity when they are consistently supported throughout the early years and all the families' needs are met. CEE efforts have begun to focus on making successful referrals to comprehensive services, facilitating successful transitions for families between programs by increasing family and provider knowledge of comprehensive supports for the whole child and family, and fostering cross-sector collaboration.

Increasing family and provider knowledge of comprehensive resources and systems. States including Michigan have leveraged their online 2-1-1 systems to help increase residents' knowledge of the wide range of supports that are available. Communities in Michigan have developed similar locally focused online resources. Michigan communities are also advancing relationship-based approaches to help connect families to comprehensive supports, such as locating trusted community members in community spaces to build relationships with families and facilitating shared professional development among providers. There have been intentional efforts in Michigan and other states to increase family and provider knowledge about two key transitions: from early intervention to early childhood special education and from early childhood into kindergarten.

Fostering cross-sector collaboration. Many states, including Michigan, are working to improve or expand their state-level data systems and data-sharing platforms to refer families more effectively to resources and track the results of referrals. States and communities are also exploring innovative approaches that leverage relationships between providers and families and among providers from different sectors to facilitate warm handoffs and tracking across systems.



"We have to search [referral information] out ourselves. We have to call and ask each county, How do you want a referral? How do we handle it? What are the steps? For us, it feels like every county is a little bit different on what they offer and what they have."

– **Early Childhood Provider**



DEVELOPING A STATE SYSTEM THAT ADVANCES LOCAL COORDINATED ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT EFFORTS

The Landscape identifies four best practices states can use to advance local CEE systems.

Setting a Vision

Establish and communicate a shared vision

The state should set and communicate a vision—developed in partnership with communities—and provide continued guidance to support implementation of CEE efforts.

Leveraging Resources

Explore opportunities to leverage federal and state funds and other supports

Considering how various funding sources and opportunities, including those at the federal and state levels, can be used to support CEE efforts is an important role for the state.

Advancing Data Use

Consider how data systems can support and coordinate with local CEE efforts

As the state invests in data systems to better track access and ensure that resources are being allocated equitably, it is important to examine how these efforts can align with and strengthen CEE efforts at the local and state levels.

Building Local Capacity

Provide communities with technical assistance to support their CEE efforts

Communities working to implement CEE systems can benefit from the state's ability to provide technical assistance in key areas, such as leveraging resources, strengthening communication strategies and data use, developing partnerships, and engaging philanthropy and other sectors to support CEE efforts.

CONCLUSION

CEE provides an important opportunity to create a more coordinated and equitable early learning system in Michigan. Successful CEE systems can ensure that every family has the resources needed to help children get the strongest possible start in life and meet their fullest potential. By partnering with communities to advance this work, Michigan is taking an important step towards achieving its vision of being one of the best states in which to raise a child.

For more detailed information regarding CEE, including how it aligns with other efforts underway in Michigan, please refer to the Michigan Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Landscape.



The project was supported by School Readiness Consulting. As a consulting firm focused exclusively on early childhood, SRC partners with cities, districts, states, foundations, and nonprofits to develop and implement systemwide strategies that improve outcomes for children in school and life. SRC believes that improving early childhood and affirming the right for all children to thrive represents the greatest opportunity to create a just society.