

# MICHIGAN COORDINATED ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT LANDSCAPE



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# INTRODUCTION

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Michigan has a vision of becoming one of the best states in which to raise a child. Recognizing that every child, family, and community is different, the state seeks to support communities in building and enhancing systems that best serve families while maximizing limited resources. In order to better understand the possibilities that Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment (CEE) offers to advance its vision, the state is exploring the current CEE landscape within Michigan and in states around the country.

## Purpose

This Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Landscape (“Landscape”) seeks to provide an overview of CEE and how it is being successfully implemented in local communities in Michigan, as well as in other states. The report focuses on key principles and elements of CEE and provides examples that show how these can be applied on the ground in communities. It also identifies key considerations both for the state and for communities as they work to advance CEE. The Landscape is intended to serve as a platform from which the state will begin targeted efforts to support CEE across the state, including the development of a CEE toolkit and the provision of community-level technical assistance.

## Process

The Michigan Office of Great Start has partnered with School Readiness Consulting to implement this project focused on supporting local communities in building and enhancing systems to coordinate eligibility and enrollment. The work is funded by the state’s Preschool Development Grant B-5 Renewal Grant (PDG B-5). The Landscape represents the first phase of this project and was developed through

- reviewing publicly available resources,
- examining resources provided by the Office of Great Start, and
- interviewing state agency leaders in Michigan and individuals from other states with innovative approaches.

The Landscape also was informed by findings from other key PDG B-5 efforts in order to ensure this work aligns with and leverages ongoing statewide systems-building initiatives. Moreover, the Landscape includes a series of stakeholder quotes from focus groups, listening sessions, town halls, panels, and interviews that were conducted and originally cited in reports that document these other key PDG B-5 efforts. These quotes are included to provide further insight into the lived experiences that families, early childhood providers, and other community and state leaders across Michigan have had with CEE.

### Needs Assessment of Michigan's Prenatal through Age Five Mixed Delivery System

*A comprehensive needs assessment of Michigan's early childhood system conducted by American Institutes for Research*

### Michigan's PDG B-5 Strategic Plan

*A strategic plan for the state's early childhood system, developed by Michigan's Office of Great Start in partnership with School Readiness Consulting*

### Michigan's PDG B-5 Communication Research Findings

*Reports and insights gleaned from communication research conducted by Advocacy and Communications Solutions*

### Listen and Learn Symposium

*A symposium hosted by Michigan's Office of Great Start for early childhood practitioners and families from around the state to create an opportunity for communities to learn from each other and share best practices*

## How the Landscape Is Organized

This Landscape begins with an **overview of CEE**, including the benefits of CEE, how advancing CEE fits into Michigan's current efforts to strengthen its early learning system, and how to make high-quality early childhood opportunities accessible to all children. The report also describes Michigan's existing infrastructure, which can be leveraged to develop CEE systems.

The Landscape then summarizes **key principles of CEE** before providing an analysis of **four elements of successful CEE systems**. Within each of these four elements, the following are included:

- An overview of **relevant efforts occurring in Michigan**
- An overview of **relevant efforts in other states and communities**
- **Examples of best practices** in Michigan and in other states ("Bright Spots")
- **Key considerations** for the state and for communities to explore as they proceed in this work

Finally, an overview of the role that state-level policy can play in developing successful CEE systems is provided, including an overview of current efforts underway in the state, best practices from other states, and key considerations.

Together, the information from this Landscape can be used to guide Michigan's efforts to support the development and expansion of community-based CEE systems, as well as individual communities' efforts to create family-centered, equitable CEE systems.





# THE OPPORTUNITY

There is great momentum around the country to build early childhood systems that provide more aligned, coordinated, equitable, and family-centered opportunities for young children and their families. One critical aspect of creating these systems is developing coordinated approaches that ensure families can fully access available services and supports—work that spans from increasing families’ knowledge of services to tracking whether families were able to enroll in programs that met their specific needs and preferences. Moreover, as the nation continues to understand and address the reality of systemic racism and to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is of paramount importance to develop systems that are aligned to families’ lived experiences, are designed to engage families in ways that are culturally and linguistically relevant, and ensure that no child or family falls through the cracks. Such efforts are vital to ensuring that families can choose and fully benefit from available resources that support their young children’s early learning and development and foster families’ health and success. CEE provides a strategy to achieve these goals and advance a more equitable and racially just system in Michigan that supports all young children and their families.

## What Is Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment?

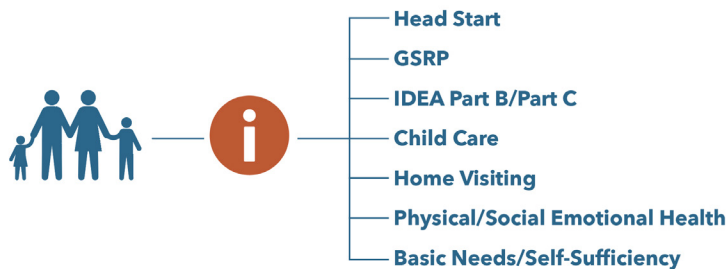
States and communities across the country are working to develop CEE systems. CEE efforts have become a national priority recently through the federal PDG B-5 initiative. The PDG B-5 Renewal Grant (2019) included a bonus opportunity for states to pilot or expand efforts for “coordinated application/enrollment or centralized eligibility, waitlist, and enrollment systems development” to streamline enrollment for families in programs that support child health and development, early learning, and family economic stability.<sup>1</sup>

A variety of approaches and strategies can advance CEE systems, and states and communities may use more than one to ensure that families can access early learning and family support programs. Two common approaches focus on how families initially access or connect to services:

- **Providing a central or single point of entry through which families can access a variety of early learning programs**—and increasingly comprehensive services and supports for the whole family. Some terms used to describe this approach include “one-stop shop,” “single point of entry,” “centralized access,” or “referral hub.”
- **Developing processes and systems that link families to the right resources to meet their needs regardless of which program or service provider a family connects with first.** This is known as a “no wrong door” approach.

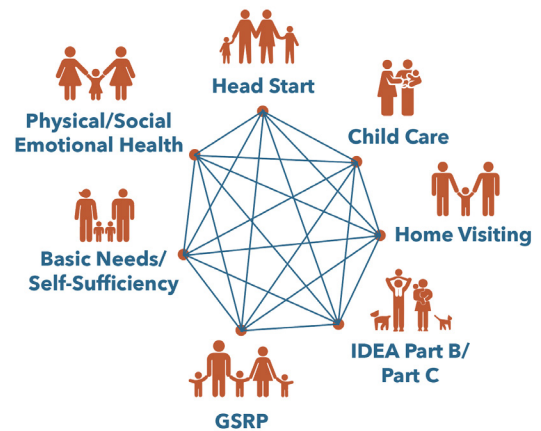
## ONE STOP SHOP

There is a central location where families can go to learn about their options and be directed to available services



## NO WRONG DOOR

No matter where a family enters the system, they are also connected to the other supports available to them



While these approaches are important frameworks to use in designing CEE systems, CEE is ultimately about implementing methods that 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 that are available to them. CEE systems are grounded in the community context and should be shaped by the families and providers who are interacting with the systems in day-to-day life. Implementing a coordinated approach to how families initially access these services—whether it be through a “no wrong door” approach, a “one-stop shop,” or some other method—is a necessary but not sufficient component of a successful CEE system.

## Why Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment?

CEE systems have several important goals:

- **Better meet the needs of children and families:** Well-implemented CEE systems help families learn about, choose, and access the early learning programs and services that meet their specific needs and interests through family-centered resources, processes, and supports.
- **Help ensure equitable access to programs and services:** Successful CEE systems develop culturally and linguistically responsive materials, tools, and resources that can support diverse families in identifying and enrolling in programs in ways that are relevant to their preferences and experiences. It can also provide a method for analyzing which families are able to access appropriate services and which are not, as well as a way through which those gaps can be addressed.



- **Allocate limited resources more efficiently:**

CEE approaches focus on ensuring that the maximum number of families can benefit from limited resources and that those resources are being utilized to their full extent—by reducing duplication in enrollment, moving families off of waiting lists into programs with availability, and streamlining administrative processes for families and providers.

- **Promote effective service delivery:** Successful CEE approaches require strong collaboration, which is sometimes difficult to foster in a system with limited resources. Engaging community stakeholders in CEE efforts can help break down silos and competition between providers, generating more effective approaches to service delivery that can generate improved outcomes for families.



"I think that to maintain the health and safety of our children ... we want our parents to be healthy mentally. How do we reduce stress on our parents who are already experiencing low income issues? Like having to need DHHS [Department of Health and Human Services] alone is stressful because of the situation you're in. If you are trying to find work, if you are not making enough money and trust me, you have to be not making hardly any money to qualify. So 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**

## How Does Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Fit into Other Early Childhood Efforts in Michigan?

Building on a history of supporting young children and families through quality early learning programs and investment in local infrastructure, Michigan is leveraging its PDG B-5 funds to strengthen its early learning system and create vital linkages to comprehensive supports for families with young children. Through the initial PDG B-5 grant, Michigan initiated a comprehensive statewide birth–5 needs assessment followed by in-depth strategic planning. The **Needs Assessment of Michigan's Prenatal through Age Five Mixed Delivery System** points to several areas where CEE can help address gaps in Michigan's early childhood system, including the following:

- **Availability:** There are large gaps in the availability of programs and services for children ages birth–5.
- **Equity:** Racial and ethnic disparities exist in Michigan's mixed delivery system.
- **Transitions:** Transition processes are inconsistent across the state.
- **Collaboration:** Systems-level collaboration remains a challenge.
- **Data:** Challenges with existing data limit Michigan's ability to understand the number of children served and the number awaiting services.

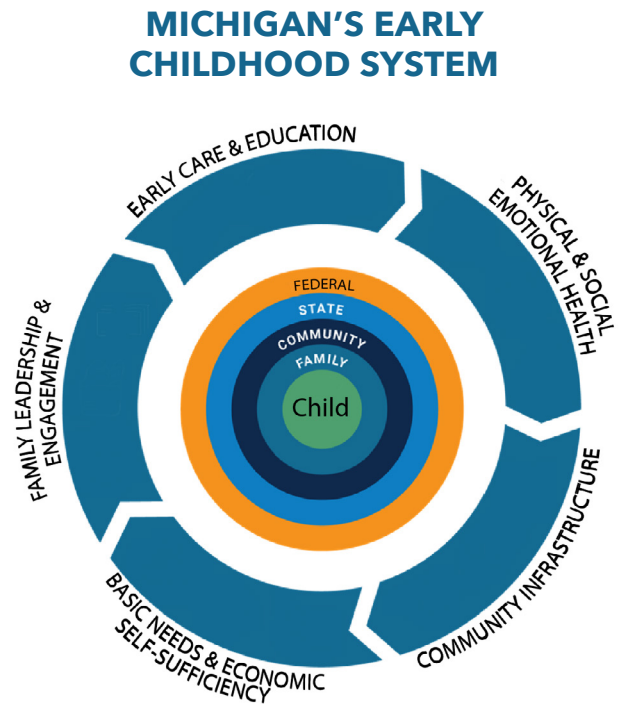
In Michigan's PDG B-5 Strategic Plan, important components of CEE are included in strategies that aim to advance the state's vision for its early childhood system, such as strengthening communication and outreach to families and eliminating obstacles to enrollment.

The development of the Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan contributed to Michigan's successful PDG B-5 Renewal Grant application, which included funding for the state to further support CEE efforts, including the development of "no wrong door" frameworks to be used in communities across the state.

# The Current Michigan Early Childhood Context

Michigan's vision for advancing CEE throughout the state is that families can access all programs and supports available to them *at any point where they come into contact with the early childhood system*. This vision includes expanding existing CEE efforts to incorporate a "no wrong door" framework. Michigan benefits from a robust mixed delivery birth-5 early care and education (ECE) system as a basis for building out the state's CEE vision, including the following programs and services:

1. **Early On® (Early Intervention, IDEA Part C):** Infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities are offered services to address or overcome those delays in the context of the children's homes or early learning placements through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
2. **Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B, Section 619):** Children (ages 3-21) with disabilities are offered special education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), in accordance with IDEA.
3. **Home Visiting Programs:** Voluntary visits by trained and experienced professionals are offered to new mothers or families of very young children to provide services that support the health and well-being of these children and families.
4. **Early Head Start, Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start:** These federally funded programs provide high-quality early childhood programming to children whose families are most financially in need (below 100% of the federal poverty level [FPL]) in the years before kindergarten.
5. **Child Care:** Publicly and privately funded child care services are offered for children from birth through age 12. Subsidies are available to families with low incomes to access these care settings through the state's Child Development and Care program.
6. **Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP):** High-quality, state-funded preschool is offered for 4-year olds whose family income falls at or below 250% FPL. GSRP is implemented through Intermediate School Districts (ISDs).



The mixed delivery ECE system described above is part of a network of public supports that aim to meet families' comprehensive needs in the early years and constitute Michigan's early childhood system. This system includes not only early care and education programs but also programs and services that support physical health, social-emotional health, and basic needs, such as food and income supports, ensuring that Michigan's youngest children and their families have what they need to learn, grow, and thrive. Some key programs include these:

1. **WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children):** Provides supplemental food, offers professional nutrition education, and makes referrals based on health screening and assessments of need for pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women who have low incomes, and infants and children up to 5 years old who are at health risk due to inadequate nutrition.<sup>2</sup>
2. **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program):** Provides temporary food assistance for eligible families and individuals with low income.<sup>3</sup>
3. **TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families):** Provides temporary cash assistance to eligible pregnant women and families with low income and with minor children.<sup>4</sup>
4. **Medicaid:** Includes a variety of programs that provide health care coverage to individuals and families who meet certain eligibility requirements.<sup>5</sup>

The state's goal for advancing CEE is not to build a new CEE system. Rather, the goal is to build on what is already in place, make connections, and leverage various parts of the system to ensure that families can access programs and supports that they need—from ECE programs and supports to the broader range of comprehensive supports for the whole child and family.

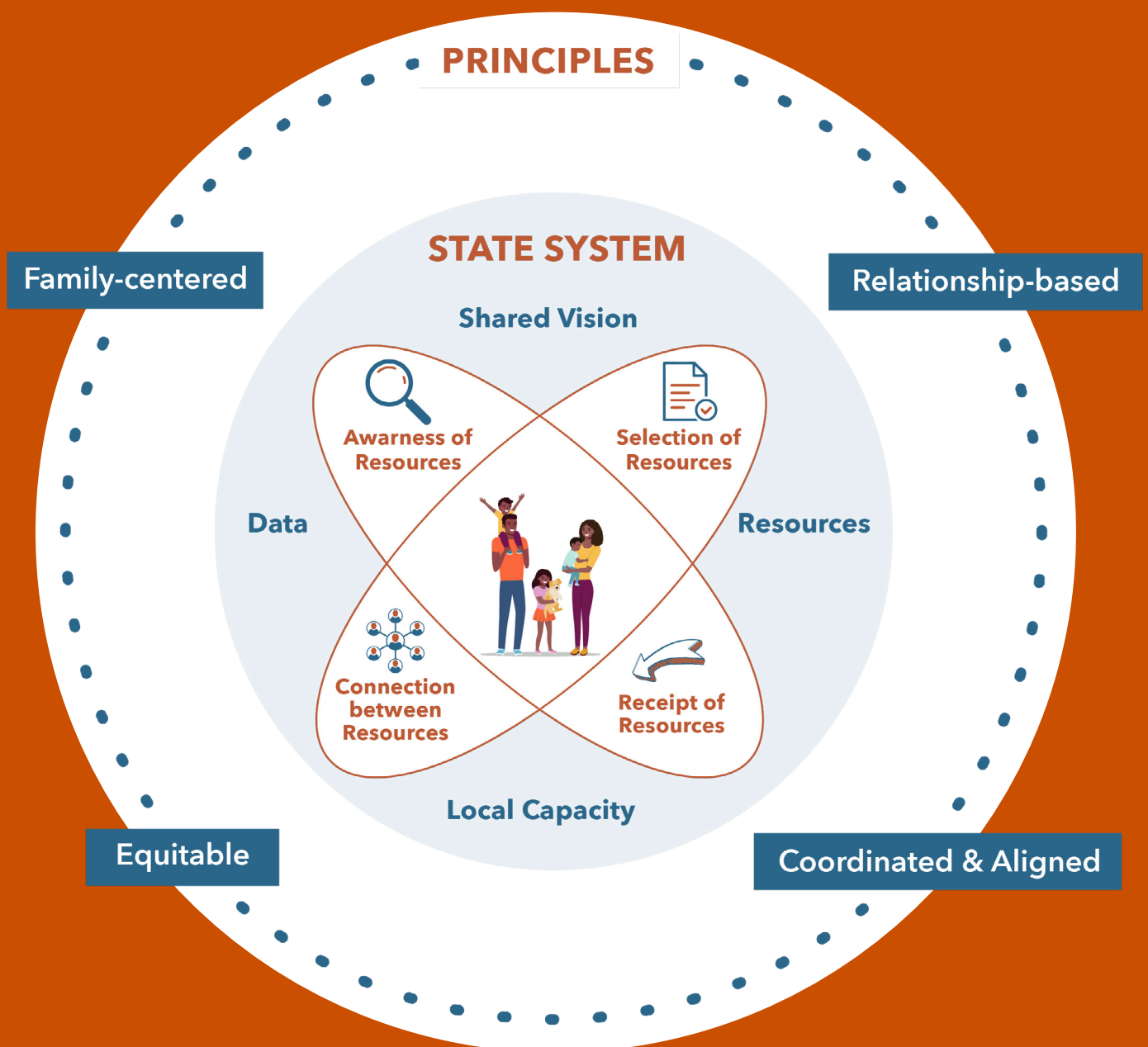






# **MICHIGAN COORDINATED ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT FRAMEWORK**

The framework in the illustration below represents the key components of CEE included in this Landscape and how they relate to one another. Families are at the center of CEE systems, which include the four elements outlined in this Landscape (Awareness, Selection, Receipt, and Connection). The state can foster the development and implementation of successful CEE systems across the four elements by providing leadership and support in four areas (Shared Vision, Data, Resources, and Local Capacity). Finally, there are four principles (Family-Centered, Relationship-Based, Equitable, and Coordinated and Aligned) that can be used to guide CEE efforts at the local and state levels, including in the design and implementation of the elements of CEE and state-level leadership and support.



# Principles of Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment

CEE systems are by design tailored to the unique community and context in which they are taking place. However, four foundational principles should guide the work of designing and implementing CEE systems no matter the context. These principles apply to all elements of CEE systems, at all stages of development and implementation, and should be considered throughout the process and incorporated into success metrics.

## Family-Centered

Focus on parent choice and voice

All efforts must consider the needs of children and families first and foremost. The characteristics of Michigan families vary greatly, as do their strengths and needs. Through purposeful, ongoing collaboration with families, communities can ensure that their CEE efforts and early childhood systems respond to community values and match local needs and preferences.



"We think we have it right and then we realize that the whole system isn't translated into Burmese and we have a large community of Burmese families. So I think it's an ongoing learning process. And it's so important that we involve not only our partners in making decisions, but also having families really be the deciding factor of what works and what doesn't work."

– Program Director

## Relationship-Based

Leverage relationships between all early childhood stakeholders

Relationships are a cornerstone of successful CEE efforts. Relationships are key to sharing information, breaking down barriers to access, and ensuring that all stakeholders are valued and supported. Communities should build on and prioritize developing trust and connections between families, providers, and other stakeholders in developing CEE systems.



"And no matter how much we work together, when it comes to business, that element of competition it's always going to be there. So building trust and partnerships so that we can kind of overcome that is one thing."

– Program Director

## Equitable

Ensure the system works for ALL families

Equity in early childhood means all children have a fair and just opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed, so that race, language, and other social factors no longer predict developmental and educational success. Advancing equity necessitates acknowledging racism, sexism, and economic injustice as the root causes of inequities and as existing barriers that will require an intentional, system-wide effort to remove. Services and resources should be allocated according to the needs and experiences of each child and family while centering and building on the developmental strengths and assets often overlooked in children, families, and communities.



"To increase access to early intervention and special needs, it's going to take getting trusted people implementing it for you to see more people of color accessing it."

– Subject Matter Expert

## Coordinated and Aligned

Prioritize effective collaboration between stakeholders

For CEE systems to achieve their goals, stakeholders cannot work in silos. Opportunities to coordinate and collaborate must be identified and implemented at all levels of the early childhood system to streamline and improve services for families and create efficiency. This effort includes providing adequate infrastructure and support for cross-agency coordination at the local and state level, including leadership, technical assistance and support, and staffing.



"Organizations operate in silos, and there needs to be more collaboration focused on the best interests of the child."

– Early Childhood Provider



# Key Elements of Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment

The following key elements are integral to developing and implementing successful CEE systems. This framework recognizes that the state has existing infrastructure in the form of Great Start Collaboratives (GSCs) that may have implemented their own community-designed approaches to CEE. As communities are in various stages of this work, and as the state seeks to support “no wrong door” approaches across the state, the elements in this framework can be used to both develop and improve community-based CEE and integrate “no wrong door” approaches as part of that work.



## BUILD FAMILY AWARENESS OF RESOURCES AND SERVICES

There are many programs and services that support children and families in the early years: early learning programs and developmental supports, physical and behavioral health care, and economic supports aimed at providing family stability. However, families with young children may be unaware of these resources because existing outreach and communication systems often do not reach or meaningfully connect with families. A foundational component of CEE systems, therefore, is increasing awareness of resources and services so that families initially enter the system. Strategies to build this awareness fall into two general categories: developing online resources and fostering community-driven communication and outreach.

### Creating online resources that maximize family knowledge of the mixed delivery system and services that support the whole child and family

While many families primarily rely on word of mouth, they are increasingly turning to and expecting online resources to provide information about early learning programs and other supports. Therefore, many states, including Michigan, have invested in developing comprehensive online platforms to provide families, providers, and stakeholders with information relating to child development and resources and services that support young children and families, such as early learning and development programs.

Even when resources are online and there are platforms for families to search and share information, families often have specific questions and concerns that cannot be satisfied purely through the universal resources and messages that are available online. Therefore, developing infrastructure to be able to engage with families in real time—through interactive chat features, contact forms, phone lines, and dedicated staff—is also an important component of reaching families through online resources.



“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



“If you don’t know someone that is in a program, you usually don’t know about the services. If programs are available, you may not be able to know about the services because you are not utilizing similar services.”

– Family Member

## What Is Michigan Already Doing?

**Developing comprehensive online resources.** Michigan has made a significant investment in developing resources that increase family awareness of the mixed delivery system and services that can support children and families. Hosted by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the **MiKidsMatter** website is a comprehensive state-level early childhood resource that is being developed as a “one-stop shop” to connect families to the state’s early childhood system and other child and family supports, from prenatal to school age. This online platform provides information for families on child development, resources for providers, and information for community stakeholders about the state’s early childhood system. The website includes a **Resources** section where families can search for comprehensive child and family supports, including health and safety services, developmental and special education resources, and family assistance programs such as cash, food, and energy cost assistance offered by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). There is also a link to **MI Bridges**, Michigan’s interactive online public benefits system. The MiKidsMatter website is mobile-responsive, and research is being conducted to further refine the website.

The MiKidsMatter platform also links to the **Great Start to Quality (GSQ)** website, which is a comprehensive resource built around the state’s quality rating and improvement system that allows families to search all licensed early care and education programs in Michigan using different parameters, such as program setting, hours, and ages served. However, there is not widespread awareness of the Great Start to Quality website among Michigan families. Based on the state’s communication research, only about 6% of families indicated they used the website to find an early childhood provider.<sup>6</sup>

At the local level, many Great Start Collaboratives (GSCs) have developed their own resources to increase family awareness of early learning programs and other resources to support young children and their families. Some—such as **Saginaw County**, **Bay-Arenac Counties**, and **Kent County**—have developed websites that are targeted directly to families and provide information on early childhood development and parenting supports and resources. Another community-level online resource is **Help Me Grow**, which includes functions that help parents find child care and preschool programs, as well as links to a handful of counties in the state that are offering online developmental screening.



### Michigan Bright Spot: Saginaw County Great Start Collaborative

Saginaw County GSC has developed a section for **families** on its website, which provides information on child development, school readiness, early learning programs, and local resources to support young children and families. There is also information on how to get involved in local early childhood efforts, including the GSC and Great Start Parent Coalition (GSPC). Another section of the website provides information on **activities** families can do with their children to promote their learning and development, such as **Math in the Mail** and **Talking is Teaching**.

**Ensuring online resources are accessible to all families.** Several of the online resources mentioned above are available in a language other than English or will be translated into additional languages. For example, the Great Start to Quality website has a “Google translate” feature displayed on its home page that allows the user to translate the website into numerous languages, while MI Bridges has an option at the bottom of its home page providing translation into Spanish and Arabic. MiKidsMatter will also be translated into Spanish and Arabic in the near future.

In addition, as part of its initial PDG B-5 work, Michigan examined its communications materials to determine strengths and gaps in reaching diverse families with the goal of ensuring that language and culture are not barriers to obtaining information about or accessing the mixed delivery ECE system. As part of that effort, feedback was collected from racially and linguistically diverse focus groups that were held across the state to glean insights about families’ communication needs with respect to connecting families to services. These families emphasized the need for translated materials to be correct, for translations to be done by fluent speakers who can avoid overly formal language, and for translated materials to be included front and center in communications.<sup>7</sup>

In accessing online resources, families may face other barriers beyond language, such as access to a computer or to the internet. To address these barriers, the MI Bridges website includes links to information about local “Access Partners” that offer internet access or computers to support families interested in using this resource.

Online resources provide an important opportunity to reach large numbers of families across the state, regardless of their geographic location, and increase their knowledge of information that can support young children and families. As these efforts continue, it is also critical to ensure that these resources are deployed with careful attention to equity. They should be designed with the state’s diverse families in mind to ensure that the resources are available in the languages spoken by families, that resources are functional across various devices and platforms, and that families have the supports in place to fully access the resources. Planning how online resources will be kept up-to-date and aligned across state and local systems is also an important part of expanding the use of online resources.





## What Are Other States Doing?

Many states are also investing in developing websites that connect families to information about early childhood development and resources and programs to support young children and families—as well as to local infrastructure that supports young children and families. For example, **Colorado** is planning to create an information hub to consolidate family-facing websites into a single online resource that will connect families to information about early childhood education, developmental milestones, early screenings, and other programs and services to support young children and their families. **Missouri** is using its PDG B-5 Renewal Grant to create a shared state-level website that will display a statewide phone number and regional resources to enable families to easily connect to these early learning supports. **Florida's** state-level website provides a map with **links to county early learning coalitions** along with information about a variety of early learning resources.



### State Bright Spot: Florida

Florida's state-level **Office of Early Learning** has configured the front page of its website into a family-facing resource where families can apply for state Pre-K and child care assistance and can find information about local early childhood coalitions and child care programs, as well as supports for children with special needs.

## Key Considerations

As Michigan continues its efforts to maximize family awareness of early learning services and supports, the state could consider the following:

### Developing comprehensive online resources

- **How can the use of online resources be increased?**
  - » What marketing strategies can be deployed?
  - » What search engine optimization strategies can be used?
- **How are online resources being maintained and updated?**
  - » Is there a plan for regular maintenance and update of online resources?
  - » How can the state share resources and updates with local communities to ensure resources (online and print) are current?
  - » How can locally developed online resources be better connected to state online resources? Are there templates that the state can develop for local use?
  - » How can families be involved in the design and utilization of online resources?

### Ensuring online resources are accessible to all families

- **In addition to English, Spanish, and Arabic, are there other languages that should be supported?**
- **What additional resources are needed to support families in accessing and effectively utilizing online resources (e.g., computer/internet access, accessibility features, chat or live support options)?**

## Fostering community-driven outreach and communication efforts

While many families do learn important information about early learning resources and services from online resources, states are also recognizing that communication about early childhood programs and comprehensive supports for young children and families can more effectively reach families when messaging is crafted by and comes from those living in the community. By fostering community-driven outreach and communication strategies, states and communities are able to provide messaging in ways that are specifically tailored to families' communication preferences, culture, community, and lived experiences to more effectively build family awareness and knowledge of early learning supports.



"And so just to have that [DHHS] online portal that parents can go in and see their benefits and things like that is a really huge step. And it is extremely helpful for those who can navigate it...But I think that a lot of times we just assume, because technology has improved so much and advanced so much that people can actually use it. And that's not fair to people who can't."

– Program Director

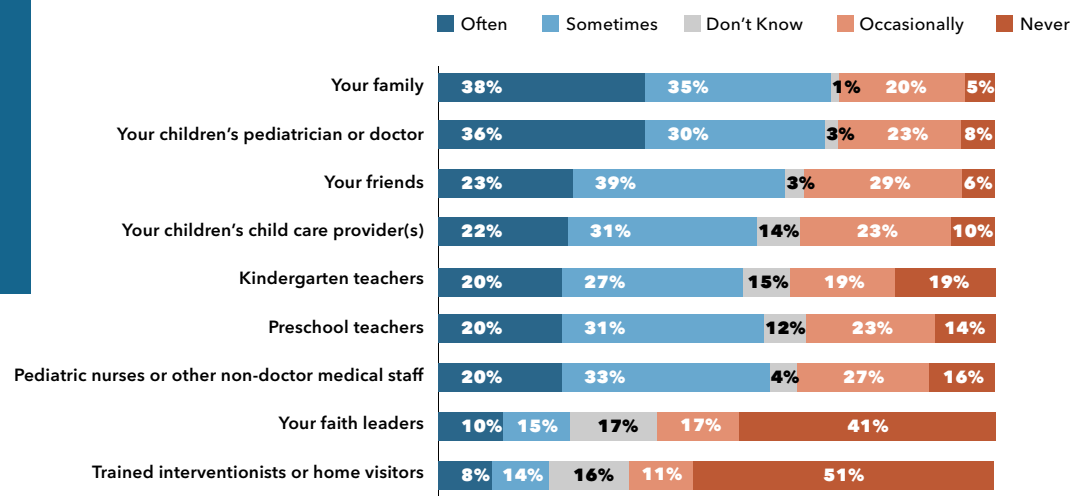
## What is Michigan already doing?

**Leveraging community voice.** The state has used PDG B-5 funds to inform its understanding of the needs and preferences of Michigan's diverse families regarding how they receive communications and information about early childhood development and programs and services to support children and families. Key themes from these findings include the following:

- Families desire messages and materials to be available in the spaces and places where they spend the most time—for example, at libraries and health care providers.<sup>8</sup> It cannot be assumed that families will see resources that are made available only at schools or government agencies.<sup>9</sup>
- Families use different media sources to seek out information on early childhood topics.<sup>10</sup> Different media, such as television, print, and social media, should be intentionally selected to reach different audiences.
- Families continue to rely on word of mouth and recommendations from family and friends more than other sources when exploring early learning supports and services.<sup>11</sup>
- Families also seek information from other trusted community members, such as health care providers and faith leaders.<sup>12</sup>

How frequently do you use each of the following sources of information to learn about child care and early childhood development?

## 2019 MI PDG B-5 Family Survey



**Implementing culturally relevant messaging.** As noted earlier, Michigan has utilized PDG B-5 funds to develop a better understanding of how to communicate with families across the state, with a focus on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, rural communities, and families with low income, and the state is taking steps to implement these findings. Brochures and flyers for the state's early childhood programs, including *Early On*, Head Start, home visiting, and GSRP, are now available in English, Spanish, and Arabic. Further options are available to customize these materials (including contact information, images, and logo selection) to the local communities in which they will be used.

Another key finding from PDG B-5 focus group participants is the importance of integrating culture and the role of family and community into communication materials, while also recognizing sensitivity to stigma.<sup>13</sup> By implementing what was learned through these efforts, such as the importance of partnering with families to identify relevant places, spaces, and media sources through which to reach these communities, the state and communities can develop communication and outreach strategies that are culturally relevant and thus more engaging for families.

**Partnering with trusted community members.**

The state has invested in Trusted Advisors to improve connections with families that have young children but have not yet engaged in early learning and development programs and related community supports. Trusted Advisors work with GSCs and Great Start Parent Coalitions (GSPCs) to build relationships with families and serve as trusted messengers in local communities. Trusted Advisors are charged with providing culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and information to families and helping them navigate and connect to appropriate services and supports.

Michigan is also supporting GSCs in developing partnerships with community partners to support preschool enrollment efforts through the state's Preschool Roundup Pilot. This pilot project, which is supported by the state's PDG B-5 grant, is underway in six GSC locations. The pilot involves the development and implementation of a coordinated preschool roundup and recruitment campaign, led by GSCs in partnership with community stakeholders, such as early childhood providers, elementary schools, faith leaders, and local United Ways. The pilot additionally includes resources for GSCs to facilitate virtual preschool roundups, including flyers, social media strategies, press release templates, and radio scripts. Some (but not all) of the materials have been translated into Spanish and/or Arabic.



## Michigan's Great Start Collaboratives and Great Start Parent Coalitions

### Great Start Collaboratives

GSCs bring together community leaders from education, health, business, religious organizations, law enforcement, nonprofits, and families to create and implement plans to achieve the state's early learning outcomes. GSCs work to develop a single network of public and private programs, services, and supports that collaborate to help achieve positive results for young children and families. GSCs began in 2005 and serve all Michigan counties—some GSCs serve one county, while others serve several counties. There are 54 GSCs in Michigan, each facilitated by a state funded director/coordinator.

### Great Start Parent Coalitions

GSPCs, like GSCs, are in every county in Michigan. These coalitions work in collaboration with the GSC and other stakeholders to ensure that the family perspective is included in decision-making and that caregivers and their children's needs are at the forefront in the design of local early childhood initiatives. There are 61 GSPCs in Michigan, each led by a parent liaison.



At the local level, some GSCs such as **Kalamazoo's** have worked to develop coordinated communication and outreach strategies that seek to reach families using a variety of means, places, and spaces. In addition, some communities have partnered with health care providers and other trusted messengers to reach families. For example, some Head Start and GSRP programs in the state coordinate outreach and recruitment efforts with local schools and health agencies, such as pediatricians and hospitals. There have also been efforts to reach families after the birth of their child by providing information on early care and learning programs at the birthing hospital. Home visiting programs in the state have also successfully leveraged public benefits programs to support outreach and recruitment, such as Medicaid, WIC, and health professionals.<sup>14</sup>

Taken together, these findings point to leveraging GSCs and GSPCs to support community-driven outreach. GSCs, as community-based collaboratives that focus on improving outcomes for young children, are positioned to provide overall direction and leadership on community-driven outreach, while GSPCs bring the vital family perspective to these efforts and help ensure strategies are family-centered. Trusted Advisors and other trusted messengers can also play a key role in designing and implementing community-driven outreach and communication strategies, including the development of culturally and linguistically responsive materials and strategies aimed at equitably engaging all families in the local community, as well as developing trust and relationships with families, which go hand-in-hand with successful outreach.

## What Are Other States Doing?

Across states, two key themes emerge in efforts to support community-driven outreach and communication strategies. First, states are charging local collaboratives and coalitions with developing communications plans and coordinated information campaigns that aim to build family awareness of early learning programs and supports. For example, **Florida** requires all local coalitions to have a communications plan focused on getting information out into the community. **Virginia** is working to develop processes, messaging, communication materials, and activities to communicate with families as consumers of early childhood education; engage with families as their child's first teachers; and enlist families in designing systems and strategies.

Second, states and local collaboratives have invested in dedicated staff—either by hiring staff internally or by engaging partners—to focus on providing community-based outreach to families.



## Michigan Bright Spot: Kalamazoo Great Start Collaborative

**Kalamazoo GSC** partnered with the Learning Network of Greater Kalamazoo, a division of the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, to provide capacity and leverage funding to support coordinated recruitment efforts. These efforts were supported by a “Back Bone Team” that provided technical expertise and consisted of professionals in areas such as public relations, graphic design, and marketing from the Learning Network of Greater Kalamazoo, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation and the Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Agency (RESA). The “Recruitment Team” included the Back Bone Team as well as many other partners, including the GSC, the GSPC, Head Start, Kalamazoo RESA, Kalamazoo County Ready 4s, and Kalamazoo Public Schools. Recruitment activities ranged from multimedia advertising (bus ads, morning news, radio, Facebook) to in-person events such as festivals and picnics, to collaboration with health care providers through Physician's Grand Rounds.

**Rhode Island** is embedding Family Navigators into existing community-based infrastructure to help ensure that all families are aware of, understand, and can access early childhood and family services, especially families who face cultural and linguistic barriers.

At the local level, **Pre4Cle in Cleveland, Ohio**, has two dedicated staff that serve as outreach specialists. They host community events and have developed a coordinated multimedia campaign that includes running television, radio, digital media, and social media ads. The **Northside Achievement Zone in North Minneapolis, Minnesota**, works directly through **partners** to do outreach in the immediate community. Another community in Minnesota, **Itasca County**, has dedicated staff who conduct outreach and disseminate information to partner programs and school districts, which then conduct their own outreach to local families, often via mass mailings.



## State Bright Spot: Rhode Island

Through its Needs Assessment, **Rhode Island** learned that families in programs with a navigator reported fewer barriers in accessing early childhood services for their children. In response to this finding, the state is using PDG B-5 Renewal Grant funds to embed Family Navigators in Health Equity Zones (existing community-based infrastructure). Family Navigators will be accessible at the community level and will assist families in ensuring that they are aware of, understand, and can access needed early childhood and family services in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way. Family Navigators will support all families in the community but will focus outreach to families who have children with disabilities as well as those facing cultural and linguistic barriers.

## Key Considerations

As Michigan seeks to foster community-driven outreach and communication strategies, the state could consider the following:

### Leveraging community voice

- **What materials, guidance, training, and technical assistance can the state provide to support communities in developing communication strategies that incorporate findings from the communications research the state has conducted?**
- **How can GSCs, GSPCs, and Trusted Advisors further engage with the local community to develop community-driven outreach and communication?**
- **How can communities leverage other local relationships and trusted community members to develop community-based and community-driven communication strategies?**

### Developing culturally relevant communication messaging

- **How can GSCs, GSPCs, and Trusted Advisors further support the development and dissemination of culturally relevant messaging?**
- **How can the resources developed through the Preschool Roundup Pilot be adapted to ensure they are culturally relevant to specific communities throughout the state?**

### Partnering with trusted community members

- **How can communities develop partnerships to support local outreach efforts that reach families in the spaces and places they spend time (e.g., pediatricians, child-and family serving programs, faith and community centers, mental health agencies, libraries, and local businesses)?**
- **What learnings, resources, and best practices from the Preschool Roundup Pilot can be scaled more broadly across the state?**



# HELP FAMILIES SELECT AVAILABLE RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Once families are made aware of the resources and services that exist to support them and their young children, CEE systems can help these families select the available resources that best meet their needs and preferences. Because of the various programs that are available and the complicated eligibility processes associated with these programs, CEE systems seek to simplify eligibility processes when possible while also strengthening family and provider capacity to identify programs that may be available and to navigate program eligibility requirements.

## Developing aligned or consolidated eligibility determination and verification processes

Public programs and benefits are provided at the federal, state, and local level and often have differing eligibility criteria in certain areas, such as geography, incomes, ages of children, and family conditions. Thus, determining eligibility for these individual programs is a time- and resource-intensive process that can pose a significant barrier to families' accessing these programs and benefits. States and communities across the country have undertaken efforts to align and consolidate eligibility verification processes in order to reduce

1. the burden on families in providing information to support their eligibility;
2. obstacles that inhibit cross-system collaboration needed to holistically address the needs of young children and families; and
3. administrative costs associated with enrolling and reenrolling families in multiple programs and services.<sup>15</sup>



"And most parents literally get a job and have to go to work. And if you have to wait on a DHHS subsidy, then it is definitely problematic ... 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

## What Is Michigan Already Doing?

### Developing technology solutions

Michigan has been piloting an effort to link MI Bridges with the state's 2-1-1 system to automatically refer families whose profiles indicate they are eligible for home visiting to specific home visiting programs. (For more information about Michigan's 2-1-1 system and broader efforts to refer families to comprehensive supports, see the section "Keep Families Supported and Connected" later in this Landscape).



**Implementing systems-building efforts.** There are efforts underway in the state to build systems that align eligibility determination processes. GSRP requires that any child who appears to be eligible for Head Start is referred to Head Start before being enrolled in GSRP. Each ISD must have an agreement with Head Start detailing how that process works. Further, the state provides guidance to communities to consult their local Head Start partners on complicated eligibility decisions to ensure there is not a gap between Head Start and GSRP eligibility. To begin efforts to better coordinate and align eligibility between *Early On* (Part C) and Part B, Michigan has brought the programs into the same government unit under one director and is developing new management processes to coordinate the two programs, including communicating eligibility requirements and processes to families.

**Pursuing regulatory change.** Like other states around the country, Michigan has made regulatory changes to help ensure that families and providers can access needed supports and resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. The state's Child Development and Care program allowed early childhood care providers receiving subsidies to bill for enrollment rather than attendance, in an effort to provide financial stability for providers during the pandemic. The state is also exploring how to streamline and improve child care eligibility processes for families and providers, such as raising the income level for eligibility, operationalizing the state's flexibility in provider reimbursement, and implementing other financial supports for families with low and middle incomes. Further, an example of regulatory change from outside the early childhood system is the **Michigan Combined Application Project (MiCAP)**, a program that allows individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income to also receive food benefits.

An initial snapshot of eligibility requirements to access the services in Michigan's mixed delivery ECE system and some key family-serving supports (see Appendix) shows the varying eligibility requirements among programs. Most, but not all, require income below a certain level. While many families may meet this requirement for multiple programs based on family income, the level of that requirement varies across programs. Further, most programs require meeting additional eligibility criteria to qualify. Navigating these differing requirements is challenging for both families and providers.



While the state has begun efforts to consolidate or align eligibility requirements, some communities such as **Kent County** are also working to streamline the eligibility determination process for families through coordinated on-the-ground efforts.

As noted, there are various efforts underway in Michigan to align eligibility criteria and improve eligibility verification processes within the mixed delivery early childhood system—and in some cases with other child and family programs and resources offered by the state. This work involves multiple regulations, systems, actors, and platforms across state programs. As these efforts advance, cross-agency communication and coordination are critical to ensuring that the various technology, systems-building, and regulation changes that are being explored will lead to more aligned and streamlined processes that make it easier for families to select appropriate resources.

### What Are Other States Doing?

Like Michigan, other states have made or are making efforts to align and streamline eligibility processes through a variety of strategies, including technology, systems-building, and regulatory change.

- **Technology-based efforts:** **Maryland** is using PDG funds to modernize its data system and revise data-sharing agreements between several state agencies to streamline eligibility and enrollment procedures for families who may be eligible for multiple programs.



### Michigan Bright Spot: Kent County

**Kent County** began developing its CEE system in 2017 as preschool options expanded in the community. Community providers formed a committee to create a universal application that included key elements required across providers. With respect to Head Start, the local Head Start provider—Michigan Family Resources—ensured that the common application contained all the information needed to determine whether a family was eligible for Head Start. A 1-800 number was also established through these efforts; when parents call the number they can immediately be informed whether they are eligible for Head Start and transferred directly to the Head Start program. If the parent is interested in another program, the person taking the call provides the family's information to the other program so it can follow up with the family.



- **Systems-building efforts:** **Minnesota** is convening cross-developmental working groups to consider how eligibility verification across various child- and family-serving programs could be consolidated along with efforts to expand and link data systems.
- **Regulatory changes:** Even before making changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, states were pursuing regulatory changes to streamline and align eligibility for certain public programs and benefits and to consolidate and simplify verification processes so that it is simpler for families and providers to determine and verify eligibility. Examples of these types of changes include (1) lengthening certification periods and reducing reporting requirements within specific programs—child care assistance being a primary example; (2) using eligibility data for one program (e.g., SNAP) to automatically provide eligibility verification for another (e.g., Medicaid); and (3) aligning definitions and/or requirements across programs (e.g., SNAP and child care assistance).<sup>16</sup>



## State Bright Spot: Minnesota

**Minnesota** is working to consolidate eligibility verification across programs for children and families through the state's PDG B-5 Renewal Grant. Cross-departmental work groups will be created to consolidate eligibility verification across programs. Programs that are being considered include: Head Start, home visiting, WIC, SNAP, child care subsidies, Pre-K, Voluntary Pre-K, Early Learning Scholarships, TANF, and Medicaid.

## Key Considerations

As Michigan looks to develop more aligned eligibility processes, it could consider the following:

### Developing technology solutions

- **How can online eligibility tools be enhanced to increase accessibility for families who may not want to create a profile to identify programs of interest and learn more?**
- **Are online eligibility tools available in families' primary language?**
- **How do online eligibility tools function on smartphones, tablets, and other devices?**
- **What additional resources that complement or provide an alternative to online tools should be in place to support families in helping to identify and select programs to support their young children?**

### Implementing systems-building efforts

- **How are various state agencies involved in improving eligibility determination and verification processes coordinating with one another?**
- **Are there opportunities to integrate eligibility determination and verification processes into other systems-building efforts underway in the state?**

### Pursuing regulatory change

- **Are there opportunities to streamline or consolidate eligibility processes within specific state programs (e.g., the efforts being explored in child care) or among different state programs, such as those included in the Appendix**
- **Are there changes to eligibility in state or local programs that were made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that can and should be continued?**



## Strengthening family and provider capacity to identify programs and navigate eligibility processes

There has been increased recognition of the barriers that various eligibility requirements pose to families who may be interested in participating in early learning and other programs. Families—either on their own or with assistance from providers—are often left to parse through multiple requirements and income charts to determine whether the family qualifies for a particular program. There are often multiple rounds of meetings, paperwork, and other steps families must go through to determine whether they are interested and then eligible to receive services or benefits. Addressing these barriers early in the process can help families identify and select available resources and services that meet their unique family needs and preferences.



“I know what it feels like to be confused by some of the questions [on the application], you don’t want to mess it up the first time, because then trying to go back to fix it is going to be a large headache. So I think it’s really nice to know that when I had my family coach, if I had a question, she would help me walk through it to take away the fear of a mistake, or, you know, sometimes when you deal with DHHS, if you mess something up, it’s going to take a long time to fix it. And just to know that there’s someone there that can walk you through and make sure you’re doing it right the first time is a beautiful thing.”

– Parent Liason

### What Is Michigan Already Doing?

**Developing online eligibility tools.** As noted earlier in the section “Build Family Awareness of Resources and Services,” families are increasingly using technology to access information about how to best support their children and themselves. In Michigan, families can use the **MI Bridges** self-service portal to apply for benefits in assistance areas, explore resources, view communications, receive text or email alerts, and upload requested documents from a smartphone. MI Bridges can be used to manage public benefits in the following areas:



Child care subsidy



Health care



WIC



Food assistance



Economic assistance



Emergency funds



Access Partners support families in accessing the MI Bridges system, while locally based Navigation Partners are available to assist families in exploring resources and using the system to apply for programs.

Local communities in the state, such as **Detroit**, have also developed their own online tools to support families in identifying programs for which they may be eligible and navigating eligibility processes. Several communities in the state use the **Michigan Preschool** website as a portal to a local intake form that collects information from families that can help determine their eligibility for early childhood programs, including preschool, Head Start, and home visiting.<sup>17</sup>

**Leveraging human resources.** Family advocates used by GSRP and Head Start programs are also helpful to families in navigating eligibility processes at the local level. Some communities have also seen success through identifying dedicated staff (who are not tied to a specific program) to be responsive to families and support them in navigating program eligibility requirements. More recently, GSRP programs worked with partners to ensure that families enrolled in GSRP received food assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, including partnering with Head Start grantees to authorize funds in support of the effort.

Based on these state and local findings, it is clear that strengthening family and provider ability to identify programs and navigate eligibility processes for resources and services is an effort that benefits from both the development of online tools and dedicated human resources. Both components are important not only in terms of helping families understand what programs might be available to them but also in providing vital support to families as they navigate the process of demonstrating that they are in fact eligible for those programs. By developing both online and human resources, which families can utilize as best fit their needs and preferences, states and communities can ensure that eligibility processes are more family-centered and equitable.

## What Are Other States Doing?

Numerous states around the country are working to create a single point of access or “one-stop shop” for child and family services, where families can explore information about services that may meet their needs and preferences, complete eligibility requirements, and apply for services. For instance, **Florida** is developing a single point of entry system (or portal) that will integrate information provided by families through a mobile app, allow families to access comprehensive information on services for which they are eligible, and eventually apply for multiple services in one place. **Missouri** is piloting a regional approach that will quickly determine eligibility for early learning programs and connect families to other community resources.



## Michigan Bright Spot: Detroit

**Detroit** has launched **Connect4CareKids.org** an online tool that aims to serve parents and caregivers of children aged 5 and younger by helping them better understand and find early childhood education and care options in Detroit. By answering a few questions such as zip code, children’s ages, and income range, parents and caregivers are given a preliminary answer regarding which early care and education programs they may be able to enroll in, including Head Start, Great Start Readiness Program, and Michigan’s Child Development and Care subsidy. This website is available in English and Arabic.

Some local communities across the country, such as **Seattle**, have developed tools such as online eligibility calculators that let families know what programs they might be eligible for based on a few key pieces of information, such as household members, income, and zip code. Seattle's **Affordable Seattle** platform also allows users to set up a profile, enter and save their specific information, and then provide permission to programs that are of interest to the users to pull that data from their profiles.

Communities are also investing in on-the-ground resources to help families identify and select available resources and supports and navigate eligibility requirements. For example, **New Orleans** tested different communication strategies to support families in verifying their eligibility for publicly funded early learning programs, including public school Pre-K, Head Start, Early Head Start, and state-funded preschool in private schools and child care centers.<sup>18</sup>



## State Bright Spot: Missouri

Through its PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, **Missouri** is planning to develop a pilot for regional hubs to implement a coordinated application, enrollment, and intake system for families. This centralized system will include a combination of programs serving children birth-5, creating a single point of entry. The pilot will begin in rural areas of the state to increase support for communities further from opportunity. Families will answer a series of questions online, by phone, or in person, as key information is collected to complete the enrollment process. This questionnaire will quickly determine potential eligibility for programs (e.g., early intervention, Early Head Start, home visiting) and connect families to other appropriate resources in the community.

## Key Considerations

As Michigan works to strengthen families' and providers' knowledge of eligibility requirements and processes, the state could consider the following:

### Developing online eligibility tools

- **How can eligibility information, such as age, residence, and income, be communicated to families in a clear and transparent way to reduce the burdens on families in determining this information?**
- **How can the state enhance its online eligibility tools to ensure that families who need personalized support receive it?**

### Leveraging human resources

- **How can the state ensure that providers, family advocates, volunteers, and others who are supporting families in navigating which programs and services will meet families' needs and preferences have the most up-to-date information on eligibility requirements?**
- **How can communities leverage MI Bridges Navigation Partners, program providers, and trusted community members to help families navigate and select programs and services?**



## SPOTLIGHT: Louisiana's Coordinated Enrollment System

Louisiana has been on the leading edge of coordinated eligibility and enrollment efforts. The state first launched these efforts in 2014 by requiring communities to develop a single application to collect family preferences that can be used to match families to programs. More recently, the state has focused on expanding this work to include local systems-building and comprehensive supports for families. This spotlight provides an overview of Louisiana's coordinated enrollment systems, including how the state implements the four elements of CEE.

### Coordinated Enrollment: How Louisiana Supports Families



#### **Q: How does Louisiana support families through a coordinated approach to enrollment?**

A: Louisiana's coordinated enrollment approach identifies and communicates all available early childhood education seats within a community network, allows families to submit one common application form for any ECE seats, and matches children to seats based on family preferences and eligibility.



#### **Q: How does Louisiana build family awareness of resources and services?**

A: Louisiana builds family awareness through local coordinated public information campaigns.

- Every community network conducts a community-wide information campaign designed to inform families about the importance of ECE, the availability and quality of publicly funded options, and eligibility requirements.
- The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) supports this effort by providing site-level performance information profiles on [Center Finder](#), a searchable online database for families.
- Currently LDOE is calling on community networks to establish improved coordinated information campaigns that prioritize equity and must reach all families.



#### **Q: How does Louisiana help families select available resources and services?**

A: Louisiana helps families select available services through local coordination of eligibility determination.

- Each community network establishes a process to ensure that families know what programs they qualify for, provide complete and timely documentation, and are referred to additional programs for which they qualify.
- This is a preliminary process to give families an idea of what they may qualify for so that the application process is efficient and they do not apply to programs that they will not be eligible for. Each program makes the final eligibility determination.





## SPOTLIGHT: Louisiana's Coordinated Enrollment System



### **Q: How does Louisiana help families receive resources and services?**

A: Louisiana uses an open enrollment period and a unified application developed locally to collect information on family preferences.

- Families apply through a unified application that is used and accepted by all providers for all children birth-4.
- Lead Agencies create single applications that provide clear and understandable directions, available in multiple languages when necessary, and work with partners to ensure families are enrolled in programs based on their preferences.
- Community-wide waiting lists are used to assist in enrolling families in preferred programs and to avoid duplication.

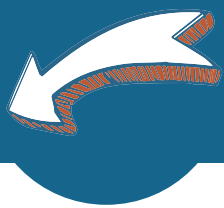


### **Q: How does Louisiana keep families connected and supported?**

A: Louisiana keeps families connected and supported by centering all work on families and providing resources to facilitate navigation and transitions.

- The creation of Ready Start Community Networks (RSCNs) will raise community awareness of the importance and need for early care and education and begin taking steps to develop local funding and resources to support quality and access.
- Early Childhood Guide positions are being piloted in RSCNs to better reach families and streamline their application and enrollment experience, with a focus on families looking for child care for their children ages birth-3.
- LDOE is supporting RSCNs to integrate comprehensive services into their approach, including home visiting programs, community-wide screening practices, early childhood mental health consultation services, and other supports for families.
- Louisiana is developing EdLink, an integrated data system that will assign unique identifiers to children enrolled in publicly funded ECE sites at the time of program entry. Once launched, this data system will further streamline the collection of application and enrollment data.





# ENSURE FAMILIES RECEIVE RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The overarching goal of CEE systems 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 various programs can be complicated and burdensome for both families and providers. Successful CEE systems seek to mitigate these barriers and ensure that families receive available resources and services through two approaches: improving the application experience and managing the enrollment process.

## Creating streamlined and accessible application processes for families

Similar to the barriers posed by multiple and complex eligibility criteria and verification processes, families often have to navigate numerous application processes and approaches in order to access early childhood supports. In addition to filling out multiple applications for different programs, families may also have to submit applications to different places or via different methods, often within a prescribed time period. By streamlining application processes and making application procedures more accessible to families, states and communities can ensure that more families are able to complete the enrollment process and benefit from early learning resources and services. Examples of strategies to make application processes less burdensome for families include developing common applications, providing numerous methods to submit application materials, and developing matching processes for families.



“And so I think what’s important about that for any community, whether they have the money to create a portal or not, is the fact that the programs that were connected to that application had a real strong partnership and had a system between them in place to make sure that families, no matter what program they went to apply, they were connected to the appropriate program.”

– Program Director

## What Is Michigan Already Doing?

**Developing a common application.** How families apply for early childhood programs and other child- and family-serving programs depends on the program, funding, and context. At the state level, families can use the MI Bridges portal to apply for state programs and benefits, including child care subsidies, health care, WIC, and food and cash assistance. As noted above, Access Partners support families in accessing this online system, while Navigation Partners assist families in using the system to apply for programs.

Several communities in Michigan have developed their own common application for certain programs and services or have implemented other streamlined application processes. For example, as noted earlier, **Calhoun County** has created a **common online application portal** that allows for centralized intake and matching of children to programs. Families can use this portal to submit one application that is used for play groups, Head Start, home visits, and GSRP.

**Providing application processes that work for families.** Beyond developing one common application that can be used to apply to multiple programs, communities in Michigan have also developed other strategies to make the application processes easier for families. For example, **Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA)** has made the preschool application process more streamlined and accessible by offering families a coordinated application to three different programs that can be submitted in a variety of ways.

Ensuring that families are provided a means of applying for programs and services in a way that is accessible and centered on families' preferences and day-to-day experiences is the common thread in these efforts. Doing so could mean providing a variety of ways to apply—online, through a paper application, or in person—developing application materials that are streamlined across programs, or providing applications and support in completing them in the families' home language. Developing such application processes therefore requires not only a deep understanding of the community being served but also strong coordination and partnership across providers to come to a common understanding of the benefits of developing a common application, identify programs to include in a common application, and develop family-centered application processes.

## What Are Other States Doing?

As in Michigan, efforts to streamline and create more accessible application processes often take place at the local level, with each community adopting the approach that is most viable locally. These efforts can range from the development of a coordinated online application portal, as is used in **Roanoke, Virginia**, to the development of a single hard-copy application for a variety of early learning programs across a community, as in **Itasca County, Minnesota**. Beyond or as an alternative to developing a common application, communities may also create more streamlined and accessible application and enrollment processes through strategies such as eliminating duplication of enrollment paperwork and appointments or holding coordinated enrollment events or activities that meet the needs of families in the community.<sup>19</sup>



"So thinking back at the beginning of this adventure, our enrollment process included several organizations. So it wasn't just the ISD 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



## Michigan Bright Spot: Kalamazoo RESA

**Kalamazoo RESA** has been conducting joint recruiting, including the use of a common application for preschool programs, since 2012. These programs include Head Start, GSRP, and Kalamazoo County Ready 4s (private and public early childhood providers for 3- and 4-year-olds). Families use one common application to apply for these programs, which also includes information to determine which programs families may be eligible for. The application is available in **English** and **Spanish**—both online and in hard copy. Families can fill out the application and submit it in a variety of ways: online, through email, by mail, by fax, or by hand delivery. There is also a phone number families can call with questions about completing the application.

States are also undertaking efforts to streamline application and enrollment processes for early childhood programs and services—both at the state level and through increased supports for local efforts. **New York** is working to expand an existing coordinated application used by some Head Start programs and school districts and promoting co-location of WIC offices in Head Start/Early Head Start facilities. **North Carolina** is using PDG B-5 funds to expand mentoring support to additional communities across the state. The original project supported four NC Pre-K contractors in sharing with other communities the contractors' expertise in developing a universal application and enrollment process for 4-year-old children in their counties, to better coordinate service delivery, and to increase families' access to ECE programs and resources. And some states, such as **Maryland**, are focusing on both state-level and community-level efforts.



## State Bright Spot: Maryland

**Maryland** is developing two plans that address both state and local efforts and together will result in a unified application and enrollment system. At the state level, Maryland is engaged in modernizing its current data system. Efforts include developing a unique identifier and revising data-sharing agreements between the Department of Education, Department of Health, and Department of Human Services to enable the state to streamline eligibility and enrollment procedures for families who may be eligible for multiple programs. The state is also conducting “Greenhouse” sessions with parents and other stakeholders to better understand their experiences with application and enrollment processes so that this understanding can inform the new data system. To support local efforts, subgrants to Local Early Childhood Advisory Councils include the opportunity to support unified application or enrollment approaches, which also will inform the development of the statewide coordinated data system.

## Key Considerations

As Michigan seeks to make applying for programs and services simpler for families, it could consider the following:

### Developing a common application

- **How can the state best ensure that common application processes for state programs are accessible to families?**
  - » What additional languages should MI Bridges be available in?
  - » How do families connect with MI Bridges Access Partners and Navigation Partners?
- **Are there opportunities to integrate applications for other child and family programs into MI Bridges?**
- **What strategies can support the local collaboration needed to implement a common application?**
- **What local programs can feasibly be included in a common application?**

### Providing application processes that work for families

- **How is family voice being used to design application processes?**
- **What application processes will best meet the needs of families in the local community?**



## Developing shared processes to track enrollment in programs and wait lists

While developing streamlined and more accessible application processes is a critical family-facing strategy to help ensure families receive early childhood resources and supports, an equally necessary component to ensuring families can benefit from these resources and supports is developing streamlined and coordinated processes for providers to track enrollment and manage waiting lists. This “back-end” strategy not only ensures that more families can receive services but also supports effective use of resources by maximizing use of available slots. Examples of these efforts include data-sharing agreements and processes and in-person collaboration and decision-making.

### What is Michigan already doing?

**Expanding state data systems.** Michigan tracks enrollment and wait lists in early childhood programs at the state and local level, depending on the specific program, funding, and context.

- **Early On:** *Early On* is managed by the Clinton County RESA for the entire state and maintains its own system.
- **Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B, Section 619):** Early childhood special education services are provided by ISDs to children who qualify under IDEA, Part B, Section 619. The Clinton County RESA manages the state’s **Build Up** initiative, which seeks to connect preschool-age children to special education services and supports.
- **Home Visiting:** By law, state-funded home visiting programs must coordinate with one another; however, each home visiting model has its own eligibility requirements. This variation impacts enrollment and wait lists, with some programs maintaining a wait list and others that do not have the need.
- **Early Head Start and Head Start:** Federal programs, such as Early Head Start and Head Start, often manage their own enrollment and wait lists, although some providers of these programs collaborate on enrollment and wait list tracking and management at the local and state levels.
- **Child Care:** Enrollment in Michigan’s child care subsidy program, Child Care and Development, is managed at the state level by the Office of Great Start (OGS) located in the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and by DHHS through the MI Bridges system. The state chooses not to maintain a wait list; rather, a family, once determined to be eligible, can search for programs using the Great Start to Quality website or other means.
- **GSRP:** Michigan’s state-level preschool program, GSRP, manages enrollment and wait lists primarily through ISDs, which are the fiduciaries of GSRP funds. OGS has recently obtained access to this information as well.



To develop a better understanding of the children and families who are enrolled in Michigan’s ECE system, as well as those awaiting services, the state developed a unique child identifier and has undertaken efforts to determine an unduplicated count of children enrolled in early childhood programs. Currently, child care subsidy; GSRP; Early On; IDEA Part B, Section 619; and some Head Start programs are a part of this system, which is connected to the Michigan longitudinal data system (MSLDS) and can be accessed through **MI School Data**. Through the state’s PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, Michigan is exploring how to build from these efforts to integrate a more comprehensive data approach that can incorporate data from other child- and family-serving programs, such as health care.

**Fostering local efforts to manage enrollment and wait lists.** Some local communities in Michigan have developed their own processes to track enrollment and manage wait lists for early childhood programs. For instance, **Calhoun County** has created a “Data Hub” as part of its common application portal that tracks child enrollment, services received, and data. **Kent County’s** coordinated enrollment system—which includes Head Start, school district and community-based preschools, and for-profit preschools that offer scholarship slots—includes a centralized database through which providers can manage enrollment. Pursuant to the processes developed as part of the coordinated enrollment system, all 3-year-olds are first referred to Head Start, with 4-year-olds prioritized for the other preschool programs in the system. The Head Start program maintains the 3-year-old wait list for the county, as the program is the main provider of services for 3-year-olds in the area.<sup>20</sup>



## Michigan Bright Spot: Calhoun County

**Calhoun County** launched its **birth-five application portal** in 2011. In addition to being a centralized place for families to apply to early childhood services, it can assign or transfer children to specific programs, track child enrollment, and services children have received. This information can be used to generate information for grants, reporting and quality improvement efforts. All children are assigned a unique identification code, which marks the start of their birth-graduation digital portfolio. The data hub is also used to collect key data elements such as immunizations, hearing and vision screening, and Ages & Stages Questionnaires® scores.

Understanding who is and who is not able to successfully access early learning programs is a cornerstone of advancing equity. As the state advances its efforts to develop improved and expanded enrollment tracking, it will be important to ensure that data and processes that capture enrollment and wait-list status of priority populations are part of the system. Intentional efforts to coordinate between state-level systems that are being leveraged to improve enrollment tracking, as well as alignment between state and local efforts, are also critical to successful development of these systems.

## What Are Other States Doing?

Similar to Michigan, enrollment and wait lists in other states are managed at both the state and local level, depending on the program and context. Thus, states are supporting both state- and community-based efforts to track enrollment and manage wait lists for early care and education programs. For example, **Florida** is building from its efforts to develop a single point of entry system to develop a unified waiting list for services, while **Virginia** is planning to partner with a national vendor (ChildPlus) to adapt software and strengthen the state's ability to access real-time information about slots and vacancies.



### State Bright Spot: Florida

To mitigate the challenges of navigating the multitude of services for families with young children, **Florida** is developing a single point of entry (SPE) system informed by a family needs assessment to make more complete, digestible information accessible online for families. Through a web-based app, families will have the ability to apply for multiple social services. Additionally, an SPE will enable the development of a unified waiting list for services that allows state leadership to better understand and track current service limitations, as well as to provide expedited access to available services for families.

## Key Considerations

As Michigan seeks to develop more robust enrollment and wait-list tracking, it could consider the following:

### Expanding state data systems

- **What data agreements, systems, and processes need to be in place to track enrollment and those waiting for services?**
- **What programs and services will be included in efforts to track enrollment and those waiting for services?**
- **How can state-level enrollment and wait-list data be used to address gaps in access and understand how race, ethnicity, geography, and other demographic factors impact access?**
- **How can the state support and learn from local efforts to manage enrollment and wait lists?**

### Fostering local efforts to manage enrollment and wait lists

- **What processes to track enrollment and wait lists will work best in the local context?**
- **What capacity is needed to track enrollment and wait lists?**
- **What local programs and providers need to be at the table?**



# KEEP FAMILIES CONNECTED AND SUPPORTED

As states and communities are developing and expanding their CEE systems, there is growing recognition that enrollment in an early learning program is not the end of the effort. Young children and their families have the most opportunity when all of their needs are met and they are consistently supported throughout the early years. Thus, CEE efforts in state and communities have begun to focus on making successful referrals to comprehensive services and facilitating successful transitions for families between programs. In order to achieve these outcomes, states and communities are advancing two general strategies: (1) increasing family and provider knowledge of comprehensive resources and systems to support the whole child and family and (2) fostering cross-sector collaboration.

## Increasing family and provider knowledge of comprehensive resources and systems to support the whole child and family and to facilitate effective referrals and transitions

Families enter the mixed delivery early childhood system in a variety of ways. Approaches such as “no wrong door” and “one-stop shops” can help ensure that families are connected to early learning programs and other supports for young children and families. However, these types of approaches cannot be implemented overnight; rather, they require intentional work to build family and provider knowledge of other systems and supports beyond their particular program in order to make effective referrals and support transitions.



“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**

## What Is Michigan Already Doing?

Efforts are underway in Michigan to both develop resources for families and providers that build knowledge of comprehensive services and support relationship-based approaches to ensure that families are connected to a wide range of supports.

**Developing referral and transition resources.** Michigan has developed **2-1-1 Michigan**, a state-level resource that aims to connect residents to a wide range of supports, such as education, housing, mental health, and financial assistance, available in specific communities. Families and providers can access this information through a search or chat feature on the website, or by calling or texting. Seven regional Contact Centers across Michigan are staffed with trained specialists who provide information, referrals, and advocacy when people in their region need help or have help to offer. The website can be translated into more than 80 languages. There is also a way for providers to add their information to the system via the website.



At the local level, some GSCs have developed resources to share information regarding comprehensive services beyond the mixed delivery system that are available in their communities. For example, the GSC of **Traverse Bay** has created the **5toOne** website, which allows families and providers to search for comprehensive supports by county. **Kalamazoo County** provides on its website a set of comprehensive resources, including clothing, counseling, housing, and food available in the community.

### **Implementing relationship-based approaches to referrals and transitions.**

Communities in Michigan are also taking innovative relationship-based approaches to build family and provider knowledge of comprehensive services and facilitate effective referrals and transitions. For example, **Calhoun County** intentionally works to increase provider knowledge of programs that are available in the community through collective professional development, sharing written resources between programs, and hosting “speed dating” events to learn about each other’s programs. **Newaygo County** is using Trusted Advisors to build relationships with families and connect them to broader family supports through its mobile **Family Information Service Hubs (known as FISH)**. Through FISH, Trusted Advisors engage families at strategic locations to help them connect to and navigate local resources while also reducing barriers that families face in accessing resources, such as transportation. The **Eastern Upper Peninsula GSC and ISD** have established partnerships with school districts, community agencies, and business and philanthropic partners as a strategy to increase coordination and link families with young children to community supports.

**Targeted supports for early intervention and kindergarten transitions.** The state has also made strides in supporting specific transitions for young children and families in the early years. About 65% of children who receive *Early On* services qualify for early childhood special education services when they turn 3 years old—and of these children, approximately 93% had an IEP in place by their third birthday.<sup>21</sup> However, stakeholders have noted that successful transitions do not always occur as a result of ineffective collaboration between organizations or agencies.<sup>22</sup> As noted earlier, the state has taken important steps to improve collaboration between *Early On* and early childhood special education by uniting the two programs under one director and advancing relationship- and systems-building efforts. The state is also working to respond to families who have identified a lack of support in transitioning from Part C to Part B, including developing improved family education and communication strategies and processes to help families navigate the transition.



## **Michigan Bright Spot: Eastern Upper Peninsula**

**Eastern Upper Peninsula Connections** is a “one-stop shop” website where families can search for a wide range of community resources that meet families’ needs, including basic needs, child care, crisis intervention, education, medical, and faith-based supports. Through partnerships with local agencies and the Clinton County RESA, this website also includes an **intake form** that families can submit to indicate their interest in being connected with local resources. “Navigators” from local agencies then follow up with families who have indicated an interest in being connected with the corresponding service or resource. The Navigators assist the families in applying for the program being offered or help identify a program that would better suit the family’s needs.

Developing resources to support kindergarten transitions has also been a focus in Michigan. MDE has developed **kindergarten transition guides** in response to feedback from families who reported that the most difficult transition time for them was kindergarten entry. These guides are for families and are available in English, Spanish, and Arabic. Additional resources, such as a kindergarten FAQ, are also being developed through the state's PDG B-5 initiative. The materials will be translated into Spanish and Arabic, and other languages as needed.

Local collaborative efforts to support the transition to kindergarten are also underway, most often between publicly funded preschools directly connected to the school district.<sup>23</sup> Further, through the state's PDG B-5 effort, Michigan is exploring additional opportunities for supporting kindergarten and other transitions that occur for children and families in the early years.

In sum, there are a number of promising practices currently underway in the state aimed at increasing family and provider knowledge of resources and systems, which ultimately all seek to center families and ensure they are supported as they transition into and between early childhood and family-support systems. While some of these efforts have focused on online tools and other resources for families, there are also relationship-based strategies being implemented, including efforts to build relationships with families and foster relationships among providers. As the state seeks to advance "no wrong door" approaches in communities across the state, it is important to consider a variety of strategies to develop the knowledge needed to successfully implement this approach, share successful examples, and allow communities to tailor efforts to fit the specific community context.



## What Are Other States Doing?

States have taken a variety of approaches when it comes to increasing family and provider knowledge of comprehensive supports outside of the mixed delivery system and supporting transitions among and between systems. Some states, such as **Connecticut**, have developed robust state-level **2-1-1 platforms**. **Kansas** is piloting a care coordination model to increase family knowledge of services, identify relevant needs, and then make referrals through the state's referral system.

## State Bright Spot: Kansas

**Kansas** is implementing a "no wrong door" approach by using PDG B-5 funding to co-locate Care Coordinators in two high-volume pediatric practices. The coordinators will expand the capacity of the practices to take a two-generation approach to screen for parent-child needs, make referrals through the state's Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS), and work with families to build knowledge and skills that empower choice. The state is also piloting a care coordination model for families aging out of Part C services.

Regarding transitions, many states have made efforts to target key transition points, such as from Part C to Part B or from early childhood programs into kindergarten. For instance, **Connecticut** used PDG funds to improve transitions between Part C to Part B by creating training modules for IDEA professionals and a parent video. **Kansas** is also focusing on supporting families as they transition out of Part C services. Regarding kindergarten transitions, **Illinois** established a Kindergarten Transition Advisory Committee that provided specific recommendations around professional learning, parent engagement, and improved coordination with the child care community. **Virginia** is supporting “pilots” (locally coordinated mixed delivery systems) in embedding kindergarten transition strategies into local coordinated enrollment models.

## Key Considerations

As Michigan seeks to increase knowledge by families and providers of comprehensive child and family supports to facilitate effective referrals and transitions, the state should consider the following:

### Developing referral and transition resources

- **How can online resources be incorporated into early learning outreach strategies to increase family and provider understanding of comprehensive resources that might be available?**
- **How can online resources be leveraged to better support providers in locating resources to support their families, especially those who may live in a different county or whose children have special needs?**
- **What other materials, such as guides or videos, might be developed to support referrals and transitions?**
- **Are transition materials available in families’ primary language?**

### Relationship-based approaches to transitions

- **What resources or existing infrastructure could be leveraged to support relationship-based approaches to increase family and provider understanding of comprehensive resources and support transitions across programs and services?**
- **Are transition practices being conducted in a culturally relevant way?**
- **How can communities leverage state resources in ways that are community-based and responsive to families?**

### Targeted supports for early intervention and kindergarten transitions

- **How can kindergarten transition strategies expand beyond public school district preschool programs to community-based and private-pay preschool programs?**
- **Beyond kindergarten transitions, how are families being supported as they enter new programs and transition through programs, for example Part C to Part B?**



## Fostering cross-sector collaboration to provide families with warm handoffs and tracking across systems

States and communities are leveraging a variety of approaches to go beyond traditional referral methods and ensure that families are successfully connected to other programs and services that meet the families' needs and preferences. The use of data sharing and technology is a key innovation that has helped advance efforts to increase collaboration between different programs and systems and create better tracking of referrals and follow-ups. However, it is recognized that data and technology can only go so far, and there is a need to continue to focus on relationship-based approaches, such as partnerships, and ongoing communication channels to ensure that families have the supports they need to make new connections, transition to new programs, and then benefit from these new resources and services. Both of these features are essential components to ensuring that families can access services no matter how or where they first come into contact with the mixed delivery system or the child- and family-serving system of supports—the foundation of “no wrong door” approaches.

“

“[There is] little coordination between preschool and [the] K-12 system. Some districts do this better than others, but generally child care and preschool operate in isolation from the K-12 system.”

– **Early Childhood Provider**

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“And in order for us to share information across programs, we had to have releases and all kinds of agreements between our organization and DHHS. So I think the first big hurdle in working on actually having these coordinated efforts is getting past the policies and coordinating those types of things first.”

– **Program Director**





## What is Michigan already doing?

**Developing data-sharing systems.** Michigan is exploring efforts to enhance its data systems to foster increased collaboration between MDE and DHHS to better support the whole child and family. These efforts build on the data systems and linkages that have been made between early childhood programs, including child care subsidy, early childhood special education, *Early On*, GSRP, and some Head Start programs, and to the state's longitudinal data system. Through the state's PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, Michigan is exploring how to track children waiting for services in areas beyond what it currently tracks, including children's health care home and health and well-being throughout the early childhood years.

**Building cross-sector relationships.** Beyond utilizing data systems to foster cross-sector collaboration, the state's home visiting sector is focusing on relationship-based approaches. The **Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Maternal Infant Health Program (MIHP) Pilot** is currently exploring how MIHP provider agencies can help address the social determinants of health for families they are serving through several strategies, including a "discharge visit" and coordinated services. MIHP is also exploring transitions through Michigan's PDG grant.

At the local level, **Calhoun County** has partnered with other programs beyond community-based early care and education programs, including workforce development programs (such as Goodwill) and health care, to connect families to those broader supports and services. Further, the county partners with home visiting programs that are not part of the common application portal to ensure that families enrolled in those programs complete an application so that families who are transitioning out of home visiting are connected to other programs and services in the community. **Grand Rapids** is implementing a strategy that combines community collaboration and a technology solution based in the housing and health care sectors.



## Michigan Bright Spot: Kent County GRACE Network

The **Gather Resources & Align Community Efforts (GRACE) Network** is a network of community-based organizations in **Kent County** working to provide social services, health care, and educational support services to individuals in the community. Community Rebuilders, a nonprofit housing agency committed to ending homelessness located in Grand Rapids, launched the network in 2020 in partnership with Signify Health, a provider of technology products and services focused on addressing the social determinants of health. Through this coordinated care network, health care and social service providers can collaborate around the needs of each at-risk individual and connect the person to community resources that address the contributors of homelessness. Health care and community stakeholders can share information, coordinate services, and create records that stay with people over time and across settings and that can be connected back to quality and outcomes through a collaboration technology platform that complies with state and federal legal and privacy requirements.

Community Rebuilders received a \$5 million grant from the Bezos Day 1 Families Fund in 2018, which allowed the agency to invest in the Signify platform. Each member of the network pays a small fee to access data in the system network. The Grand Rapids Community Foundation covered the first year of these monthly fees. Referrals are the leading way participants are using the GRACE Network. Participants can accept referrals from other organizations on the network and review information gathered by them. Participants work to keep the referral list current, and some GRACE Network members also use the system to "close the loop on referrals"—tracking whether and where individuals actually receive services.

Cross-sector communication and collaboration to facilitate referrals and warm handoffs are happening in other communities across the state as well. For example, some families report being connected to early care and learning programs through home visiting programs, WIC, and some local nonprofits.<sup>24</sup> However, it appears that this practice is not widespread: the Michigan PDG B-5 Needs Assessment notes that many trusted messengers for families, such as health care or child care providers, often do not make referrals to important supports for young children and families, such as early intervention and home visiting. Similarly, stakeholders note that some home visiting providers fail to reach out to child care providers and medical providers to connect families with specialized medical or educational services. This disconnect appears to be the result of a lack of information about the programs and services offered by the different sectors, highlighting the importance of increasing family and provider knowledge through relationship-building and other strategies.

Another important consideration in ensuring the sustainability of efforts to build relationships across sectors is how the relationship can or should be formalized through a partnership agreement, contract, memorandum of understanding (MOU), or the like to ensure that the relationship continues after staff or program changes occur. Such agreements are also important to sharing data and help to ensure that collaborative efforts are coordinated and aligned. Partnership agreements between ISDs and Head Start regarding GSRP and Head Start eligibility, or MOUs developed through the state's Early Head Start Child Care Partnership, may serve as helpful models.

## What Are Other States Doing?

States are taking a variety of approaches in advancing cross-sector communication and collaboration that build on or expand existing efforts to create a “no wrong door” approach, provide families with warm handoffs, and facilitate effective tracking across systems. **North Carolina** has created the first statewide coordinated care network that can electronically connect those with identified needs to community resources and provide a feedback loop on the outcome of that connection. Through this network, known as NCCARE360, community partners can access a statewide resource directory that includes dedicated navigators, chat and text features, and a shared technology platform that enables health care and human service providers to send and receive referrals, share client information, communicate in real time, and track outcomes.<sup>25</sup>



Other states are taking more relationship-based approaches to foster cross-sector collaboration.

**Virginia** is working to expand community service providers engaged in coordinated enrollment efforts—currently Head Start, school division, social services, and child care providers (including family child care homes)—to include parents, leaders from human services and community action agencies and health, mental health, early intervention, home visiting, and food security programs to more seamlessly connect families to needed support services. And **Illinois** is working to expand its home visiting coordinated intake approach to better support referrals and tracking across systems.



### **State Bright Spot: Illinois**

Illinois is using PDG B-5 renewal grant funds to expand its home visiting coordinated intake approach, which was first established in 2012 among communities receiving Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting. Illinois's coordinated intake approach is a "collaborative process that provides families with a single point of entry for home visiting programs within a community."<sup>26</sup> Through this approach, trained Coordinated Intake workers serve as a hub for home visiting in the community. They assess family needs, refer families to the appropriate home visiting program, and track the referral after it is made. These workers also build relationships with other child and family service providers, such as early intervention and pediatrician offices, to support referrals to home visiting programs. Using the PDG renewal grant funds, the state is supporting efforts to track referrals and follow up by expanding the use of the IRIS data system to additional local home visiting collaboratives, engaging in community-building efforts, and providing technical assistance to communities. The use of a shared data platform has been a key element in communities that have implemented coordinated intake successfully.

## **Key Considerations**

As Michigan seeks to foster cross-section collaboration to connect families to services and support transitions across systems, it should consider the following:

### **Developing data-sharing systems**

- **What role can data systems and technology play in fostering cross-sector communication and collaboration?**
- **What state-level actions can best foster cross-sector partnerships at the local level?**

### **Building cross-sector relationships**

- **What current community infrastructure can be leveraged to support more cross-sector collaboration at the local level?**
- **How can communities best support providers that want increased awareness and partnership with sectors beyond early learning to help families navigate the system and access holistic supports?**
- **What specific partners, systems, or sectors should be engaged to better meet the needs of families in the community?**
- **What agreements or MOUs should be in place to ensure the sustainability of cross-sector relationships through staff or program changes?**

# Developing a State System That Advances Local Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment Efforts

The state has a critical role to play in developing successful CEE systems—both through state-level efforts and through tailored supports aimed at fostering successful local approaches. This section provides a summary of four best practices that states can use to advance local CEE systems, including efforts currently underway in Michigan and examples from other states.

## SETTING AND COMMUNICATING A VISION

In order for communities to implement successful CEE systems, the state needs to set and communicate a vision for this work. The vision should be developed in partnership with communities, families, and other stakeholders so that it resonates with communities and is communicated broadly and consistently. While many states, including Michigan, have established a vision for their early childhood system, it is important to specifically connect CEE efforts to this vision and engage stakeholders in it from the outset so that they share in the vision and see how their efforts help advance it.

Equally important to setting a vision is communicating that vision to communities and providing guidance and robust communication to support implementation of CEE efforts. State-level guidance should allow for flexibility for local approaches so that communities can tailor these efforts to their specific communities. Developing opportunities for two-way communication between the state and communities is also important so that all communities have access to the most up-to-date information and resources, and so the state can learn what is working well to support system-building efforts, scale innovation, and work in concert with communities to ensure families get what they need.

### What Is Michigan Already Doing?

The state has developed a strong vision through Michigan's Strategic Plan to enhance parent choice and expand access to a wide range of early learning and supports. Beyond the Strategic Plan, Michigan has regional and local infrastructure in place in the form of the GSCs and GSPCs through which to communicate the state's vision and establish robust two-way communication with communities and stakeholders. Michigan is also participating in a CEE cohort convened by SRI International through which the state has the opportunity to learn from other states implementing CEE approaches as part of their PDG B-5 Renewal Grants.





## What Are Other States Doing?

While many states are in the beginning stages of efforts to support CEE approaches as part of their PDG B-5 Renewal grants, there is recognition of the need to communicate a specific vision for these efforts to families, providers, communities, and other stakeholders. **Louisiana**, which has been developing robust coordinated application, eligibility, and enrollment approaches for several years now, has developed several resources to support communities in understanding the vision and goals of these efforts, including a **Guide to Success for Early Childhood Community Network Lead Agencies** that includes a section on the requirement that communities coordinate birth-5 enrollment, a **model overview**, and various **presentations** that outline the vision and goals and define the elements of the state's coordinated enrollment approach. **Oregon** has also worked to develop coordinated enrollment into early care and education programs as a strategy to strengthen its early learning system more broadly.

## Key Considerations

- **How will the state establish and communicate its specific vision for CEE?**
- **How can the state leverage or improve communication channels to provide guidance, two-way communication, and feedback loops with communities?**
- **What opportunities are there at the state level to provide leadership to communities (e.g. dedicated staff, partnerships)?**



## State Bright Spot: Oregon

**Oregon** has been developing efforts to support CEE through the state's 16 Early Learning Hubs. These efforts have initially prioritized enrollment into the state's preschool program (Preschool Promise), with a longer-term goal of coordinating enrollment across multiple early childhood programs and funding streams, including Head Start, subsidized child care, early childhood special education, and K-12 school district preschool. As part of this work, the state has developed a Coordinated Enrollment Guidebook that outlines the vision of the Early Learning Division (the state-level early childhood agency) for coordinated enrollment in Oregon. This guidebook provides information to state and local stakeholders as to how coordinated enrollment aligns with the state's overall early learning system plan and vision and advances efforts to center families and promote equity. The guidebook also provides initial guidance to communities on how to operationalize coordinated enrollment at the local level. In addition, Oregon has hired a Coordinated Enrollment Specialist in the state's Early Learning Division as part of the state's PDG B-5 Renewal Grant. While coordinated enrollment is managed at the local level through the regional hubs, the Coordinated Enrollment Specialist is charged with supporting the planning and implementation of coordinated enrollment systems across the state.



# ADVANCING DATA USE

States around the country are investing in data systems to better track access to and reach of early learning programs, measure and improve quality, and ensure that resources and supports are being allocated equitably and supporting those who need them the most. As states begin to undertake CEE efforts, they are considering how state-level data systems and advancements can be leveraged to promote better state-local coordination, maximize the impact of technology investments, and advance equity.

## What Is Michigan Already Doing?

As mentioned earlier, Michigan has been working to strengthen its data system for a number of years, including using Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge funds to create an Early Childhood Integrated Data System that is interoperable with Michigan's Statewide Longitudinal Data System, the state's centralized education data repository. Collaborative efforts between state systems such as DHHS and GSQ have further enhanced efforts to connect early childhood data into the MSLDS and MiSchoolData, the state's public-facing portal for education data. Michigan is also using a unique identifier across early childhood programs such as preschool, Early Intervention, and IDEA. As part of Michigan's PDG B-5 Renewal Grant, MDE is working to expand data sharing between MDE and DHHS; establish data-sharing agreements with additional partners; and build on the existing MI School Data portal to better understand the "whole child" early childhood experiences of all children. Michigan's Strategic Plan also calls for an increased focus on using data to inform outreach to families who are not being consistently reached and to engage communities in these efforts. As this work is undertaken, it will be important to consider how it can be used to align with and strengthen CEE at the local and state levels.

A specific area of Michigan's work to integrate its data systems and use them more effectively that has significant relevance to the CEE systems is the state's work on "use cases." The state is currently working on four use cases that seek to determine how the state's data systems can or could answer important questions that help the state understand which young children and families are accessing the mixed delivery system and how the system can equitably support all families. Those four use cases are as follows:

1. What is the unduplicated count of children enrolled in different programs across the state?
2. Is access to and participation in the early childhood mixed delivery system equitable?
3. What are the differences in outcomes among children and families who were enrolled in different programs, or different combinations of programs?
4. To what extent do children and families enroll and participate in services for which they are eligible?

## What Are Other States Doing?

Numerous states are leveraging PDG B-5 funds to advance state and local data use in supporting CEE approaches. Generally, these efforts fall into two categories: (1) incorporating the use of a unique student identifier; and (2) developing or expanding state data systems to provide unduplicated counts of children receiving and awaiting services, in early childhood programs and more broadly. Six states (Kansas, Oregon, California, Minnesota, Louisiana, and Maryland) are assigning unique state identifiers to all children as an effort to streamline the collection of application and enrollment data.<sup>27</sup> States are also using PDG B-5 Renewal funding to expand their data systems to provide better and more timely data regarding enrollment (slots and vacancies) and to connect systems across services outside of early childhood, such as health, through Help Me Grow or other systems.

While state-level data efforts are necessarily complex, overlap across multiple areas of CEE, and are highly specific to a particular state, a few pertinent approaches include these examples:

- **Virginia:** Partnering with a national vendor (ChildPlus) to adapt software to Virginia's needs and strengthen the capacity to have real-time information about slots and vacancies
- **Maryland:** Gathering parent and other stakeholder feedback to better understand their current experiences with application and enrollment processes to inform new data system modules that support coordinated enrollment
- **Colorado:** Leveraging resources from the Governor's Office of Information Technology to implement an IT Solutions Roadmap, which will improve the quality of the user experience for multiple data systems and websites used by human service and early childhood agencies, resulting in increased access, integrated service delivery, and the alignment of programs
- **Minnesota:** Linking multiple data systems to better coordinate application processes, service provision, and follow-up



### State Bright Spot: Minnesota

**Minnesota** is developing a data-sharing platform (the "Portal") that will be linked to **Help Me Connect**—a family navigation and intake model linked to Help Me Grow. The Portal will require a coordinated application for families to complete to determine the eligibility for services, including Head Start and Early Head Start. This will be informed by the current **Bridges to Benefits** system developed by Children's Defense Fund Minnesota that includes a screening tool families can use to learn whether they are potentially eligible for a wide range of supports. When combined with Help Me Connect, the Portal will be able to directly refer children and families to the services for which they are eligible.

# Key Considerations

- **What data infrastructure best supports CEE efforts?**
- **How can the data systems developed from the “use cases” inform CEE efforts at the state and local level?**
- **What data-sharing policies need to be in place at the state and local level?**
- **How can data be used in connection with efforts to physically map resources and enrollment and provide a comprehensive picture of access to comprehensive resources that support the whole child?**
- **How can state-level enrollment data be made more accessible, usable, and inclusive?**
  - » Is the language and terminology relevant to diverse communities?
  - » Is data disaggregated by race and ethnicity whenever it can be?
  - » How are the perspectives of families and communities informing the use of data?

## LEVERAGING RESOURCES

States have been able to leverage different funding sources and partners to support CEE efforts. Perhaps most notably, the federal PDG B-5 program included a bonus opportunity for states to develop or expand CEE approaches to help make it easier for families to navigate multiple services and programs and to maximize allocation of resources.

The requirement of the Every Student Succeeds Act that local education agencies (LEAs) that receive Title I funds coordinate with Head Start and other early childhood providers also provides states and communities with an opportunity to advance CEE efforts in partnership with local school districts. This requirement supplements the existing requirement in the Head Start Act that Head Start programs develop memoranda of understanding with LEA. As additional federal funds are directed at states and school districts, there may be opportunities to continue to build on CEE efforts.

### What Is Michigan Already Doing?

Michigan included CEE in its PDG B-5 Renewal application, noting that these funds could support the continuation of CEE efforts in the state, including implementing “no wrong door” approaches more broadly across the state. As outlined throughout this Landscape, efforts are underway at the state and local level to develop and expand these efforts. The state will also be awarding funds to local communities to participate in a technical assistance cohort focused on CEE in the upcoming months. Some communities in Michigan, such as Genesee County, have also brought together partners and funding independently to explore the feasibility of developing and implementing local CEE approaches.



CEE is a systems-building strategy that advances the state's overall vision for its early learning system and aligns with various aspects of the Michigan's Strategic Plan. Moreover, many communities in the state have developed or are in the process of developing local CEE approaches that they have been able to leverage state and local resources to support. In addition to funding available through PDG B-5, the state should look to opportunities to leverage other federal and state funding, local funding, and private funding through the business and philanthropic communities to continue these efforts, at both the state and community levels.

## What Are Other States Doing?

As noted throughout this landscape, states are taking various approaches to supporting CEE through their PDG B-5 funds. According to the **Administration of Children and Families Summary of Funded Applications**, common strategies include these:

- Assigning **unique state identifiers** to all children as an effort to streamline the collection of application and enrollment data (as noted earlier in "Advancing Data Use")
- Creating a **single or central point of access for coordination of services within the state**. Several of these states are establishing or expanding on Help Me Grow frameworks, which consist of early intervention screening and referral services designed to identify children at risk for developmental or behavioral challenges and to connect these children and their families to community-based programs.
- Supporting **"no-wrong-door" strategies** to help families access services regardless of their initial program entry point.

Note that these strategies are not mutually exclusive and that some states are advancing more than one CEE approach. States are also advancing unique approaches that do not fall into any of the categories listed: for example, **Connecticut** is supporting community-level universal service coordination as a means of advancing CEE.

These approaches are not the only ways that states are working to leverage funding and allocate resources efficiently in support of CEE. As just one example, **Kentucky** has enacted a requirement that school districts and Head Start programs enter into "full utilization" agreements to coordinate services to eligible children through state preschool and federal Head Start funds. The purpose of this requirement is to "avoid duplication of preschool services and supplanting of federal funds and to maximize the use of Head Start funds to serve as many four-year-old children as possible."<sup>28</sup>



### State Bright Spot: Connecticut

**Connecticut** is using PDG B-5 Renewal Grant funds to invest in community-level universal service coordination to expand already existing efforts in three cities. For example, funds would support Bridgeport Prospers, a cradle-to-career collective impact effort that engages families, community members, early education providers and public schools, faith-based stakeholders, businesses, and the health care and social service sectors to improve education outcomes for children.



## Key Considerations

- Are there existing funding and resources that can be used to support CEE?
- What opportunities may exist to partner with other agencies, universities and research institutes, and business and philanthropic partners to identify resources?
- How can the state foster increased state-level collaboration to leverage resources effectively and avoid duplication of efforts?

## BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY

CEE is a systems-building strategy that seeks to ensure that families can access programs, supports, and resources that meet families' diverse needs and preferences and that public resources are deployed effectively and equitably. As a systems-change initiative, it is an iterative and ongoing process that takes time and effort to understand, design, and implement. Communities working to implement such efforts benefit from a state's ability to provide technical assistance in key areas such as leveraging existing funding and resources, developing partnerships, assisting with communication strategies and data use, and engaging philanthropy to support successful CEE approaches at the local level. Technical assistance can vary based on the need and particular context but can take the form of convenings, communities of practice, or written resources in the forms of templates, inventories, and so on. In all cases, technical assistance and other supports for local communities should be responsive to the specific local context.

### What Is Michigan Already Doing?

Michigan has several key assets that can be leveraged to provide technical assistance to communities as they seek to implement coordinated enrollment efforts. The state has local infrastructure in its GSCs, GSPCs, Resource Centers, and Early Childhood Support Networks, through which the state can facilitate technical assistance and capacity-building efforts focused on developing, implementing, and enhancing CEE efforts by local communities. Such efforts also tie into Michigan's Strategic Plan, which

identifies building the capacity of local infrastructure as a priority.

Another important asset the state can use to build capacity in advancing CEE approaches is its convening power. The state can pull stakeholders together to connect regarding the vision and elements of successful coordinated enrollment efforts. Such convenings can help set the direction for this work and foster increased local coordination and collaboration.



## Michigan's Resource Centers and Early Childhood Support Networks

### Great Start to Quality Resource Centers

There are 10 Great Start to Quality Resource Centers across the state that provide child care resources and supports to families, providers, and programs. Resources for families include assistance with finding quality licensed child care programs for children ages 0-12 in their area (child care resource and referral, or CCR&R). Resource Centers also offer quality improvement supports and professional development to programs and providers.

### Early Childhood Support Networks

The Early Childhood Support Network (ECSN) comprises four regions throughout the state. The network regions are designed to provide a coordinated, easy-to-navigate early childhood system for providers and families that addresses the needs of the whole child. The ECSN facilitates cross-sector collaboration within the region for maximum utilization of federal, state, and local resources and equitable access to early childhood support and services. The ECSN provides systems development, professional learning, and technical assistance for the Great Start Network, which includes the Great Start to Quality Resource Centers, Great Start Collaboratives, and Parent Coalitions.



## What Are Other States Doing?

As CEE efforts are primarily community-based, states have worked to build community capacity in implementing successful approaches by providing technical assistance, sharing best practices, and developing tools and templates for use in communities. For example, **North Carolina** used PDG B-5 planning funds to expand mentoring supports for communities developing universal application and enrollment processes. Both **Oregon** and **Louisiana** have developed guides and other resources for communities, as noted earlier, while **Virginia** is also developing a variety of tools for communities.



### State Bright Spot: Virginia

Through its initial PDG funding, **Virginia** supported the work of an initial cohort of “pilot” communities (locally coordinated mixed delivery systems) that included facilitating streamlined enrollment processes focused on a centralized point of entry for families to access needed services. PDG B-5 renewal funds will be used to expand pilot communities with the goal of reaching all communities by 2022. The work is supported by a state-level implementation team—a partnership between the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, and the University of Virginia—that will provide technical assistance and other supports to pilot communities. As part of that capacity-building effort, the state has drafted a coordinated enrollment self-assessment tool and implementation guide. The self-assessments provides a lens on how well pilot partners coordinate and address sharing of information, eligibility, application processes, preference matching, and wait lists, and where there are opportunities for more efficient integration of funds. The implementation guide provides a detailed road map for building local teams and developing action plans for coordinated enrollment systems with a focus on family engagement in designing systems, expertise in integrated early childhood financing, and improved transitions.

## Key Considerations

- **How can the state best leverage Resource Centers and Early Childhood Support Networks to build local capacity around coordinated enrollment efforts?**
- **How can the state best build capacity to support developing robust community partnerships in which all partners are engaged from the start and have equal footing in the partnership?**
- **How can the state best build local capacity in identifying and executing opportunities to blend or braid funding for developing coordinated eligibility and enrollment systems?**
- **How can the state best build local capacity regarding the development and maintenance of data and technology systems that can support coordinated eligibility and enrollment efforts?**
- **What forms of technical assistance are best suited to building capacity in specific areas?**



# NEXT STEPS

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As the nation recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and works to achieve a more racially just society, CEE provides an important opportunity to create a more coordinated and equitable early learning system, one that is rooted in local community, empowers families, and ensures that every family has the resources and supports needed to help their children meet their fullest potential. By developing this Landscape, Michigan has a strong platform from which to launch additional supports for communities across the state in implementing equitable and family-centered CEE systems.

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# APPENDIX: Overview of Eligibility Requirements for the Mixed Delivery System and Select Whole Child and Family Supports

 Program	 Serves Ages 0-3	 Serves Ages 3-5	 Eligibility: Income	 Eligibility: Other Factors	 Income Eligibility Description	 Other Factors Eligibility Description
Early On (Early Intervention, IDEA Part C) <sup>29</sup>	X			X		Established condition and/or a developmental delay of 20% or more in one or more developmental domains or a score of one standard deviation below the mean.
Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B, Section 619) <sup>30</sup>		X		X		Qualify under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, Part B, Section 619).
Home Visiting (MIHP/MIECHV/State Funds) <sup>31</sup>	X (prenatal)	X	X	X	Varies according to program	There are eight evidence-based and promising models in Michigan with varying eligibility criteria. Most programs serve pregnant women and families children from birth to age 2 or 3; some will serve families with children up to age 5. In addition to income requirements, some programs also have eligibility requirements related to specific populations—for example, first-time parents, pregnant women and infants enrolled in Medicaid, or American Indian Communities. See <a href="#">this resource</a> for more detailed eligibility criteria.
Early Head Start <sup>32</sup>	X		X	X	100% FPL	Children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and children from families receiving public assistance (TANF, SSI).
Head Start <sup>33</sup>		X	X	X	100% FPL	Children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and children from families receiving public assistance (TANF, SSI).
Child Development and Care <sup>34</sup>	X	X	X	X	150% FPL (as of July 2021)	Showing of parent need (e.g., work or education).

# APPENDIX: Overview of Eligibility Requirements for the Mixed Delivery System and Select Whole Child and Family Supports

 Program	 Serves Ages 0-3	 Serves Ages 3-5	 Eligibility: Income	 Eligibility: Other Factors	 Income Eligibility Description	 Other Factors Eligibility Description
Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) <sup>35</sup>		X	X	X	250% FPL	Children must be 4 years old on or before September 1. The primary factors used to determine GSRP eligibility are low family income, families in foster care, families experiencing homelessness, and children with IEPs that recommend an inclusive setting.
WIC <sup>36</sup>	X	X	X	X	185% FPL	Applicants must meet all of the following four criteria:  1. Pregnant, breastfeeding (up to one year); 6 months postpartum, or a child ages 0-5 2. Resident of the state of Michigan (U.S. citizenship not required). 3. Income eligible (at or below 185% of federal poverty guideline or on Medicaid or food stamps). 4. Determined by WIC clinic staff to be at nutrition and/or health risk.
SNAP/Food Assistance <sup>37</sup>	X	X	X	X	Eligibility is based on the financial situation of all members in a household	Must be a resident of Michigan and a U.S. citizen (or acceptable alien status).
TANF/Cash Assistance <sup>38</sup>			X	X	Eligibility is based on the financial situation of all members in a household	Available for eligible pregnant women and families with minor children who have low incomes.  Must be a resident of Michigan and a U.S. citizen (or acceptable alien status).  Applicants for cash assistance take part in a work participation program.
Medicaid/Health Care <sup>39</sup>	X	X	X	X	Varies according to program	Michigan has several health care programs for children and pregnant women including MiChild (children under 19), Healthy Kids/Healthy Dental (pregnant women and children under 19), and Health Care Coverage for People Impacted by the Flint Water Crisis.

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