

Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System

This innovative tool will combine data collected by the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health into one online, interactive database. The system will protect the privacy of individual children by not showing data for individual children. It will show population results only. It will show children's growth and achievement in relation to their participation in a variety of educational and social programs over time.

Why do we need it?

Our government invests a lot of money into programs that help children. As it is now, we don't have a complete picture of all the ways that the money has helped those children. Each department collects its own data: the education department collects education data, the health department collects health data, and human services human services data. Decision-makers rely on comprehensive information to make decisions. If all the data we collect were linked, we would be able to see what's working and what isn't across more than one public program. This online data tool is intended to do just that. We are able to build this tool because of funding from the federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant.

How will it work?

Minnesota already has all this data. The new tool will just make better use of what we already have at state agencies. The database will show users a variety of information. For example, you could look up how groups of children did in elementary school after participating in a certain type of early childhood program. For the first time, anyone will be able to explore how children benefit from government programs when they are very young. The system will not reveal data on individual children.

Why is it important?

Research shows that the early years of a person's life are very important, so we need to know whether our programs for young children are helping. The new tool will allow anyone to see information on the results of multiple programs. Learning what works now will inform what we do in the future to help our children thrive.

Who will use it?

We hope this innovative tool will be a go-to source for anyone who is interested in our kids' well-being. Anyone who wants to know whether we are spending public money wisely can use the system. This might include lawmakers, educators, community members, and parents.

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System is expected to go live in 2015. For an example of how it might look, please see the SLEDS system at sleds.mn.gov. SLEDS tracks students from K-12 to higher education to the workforce to see how older children are doing as they move through our education system.