

Bridge Event Webinar Transcript: Leading the Way: How States Are Addressing Early Learning Under ESSA

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Presenters:

- Janice Keizer, Prekindergarten Research Alliance Liaison, REL Southwest
- Lori Connors-Tadros, Ph.D., Director, Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO)

To view a video of this archived webinar:

http://relsouthwest.sedl.org/bridge_events/2017-03-21_ece-essa/index.html

Webinar Introduction

Janice Keizer:

Slides #1–4: Good afternoon. On behalf of the REL Southwest and the Center on Enhanced Early Learning Outcomes, CEELO, I would like to welcome you to today's webinar titled Leading The Way: How States Are Addressing Early Learning Under ESSA. My name is Janice Keizer. I'm the Prekindergarten Research Alliance Liaison to two of the REL Southwest research alliances, the Arkansas Prekindergarten Research Alliance and the New Mexico Prekindergarten Research Alliance. This webinar bridge event is a collaboration between the REL Southwest and CEELO. The goal of today's webinar is to share current information on how state education agency leaders are including evidence-based practices for children preK to grade three in their state plans for the Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA. By the end of this webinar, we expect that you will gain a better understanding of the resources available to support states in developing ESSA state plans. You'll increase your knowledge of strategies for including evidence-based practices in early childhood education in ESSA state plans, and become aware of specific examples of ESSA state plans that include provisions for early childhood education.

Slide #5: We have assembled an excellent panel of speakers to share their state's experiences in including early learning components in their ESSA state plans. My colleague, Lori Connors-Tadros from CEELO, will facilitate today's discussion with our panelists. Our panelists in order of how they will share their state plans are Richard Lower, Director of the Office of Preschool and Out-of-School Time Learning at the Michigan Department of Education; Jenna Conway, Assistant Superintendent of Early Childhood at the Louisiana Department of Education; Robert Butts, Senior Advisor for Governmental Relations at the Washington Office of

Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Tonya Williams, Director of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education at the Arkansas Department of Human Services. On behalf of the REL Southwest and CEELO, I would like to thank all of our panelists for participating in today's webinar.

Slide #6: Before we get into our conversation with our panelists, I would like to briefly share a little bit about the REL Southwest work with you. We have eight active research alliances. Two of the research alliances, the Arkansas Prekindergarten Research Alliance and the New Mexico Prekindergarten Research Alliance, are specifically involved in early learning research, evaluation, and technical assistance projects.

Slide #7: The REL Southwest has a diverse portfolio of early learning research and technical assistance projects. A few of those projects are listed here, but I'd like to highlight just a couple of these projects now. However, you are invited to visit the REL Southwest website to learn more about each of these projects and others we have completed.

The first I'd like to tell you about is the Arkansas Prekindergarten Data Inventory. REL Southwest did a data inventory for the Arkansas PreK Research Alliance and the purpose of this project was to help alliance members identify what data are available related to early learning and preK education in Arkansas. We looked at a variety of sources that included data collected and maintained by the Arkansas Department of Education, the Arkansas Department of Health Services, the U.S. Department of Education, and some other organizations.

The second project I'd like to share with you is our PreK Participation Study and GIS Mapping that we did in Arkansas PreK Research Alliance, for the PreK Research Alliance in Arkansas. We described and mapped participation patterns and trends for the state-administered Arkansas Better Chance PreK Program, and participation was examined by student demographic and geographic categories over a five-year period. Then we created a set of geographic information system or GIS map to better inform the state about where preK students are enrolled and where there are pockets of low enrollment around the state. We'll share the results of this study and provide technical assistance to our alliance members in Arkansas in April.

So once again, thank you for joining us today, and next I would like to introduce Lori Connors-Tadros from CEELO to kick off the panel discussion about the inclusion of early learning in state ESSA planning. Lori?

Lori Connors-Tadros: **Slide #8:** Oh, thank you so much. Good afternoon and/or good morning to everyone that's joined us. We have over 60 participants with us today

from across the country. I wanted to tell you a little bit more about CEELO, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes. We are one of the U.S. Department of Education's federally funded comprehensive center networks. We work with every state across the country and territories to build capacity to improve outcomes for children birth to third grade. We take our name very seriously, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes. we define that very broadly to think about the whole child, and we work most effectively in partnership as we are today both with the REL Southwest as well as with states and local folks.

In looking at the introductions, I'm so pleased to have a broad array of stakeholders from a parent in Hawaii, Christie, so glad you could join us, to state early education leaders, professors from institutes of higher ed, researchers, philanthropy, and local education administrators. We're very much looking forward to both learning more from the states about their approach to the state plan and also sharing with you a variety of resources and opportunities and ways for you to get involved in both the work at the state and the local level.

Slide #9: As you know, the Every Student Succeeds Act is intended to target resources to those children that are most vulnerable. Federal funds prioritize within the Every Student Succeeds Act goals related to both reducing achievement gaps and improving schools and the quality of teaching and actually principals as well. So we'd like to take a broad view to looking at how to embed early learning, and by early learning I do look at consider the birth to third grade framework, so that we can be very intentional about ensuring that the state and the state education agency and the local education agency and all the other partners are focusing on what it takes to help children be successful at formal school entry and in their early years, before standardized testing might identify them with more serious challenges to their success in school.

Really important to think about ESSA as legislation that affords the state and locality to meet the goals that they've already set for how they think that children will be most successful. As you are looking at your state's plan, which some states are drafting those and some are submitting those in early April, others will be submitting in September to the Department for review, that that's really the state plan is the initial step, if you will. It's the initial identification of key strategies and priorities and it's most important to create an early learning footprint, if you will, to integrate early learning, particularly those strategies that we have the strongest evidence throughout the state plan, and we're going to talk more about how each of the states have done that. But a number of states throughout our country have long-term goals to ensure that every child is ready for kindergarten, that children are successful at third grade reading proficient, that they graduate on time. And strong early childhood programs are our greatest path to achieving those goals for children.

Most importantly, ESSA really embodies what we know that works, and that is working with others, building alliances both internally, and by internally I meant there within state departments of education or local education agencies, and that's one of the opportunities with the consolidated state plan which brings together funds that were targeted by Title, for example, Title One, Title Two for educator support, and others, together as well as with local partners, a very important, and actually historic focus on engaging stakeholders in what is the best way to educate young children in each state and community. Most importantly, at any time it's very important to think about how to align your priorities with resources so that there are sufficient funds to support young children and all children being successful.

Slide #10: Regarding early childhood, there are three cross-cutting policy goals that actually embody ensuring that the goals and priorities of the Every Student Succeeds Act are met. That is one, expanding access to high-quality early learning both in the birth-to-five age range but most importantly in kindergarten through third grade as well. In Title One, there is the opportunity to use funds to support expanded access to preschools, but there are also opportunities to prioritize early learning in state support to targeted or comprehensive support to those schools that need specific support to improve.

Again, I think you're going to hear today from the states a vision about birth to third grade and how we ensure continuity and a great experience for every child, every day, every year when they are in school, and that's the way we like to think about what is an alignment and collaboration. I know as parents we all want our children to experience a great teacher every day, every year.

That leads me to the third cross-cutting priority and policy goal of ESSA. In order for every child to succeed, we know they need a highly effective teacher in their classroom, and those teachers need the support of highly effective administrators. We'll be talking a lot more about specific strategies that states are utilizing to address these cross-cutting priorities.

Slide #11: However, the states set out the state plan. They set out more or less that blueprint or framework. There's lots of local flexibility and local opportunity. You'll hear these states talk about guidance and resources and toolkits that they are developing to aid and support local educators in designing strategies that best meet the needs of their communities. I'll be sharing some resources around that as well, but there really are important opportunities, if you will, for local education agencies and that really would take all of us engaging with each other to make sure that the best minds are put towards supporting young children around aligning with very comprehensive standards and Head Start, using funds for cross-sector and cross-role professional development for principals, teachers and

community-based providers of early learning, looking at Title Four funds for community school models to support school readiness of children in poverty, particularly children in foster care and homeless and migrant children, and using school improvement funds to prioritize effective practices in the birth to third grade realm. We'll talk more about that as we go on.

Slide #12: Feel free to submit your questions at any time. In a couple of minutes we are going to turn to the states. I'll go back to this at the end, but CEELo's resources are part of our federally funded projects. They are open to all, free to anyone to access. We have, I'd like to say our website is chock-full of resources that can support all stakeholders in engaging with others in ensuring that you have highly effective and evidence-based strategies supporting early learning. We have a dedicated webpage to ESSA and on that, you will find the links to your state ESSA plan so that you can sign up for information, other links and blogs.

We have a Costs of Preschool Quality tool, which can help states understand what the true cost of quality is, lots of resources on specific topics and policy areas. We are a partnership of the National Institute for Early Education Research as well as the Council of Chief State School Officers and EDC, so again we're all contributing resources that really are a benefit to you. Our center is intended, as REL Southwest is, to be of service to you in the communities and in states.

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