

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

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Facilitators:

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

Presenters:

- Richard Lower, Director, Office of Preschool and Out-of-School Time Learning, Michigan Department of Education
- Jenna Conway, Assistant Superintendent, Early Childhood, Louisiana Department of Education
- Robert Butts, Senior Advisor for Governmental Relations, Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Tonya Williams, Director, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, Arkansas Department of Human Services

To view a video of this archived webinar:

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

Questions and Discussion

Lori Connors-Tadros: That's fantastic. I really appreciate the presentations from each of the states. I do encourage you to submit questions if you like. However, I have a couple that we do want to talk about. I will note a couple of key points and thoughts that emerged. One is one of the handouts that we have there in the download section there does identify specific resources that can be used by any one of the states today or any others really to support this guidance and the toolkits and the information to LEAs. I do think that that's going to be one of our large focuses right now as states finalize their plans. Given the new state plan template, they may be really looking to streamline what is submitted based on what the department would like to see and then really focus their effort and time on the implementation and guidance. So I'd like to ask any of the state presenters to talk a little bit about what you plan to do and what work you've begun on implementation guidance, if any. I know Bob, you mentioned a toolkit, and if you want to say a few more words about that and then I might ask Richard and Tonya and Jenna in turn.

Bob Butts:

Yes. So the toolkit that Jason from our Title I office has been working on does provide information suggesting that community school districts do a needs assessment. It looks at operating preschools and how you can utilize ESSA funds for that purpose, talks about building-level programs, there's information on some transition activities with some specific examples from school districts who have been doing it in the past. There's examples of additional funding sources. We have a state preschool program, for example, and some ideas about how you might integrate ESSA funds with those state funds. So it's short, it's concise, we're hoping that it will be utilized by districts. As I mentioned before, our Title I ESSA group did bring together about 200 school district special program people all in the room to talk about the different provisions of ESSA and I strongly recommend that if you have such an event, you make sure that you do get included. We had a PowerPoint which is included in your handouts where we ask a series of questions that I think went over well, and we also invited Linda Sullivan-Dudzic who's the author of *Making a Difference: 10 Essential Steps to Building a PreK-3 System*, that our school districts have found very helpful in the past. So I think the next step is to figure out a way that we can share information more at a regional level and have conversations at regions perhaps through our educational service districts or through other means to provide information on how they can use ESSA funds for early childhood.

Lori Connors-Tadros: Thank you, I think that's extremely helpful. I think these guides and toolkits will be fantastic to share. Richard, Jenna, well, why don't we go to Richard next? Would you like to share anything about how you have begun implementation, planning, or are thinking about doing so?

Richard Lower:

Sure. So at this point in Michigan, we've conceptualized ideas, but haven't actually engaged in development of guides or implementation plans to assist LEAs in incorporation. The areas that we are thinking about, that we have mapped out for consensus across the department that we would put out guidance on, a couple are similar to what Bob mentioned in terms of encouraging in particular Title I Part A funds to be used for preschool, but more importantly, to leverage those funds to coordinate with any other federally funded programs as well as with state programs to maximize the use of all dollars available. So whether you blend and braid those Title I Part A funds with Head Start, or you blend and braid them with Early Head Start, or you blend and braid them with a state preK, the one thing that I would suggest as you develop that concept is that you don't forget about quality and standards, that when you blend and braid funds, you always want to achieve the highest standards and maintain that so that you do get the desired results you're looking for. The other piece that I don't think is regularly thought about within the K-12 education community is the ESSA plan really outlines ability to cross over into HHS federally to tap into the childcare development fund subsidy dollars for wraparound. So for many programs that may be before and after school, that childcare

subsidy dollars are a pot that you can coordinate with that help to address more of the whole-child approach, the needs of parents and families, especially those who are working, and especially in low-income communities. So those are two ideas that we are pushing. The Community Needs Assessment piece that Bob mentioned, we'll be pushing on that. We are absolutely pushing on ensuring an understanding as was mentioned earlier about all providers in early childhood are feeders into local districts for enrollment. So transition plans from all provider types is essential to kick start the differentiated student-centered support at the beginning of kindergarten. So helping to raise awareness and understanding that a home provider, a center provider, private, public, these are all feeders into enrollment, and especially in a world of schools of choice in Michigan as well as virtual education that kicks off at kindergarten in some areas, having that established relationship with feeder early educators, that is an advantage to local districts. So these are pieces that we're thinking about for alignment and collaboration.

Lori Connors-Tadros: Okay, that's fantastic.

Jenna Conway: Lori, I just want to say, there're two pieces for us on implementation. So I think the first of which is putting in place a structured process by getting folks to plan, to put something on paper, to work with the various aspects of the state department, so I kind of think about, Okay, if you want to see X change, what does that mean in terms of Y input? So that I think will be very important, and then we'll help them create a template and organize that planning around those five areas. I think that's sort of key, and then we do quarterly collaboratives in Louisiana with folks across the state, which it's not training, per se, but it's when the state brings out things that we're working on. We collaborate with representatives from all the school districts, whether that's the early childhood point people, whether that's folks who focus on standards, curriculum and assessment, whether that's folks who focus on talent. So again, kind of using these existing forms and structures, but making sure to shift the conversation and really kind of fully integrating ESSA into it. The second piece and probably sort of the least sexy of all of this, but I would encourage folks to use this idea of counting and building on the point just made around feeder patterns. I've still been shocked; one of the most radical things we've done in Louisiana is just require folks to count every kid, to look at as a community at their Medicaid estimates, at their at-risk percentage for their K cohort, and to kind of approximate how many kids are being served, and then to work with every publicly funded provider to just count kids, October 1st and February 1st, and to share that information and to say, Okay, what does this mean in terms of enrollment? What does this mean in terms of who's in quality, and who's not?

So it's as people get into implementation, looking at what is the data that you have, what is the data that we're missing, and not to sort of discount those very simple things around really looking at, particularly with early childhood, where are the kids, who's being served, who's not. I find too often that we've arranged for a small set of kids extraordinarily high quality options, but we don't have a sense of, Okay, where are the different risk brackets? Where's our most? Where's our poor, but better off than the very poor? Where are those that are moderate income? Where are all those kids being served across that birth-to-five spectrum, knowing that the vast majority of your low and moderate income kids are going to end up in your public school system? So really encouraging people to use this as an opportunity to just look at counting kids, mapping kids, evaluating where kids are at prior to entering the formal school system.

Lori Connors-Tadros: Thank you. I think that point reinforces a question we've actually been asked and I think something we also know that is very important. One is that states and districts are required to report the number of children attending preschool. I do think with a focus on coordination and collaboration in ESSA, it really incentivizes, if you will, just the building of the relationships and the alliances within a community, so you know, your school districts know and school principals know where their children and their community are coming from and what ways that you can work together to have an effective transition to preschool into kindergarten and early elementary and then beyond. A question we did receive that I'm going to ask perhaps Bob and others and I know Richard would like to comment on is, What are some best practice strategies for improving and having an effective alignment and collaboration between state education or preschool agencies and school districts? I'll turn it to Richard and then Tonya, you may want to address this as well and others.

Richard Lauer: So I spoke to a few of these best practice strategies, but thinking about alignment and collaboration, in particular, one of the things that has helped to build credibility for that collaboration is really showcasing the alignment between early childhood standards of quality and early learning expectations, in particular around more academic domains more so than the social-emotional pieces, although that is growing, but to actually take time to show alignment that early education as a field has high standards and expectations for children's learning and that these align with those that are typically in place for kindergarten, first, second, third grade and on up, but to show and put some resources in place. We do have one, some examples in Michigan on the website that was posted that showcased alignment in early literacy, just showcased our standards, our pieces that you build upon as the child grows and develops and is learning throughout pre-K to age eight in particular, developing more of those types of alignments to establish credibility. That then establishes a foundation and recognition that early childhood in multiple domains are essential partners in education. So establishing those alignment documents helps to establish

credibility in the K–12 community, and it also gives them concrete understanding that crosses that jargon barrier that I spoke about earlier. So that's just one example. I'll let others...

Lori Connors-Tadros: Thanks so much. Any of the other state folks, would you like to make any other comments on this issue?

Tonya Williams: Hi Lori, this is Tonya. I totally agree with Richard, but going back to something that Jenna said, really supporting that because that has really I think helped with our relationship here at the state agency level with working with local school districts, and that is being able to take data about children birth-to-five to them or sharing that with them, both where they are, and we have all of the data regarding preK children, Head Start, childcare development-funded children, and using census, how many children, or Medicaid estimates. We actually use census for children below 200 percent of federal poverty in just the general population, but I mean I think school superintendents have so appreciated not having to do all that research and somebody brings it to them, and I think it adds a great deal of credibility. Consequently, it's not just the numbers. It's also, By the way, here's how those children are doing on assessments that are being done, and here's how they're doing as they track into the longitudinal system of just how students are doing in the K–12 world once they leave preK and Head Start and child care. So I just think using data is a wonderful, powerful tool and helps build that relationship and really lends a great deal of credibility.

Bob Butts: I have three things on my list. One, to piggyback on that which was just said, we're sharing our kindergarten entry assessment data with school districts and also early learning providers. We've put it into Tableau, which is a tool where you can slice it and dice it. You can look at those districts that are comparable to yours and how did their kids do versus your kids, so it's a very useful interactive tool that can be used. We're also putting together feedback reports of our kindergarten data that goes back to early learning providers, and we've had a pilot on that which worked quite well. Third, as part of that, we do have as part of our kids kindergarten assessment a component where we ask school districts to collaborate with early learning providers. One specific thing that we've done is worked with our Childcare Aware organization here in the state where principals and school staff can go to their site and specifically request a list of licensed childcare providers within their school district, and districts and principals have found that to be useful. Then also as I mentioned in my presentation, we have a growing number of school districts and educational service districts that are doing dinner and dialogs, where you will see 50, 60, 100 early learning providers and school district staff in the room doing professional development together, professional development that they have jointly decided would be important. So there are some specifics.

Lori Connors-Tadros: Fantastic, thanks so much. Any other comments? We have a question that was actually really important as well that was submitted. I know a couple of folks wanted to share some ideas regarding Title II A state-level funds for early childhood. Richard, I'm going to let you kick off and I'm going to put something in there which is a strategy being used in Minnesota, a really fantastic strategy to engage teams from districts including principals and early childhood folks and superintendents. I'll put that in the questions and discussions while Richard shares what Michigan may be doing in that area.

Richard Lower: Sure. So recognizing the fact that the president's budget is a proposal, I just wanted to state to the attendees and for the purpose of this webinar that in my opinion, don't let the proposal limit your vision. It has been said in a couple different ways, from Washington to Arkansas, Louisiana and myself. All of us had plans and work in place. The ESSA state plan is a mechanism to achieve a greater outcome and vision. It's how we're seeing it in Michigan. We call ours the Top 10 in 10. Other states have other names for it, and we have goals. Again, ESSA state plan is one mechanism to achieve those goals. And so again, I would just reinforce that the supporting educators, there's joint professional learning that can occur, there are supports for the teachers and principals and recognition that early childhood providers are educators, are partners in education. So that's where I wanted to just make a statement, that it's a kneejerk reaction to say, Ooh, what do we do in this situation? I would encourage you to move forward with your vision, your ideas, globally for the state plan, more specifically for your implementation plan at the department level, at the state level, but do not let a proposal so early in the process of a federal budget limit your vision for what is best for children and what is best for the educators of those children. So that's just the statement I wanted to make.

Lori Connors-Tadros: Thank you. I would just also reiterate that all states and locals should just carry on with their planning. This has been a great opportunity to engage with stakeholders around what's important in your state or your community. There are tons of resources that were shared today by the states and in the handouts. I do encourage you to download all the handouts. I'm going to ask us to now—I think we don't have any other questions, right? So at this point, I think we will move towards our closing. First I want to thank each of the state presenters that presented today. You really shared very thoughtful, informative, and I'd say inspiring approaches, if you will, and strategies for how we prioritize young learners, remembering that it really isn't a requirement in most cases to address children birth to third grade, and in some regards we sometimes feel like the early grades are the invisible grades; however, we all know what's kind of the right thing to do and what matters, and so we really applaud you as leaders, truly leading the way to embed early learning in the ESSA plan. For those of you on the call, there are still

many, many opportunities to influence your own state and local communities, ESSA plan, and just education. There are lots of resources that it looks like Janice is sharing right now on the REL Southwest website, and in a minute you'll see the CEELO resources. I would encourage you to again check that out or contact us with any question that you might have. We know that a lot of different folks on the call play different roles in educating all of our children. So we do thank you very much for being with us today and I'll turn it over to – well, first let me check in with the states. Did you have any other closing comments, anything that you wanted to say that you didn't get a chance to say so far? With that, I'll turn it then to Janice to close out the webinar. We do really encourage you and please complete the stakeholder feedback survey. We really would like your honest feedback about how helpful this webinar was and ways we could improve. Thank you so much to Janice and to Jackie, fantastic partners, and for putting our heads together and our expertise together to offer this webinar nationally.

Janice Keizer:

You're welcome, and thank you as well. What a great panel this afternoon. This is a lot of wonderful information. As you mentioned, the REL website information is on the screen, a list of CEELO resources are available for you. Please take a moment to check those out. One last reminder, there are handouts for each of the presentations as well as a comprehensive list of resources in the handout section. We'll leave that link active. And finally, two things before we go, please follow us on Twitter. Both CEELO and REL Southwest are active on Twitter and we'd love to see you there too. Lastly, please take a moment to complete the survey for us. We would really appreciate your feedback. With that, we will close out today's webinar and thank you all once again for being a part of our afternoon. We hope this was helpful to you. Take care, everyone.

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