Effective State Offices of Early Learning: Moving Beyond Structure to Organizational Capacity, Enabling Conditions and Functions
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Today we will:

• Describe the organizational capacities, enabling conditions, and core functions of Effective State Offices of Early Learning
• Share the twelve lessons learned from our case study of four states
• Discuss strategies to increase the effectiveness and alignment of state agencies overseeing early childhood programs
Effective State Offices of Early Learning: A Case Study in Four States

**Why:** State Offices of Early Learning (SOELs) are responsible for setting policy, distributing funding, and ensuring accountability for these funds.

**Who:** We studied four states—Alabama, Michigan, New Jersey and West Virginia. These states were selected based on indicators of effectiveness and quality early childhood programs.

**How:** We conducted site visits to each SOEL and held over 15 interviews in each state with agency leaders and staff, philanthropic and advocacy partners, and other key stakeholders. We also examined reports and data on the programs these states administered.
About the Four States:

• **Alabama’s Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE)** is a separate state agency and has a structure of regional directors & staff to guide quality at the local level.

• **Michigan’s Office of Great Start (OGS)** has responsibility for all major EC programs, including state funded pre-K, child care, early childhood special education and early intervention, Head Start, and family engagement.

• **New Jersey’s Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE)** was established in response to the court-ordered Abbott Preschool program.

• **West Virginia’s Early and Elementary Learning Services (EELS)** includes the entire pre-K through fifth grade (P–5) continuum in the SOEL and offers universal access to preschool for 4-year-olds.
Research Question:

What are the structural characteristics, organizational capacities, and programmatic functions of effective SOELs?
Theory of Change for Building Effective Early Learning Systems

- **ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**
  - Creates the conditions for development of effective programs

- **RIGOROUS PROGRAM POLICIES**

- **ENSURE GREAT TEACHERS, LEADERS AND OTHER SUPPORTS**

- **COHERENT PROGRAM PRACTICES**
  - Informed by a continuous improvement system

- **EXEMPLAR PROGRAMS**
  - Produce lasting outcomes
Logic Model

State-specific contextual histories shape their SOEL.

**Identify and Describe the SOEL**
- History
- Structure
- Funding

**SOEL’s Structural and Organizational Capacities**
- Authority
- Goals & Strategic Plan
- Collective Capacity

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Beyond governance structure, shared commitment to a vision, resolute leadership, and attention to collective capacity sets the stage for effectiveness.

**Enabling Conditions**
- Political Will
- Public Will
- Leadership
- Staffing
- Other Contextual Factors

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Structural and organizational capacities and enabling conditions shape how SOEL perform the functions critical to achieving enhanced early learning outcomes.

**Functions**
1. Promote Program Quality
2. Guide Instructional Quality
3. Support Educator Competence
4. Use Research & Data
5. Strengthen the Continuum of Learning
6. Manage Public Resources
Functions

**Promoting Program Quality**—developing and implementing policies which may include program standards, regulations, guidance, licensing, and accountability systems.

**Guiding Instructional Quality**—building an integrated system of student learning standards, curriculum, and aligned child assessments

**Supporting Educator Competence**—ensuring a qualified teaching and leadership workforce in a supportive environment.
Functions (cont.)

**Using Research and Data**—employing a robust continuous improvement system, including collecting data and facilitating self-assessment at multiple levels, and contributing to an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).

**Strengthening the Continuum of Learning**—fostering a coherent system of care across settings and ages, including family engagement policies, aligned birth to third grade policy and practice, and engaging stakeholders in the transitions of children across the continuum of learning.

**Efficiently Managing Public Resources**—effecting sound program and fiscal management of the SOEL, including finance and accounting for grants to districts, contracting with technical assistance providers or other intermediaries, internal human resources or professional development, communication, and outreach.
Effective State Offices of Early Learning: Structural Features, Enabling Conditions, and Key Functions in Four States

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Lessons Learned

- **Lesson #1**: Emphasize an SOEL governance structure that provides sufficient authority.
- **Lesson #2**: Focus on the horizontal and vertical aspects of child well-being and early childhood education.
- **Lesson #3**: Identify a set of priorities, with quality at the core, and pursue them relentlessly.
- **Lesson #4**: Regularly assess whether SOEL performance is meeting its goals.
Lessons Learned

- **Lesson #5:** Create a data culture that improves decision-making and influences funding.
- **Lesson #6:** Use organizational capacity to replace a program mentality with a systems approach.
- **Lesson #7:** Build on the expertise and experience of leaders and staff.
- **Lesson #8:** Ensure adequate SOEL capacity.
Lessons Learned

• **Lesson #9**: Build collective capacity within and across sectors and systems.

• **Lesson #10**: Authorize SOEL leaders to cultivate political will.

• **Lesson #11**: Gather diverse perspectives to augment effectiveness and build sustained collective support.

• **Lesson #12**: Establish a coalition of key champions and unlikely allies.
Effective State Offices of Early Learning in Practice

Please type any questions you have into the chat window.
Dr. Barbara J. Cooper  
Secretary of Alabama’s Department of Early Childhood Education

1. Overview of the structure of the SOEL  
2. Major function(s) of the SOEL, including if there are functions that are a priority  
3. Key takeaways
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2. Major function(s) of the SOEL, including if there are functions that are a priority
3. Key takeaways
Q and A

Please type any questions you have into the chat window.
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