2012 CCPRC Annual Meeting
Workshop Session C-1
October 25, 2013, 10:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

Linking and Using Data to Support Quality Improvement Initiatives/QRIS Policy Decisions

Description

The goal of this session was to describe recent State-level and cross-State efforts using data to inform QRIS policy decisions and identify new research questions and strategies for using integrated data. Key policy questions in QRIS and quality improvement initiatives can be addressed by existing data that States have available in their systems. Presenters in this session provided examples of questions that have been or could be addressed using State-level data. The Director of the Early Childhood Data Collaborative reflected on how data analysis efforts can be supported through integrated data systems.

Facilitator

Dawn Ramsburg, Office of Child Care, ACF

Presenters

Laura Rothenberg, Child Trends
Meg Soli, Child Trends
Lizabeth Malone, Mathematica Policy Research
Herman Knopf, University of South Carolina
Elizabeth Groginsky, Early Childhood Data Collaborative
Rena Hallam, University of Delaware
Tabitha Isner, Minnesota Department of Human Services

Scribe

Rebecca Starr, Child Trends

1. **Documents in Session Folder**

2. Brief Summary of Presentations

- Dawn Ramsburg introduced the session indicating that the focus of the session would be to provide examples and strategies that are being used to link data in examining quality. Presenters will speak to the policy question they were trying to address and the data and methods they used. After brief presentations, the session will be opened to discussion to allow for deeper exploration.

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Liza Malone
  - The goals of the QRS Assessment Project were to gather resources and to look at validation of QRS. The Project included a quality measurement study with two components:
    - In-depth site visits with five QRISs (to understand processes for developing QRIS, the measures and components used, and how they fit together to form a

rating); used interviews to ask questions such as what questions do you want to answer and what kinds of data do you need to answer those questions?
    - Secondary data analysis with three of those QRISs (this effort sought to validate the QRIS components--do the data map onto quality levels in the way expected.)
  - Working with data from 2008-2010 in Tennessee, Florida (Miami-Dade) and Illinois. Developed framework to look at QRIS across systems while still keeping the nuances of those systems. What are the common metrics?
    - Worked with administrative databases and other sources such as PD registries and classroom observations.
    - Had to link several sources of data and then tried to create common variables across States; dealt with a lot of variation in how data were kept.

- **Summary of Presentation #2:** Meg Soli
  - Child Trends used data from Kentucky (KY) to model possible QRIS structures, looking at what QRIS rating structures might be most useful for KY. They were interested in how the distribution of program ratings would change under different structures and what additional indicators might be useful.
  - Kentucky uses a block system for its QRIS, so administrative data did not reveal anything about what standards programs met at the level above the level they were awarded.
    - Child Trends conducted interviews to find out what standards at the next highest level programs might have been met. Using this information, Child Trends modeled different potential structures.
  - The process resulted in four different models. Child Trends conducted analyses on how alternative structures would impact program distribution across the levels.
    - A points/hybrid system allowed more programs to reach higher levels. Programs could often meet standards at higher levels.
    - They also learned that many programs had practices in place that could be captured with new indicators.
  - Process demonstrates that by using administrative data and interviews, new models for alternative rating structures can be designed.

- **Summary of Presentation #3:** Rena Hallam
  - In Tennessee (TN), every program is rated (it's linked with licensing).
  - One-third of programs get an ERS rating each year. Using the subsidy database, they were able to link, using program identifiers, subsidy information with program rating data. This allowed them to look at relationship between subsidies and quality during the early years of the TN QRIS.
  - The next piece, in terms of aligning data systems, tracked families using TANF. This group of families was linked to quality data and relationships were examined between child experiences and program quality. Children in higher quality programs used fewer arrangements.

- **Summary of Presentation #4:** Herman Knopf
  - In South Carolina (SC), they are planning to build off of integrated data system that pools human services data and information in one location. The Integrated Data

System is housed at the Office of Research and Statistics and about 30 systems feed into this data system including child care, Medicare, public safety, etc. Given that each department owns their own data, there are some issues with bringing the data together.
    - The child care data includes quality information, vouchers, and licensing and information is available by county.
        - They can look at licensing deficiencies by program, densities related to licensing deficiencies, poverty as it relates to licensing deficiencies, etc.
    - SC has identified the need to continue to look at data including the kinds of relationships that might exist across data systems. They are still discussing questions, identifying the data needed to answer those questions, and working trust building.

- **Summary of Presentation #5: Lessons Learned**
    - Lizabeth Malone: Data systems have been evolving over time, but while there are new technologies, some are still using old "legacy database" systems. It is important to bring administrators and data system people together.
        - Four areas are important to make sure you are collecting the data you need to answer key questions: 1) storage (some systems do not include electronic storage); 2) coverage of the data (rating level or components/indicators—affects what you can address); 3) how do you define the data, how do you measure it; and 4) how do you report it?
        - Linking datasets is challenging (licensing, subsidies, child outcomes) especially when data is not used in a consistent way across systems.
        - Also need to think about who is entering data. Who has access to the data system, what types of access?
        - Need to have an identifier to link data, i.e., ID rather than program name) and need documentation of data, labels, expected values etc.
        - INQUIRE is developing two products: a data management practices guide (Bobbie Weber) and a resource document to guide and support administrators in building a data system.
    - Laura Rothenberg: 1) it is important to work closely with administrators to identify questions, a collaborative process; 2) at stages in QRS implementation, creating models can be more cost effective than conducting a pilot; 3) models can help States in planning for redesign or revision by helping to project the cost of changes; and 4) QRIS models can be very sensitive to changes with slight changes having a big impact. Collecting data in a different way can help with simulations, e.g., collecting all indicators in a block system.
    - Tabitha Isner: in a block system, programs don't have an incentive to document information at higher levels than they will be rated.
    - Herman Knopf: 1) just because we have support from child care administrator, it doesn't mean that all of the programs are equally supportive. Many aren't familiar with being asked for data and may be protective of their information; and 2) some data systems don't capture history. Many systems just override old data with new. Need to work toward keeping archival data or at least monthly downloads.
    - Rena Hallam: 1) it is better to plan ahead, than to go back and make linkages. However long you think it will take, it will take three times longer; 2) It is important

to do this in a collaborative process with many conversations about what the data means; and 3) think about policy changes that may have occurred that impact the data. This information isn't in the data system. But if, for example, subsidy policy changes, it will affect the data.

- **Summary of Presentation #6:** Elizabeth Groginsky
  - Elizabeth described the Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC) which was formed in 2009 and is now housed at Child Trends. Many agencies came together to form the collaborative and high level State leadership has been critical. The goal is to better understand what is happening with children in real time and to change the trajectories of children preK and beyond.
    - The Collaborative has articulated 10 fundamentals of what needs to be in any good high-quality State early childhood data system. States need unique identifiers that span across data systems to be linked; these include unique identifiers for children, for programs, and for professions.
    - Six critical policy questions States are grappling with: Is the quality of programs improving in States? Are children on track to be ready for school? There wasn't one State that could answer all six questions.
    - The ECDC has been working with states to ensure they have these questions in mind as they build their data systems. A lot of critical data aren't even being collected. Much of it is housed on paper or in separate systems that aren't linked.
    - The goal is that in 10-15 years, the ECDC will have made sure that everyone has access to data they need to make the decisions they need to make and that States will be thinking about how systems can be more coordinated and longitudinal.

3. Brief Summary of Discussion/Questions

- Maryland pilot of QRIS. Lessons learned include questions about what happens when credentials change, teachers leave, accreditation status changes. It would be helpful to link accreditation to QRIS data systems.
- Next year, Federal reporting will require States to link program quality to subsidy data. With provider IDs, basic analyses about stability and continuity of care will be possible.
- Louisa Tarullo: linkages with Head Start (HS). How is HS incorporated in QRIS?
  - Liza Malone: in her work, only one data system allowed for identification of HS programs in QRIS.
  - Bobbie Weber: at the Federal level, is there any movement in getting HS data?
  - Richard Gonzalez (ACF): there is movement, but it's not very quick. Conversations are occurring (but no decisions) between HS, child care, and education, on issues such as monitoring processes (if monitored by one process, can this count for other monitoring processes?).
  - Jennifer Brooks (OPRE): HS has a huge push with local grantees on their own use of data; they're dealing with CLASS and the Designation Renewal System and their own set of issues around data.
  - There are efforts through the State Longitudinal Data System work at the Department of Education. Ten States are working on integrating HS data. However, a lot of HS data is still collected on paper, and in several different systems. There's a real need for State level leadership around data systems that make sense.

- For States doing integrated data systems, there is confusion about process, who can share data etc.? What are the parameters?
    - Elizabeth: Some States are setting up data governance including data sharing agreements, building trust. Must change the culture. We are currently using data to meet compliance, but need to shift to other uses. Need checklists, need to know who can authorize etc.
- What about missing data? Are there standard ways that we can use to address missing data? Much of administrative data is not missing at random.
    - Tennessee's data was 99% complete…because assessments are required and they used subsidy payment data.
    - Some children are in three different programs in one day. This makes it difficult to determine how many children you're serving and what's actually happening.
    - There are some "off the shelf" systems for QRIS that have the capability to link children across programs (Tabitha).
- Sarah Friese: One of the challenges in developing common data elements is balancing how we would collect information for research versus how it would be collected for reporting purposes—often these differ. How can we use integrated data systems to replace what's there rather than adding on to what's there?
    - Elizabeth: that's the hope. States approach it differently, but the goal is to reduce burden, improve accuracy, and improve reliability and access.
    - What is the point of the system? There will be different interests in the so what? But the finances aren't there for all systems to be able to answer questions equally well. We need a balance in the solutions.
    - If the folks who are entering data can't use it for their own purposes, you won't have good data. Needs to meet their needs as well.

4. **Summary of Key issues raised**
    - Value of providing models for States. Helps with decisions in revising their systems. Speaks to what we are and are not collecting.
    - Need for aligned data systems. A lot of effort is required.
    - Identify policy questions up front. Establish trust across all players who control the data. Recognize that this takes time.
    - Lessons learned:
        - Head Start: they are they part of the system, but are facing their own challenges in terms of data and accountability.
        - Understand that small changes can have large implications. Pay attention to policy changes that may impact the data.
        - How will you define and measure across systems? Need to pay attention to storage, coverage, and access. Some systems still rely on paper and don't capture history (override old data with new).
        - Subsidy – being able to link it at the program level.
        - Need for uniformity in data elements.
        - From experience with KY: new models for alternative QRIS rating structures can be designed using administrative data. Models can help States project the impact of changes including costs.