



STATE OF THE STATES POLICY SNAPSHOT:

STATE PRE-K MONITORING AND EVALUATION POLICIES

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Introduction: Why Evaluation and Monitoring Systems Are Important for Quality Early Education

“High-quality early learning is arguably the greatest investment we can make,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2012. “Raising the quality of early learning and expanding access to effective programs plays a pivotal role in improving our children’s chances at being successful in grade school through to college and careers. It’s the kind of investment that benefits us all.” Research supports the positive impact of a high quality preschool program on children’s cognitive and social and emotional development, and the effects of high quality programs do not fade out over time.¹

Data monitoring is crucial for policy makers to have information to ensure and enhance quality.² Ongoing data collection and monitoring of program quality, including independent on-site observations, can be valid and reliable methods of documenting program quality over time. A robust quality assurance and monitoring system includes multiple opportunities to collect program quality data to inform teacher and program quality improvement efforts. Ultimately, a comprehensive quality

About CEELO State Policy Snapshots

The CEELO State Policy Snapshots summarize information from the National Institute for Early Education Research’s (NIEER) annual survey of state preschool programs. This Snapshot presents information from 39 states and the District of Columbia that operated public preschool programs and responded to questions in the *2012 State of Preschool Yearbook*:^[2]

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¹ Camilli, G., Vargas, S., Ryan, S. & Barnett, S. (2010). Meta-analysis of the effects of early education interventions on cognitive and social development. *Teachers College Record*, 112(3), 579-620.

² Barnett, W.S., Carolan, M.E., Fitzgerald, J., & Squires, J.H. (2012). *The state of preschool 2012: State preschool yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

assurance and monitoring system can assure classroom practices lead to children’s learning and development.

Most State Pre-K programs are required to monitor program quality, although the components of the monitoring system vary, based on authorizing legislation, regulation, and/or specific program guidance.³ Some states also conduct annual and/or longitudinal evaluations of state-funded Pre-K programs that use data from the quality assurance system, and in some cases link to family characteristics and child outcomes.

The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force recommends that state education agencies support a comprehensive, standards-based assessment system to assure quality. According to the Task Force, such accountability and assessment systems should be designed to: (a) inform state policy decisions, investments, and improvement efforts for early education program curriculum, assessments, and program improvement efforts, and should include (b) standards-based assessments of children’s development and learning.⁴ To assure quality, it is important for states to monitor program quality; evaluate programs annually to assess whether programs are meeting quality standards; and to support the use of valid data to inform ongoing decisions about programs, teaching and learning.⁵

What Data Do States Collect to Monitor and Evaluate Pre-K Program Quality?

The State of Preschool 2012⁶ tracks state trends on program quality standards benchmarks, access, and resources of state-funded preschool programs for national and state policymakers, State Education Agency (SEA) staff and administrators, and researchers. In 2012, 40 states and the District of Columbia offered one or more state pre-K programs, with children in 10 states lacking access to state-funded pre-K. Across these 40 states, eight offered more than one program, resulting in a total of 52 state pre-K programs that existed in 2012. The 52 existing programs served a total of over 1.3 million children.⁷ Total state pre-K funding exceeded 5.1 billion in 2012, but this figure represented a significant decrease from 2011 levels.⁸ Even with stagnant enrollment, state funding fell by more than \$400 per child

³ Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012 ; Kools, M. & Vitiello, V. E. (2010) *Good governance of early childhood development programmes in developing countries: The need for a comprehensive monitoring system*. Scandicci, Florence: UNICEF Office of Research. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/597>

⁴ National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force. (2007). *Taking stock: Assessing and improving early childhood learning and program quality*. Retrieved from http://ccf.tc.columbia.edu/pdf/task_force_report.pdf

⁵ Fowler, S., Bloom, P.J., Talan, T.N., Beneke, S., & Kelton, R. (2008). *Who’s caring for the kids? The status of the early childhood workforce in Illinois—2008*. Chicago, Illinois: McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. Retrieved from http://cecl.ni.edu/research/reports/whos_caring_report_2008.pdf

⁶ Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012.

⁷ Total program enrollment was 1,332,66.

⁸ Total funding for 2012 was \$5,119,322,047.

compared to the previous year, bringing funding down to \$3,841 per child. This drop in funding resulted in many states cutting back on efforts to monitor quality and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. For example, seven states lost ground on the number of quality standards benchmarks they met, and in five states this drop was due to failing to meet the benchmark for site visits. In 2012, 47 percent of children were enrolled in programs that did not meet the benchmark for site visits.⁹

For this brief, we performed secondary analyses on data collected in 2006 and 2012 on state responses to survey questions related to pre-K monitoring and evaluation. It is important to note that this brief did not include information about federal programs such as Head Start or locally funded pre-K programs, which have their own monitoring requirements. The textbox below, “Methods,” describes the methodology of the survey in more detail.

States reported the following:

- what data are collected for monitoring purposes,
- whether monitoring data is required by state policy,
- how monitoring information is collected (e.g. site visits or paper audits),
- how monitoring information is used for program improvement, and
- whether the state conducted a formal evaluation of the prekindergarten program to measure quality and effectiveness, including whether the evaluation is mandated by state policy.

METHODS

Data in the Yearbooks were collected primarily through surveys of state preschool administrators, with follow-up interviews and reviews of documents as needed. In the summer of 2006 and 2012, NIEER staff contacted state preschool administrators and asked them to complete a survey asking for information for the most recently completed program year. Data from 2006—the first year in which monitoring questions were asked—were collected using surveys and, as needed, follow-up interviews. In 2012, data were collected using a web-based survey that included the previous year’s data and asked the administrators to verify and update the responses.

After the surveys were completed, staff followed up with state administrators to clarify any questions about their responses and major changes from the previous year. Later, respondents were asked to review and verify all of the data from their state survey, as well as the narrative about their program.[1]

[1] For a full explanation of the specific methodology used in collecting all data, please see the Methodology section of the 2012 report online at http://www.nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2012_methodology.pdf.

⁹ Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012.

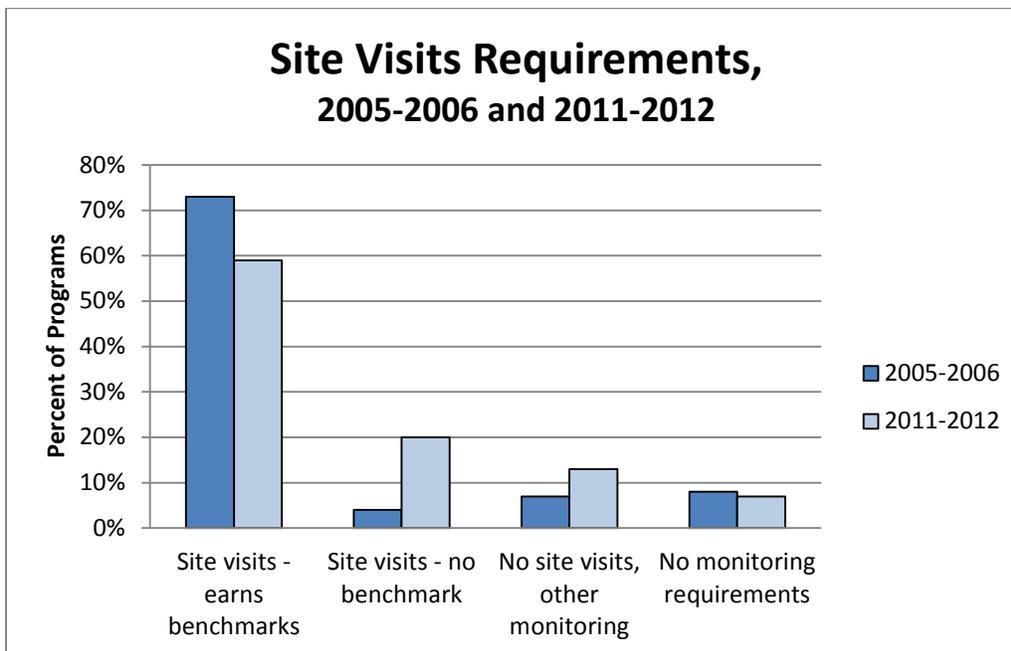
FINDINGS

MOST STATE PRE-K PROGRAMS REQUIRE MONITORING BUT DECLINES SEEN IN SITE VISIT REQUIREMENTS

In 2012, all but four (7%) of the state-funded programs required some form of monitoring, though 7 (13%) did not require any site visits by state staff or consultants. Therefore, seven programs had no independent observations or program quality monitoring. Another 11 (20%) programs required site visits, but did not meet the NIEER benchmark requirement to make site visits at least once in a five-year cycle. Nonetheless, 32 (59%) fully met the NIEER benchmark of requiring a site visit to monitor quality in every program at least once in a five-year cycle (See Figure 1).

The percentage of programs that met this benchmark dropped between 2006, when the data were first collected, and 2012. As Figure 1 illustrates, in 2006, 73% of the 48 state-funded pre-K programs in existence required site visits that met the NIEER benchmark. A number of programs met the NIEER benchmark in 2006, but no longer met it in 2012.

Figure 1: Percent of State Pre-K Programs that Required Site Visits in 2005-06 and 2011-2012



The programs that failed to meet the benchmark in 2012 included those with no laws or regulations requiring site visits, some that required visits only to a sample of programs, and others that required LEAs visit programs, but without state oversight. Examples of the variation among programs that did not meet the benchmark in 2012 are presented in the box below, “Nearly There: Examples of Pre-K Programs that Require Site Visits but Fall Short.”

**Nearly There: Examples of Pre-K Programs that Require Site Visits
but Fall Short**

Michigan

The Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP) was established in 1985 to provide preschool education to at-risk 4-year-olds and is directly aligned with the state’s early childhood initiative, Project Great Start. In Fall 2008, MSRP became known as the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP). The MSRP does not meet the monitoring benchmark because Michigan conducts site visits only for sites with identified problems or special issues. The state reports that visits are conducted until the program meets the required standards. State capacity for on-site monitoring is limited by staff and funding, though child care centers are subject to licensing visits every other year. Information collected includes staff qualifications, anonymous child eligibility data, program quality assessment data, and financial information.

Vermont

Vermont has two programs that do not meet the monitoring benchmark. The Vermont Public Preschool Act 62 program, created in 2003 and renamed in 2006, allows the Agency of Education and the Department of Children and Families staff to conduct unannounced visits. About 10 are completed annually. All pre-K programs must meet child care licensing regulations and receive regular licenser visits to ensure they are in compliance with these regulations. Nonetheless, this program does not meet the monitoring benchmark because the state does not conduct site visits at least once every five years.

The Vermont Early Education Initiative (EEI), established in 1987, requires each provider to submit data annual child progress data. Monitoring information is collected through annual reports to the states and full applications once every three years. State policy does not require monitoring for EEI, except financial reports and a program's annual report, including child progress data. In previous years, DOE staff and representatives from other EEI programs performed joint monitoring visits on a three-year cycle, a practice discontinued due to insufficient resources. DOE staff may conduct unannounced site visits.

Pre-K Programs Required to Collect Range of Data

In 2012, states required pre-K programs to collect and report a range of data for monitoring program quality. Among the 52 existing programs, the programs were most commonly asked to collect data on children’s learning, but nearly as many programs were required to collect program records. Table 1 indicates that the same percentage of programs required structured observations as required programs to submit documentation on facilities and safety procedures. The least common type of data collected was information about participation in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Currently 31 states have a QRIS; while state laws regarding pre-K participation in QRIS’ vary, only Arkansas, Delaware,

Louisiana LA4, New Mexico’s public programs, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and DC required pre-K programs to report data on participation in a QRIS.¹⁰

Table 1: Percent of Pre-K Programs by Type of Data Collected

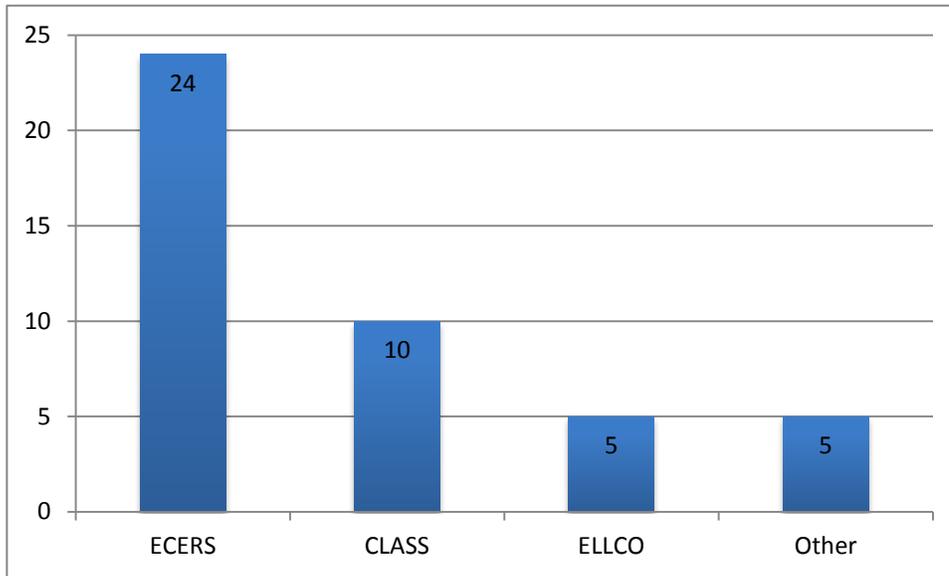
Types of Data Collected	Percent of programs (out of 52 total)
Children's learning and/or child outcomes	74%
Program record	67%
Structured observations of classroom quality	63%
Program facilities and safety procedures	63%
Documentation of program-level outcomes	59%
Results of program self-assessments	50%
Other	28%
Participation in a state quality rating system	20%
State policy does not require information for monitoring purposes	11%

States reported that pre-K programs used a range of structured observation instruments to assess classroom quality. Chart 3 indicates that the most common assessment instrument used by pre-K programs in 2012 was the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS or ECERS-R). This rating scale was developed as a global measure of child care center classroom quality, and assesses the physical environment, basic care, curriculum, interaction, schedule and program structure, and parent and staff education. In contrast, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) focuses on emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support of the classroom. Within each of these domains, interactions are further organized to examine how teachers interact with children to develop warm relationships that promote children’s enjoyment of the classroom community, and how teachers interact with children to promote higher-order thinking and cognition. The ELLCO assesses effectiveness of literacy instruction that takes into account the physical classroom environment and teacher-child interactions that facilitate language learning and literacy. Other observational tools that

¹⁰ QRIS Learning Network (2013). *State QRIS Contact Information*. Retrieved from <http://grisnetwork.org/state-gris-contacts>

states require include environmental rating scales for younger children and state-developed tools aligned with their early learning standards.

Chart 3: Number of Programs Requiring Observation Measures



Most Pre-K Programs Use Information to Guide Training and Professional Development, but Uses of Monitoring Data Vary

As Table 2 indicates, states reported that the monitoring data pre-K programs collected were most commonly used to improve program and teaching quality, by guiding professional development and technical assistance. About two-thirds of all programs reported that monitoring data are used to take corrective actions or sanctions, and about half report that data is used to make funding decisions about programs or grantees, or to implement changes in state policy regarding the preschool program.

Table 2: How Pre-K Programs Use Monitoring Information

How Programs Use Monitoring Information	Percent
To guide teacher training or professional development	85%
To provide program staff with technical assistance and/or mentoring	70%
To identify programs for corrective action or sanctions	67%
To make changes to state policies regarding the preschool program	59%
To make funding decisions about programs or grantees	52%
To adjust curricula	41%

To provide feedback to parents	30%
To measure program on a QRIS	20%
Other	7%

About half use monitoring data to make funding decisions. In, “State Policies Vary on Use of Program Quality Monitoring Data,” below, we provide two examples from states with very different approaches to using monitoring data.

State Policies Vary on Use of Program Quality Monitoring Data for High Stakes

Florida

The Florida Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) Education Program was created from a 2002 state constitutional amendment requiring pre-K access for all of Florida’s 4-year-olds. More than 80 percent of children are served in non-public school settings, such as child care centers, Head Start, and faith-based programs. While large, the program met only three benchmarks in the 2011-2012 year.

VPK has been assessed annually, based on the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener (FLKRS), administered within the first 30 days of kindergarten, comparing both children and programs that participated in VPK to those that did not. VPK-only providers characterized as “low-performing” based on the FLKRS received needs assessments and improvement plans; community coalitions provide follow up, mentoring, and technical assistance to these providers as needed, to make adjustments to their curriculum and implementation in the classrooms. Providers can lose funding if they do not improve.

Legislation adopted in 2011 assesses satisfactory delivery of the VPK program by measuring provider and school kindergarten readiness rates against targets set by the State Board of Education. As part of this effort, all providers are required to administer the Florida VPK assessment as of the 2012-2013 school year. Results from the first and third assessment periods will be collected and used as a pre- and post-assessment to measure learning gains. The results of the VPK assessment will be used to tailor improvement plans for “low-performing providers” who have fallen below the state-set targets.

Oklahoma

The Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year Old Program, established in 1980, meets nine of the 10 benchmarks. The state requires monitoring through site visits to identify programs for corrective action and to make state policy changes. Uses of child-level assessments are determined locally, but state policy requires that the results of child assessments *not* be used for high-stakes decisions regarding children. The state encourages programs to consider using the data to identify needs that will guide teacher training or professional development, track child and program-level outcomes over time, and provide a measure of kindergarten readiness.

Many State Pre-K Programs Were Not Evaluated in 2012

In 2012, 23 (43%) of the 40 state-funded pre-K programs were not evaluated formally for quality and effectiveness. Of the programs that were evaluated, four focused on process indicators (such as child-teacher interactions and other qualities measured often through observation¹¹); four focused on program impact and child outcomes; and 23 focused on both process and impact. The way states used evaluation results varied substantially, with some states collecting and reporting process, program quality, and child outcome data regularly to a variety of stakeholders; and others eliminating evaluation requirements in the future. A number of states had funded evaluations in previous years, but due to state budget cuts, are not currently evaluating the program. See, “Evaluation to Inform Policy and Practice” for how two states used Pre-K program evaluation to inform policy and practice.

Evaluation to Inform Policy and Practice

Colorado Preschool Program Evaluation Informs State Policy

The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) was evaluated to assess program impact on children’s learning and school progress in 2011-2012 using data from the child and family data system and analyses of other longitudinal data collected by the Colorado Department of Education.

Results are reported to the Colorado Legislature through an annual report provided at the commencement of each legislative session, and the Lieutenant Governor’s office submits an annual report to the Governor’s office based on the child assessment data. Colorado’s Results Matter system collects data on child and family outcomes for children ages birth to 5 to use in assessing children’s learning and development. Provider effectiveness is rated based on parents surveys, student assessments in grades K to 5, retention rates, and program quality ratings. The system uses innovative web-based technology to efficiently collect and analyze child outcomes data, giving teachers immediate feedback on child responses to instruction and intervention. Data are collected on the following domains of children’s development: social-emotional language, literacy, math, science, creative arts, physical development, and approaches to learning. State policy required programs to use *Teaching Strategies GOLD* or *HighScope COR*, to measure child outcomes in 2011-2012.

Child assessment results are analyzed over time, to study the long-term benefits of participating in early care and education opportunities. Elements include following the number of children who have been retained, who require an Individual Literacy Plan, who exit special education, or graduate. In addition, child outcome data is linked with existing program quality information, such as Qualistar Ratings (the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System), NAEYC accreditation, and environmental rating scale

¹¹ Espinosa, L. (2002). *High-quality preschool: Why we need it and what it looks like*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved from <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/1.pdf>

results. Finally, a system of direct training and training-for-trainers provides participants with information and skills in observation, documentation, assessment, using data for instructional and intervention planning, and using data for local program improvement.

New Mexico

The New Mexico Pre-K program was in its sixth year of operation in 2011-2012. About half of the 4,591 enrolled children attended programs in public schools while the other half were served in nonpublic settings, such as faith-based centers, community and municipal child care centers, Head Start programs, family child care homes, and universities.

New Mexico uses annual site visits by state personnel or consultants, in conjunction with program information submitted to the state throughout the year (including results of child assessments), to monitor quality. New Mexico Pre-K had been formally evaluated on an annual basis through 2009 for process quality and program impact/child outcomes, using child outcome data and classroom observation data. (The detailed evaluation report is available at: <http://nieer.org/pdf/new-mexico-initial-4-years.pdf>.) However, planned formal evaluation for subsequent years was discontinued in the 2010-2011 school year, due to financial constraints.

Conclusion and Recommendations

State responses to the recent recession negatively affected the capacity of state staff to monitor the quality of pre-K programs, and to track outcomes through program evaluations.¹² Despite what is known about the importance of high quality for positive program effects on children’s learning and development, many states lack legislative or regulatory requirements to ensure state agencies collect and use data to improve the quality of their programs. To ensure that programs are highly effective, states will need to invest in the human and organizational resources required for continuous quality improvement efforts, including strong monitoring systems.¹³

We recommend that state policymakers and leaders consider the following actions.

- **When Faced with Difficult Budget Allocation Constraints, Preserve Monitoring.** The quality of pre-K education significantly determines the resulting benefits for children. Learning and development gains, as well as later state cost-savings from reduced school failure and other long-term benefits to children, communities, and the state economy, depend on quality. When states eliminate evaluation and monitoring, they reduce their capacity to ensure accountability

¹² Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012.

¹³ Frede, E.C., Gilliam, W.S., & Schweinhart, L.J. (2011). Assessing accountability and ensuring continuous program improvement: Why, how, and who. In E. Zilger, W. S. Gilliam, & W. S. Barnett (Eds.), *The Pre-K Debates: Current Controversies & Issues* (152-162). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

and measure the extent to which pre-K is achieving the state's goals for children. This puts all of the promised gains from pre-K at risk.

- **Monitor What Is Important: Conduct On-Site Observations of Adult-Child Interactions and Child Progress.** Observed classroom quality, particularly the quality of adult-child interaction, is correlated with improvements in children's learning and development.¹⁴ It is important that state policymakers support the use of observational measures that focus on educational interactions. Assessments of children's learning and development on a representative sample of children can be used to assess the extent to which children leaving pre-K are prepared to succeed in school. As part of an appropriately designed evaluation, such data can provide additional insights into pre-K program performance and selecting a representative sample can be more cost efficient than assessing the entire population of children served. File reviews, desk audits, and annual reports may still be necessary for compliance purposes, but should not replace on-site classroom observations and child assessment.
- **Invest in Comprehensive Assessment Systems that Provide Data to Drive Improvement.** Using data to inform instruction, policy, and practice is associated with improvements in teaching and student learning.¹⁵ As policymakers consider allocating resources to monitoring systems, it is important to link data collection with provider and program objectives, and allocate adequate resources to support using data for continuous improvement. This includes supporting professional development and opportunities for reflection on the data to ensure that program administrators, supervisors, professional development staff, and teachers use data as part of a continuous improvement system.
- **SEAs Should Offer Monitoring Guidance and Support to Pre-K Programs even when LEAs control monitoring.** States that give LEAs authority over specific requirements for instruments or processes, guidance, technical assistance, and support from the SEA can nonetheless support using monitoring data to drive the continuous quality improvement process, through policy guidance, technical assistance, and budget allocations.

¹⁴ Moiduddin, E., Aikens, N., Tarullo, L., West, J., & Xue, Y. (2012). *Child outcomes and classroom quality in FACES 2009. OPRE Report 2012-37a*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/faces_2009.pdf

¹⁵ Wayman, J. C. (2005). Involving teachers in data-driven decision-making: Using computer data systems to support teacher inquiry and reflection. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 10(3), 295–308; Wayman, J. C., Cho, V., & Johnston, M. T. (2007). *The data-informed district: A district-wide evaluation of data use in the Natrona County School District*. Austin: The University of Texas; Wohlstetter, P., Datnow, A., & Park, V. (2008). Creating a system for data-driven decision-making: Applying the principal-agent framework. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19(3), 239–259.

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