

# E2C Hub Research Advisory Committee Meeting

Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2025

Members Attending	Agency Staff Attending
Abbie Anderson Alex Mayer Amaris Kinne Anne McKenzie Brian Gill Christopher Cleveland Dan Goldhaber Kate Giapponi Schneider Jeremiah Johnson Mark Melnik Monnica Chan Penny Hasseli Sarah Cohodes Shanette Porter Shaun Dougherty	Amy Checkoway Ashley White Danielle Kane David Bogojevich Ellen Song Mario Delci Matt Deninger Sam Ribnick Symantha Clough

## General Updates

1. Reminder of governance and decision-making structure
  - a. Your voices are heard and shared with leadership. With RAC feedback, we have:
    - i. Formed a Student and Family Voice Committee
    - ii. Drafted and are close to publishing research agendas for education agencies
2. Open Data Day
  - a. This will be an in-person event at DESE offices in Everett, Tuesday, March 4. Modeled after hackathons, we'll connect data users, work with public aggregated datasets in the E2C Hub, build skills, and have good nerdy fun. It's part of international Open Data Day week. If this is not on your calendar, get a new calendar!
3. Research agendas
  - a. DESE and EEC research agendas are posted.
  - b. DHE's research agenda is being finalized and will be presented in February.
  - c. We will share in our newsletter when all three are posted online.
  - d. Ashley White: Now that EEC's research agenda is published, we are looking at how to make it most effective. How and where do we start promoting it, and engaging in the right conversations to form more research partnerships?
  - e. Where have you seen research agendas used effectively?

- i. Dan Goldhaber: I have seen where the research agenda helps to inform what things are prioritized internally — including in Massachusetts — but I sense you are talking about externally, including with the legislature, and I have not seen places make full use of research done with state data. It would be good to track when research has been published using state data in order to have a quick answer for policymakers when funding or program questions are raised. U.S. Department of Education has gotten a lot better at tracking what is done with its grants and datasets. States could do a better job on that front.
- ii. Sam Ribnick: This year we introduced an annual review. Next year, we talked about producing an annual report, and that can include research publications to give people a fuller picture of our outputs.
- iii. Alex Mayer: When it is done well, there is a vision of how the research will be used to inform decisions.
- iv. Monnica Chan: As another example, perhaps the way VA has woven in their state research agenda with their SLDS project approval process could be of interest? Have only seen this from the researcher side, and the research agenda there is a bit shorter / broader and more centralized. Part of the research project application asks researchers to identify which part of the research agenda their project fulfills.

#### 4. Wage data match

- a. Sam: One of the researchers noticed more recent cohorts of graduates had fewer matches with wage data. We discovered a data crosswalk file between student IDs and SSNs is not getting updated. We have been working on a lot of different avenues to get that crosswalk updated. We are matching high school graduates who go on to higher education, but K-12 graduates who don't go on to higher ed are not getting matched because we don't have their SSNs. If you see a need for this data, we encourage you to let your agency contacts know.

#### 5. Industry Recognized Credentials

- a. Talking with staff at the Department of Economic Research and Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. We are jointly working toward a six-month project to get three datasets:
  - i. On the supply side, how many people with credentials already?
  - ii. On the demand side, how many jobs are looking for candidates with IRCs?
  - iii. How many new certificates given out through high school pathways, adult education, higher education and other places that award IRCs?
  - iv. Discussion:
    - 1. Anne: Are we sure that the Regional Workforce Skills Development cabinet doesn't collect this already? Each one has data subcommittee, and they include K-12, higher ed, and business.
    - 2. Penny: We're part one of those blueprint planning groups for Boston, and we can connect you. We are mandated to collect this information. A warning about construction: they hire differently

and don't use job postings, so we don't see an accurate representation of construction industry in the data.

6. Research Proposal Submission Portal
  - a. We have made a lot of progress in getting this online but we had a recent setback with a staff departure. We are close to having it ready for researcher use.
7. Hiring for Research and Equity Specialist
  - a. We will soon be posting for this contract role, along with an assistant director/project lead (contractor) for the E2C Hub. We will let you know when they are posted on MassCareers and ask you to share.
8. Data Stories
  - a. We are close to publishing two data stories on the E2C Hub that we began last year:
    - i. Community College Enrollment with MassReconnect
    - ii. End-of-year College and Career Outcomes Report, mandated by state law
  - b. On the schedule for 2025:
    - i. Universal PreK expansion
    - ii. High School pathways and workforce development
    - iii. Early literacy screeners
      1. DESE engaged with WestEd as a partner as the screeners rolled out. Districts are not using same screening tools, so it's been a process trying to align data.
    - iv. College costs: net tuition and fees trends
    - v. Discipline by race, gender, and disability
    - vi. Wage data insights
      1. Contingent on fixing the data match problem
  - c. Discussion:
    - i. Chris Cleveland: How do you decide what topics become a data story?
    - ii. Sam: The list comes from our leadership group — executives and board members at each agency — based on policy priorities in year ahead.
    - iii. Shanette Porter: I would add chronic absenteeism, and staff attendance.
      1. We have done a data story on chronic absenteeism. We don't currently collect staff attendance data statewide.

## Research enclave

We are exploring two ideas that are related and want to hear your ideas and feedback on what is going to be valuable for researchers. It's a possibility that we won't go ahead or that we will but with care to make sure we don't create new problems.

1. Research Enclave
  - a. Similar to systems used by UChicago "NORC" and ADRF
2. Public Research Files

- a. Using synthetic or noised non-confidential data to help researchers learn about data without the need for an MOU

### 3. Discussion

- a. Dan: I don't think there is a real benefit to providing data quickly. But assuring people the data are safe, I see that as a benefit as a reality and to counter crazy rhetoric. On the downside to the Research Enclave, any time you do any little subtle thing that is different, you have to go through a new approval process. It slows things done, along with other clunkiness of enclave.
- b. Chris: Researchers are requesting more merging of identifiable records, not solved by research enclave. What would reduce burden on state time? Look to solve that first. Is the state interested in reducing ways researchers are storing data to increase security? Sam: Yes, security is an issue, but it hasn't been a problem to date. Is it worthwhile to solve a problem preemptively that hasn't come up?
- c. Jeremiah: Public trust is a benefit. As a potential benefit, maybe the enclave would let us assume a slightly higher degree of risk in linking data the state hasn't before. Maybe the enclave is appropriate for certain kinds of research?
- d. Chris: Enclaves often have associated costs. Who will pay?
- e. Sarah: I see a lot of the benefits come from having *either* the current system, *or* the enclave. But given complications, I worry DESE ends up supporting *both* and gets no gains from simplification.
- f. Dan: Look up research by John Abowd. There's a debate how synthetic data affects research results. The feds devoted a lot of research to figure this out, if debate is still going on, it's probably not worth moving ahead.
- g. Jeremiah: I'm hearing two goals: 1. Provide data that is secure, and 2. train a bigger group of researchers. Not sure those two are compatible.
- h. Alex: The public research files option feels like it might have more limited use and more limited growth, while the enclave might have more possibilities.
- i. Monnica: Is a third path (the status quo) no longer on the table? There will be certain projects logistically where an enclave can simplify bureaucracy, but other projects may be smaller where it would be easier to work directly. Do you want us to pick a path or should we help you think of scenarios where one path will be more helpful than others?
- j. Chris: I think the research request portal is a helpful tool, and increased clarity on data systems that are available and how those files are organized, the researchers guide and data collection protocols—these are the materials that can help facilitate researcher access and reduce agency burden in answering questions. The researcher enclave may not be high on the list of priorities.
- k. Dan: In Louisiana, you have to travel to the state to use state data. If privacy advocates come forward and say you have to do something, then the enclave might work, but I'm not hearing you say anything like that.
- l. Sam: I'm hearing no support for synthetic data, no support for public research files to help researchers learn the data, and more work to do on

research enclave idea. There may be reasons that it may be right solution for right data.

## Vision for researcher involvement

Review of E2C Hub vision and key components, which involves researchers as advisors on evidence-based policymaking. How much culture change is possible/needed? If we can get to a strong future of data and policy research used by policymakers, what does it look like?

1. Alex: On the vision statement, we need a clear connection between the research you're looking for and how it will be used. That feels critical to me.
2. Chris shared example of agency/researcher collaboration:
  - a. Research agenda items developed and prioritized by agency staff, legislators, and researchers.
    - i. Need to determine who drives
    - ii. Putting topics on the list
    - iii. Need to decide which topics are in scope
    - iv. Need to determine when topics should be on the table
  - b. Prioritization approach for the agency's research agenda:
    - i. agency will do research itself
    - ii. agency issues rfp for research
    - iii. addressed by outside researchers for free in response to public research agenda
    - iv. research less aligned with research agenda and is approved
  - c. Mostly been engaged in research the agency considers important but not urgent and has been working with programmatic decision-makers on a few different projects. Our access to the data enables those conversations to happen.
3. Dan: It's work in MA that I would point to as feeling successful. I can't tell if it's structural or the people. 1. It's helpful not to have research questions framed in very high stakes ways. So instead of "it worked" or "it didn't," instead, can we say, "Can it work better" and "under what conditions"? 2. Create a partnership where there are no surprises. Researchers can say, "It's a good question, but I worry about what if we find..." and lay out the potential downside.
4. Kate: I have worked in consulting with many other states and MA has been most rewarding relationships. We meet every other week, discuss interim results, are in close communication, and have no surprises. It's easier to get data sharing agreements here as well.
5. Alex: In California, we are working to add math requirement to admissions:
  - a. <https://www.mdrc.org/work/publications/how-data-analysis-helped-california-state-university-make-important-decision>.
  - b. Here's a report we did looking at how a few states used evidence and barriers: [https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/E2ABrief\\_1.7.pdf](https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/E2ABrief_1.7.pdf)

- c. <https://www.mdrc.org/work/blogs/college-completion-strategy-guide/evidence-standards>
- 6. Shaun: A culture of research is well established across EEC, DESE, and DHE, which is not something that prevails across all states.
- 7. Amy: This just came out — there are some good nuggets that are not at all early education specific: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/How-to-Build-and-Strengthen-Partnerships-between-CCDF-Lead-Agencies-and-Early-Care-and-Education-Researchers.pdf>
- 8. Where do you want to see researchers getting involved?
  - a. Dan: Earlier is better for two reasons:
    - i. From the research design perspective, it increases confidence in the answers you are getting.
    - ii. When something new is being implemented, there is more consensus or thought on the types of outcomes and magnitude of outcomes desired from the program. Researchers can help define the different outcomes and how big the outcomes can be to align with expectations.
  - b. Jeremiah: Think of how we can leverage agency superpower to convene. Think of us as a community. The best way to shorten the distance between question and answer is to connect people, not data.
  - c. Amy: This is an active topic within the early ed community as well.
  - d. Monnica: Who will do the research? E2C Hub may get requests, but there are a lot of policy-adjacent entities in Massachusetts that have been in this space for a long time. It's important to consider the amount of time and the quality of the research needed to inform decision making.
  - e. Chris: Different types of research to support a state agency's policymaking decisions:
    - i. Foundation Setting: What do we know about [this topic] in our context?
      - 1. Landscape Analysis
      - 2. Descriptive Study
    - ii. Possibility Reviews: What is happening in other states we should consider?
      - 1. Literature Review
      - 2. Policy/Practice Scan
    - iii. Assessing the System: How is what we have/had in place impacting the things we care about?
      - 1. Impact Analysis
      - 2. ROI Analysis
    - iv. Making Change Plans: What if we tried something different in our state?
      - 1. Experimentation
      - 2. Implementation Study
      - 3. Program Evaluation

- v. Framework credit to <https://wheelockpolicycenter.org/>
- f. Dan: Something that Carrie and I worked on related to this discussion:  
<https://direct.mit.edu/edfp/article/15/2/383/65042/Appropriate-Standards-of-Evidence-for-Education>
- g. Additional resources:
  - i. Conaway, C., Keesler, V., & Schwartz, N. (2015). What Research Do State Education Agencies Really Need? The Promise and Limitations of State Longitudinal Data Systems. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(1\_suppl), 16S-28S.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373715576073>
  - ii. [Brokering in Education Research-Practice Partnerships: A Guide for Edu](#)