Increasing Family Access and System Coordination Through Coordinated Eligibility and Enrollment – Part 1

Wei-Bing Chen:

Hi, everyone, and welcome to this video series about increasing family access and system coordination through coordinated eligibility and enrollment, or CEE. This is the first of three episodes, and today, we're going to talk about the what and the why of CEE. My name is Wei-Bing Chen, and this is my colleague, Howard Morrison. To learn more about us, you can scan the QR code to connect with us on LinkedIn. You can also follow SRI on LinkedIn and subscribe to SRI EDU News by scanning the QR code.

Howard Morrison:

So we're here to share some highlights of what we know about CEE from our years of supporting states and local communities and their CEE efforts and from our national learning community that we recently hosted. So this community included seven states, three local communities, and 24 participants that met between October 2023 and March 2024 to on shared learning, SRI, and peer-led presentations, and topical problems of practice. We will share examples from many of these communities as we go. So Wei-Bing, can you tell us, in a nutshell, what is coordinated eligibility and enrollment?

Wei-Bing Chen:

Absolutely. So CEE is a system-building strategy that states and local communities can use to build a more robust and interconnected support system for children and families. It falls under a broader umbrella of what we consider to be system coordination efforts, and these can include things like aligning program standards and program eligibility, coordinating funding through blending and braiding, and building integrated data systems. CEE also requires partnership across the programs and services that are participating, and where the level of partnership can really vary, it can range from relatively light touch partnership, in the form of communication and cooperation, to much more in-depth partnership in order to integrate services, for instance.

Partners can also work together on a range of enrollment activities. They can decide that they are really only interested in jointly recruiting and marketing to families. They may also decide that they want to actually fully coordinate enrollment into a defined set of programs. We'll say more about this in a minute.

Howard Morrison:

So there are a few main reasons why a state or local community should implement CEE.

Wei-Bing Chen:

So when you do CEE, families have easier and more equitable access to services. This is because there's one place for them to go, usually a website these days, to learn about what's available to them, to apply for services, and to have eligibility determined in one process. Access is more equitable whenever barriers to entry are reduced and all families use the same clear and transparent process to access the same pool of services. In our learning community, First 5 Alameda County was planning to build a CEE system explicitly to increase equity and access to services for families.

Howard Morrison:

So when you use CEE, rather than compete, providers collaborate with each other as their main strategy for maintaining full enrollment. So the use of CEE means that providers have equal access to a large pool of families looking for services, and once enough momentum is built and enough providers are part of a system that families go to almost exclusively to that network to seek services, even more providers will join the region, join that network to avoid being left out. And so this is what we saw happen in Ready Region West in Virginia.

Wei-Bing Chen:

Coordination and partnership also allow for better use of public resources, because there's less redundancy in the application and enrollment process. Excuse me. In some communities that choose to match families to a single provider through what we call a single best fit matching process, public dollars are used even more efficiently, because through that matching process, the overall needs of the community are being taken into consideration at the same time as the needs of individual families.

Howard Morrison:

So now that we know the why, let's talk a little bit about how you can coordinate eligibility enrollment. So there's a continuum of program enrollment processes that you can coordinate. So these include outreach and recruitment, application or intake, eligibility determination, selection or matching, and enrollment. In coordinating enrollment processes, some communities may choose to tackle only joint outreach and recruitment, while others may aim to create a common application for a certain set of programs. Still, others may want to fully coordinate enrollment into a set of programs, meaning that selection of a program must occur, and families may even be matched with a single best fit provider as we previously described. So Wei-Bing, could you share a few examples of those for us?

Wei-Bing Chen:

Sure. So we know that Colorado is working on a common application for mixed delivery of their new universal preschool program, and their goal is to have parents be able to apply for UPK as delivered through multiple settings, including school-based, preschool, childcare, and Head Start all in the same place. We also know that Ready Region West in Virginia, which has been doing CEE for quite some time, that they have a system where parents go online to fill out a common application for a pool of programs. Eligibility is jointly determined, and available providers that a family is eligible for are identified. Then, the families choose which of the providers are the best fit for them. In some systems like this, families have to submit additional paperwork once they've identified the provider they want to enroll with, but in others, the initial application is quite extensive, so they don't have to.

Howard Morrison:

That's it for today. Stay tuned for our next video, episode two, which will focus on the multiple approaches to CEE, where to begin, and some key decisions to make. In the meantime, though, SRI has a number of resources about CEE that you can check out. Here's where you can also learn more about SRI Education and some of the other work that we do. Thanks for joining us.

Wei-Bing Chen:

Thanks. See you next time.