DaSy Talks
Episode 1 Transcript

Howard Morrison:

Welcome to DaSy Talks, real talk for states, by states. Brought to you by the Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems, known as the DaSy Center. We're all about using data to make a big difference for young children with disabilities and their families.

The DaSy Talks podcast series will highlight the great work happening in the Part C and Part B 619 programs across the country, covering a variety of topics. In this first episode, we're going to kick off DaSy Talks by sharing one of DaSy's foundational resources. In the following episodes, you'll hear from states. Be sure to follow us so that you never miss an episode, and if you like what you hear, leave us a review. Let's get into it. I'm Howard Morrison.

Jenna Nguyen:

And I'm Jenna Nguyen.

Howard Morrison:

And we're your DaSy Talks podcast hosts. Today we're talking about the DaSy data system framework, referred to as the DaSy framework, which is used to assist IDEA Part C and Part B 619 programs to develop and improve high quality state data systems for IDEA data. Joining us is Kathy Hebbeler, senior principal education researcher at SRI. Welcome to the DaSy Talks podcast, Kathy.

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Thanks Howard. It's so nice to be here with you and Jenna.

Jenna Nguyen:

Hi Kathy. Before we get into the topic, we just want to say good day-ta to you, a quick data pun. We're thrilled to kick off the DaSy Talks podcast with you, Kathy, as our first guest, and since we are all about data here at the DaSy Center, let's start off by asking you a fun question. How did you unknowingly use data today?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

When I woke up this morning, as I often do, the first thing I did was look at the weather to see what the temperature was now, and what it's going to be later.

Jenna Nguyen:

And you're in California, Kathy, how is the weather today?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

The weather actually is not bad. We're going to go into the low nineties, which for where I live is quite nice.

Jenna Nguyen:

Wow, low nineties. That sounds warm. So Kathy, as we jump in, what excites you about the DaSy data system framework?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

There is so much that excites me about the data framework. The data system framework is like a key that unlocks a box. In the box are state superpowers. The power to have high-quality programs for children and families, the power to report timely and valid data to the federal government, the power to make database arguments about why the program should be funded and why they need more funding. The superpower unlocked by the framework is that the state team will have high-quality data on programs, and the children and families that those programs are serving. There's just so much in the framework for states to use.

Howard Morrison:

Great. Kathy, I love how you kind of framed that, especially for states, as they're kind of thinking about using this as kind of a key to unlock the potential of enhancing and improving their data systems. Which kind of leads me to our next question, is can you share, big picture, why DaSy created the DaSy data system framework, and a little bit about what it is?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Sure. Well, let's start with what is a framework, because I'm not sure it's something most people think much about. A framework is a way of thinking about something. In this case, what we want states to be thinking about is their data system. High quality data are powerful, but there's a lot of work that has to occur for a state to be able to get to the point where they have high-quality data. That's where the framework comes in.

One of the things I want to point out is the framework has an unusual usage of the phrase data system. The framework uses data system to refer to the entire package that's required for state to have high-quality data. That's the hardware, that's the programming, the processes and the procedures required to collect, analyze, and report the data. The framework addresses the entire system that's required to be able to have and use data, and it actually might be better thought of as not the data system as much as the system of data.

DaSy created the framework to help states understand what high-quality looks like in a data system, with, obviously, the ultimate goal of helping states put all those necessary pieces in place, to be able to use data to improve programs for children and families. I do want to mention that the DaSy data system framework is part of the larger ECTA framework, the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center's system framework. That framework defines quality for the overall system of services, the entire system, and one component of that is the data system. And that's the DaSy data system framework.

Howard Morrison:

So Kathy, you talked about data systems and the verbiage around that. Can you share a little bit about what some of those key components are within the framework?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Certainly, yeah. The data system has five what we call subcomponents, and I'm going to walk through each one and I'll tell you a little bit about it. The first subcomponent is purpose and vision. Purpose and

vision refers to a written statement of, as you would expect, the purpose of the data system and its intended benefits. Purpose and vision also includes a general description of what kinds of data are being collected, and how they will be used.

Second subcomponent. Second subcomponent is data governance and management. Data governance is about decision-making authority. It's about policies and procedures. What's interesting is that all states have data governance, but in some states that data governance is what we call informal, and that is generally not good. You want data governance to be formalized. So this subcomponent helps states be intentional about establishing good data governance and good management practices.

Our third subcomponent is system design and development. This is the one that is about the hardware, the data system, what most people think of as the data system. It addresses the functional and technical requirements for database applications, and really digs deep into what one needs to have and to do around building a data system. States that are thinking about a new data system or a major enhancement to an existing system should definitely look at the system design and development subcomponent.

That brings us to our fourth, that's data analysis and use. This one helps states think through what needs to be in place to be able to make regular use of all that marvelous data that they've been collecting. This one is the culmination, and it's where states get to exercise their superpower by using that data.

Finally, we have the last component, and that's sustainability of the data system. As we know, programs and technology are never static. They are always changing, always evolving. States need to be able to address those evolving needs and those changing conditions, and that's where sustainability comes in. They need to be intentional about thinking how to enhance, how to sustain their data system, because if they don't, their data superpowers will be very short-lived.

Howard Morrison:

Great, thanks Kathy. It was so great hearing about the different components within the DaSy data framework. And you talked about states, and so I'd like to dig in a little bit and see if you can share a little bit more about the DaSy framework, and who it's for, and how they use it.

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Sure. It was designed for states, particularly the early intervention and the early childhood special education state staff. The state teams in different states, or different sizes have different teams, but it is for those state staff.

What we want to say to state staff is you can use the framework in many different ways. The first thing I would advise someone to do is read it. Sit down, look it over. If you don't have time to read it, just skim it. But skim it with the intent of understanding what the key pieces of a data system are, and more importantly, or equally importantly, what high quality looks like. So this is what your data system should have.

We know that state staff have so many responsibilities, and we certainly know that it's really hard to take on one more thing. But that system for producing high-quality data is critical to having high-quality programs for children and families. So try to carve out some time out of your busy schedule to look at your overall data system, and then bit by bit, pun intended, try to make it better.

States can pick a subcomponent or two to work on as part of a data system improvement process. There is absolutely no reason to try to address the entire framework at once. Start with a component that is highest priority, or the most manageable, so you can get an easy win early on.

A really helpful tool for states is the companion document to the framework called the self-assessment. The self-assessment is designed to be used by a state team, and to work through each of the elements of quality in the framework. There's a four-point scale for each element, and the state team looks at, reads, discusses the element of quality, and then reaches a consensus rating as to where they are right now on that element.

And then there's a space for documenting the rationale for why you gave that rating. And that's helpful, especially if you come back later and try to say, "Huh, why did we think we weren't implementing that?" Or, "Why did we think we were implementing that?"

Another really nice feature, the self-assessment, is that it generates some really very easy to use and visually-engaging graphics, and that way the state team can see the highs and lows across the elements of quality, their rating. And from there, they can set the priorities for how to begin. And again, you can begin with working on just one or two elements, if that is all you have the bandwidth to do. But set the priorities, and from there, state teams can begin to work on improving their data system.

Jenna Nguyen:

Thanks, Kathy. Something that really stood out to me is, first of all, the analogy that you made about unlocking this information and harnessing this power that states can use, to make decisions based on their data. And you talked about what the framework is, who can be involved, who it's for, and can you talk about the process of the framework and completing it, and who should be involved in that process? Is it a state team who comes together to complete it doing the self-assessment, or even components at a time?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Yeah. Our advice is that it be a team, and as I said earlier, we know that state teams vary in size. Some states have what they would call a really large state team, and some states have a half-time person, and half-time coordinator, and possibly a half-time data manager.

Whoever your team is, the size of the team isn't really as important as that the team, or one person, if that's all you can manage, but that someone sits down and works through the process. Again, pick a place to start, and then start.

And the process of the self-assessment is, we have watched when state teams do it. It generates a lot of good discussion, and surprisingly, also, sometimes a lot of interesting insight into where different people on the team think the state is, or what that particular element is. Each person sees the data system from a very different perspective, and so one person will say, "Wow, we really are doing a good job." And another person will say, "No, we're not."

And that's the whole point, to get people talking, reflecting, thinking about the data system, and you're really dissecting it to quite a fine level when you get down to the elements. But those elements are the building blocks that together will allow the state to have a high-quality data system.

Jenna Nguyen:

Something I also just thought of is how you're hearing different perspectives, and if you're doing this taking a team-based approach, or even just doing at different time points, that gives really useful information, because especially in such a dynamic environment, you're gathering data at different time points to then be able to map out progress over time. Is there anything that you would want to add to that, or other outcomes to using the framework?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Yeah, thanks Jenna. The point about change over time is so important here, because that's really what ... It's not just the self-assessment that you do once, it's the self-assessment that you do six months later, and then you can celebrate those wins. States were able to see, "Wow, we've really moved from not implementing to partially implementing," or, "We've moved from partially implementing to fully implementing," and that's progress. And that's why doing this self-assessment more than once can be really helpful and very rewarding, because states get to see their progress.

Howard Morrison:

Yeah. Another thing I heard, Kathy, you talking about is just the, you don't have bite off more than you can chew to start off with. You can start off with one section, really kind of identify some of your areas for improvements and some of your strengths, and focus on that. And it can be from someone that's new in their role, or someone that's been in their role for multiple years but might be building out a new data system, or enhancing that. And so it's valuable for so many state staff in different stages and careers within their agency.

Kathleen Hebbeler:

That is one of the ways the framework can be especially helpful, because we know state staff come from a lot of different backgrounds, and some will have a lot more data experience than others. The framework's kind of an equalizer like that, because it allows everyone to kind of understand, "Well, this is what quality and data governance looks like, here's what we have to do." That's not, again, to say everybody has to work on it, because everyone's responsibility is not data governance, but ultimately the state needs to be able to have good data governance, and that's what the framework can help them do.

Howard Morrison:

Great. So let's say a state has gone through, reviewed the DaSy data framework, they've completed the self-assessment or a portion of it. What do states do after they've completed that, Kathy?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Then the work begins. We know how busy states are, and we know this is not an easy task. But we also know that having that good information is essential to the important work that state staff do every day for children and families. And having that good information depends on building the quality into all aspects of the state data system.

So as we've said, if you have to start small, start small. When you get through the self-assessment, you may not tackle what is necessarily the lowest-rated item. You may tackle something that gives you the win and is more doable, but do it. Improve your data governance, improve a piece of your data governance, if that's all you can do. Improve the reports that you are sharing with the public, take one report and make it better. But start somewhere, and then continue, after you accomplish that, continue to do the next one.

I think our message to states is basically just keep working to make your data system better, and don't lose sight of the goal of eventually being able to regularly use that data to unlock your superpower. And that's the superpower of having and using data for multiple purposes. It is the only way you will know if your programs are making a difference, and that's what the framework can help you do.

Jenna Nguyen:

I find that really hopeful. And you both have said this, Howard and Kathy, about just starting somewhere, not having to bite off more than you can chew. And the framework is really a tool to do that, and improving your data, accessing your data, collecting, analyzing, using your data, it's all part of this process that we engage in over time. So it gives me hope. And I'm curious, Kathy, what advice do you have for states as we kind of round out our discussion today?

Kathleen Hebbeler:

I'll kind of summarize. Look at the framework, read it, skim it, become familiar with what a good data system and what the components of a good data system are, and what quality looks like in a data system. And then find the wherewithal to actually take that deep, hard dive into your data system.

Start with a subcomponent, work through the self-assessment, develop a plan, after you finish the self-assessment, to tackle it. There isn't any way around it.

And also remember, DaSy is here to help. The self-assessment, the framework, they're standalone documents. You can do it on your own, but you don't have to do it on your own. We would be very happy to help you work through the self-assessment, very happy to help you design the action plan after you complete the self-assessment, and then to help you work on improving those components. So you don't have to go it alone. We're here, and we'd be happy to help.

Jenna Nguyen:

Love that. And I just wanted to add, too, that in our future podcast episodes, we will be talking to a couple of states who have used parts of the framework, so we can really kind of bring this to life.

Howard Morrison:

Great. Thanks so much, Kathy. I love kind of just getting started and diving in, and just taking one step at a time. That's so true, and I think just kind of a good mantra for state staff to keep in mind.

This has been so helpful, Kathy, and I know our listeners have learned so much from you today about the DaSy data framework and how they can use it at home. Thanks for joining us.

Jenna Nguyen:

Thank you so much, Kathy. It was so wonderful to talk to you.

Kathleen Hebbeler:

Thank you for having me.

Jenna Nguyen:

Thanks for joining us on the DaSy Talks podcast. Our guest today was Kathy Hebbeler from the DaSy Center. Learn more about Kathy and her work in today's show notes. You can find a transcript of today's show or browse our episodes by visiting dasycenter.org/podcast. You can also connect with us on social media with the links in today's show notes. The views expressed in today's podcast belong solely to the participants, and do not represent the views of DaSy or any organizational funder or partner. We'll see you next time.