**Hub Metrics & Hub Accountability**

**TO:** Early Learning Council

**FROM:** Early Learning Division staff

**RE:**  Recommendations from Measuring Success Committee to the Early Learning Council on Hub metrics and accountability

**DATE:**

**Overview:**

The Measuring Success Committee has been tasked with making recommendations to the Early Learning Council for the revision of the Hub metrics. This memo provides background on that work, as well as recommendations to the Early Learning Council on how to move forward with the Hub metrics. In addition to meeting and discussing this topic over the last six months, the Early Learning Division Hub Team has also solicited significant input and feedback from the Hubs on the current metrics. The ELD Hub Team has also been implementing a new Hub monitoring process over the course of this last year that provides a new in-depth picture of the work of the Hubs, and provides information and insight that the Hub metrics do not capture.

The Measuring Success Committee recommendations to the Early Learning Council on how to move forward are at the end of the document.

**Background**

The Oregon legislature created the Early Learning Hubs in 2013 with the goal of creating more coordinated and aligned regional early learning systems so that young children were more likely to arrive at school ready to succeed and more likely to live in healthy, stable and attached families. The Hubs were not designed to be direct providers of services, but to work with public and community-based organizations within their region to strengthen the focus and coordination of early learning investments. In 2015, the Oregon Legislature increased the public investment that flows through the Early Learning Hubs to about $35 million. While this was a significant increase in funding for the Hubs, most of the state investments in early childhood do not flow through the Hubs and is outside of their direct control.

Hubs, from their inception, have been asked to focus on building cross-sector partnerships. The authorizing statute for the Hubs mandated that the Hubs governance boards include early learning, K12, health, human services and business. In most of these cases, the Hubs are being asked to coordinate and build partnerships across sectors that have larger organizational structures and more resources, and over which the Hub has no direct authority or control. As a consequence, the success of a Hub depends upon its ability to persuade and influence its regional and community-based partners.

The authorizing statute for the Early Learning Hubs also tasked the Early Learning Council with establishing performance metrics for the Early Learning Hubs. In 2014, the Early Learning Council created an ad hoc Hub Metrics Committee to advise it on these metrics, and the Council adopted those recommendations in January, 2016. Those metrics became part of the Hub contracts for the 2015-17 biennium, the first contract cycle in which all of the Hubs were up and running from the beginning.

At the time the Early Learning Council created the ad hoc Hub Metrics Committee, the Hub system was still in its nascent stage with less than half of the Hubs formed. In developing its recommendations, the Committee grappled with a number of issues that continue: metrics that are appropriate for the stage of development of Hubs; metrics that captured long-term population goals (e.g. children ready for kindergarten) versus metrics that the Hubs could control, and therefore take responsibility for the outcome; and metrics that had reliable, accessible and transparent data sources.

During the last year, the Early Learning Division has also developed a new Hub monitoring process that includes a number of different steps and forms of information gathering. This monitoring process also includes input from community partners, as well as more in-depth self-assessment from the Hubs. Because this new monitoring process is now in place, there is also an opportunity to rethink the role of the Hub metrics. The Hub metrics no longer provide the only information on how Hubs are doing and the progress they are making.

**Lessons Learned from Current Hub Metrics**

Over the course of this biennium, Early Learning Division staff has been able to monitor and observe the efficacy both of the current metrics themselves and how they are currently being used in the Hub system. In addition, the ELD staff has conducted extensive engagement with the Hubs on the current metrics, including surveys, round table discussions, and individual feedback.

The original vision for the Hub metrics had the metrics carrying most of the weight for the accountability of the individual Hubs and the Hub system: the state would “contract” with the individual Hubs for a set of outcomes defined by the baselines and targets. If the targets were met, then a Hub would have met the terms of its contract. If the targets were not met, the Hub would be out of compliance and require corrective action.

This model of quantitative metrics-based accountability has proven challenging for a number of reasons:

**Metrics Myopia:** When the weight of accountability rests just on the quantitative targets for the metrics, it signals to the Hubs – even when that is not the intention – that their focus should be on moving those numbers and moving them within two years. This “metrics myopia” can take the focus away from what the Hub is really trying to accomplish or away from long-term strategies that may have the most lasting positive impact for children and families. As a result, rather than serve as a monitoring tool for how successfully Hub work is being accomplished, the metrics have come to define what the work of the Hubs should be.

**Incompleteness:** Any set of metrics will not capture the full scope of work and strategies that Hubs are implementing, particularly with the focus on developing regionally specific strategies. As a result, the metrics cannot tell the complete story of what the Hubs are doing and how well they are doing it.

**Lack of Focus:** At the same time that the metrics can only give a very incomplete and partial picture of the work that the Hubs are doing, the accountability function of metrics can also lead to a lack of focus. Because the Hubs are responsible for reaching their target for each of the metrics, they can feel obligated to put equal focus on trying to accomplish them all. “Incompleteness” and “lack of focus” push in opposite directions. The fewer the metrics, the more incomplete the picture the metrics tell; the more metrics the less focused and more scattered the work of the Hubs becomes.

**Partnership Building and Coordination:** Much of the work Hubs, particularly at this stage in their development, is focused on partnership building. While progress on many of the metrics may depend upon the strength of those partnerships, the metrics do not directly measure that partnership building work. As a result, the metrics provide, at best, limited information about some of the places where Hubs devote much of their time and energy.

**Collaboration and Control:** Much of the work of the Hubs is focused on building partnerships and increasing coordination across-sectors. Many of the current metrics were intentionally selected to emphasize cross-sector collaboration and work that depends upon those sectors. However, this focus on cross-sector works creates a challenge when these metrics are used to hold Hubs accountable. It means that Hubs are held accountable for outcomes where they may have some influence but no control, and that ultimate success depends upon the actions of other organizations over which they have no authority.

**Data:**  When metrics are used for accountability it means the stakes are much higher and the standards for transparency, reliability, accuracy and timeliness of data are also much higher. The current data and data sources cannot match the high standards that accountability demands: data systems are nonexistent or under development, data are often self-reported by the Hubs and of questionable reliability and validity, self-generated data are not comparable across hubs, and the lack of timely updates prevents a rigorous process of continuous quality improvement. This same data can still be useful for planning, monitoring and tracking progress, but it is harder for it meet the scrutiny and rigor that an accountability function demands.

The challenges identified above will not be resolved by developing a new or refined set of accountability metrics. Addressing these challenges requires reframing and rethinking the use of the metrics, as well as rethinking how the Early Learning Division and the Early Learning Council meet their responsibility for monitoring and assuring the accountability of Hubs. Using a more qualitative and holistic approach for accountability, such as with the Hub monitoring process, and using the more quantitative metrics to track progress, while acknowledging limited and incomplete data sources, is more appropriate for the Hubs at this stage of development.

**Hub Monitoring Process**

Over the last year, the Early Learning Division has been working with the Early Learning Hubs to develop a new monitoring system that collects information and provides a more complete picture than can be captured by the Hub performance metrics. The purposes of this monitoring process are:

* Ensure that Hubs are:
  + Developing collaborative systems in their regions;
  + Investing strategically in priority populations; and
  + Showing progress on outcomes related to Early Learning System’s three main goals.
* Identify any necessary corrections or adjustments in the development of the early learning system.
* Support a culture of continuous quality improvement across the early learning system.

The monitoring process involves a number of steps spread out over the course of the year. It is also imbedded in the broader system of supports and technical assistance for the Hubs that includes weekly phone calls, monthly webinars, quarterly reports, regional meetings and twice yearly in-person collaboratives. The monitoring process began with a preparatory site visit by the Hub team last year, where Hubs identified goals and priorities, best practices to share with other Hubs, and needs for technical assistance. This winter, surveys were sent out and completed by each Hub’s community partners. Hubs also completed a self-assessment, answered narrative questions about their work and progress towards implementing their work plans, and filled out a Self-scoring Monitoring Rubric. After these steps were completed, the ELD Hub Team met with each of the Hubs and reviewed these documents, identified areas for growth, and completed the scoring rubric. At the June 22, 2017, Early Learning Council meeting, the ELD Hub Tem will present a hub-by-hub review of the results of the monitoring process that will include strengths and areas of growth for each hub, the hub-identified quality improvement plans, and, if needed, a corrective action plan to be approved by the ELC.

This monitoring process addresses the challenges with using quantitative performance metrics for the purpose of accountability. Because it includes narrative questions and a review of progress towards completing their work plan, it enables the Hub to provide a more rounded picture of its work, and for a more holistic view of their progress. It also makes possible a clearer articulation of the Hub’s focus, its priority populations and the strategies it has identified to drive towards outcomes. The survey of regional and community-based partners also provides a unique window into the work that Hubs are doing to build partnerships and the extent to which these partners have bought into the work of the Hubs.

**Recommendations to the Early Learning Council**

Based on numerous meetings, discussions, and considerations, the Measuring Success Committee recommends the Early Learning Council take the following actions:

1. Adopt a more balanced accountability system that represents a partnership or compact among the Early Learning Council, the Early Learning Division, and the Early Learning Hubs

This new compact focuses on identifying shared work and outcomes, and shared tracking of progress.

1. Adopt the use of the Hub monitoring process rather than the Hub metrics as the primary accountability tool.
2. Create a system of quantitative measures that are limited, meaningful, and both shared and individualized to reflect the decisions of individual Hubs.
3. Adopt the “Hubs’ Roles and Responsibilities” document as the shared definition of the work of the Early Learning Hubs. (See attachment #1)
4. Instruct the Early Learning Division staff to work with Early Learning Hubs:
   1. To identify appropriate indicators (with no more than one required indicator shared by all Hubs per “Role”) for each of the “Roles.” (See attachment #1)
   2. To identify appropriate data and data sources for the indicators.
   3. Ensure that the data and data sources minimize additional administrative burdens and rely on existing data sources as much as possible.
   4. Provide explicit guidance and acknowledgement on the limitations of any selected data sources.
   5. Provide support for using these indicators to guide work plan development and progress monitoring.

If the Early Learning Council agrees with the recommendations of the Measuring Success Committee and takes the above actions, a newly formed data workgroup comprised of ELD staff and Hub staff is prepared to begin the process of identifying appropriate and meaningful indicators and data sources. This work would occur over the course of the summer, with the regular updates to the Measuring Success Committee and the Early Learning Council.