

# Report in Response to House Concurrent Resolution 43

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April 2024

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# Background

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During the 2023 Regular Legislative Session, House Concurrent Resolution 43 urged and requested the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) to update its early childhood care and education data management systems to better meet the needs of parents and early care providers of Louisiana through more user-friendly systems that help parents and providers easily access the quality services offered by the department.

Further, by March 31, 2024, the LDOE was to submit a report relative to the status of the improvement of its early childhood care and education data systems to the House Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Education.

## Legacy Systems

Legacy systems such as BLAS, DOE Cafe' Provider Portal, and Cafe' Worker Portal no longer meet industry standards and were unable to continue to be maintained. Significant components of the legacy early childhood data systems relied on mainframe databases and were coded in COBOL, which did not reliably integrate with modern server and database architecture. Additionally, it has been increasingly difficult to support the programming language and its aging codebase. Lastly, the original systems were not built with the same degree of data validation and quality processes as modern systems, were unable to ingest electronic form submissions, and required manual workflows while modern systems can include electronic and automated workflows.

## Approach to Modernization

The LDOE sought a dual approach to modernizing the data infrastructure by:

- Implementing customized off-the-shelf software solutions where available to require minimal customization to the core functionality.
- Utilizing expert developers and Office of Technology Services (OTS) resources to develop custom solutions to manage workflows, automating compliance and licensing processes, so that Louisiana would own the code into perpetuity.

# Louisiana's Modern EC Data System Tools and Infrastructure

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## Licensing, Monitoring, and Infrastructure: EdLink Ops Portal

A modernized solution was custom-built to consolidate several legacy applications and industry-standard, off-the-shelf products have been purchased and are being implemented. Through these modern systems, early childhood care and education providers can now electronically submit applications to become licensed with the State of Louisiana. Providers can now also maintain their approved or licensed entities through an online, modern renewal process.

Upon submission, state workers review and approve these requests through a modern issue management system. Customized dashboards and reporting tools ensure peak efficiency by managing workloads more effectively. The new system incorporates automated workflows and reduces manual processes that the legacy applications required.

Some of the key improvements include:

- The application, renewal, and account maintenance process provides more feedback for the applicant about the current status of their requests.
- Workers and program managers now have advanced reporting tools for additional analysis and decision-making within the department.
- Complete integration with the state's document repository, reporting, and security systems.
- Reduction in data quality issues through stricter validation requirements.
- Improved interoperability between the Early Childhood and K-12 solutions.

## Parental Access to Information: School Finder

School Finder is an online website available to the public to search both early childhood and K-12 sites within the state. This site provides several ways for prospective parents and students to find the right program or early childhood site available near where they live. Several features of the site include the following:

- Search by name or location;
- Filter and sort results by Early Childhood Star Rating or School Letter Grades;
- Filter by distance from a specific location; and
- Filter by Grade Levels or Performance.

The site also provides detailed information about Early Childhood and K-12 schools, such as academic performance, spending information, various inspections, and attendance/discipline details.

## **Modern Attendance Collection & Reporting: Kinder Connect**

The LDOE's new early childhood attendance software, Kinder Connect, eliminates manual attendance collection, reducing the burden on centers and families. Through a web-based provider, portal time is saved on everyday administrative tasks by streamlining processes for childcare providers and the state.

Through handheld tablets provided to the early learning sites by the state, the LDOE is able to:

- Track child attendance managed by Kinder systems.
- Allow parents an easier process to check their children in and out.
- Provide “real-time” reports and payment information easily through a single online portal.

Kinder Connect was fully put into production and rolled out to all providers with access at the end of 2023.

## **Modern Integrated Payment and Reporting: Kinder Track**

Kinder Connect will integrate seamlessly with Kinder Track, a system that will allow providers to get paid based on enrollment and attendance records generated, replacing the slower legacy processes. Through the streamlining of all legacy components of the state's casework such as eligibility determination, provider payments, and attendance tracking into one coherent data system, the LDOE will be able to:

- more accurately and efficiently process family applications for eligibility;
- assist the State in Child Care Subsidy Program Management;
- more easily communicate with families;
- report data; and
- improve audit processes.

This new solution being implemented in the summer of 2024 will integrate with Kinder Connect and EdLink OPS to ensure interoperability, along with increasing security and auditing of the Early Childhood subsidy programs.

## **Tools to Support Center Management: Center Track**

To support early learning sites needing technical support but unable to bear the cost of a modern child care management system, the LDOE is making available a Comprehensive Childcare Management System (CCMS), Center Track, that will be available to early learning sites at no cost. This option will allow early learning sites to enroll children, record attendance, update their

hours of operation, add employees that work at the site, register and manage private pay children, and invoice for payments. This will offer some sites increased efficiency through streamlining and automating enrollment, attendance, reporting, data collection, and invoicing tasks. This web-based solution is in production and will be deployed to interested sites.

## **Enhanced Online Applications for Families: Family Central**

Family Central is a web-based solution that streamlines the CCAP application process. This solution will allow families to apply and upload documents via mobile applications, enabling the state to more efficiently process the applications and determine eligibility. This system will also enhance communications between families and the state by sending notices to parent(s), reducing the need for physical mail as a primary means of communication. It will be fully interoperable with the other Kinder System solutions, seamlessly integrating with Kinder Track and EdLink OPS. This new solution will be implemented in the Summer of 2024.

## **Enhanced Fraud Detection and Prevention: Integrity Central**

Integrity Central is an audit tool that enables the Kinder System software to identify potential concerns to be investigated by program staff. With full implementation of these solutions, a complete Subsidy Management System will provide modern means to track and maintain records for recipients, providers, payment processing, and eligibility determinations. By combining these integrated solutions with Integrity Central, the LDOE will enhance its abilities to prevent and detect fraud by creating a series of alerts for state staff to review and investigate. The implementation of this system will occur during the summer of 2024.

# Summary

By fall 2024, the LDOE will have concluded a three-year process to implement a modern technology infrastructure and system, with the goal of improving family and early learning provider experiences and improving the state’s ability to monitor and efficiently manage early care programs. Through this process, the agency has replaced data systems that, in some cases, were built more than twenty years ago, with minimal preventative maintenance occurring since their initial deployment.

## Data System Deployment Schedule

New System	Legacy System Name	Estimated Age of Legacy System	Estimated Deployment Date
Kinder Connect	Conduent / TOTS	7+ Years	December 2023
Center Track	New Solution for Providers	N/A	January 2024
Early Childhood Licensing (EdLink Ops)	BLAS/DOE Cafe’ Provider Portal/ Cafe’ Worker Portal	10+ Years	Spring 2024
Sponsor Site (EdLink Ops)	DOE Sponsor Site Legacy	10+ Years	Spring 2024
Early Childhood Provider Certification (EdLink Ops)	BLAS/DOE Cafe’ Provider Portal/ Cafe’ Worker Portal	10+ Years	Spring 2024
School Finder Enhancements			Spring 2024
Care Facility (EdLink Ops)	DOE Care Facility Legacy	10+ Years	Summer 2024
Kinder Track	CAPS/TIPS/DOE CAFE’ Worker Portal	10+ Years	Summer 2024
Family Central	CAPS/TIPS/DOE CAFE’ Customer Portal	10+ Years	Summer 2024
Integrity Central	New Solution for DOE	N/A	Fall 2024

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