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ECE TECH DEFINITIONS AND FAQs

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What does Interoperability mean?

The term interoperability refers to the ability of computer systems or software to exchange and make use of information between devices made by different manufacturers. As technologists and government agencies learn how to work together it has become increasingly clear that the pathway to interoperability involves application programming interfaces, or APIs.

What is an API?

An Application Programming Interface (API) is a way for two or more computer programs to communicate with each other. It is a type of software **interface**, offering a service to other pieces of software that seek to connect. A document or standard that describes how to build or use such a connection or interface is called an *API specification*. If the API specification is published publicly, it is called an *open API* which means that all software developers can implement to this API standard. A computer system that meets this standard is said to implement the API. The term API may refer either to the specification or to the implementation.

What is transactional data?

Transactional data is information that is captured from events or activities that occur at a given time. A typical ECE example is checking children in and out of a program via a cell phone QR code, which became the norm during the COVID pandemic. Historically, data on child care transactions have been reported manually or via electronic systems that require data entry. Modern technology now makes it possible to gather data via transactional tracking. Each time a family searches for care, enrolls their child, or makes a payment, data on that transaction can be collected; each day a child enters or leaves an ECE program, data on attendance can be collected; and so forth. Collecting data via transactions is not only more reliable but much less time-consuming. And when the myriad public and private entities that fund, regulate, oversee, evaluate or plan ECE programs use the same data elements and automated systems, a coordinated ECE ecosystem becomes possible.

What is SaaS?

Software as a service (or SaaS), also known as cloud-based software, is a way of delivering applications over the Internet—as a leased service rather than software that is purchased and installed on an individual computer. SaaS applications are sometimes referred to as web-based software, on-demand software or hosted software. SaaS applications run on a SaaS provider's servers and are purchased as a monthly subscription. When a government agency chooses a SaaS approach to ECE data management, they still 'own' the data however they purchase data management from a technology vendor.

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This makes it possible to move quickly, modify the software when policy changes occur, and have access to the most current applications, including state-of-the art approaches to security, availability, data storage, updates and performance.

What is a CCMS?

Child Care Management Software (CCMS) is specifically designed to help early care and education (ECE) program administrators automate their day-to-day operations and monitor/manage the program proactively. Most CCMS are built as Software as a Service (SaaS) applications with brand names like Procare, Brightwheel, ELV Alliance Core, PowerSchool, and many others. CCMS supports a range of tasks including enrollment, waitlist management, daily attendance, fee collection, staff records (including professional development certifications and payroll), family communication and much more. Increasingly CCMS are also including tools to support accountability for child care subsidy, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and other public funding streams. Cloud-based CCMS with defined interfaces (APIs) can enable transactional data collection and exchange between other software and systems in ECE service delivery.

What is Real time Supply & Demand?

Real-time data is information that is delivered immediately after collection, with no delay in the timeliness of the information provided. When it comes to ECE supply, the team "real-time" means information on ECE slots that are available for enrollment at the time a parent or caregiver searches for care. Gathering real time supply data requires collecting data on actual vacant spaces (staffed capacity—enrollment) by classroom (or age of child) in every ECE location, ideally daily or weekly. When all ECE consumers start searching for care, and enrolling in programs, via one electronic platform it becomes possible to also collect "real-time" demand data—by tracking each search or enrollment transaction.

What are Legacy Systems?

In computing, a legacy system is a method, technology, computer system or application program that is outdated yet still in use. Typically these systems have been operational for many years and are performing functions that are still important to the overall mission. Because of their longevity, there are many reasons why legacy systems are hard to replace. For example, very often legacy software will be filled with many patches—new software built on top of the original software rendering the code complex, hard to decipher, and requiring special historical knowledge to understand and maintain. When modernizing an ECE ecosystem, there will most likely be one or more legacy systems in place. Legacy systems can be very costly to replace—in terms of both time and money—so when a modern software system is added to the ecosystem, it often includes a software interface (API) to communicate with existing legacy systems.

What is an Operational Data Store (ODS)?

An operational data store (ODS) is a central database that provides a snapshot of the latest data from multiple transactional systems for operational reporting. It enables organizations to combine data in its original format from various sources into a single destination or dashboard to make it available for analysis and reporting. Several states are in the process of creating an ODS to house cross-system data for an Early Childhood Integrated Data System **ECIDS**.