

Voices from the Field



Illinois

Background. By collaborating with other states, working with the State Core Model, and incorporating a strong state reform agenda, Illinois has put in place a solid foundation from which they can now build a high-quality State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) that aligns with the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) and serves as a key tool in advancing the state's education reform agenda. Getting to this point was not always easy, and several factors contributed to the Illinois approach.

Building a State Data System. The State of Illinois has a diverse public K12 education system, consisting of 869 school districts that range from some of the largest urban districts in the country to sprawling rural systems. There is a need to use data to inform education practice but with Illinois districts using a number of different local systems, data collection and data integration is a major challenge. In 2009, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) received an SLDS grant from the US Department of Education to advance the building of a longitudinal data system. This work entails improving the quality of education data and linking K12 data with postsecondary and workforce data for research and evaluation purposes. In 2010, ISBE received a second American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) SLDS grant further extending the SLDS effort through the rewrite of several data collection systems, the establishment of a statewide transcript system and the expansion of the collection of early childhood data.

Illinois began building a state data system by trying to identify initial steps and models to follow but quickly discovered that there were limited substantive examples of what structure to use or what kind of data to capture. As part of the SLDS grant, Illinois contracted with a vendor to help develop an SLDS data architecture. The development of this data architecture initiative included the incorporation of CEDS, alignment with national standards and the use of the State Core Model as critical foundations of their system development process. Illinois also recognized the value of producing a collaborative environment where they could leverage their work and the work of other states to reduce risk, streamline efforts and provide value to all involved.

Use of the State Core Model. Illinois uses the State Core Model in their work and has found the model to be very helpful as its extensive mapping to standards and multiple states' data usage scenarios provides a framework for gathering information that supports advancement of their SLDS. The State Core Model is also vendor-neutral, so Illinois (and other states) can use the mapping model with their existing platforms and technologies. Through the involvement of multiple states in the development of the model, a much more rigorous and in-depth validation of the data structures and data elements has been completed than any individual state could have undertaken.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) contracted with developers to create and maintain the State Core Model which is intended to supplement CEDS. CEDS and the State Core Model are reference guides for states and other education data stakeholders that identify, define and structure specific data elements that are important to education data systems. Version 2 of the State Core Model has focused on data elements in the K12 environment; future versions will include extensions to post-secondary, workforce and early childhood elements. Illinois has found the State Core Model provides critical guidance as they develop their statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) and seek to inform instruction and learning, report for accountability and policy decision making, and share data across the entire P20 environment.

Leveraging Opportunities and Facing Challenges.

Illinois is fortunate to have a reform-minded State Superintendent, Governor's office, State Legislature, agency executive team and education partners throughout the State representing the full spectrum of education and workforce. While the State unsuccessfully applied for a Race to the Top grant from the federal government, the application process did help shape the State's reform agenda. In the past, data collection was used for federal reporting purposes but is now part of the reform agenda – data is used as critical information needed to inform educational decisions.

The 2009 SLDS grant specifically targeted linking K12 to post-secondary education. ISBE has encouraged their postsecondary colleagues to incorporate the use of the State Core Model to help guide their data collection and integration efforts. The use of a common model also provides a greater ability to integrate the secondary and postsecondary data through the use of common data structures. ISBE has also included their state-level workforce colleagues in these discussions to further extend the use of data to support student outcomes. The ARRA SLDS grant awarded in 2010 provides the opportunity to expand the collection of early childhood data. The state has been collecting data on children ages three to five enrolled in State-sponsored preschool, and the new ARRA SLDS grant will allow Illinois to expand collection to include children birth to five that are involved in State-funded programs.

A critical component of developing the SLDS is the ability to collect student level data and hold data for longitudinal purposes. The Illinois Legislature passed a law, referred to as the P20 Longitudinal Education Data System Act (Public Act 096-0107), to allow ISBE and education partners such as the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) to collect and link student data and track it longitudinally.

Like other states, Illinois's efforts to develop an SLDS are high stakes – they are spending a lot of money and need to develop a sustainable, cost effective, efficient and successful system. The use of common standards to govern the collection of data and the collaboration with other states in the development of the State Core Model, help to reduce risk for the SLDS project, and help ensure that the outcome of the effort will be the capture of data capable of informing education practices.

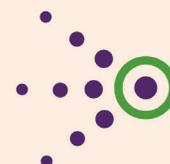
Conclusion. By reshaping the purpose and use of education data, Illinois is developing an SLDS that goes beyond reporting functions to support data-based decision making in P20 education. Illinois uses the State Core Model to help frame their longitudinal data system and to embark on a collaborative effort that allows them to learn from and support other states to align with the Common Education Data Standards. This collaborative culture reduces risk and supports efficiency, and ultimately allows for the collection, use and exchange of data necessary to support improved educational decision making for students.

The CEDS Initiative is made up of stakeholders from all levels and sectors of education in a collaborative effort to develop the Common Education Data Standards. The initiative consists of a two-pronged approach:

- The CEDS Stakeholder Group is coordinated by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and is responsible for prioritizing the scope of the CEDS based on community feedback, reviewing existing data definitions and standards, developing new data definitions and standards when necessary, publishing draft CEDS elements for comment, incorporating comments and finalizing each version.
- The CEDS Consortium, facilitated by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), participates in the development of the standards and is responsible for their advocacy, communication, adoption and implementation. The Consortium is comprised of representatives from CCSSO, SHEEO, Data Quality Campaign (DQC), SIF Association, Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council (PESC), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education (ex officio).

The Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) Initiative, a coalition of education stakeholders, is working together in a collaborative effort with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to ensure that common definitions of key data elements become commonly and voluntarily adopted and widely used within and across K12 and postsecondary sectors. CEDS will increase the ability to share and compare data consistently, allowing more informed decision-making at all levels and better educational outcomes for all students through early childhood, K12, postsecondary completion, and the workforce.

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