

Setting the Context

Current state and federal reform initiatives rely heavily on the ability of multiple stakeholders to access and use information from statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) to improve student achievement. Policymakers believe that states are best positioned to achieve this by developing and implementing various policies impacting the educator workforce. They will also, for the first time on a larger and more visible scale, use student achievement as one of the primary indicators of both educator and program effectiveness.

In this environment, it is critical for state policymakers, educators, and data managers alike to understand the importance of implementing a teacher-student data link in a valid and reliable way. While 24 states report having this link on the DQC survey, it is clear that these linkages were not implemented for high stakes use (e.g., evaluation, compensation, value-add). As a result, state and local data systems lack critical functions including the abilities to:

- Account for the contributions of multiple educators in a single course;
- Enable a teacher to review their roster for accuracy;
- Incorporate common practices found in schools including virtual classes, labs, and team teaching; and,
- Link a student's attendance records with their teachers to track the actual number of days of instruction by a particular teacher.

State policymakers seeking to implement reforms based on new state policies/legislation will be further disappointed by the lack of consistency in results across their state as "teacher of record" is currently defined differently across districts and the identification, evaluation, compensation, and distribution of effective teachers will continue to be unequal across schools/districts.

Identifying Promising Practices

To address this emerging state need, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation tapped into the expertise at the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology (CELТ) and funded them to lead the Teacher-Student Data Link Project (TSDL). This project is a cross-state, collaborative effort focused on developing a common, best practice definition of "Teacher of Record" and business processes for collecting and validating linked teacher and student data. This important initiative brings five states together to leverage their collective experiences, knowledge, and resources to determine a common definition and approach to one of the most critical components of their data systems and a key step in using data to increase student learning and improve teacher quality.

In support of the TSDL project, CELТ will be assisting the Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Ohio Departments of Education (SEAs) – and three of their local education agencies (LEAs) – in conducting a comprehensive needs assessment of the data systems, business processes, and policies related to the linking of teacher and student data. This analysis will include the types of collaboration and communication between the SEAs and the LEAs, and the appropriate program areas within the SEA. CELТ's fieldwork and analysis extends to the school district and the school in order to assess how they collect data and verify its quality. Following the assessment phase, each participating SEA will partner with its three LEAs to pilot TSDL recommendations with technical assistance from CELТ.

Leveraging State Experiences

Throughout the project, the DQC will disseminate key learnings and pilot results to non-participating states as well as to representatives of national organizations and federal agencies as part of a larger conversation around using data for continuous improvement at all levels. Specifically, the DQC will work closely with key partners to

ensure that their constituencies understand how the quality of the teacher-student linkage directly impacts their state reform plans and their ability to meet the information needs of educators and policymakers alike.

The TSDL work is structured to provide the participating SEAs and LEAs with support, guidance, and technical assistance with an overall goal of developing resources for all states to use. By the Fall of 2011, *all* states will have multiple opportunities to leverage:

- A common definition/framework of “Teacher of Record” based on the *use* of the data with associated policies, processes, and technology architecture that will guide and inform implementation.
- A set of promising practices based on the business processes that are critical to the effective alignment of teacher and student data.
- Strategies for validating teacher and student profiles and classroom rosters.
- State case studies that can be used for replication at the SEA / LEA level.
- Data models for collecting, reporting, and updating the teacher-student data link.

Emerging Promising Practices

Initial assessments of the current teacher-student data linkages have been conducted in each pilot state and several promising practices have begun to emerge. States can begin this work now and use the following guidance to inform their efforts. As this is a work in progress, more promising practices will be identified and shared with all states in a timely manner.

- Convene key stakeholders to define and clarify the purposes for which the teacher-student link will be used as these will drive the subsequent definition of “teacher of record” and the implementation process.
- Develop a process to assign a state-issued unique educator identification number to all educators in the state and work collaboratively with all districts to ensure its consistent management and use at the local level.
- Utilize roster verification tools to build confidence among educators around the planned high stakes uses of the data and construct timely linkages between the SLDS and local systems for continuously accurate student rosters.

To Learn More:

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