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Using Integrated Data Systems to Strengthen Collective Impact in Out-of-School Programs



How nonprofit organizations in two localities use IDS
data to improve their enrollees' school performance
and strengthen collective impact

CASE STUDY 3

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Solving complex social problems inevitably requires action by multiple actors and organizations. In the education sector, problems such as chronic absenteeism, poor performance in school and low graduation rates are increasingly viewed as challenges that schools cannot solve on their own. Across the country, collaborative efforts are bringing together a variety of organizations that work with school-age children and youth, including out-of-school time programs and nonprofit service agencies, to improve educational outcomes in their communities.

In theory, a shared measurement system that helps partner organizations set a common agenda and goals, align activities and monitor progress is an essential feature of these collective impact efforts. In practice, however, data-informed decision making is often stymied because the data needed to set goals and monitor progress are collected by separate agencies that don't share information with one another.

Linking activities to outcomes can be a particular problem for nonprofit organizations in collective impact efforts in the education sector because these organizations typically don't have access to their enrollees' school records. Nor can they easily compare the achievement of their enrollees against peers. Without that information, it is hard for nonprofit groups to know if their efforts to support student performance are effective, how the programs might be improved and whether they are allocating resources efficiently.

An integrated data system (IDS) that links the data the nonprofit organizations collect on their enrollees with data on educational performance collected by the local school system can overcome these institutional silos.¹

This case study discusses how two collective impact initiatives in the education sector are using data from local integrated data systems to guide action, set common goals, monitor performance, make programmatic adjustments and allocate resources effectively. Both initiatives are using an IDS developed and maintained by local data intermediaries that are partners in the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP).²

- Responding to IDS data that highlighted the poor attendance and school performance of its enrollees, a collaborative of youth-serving agencies funded by the United Way of Central Carolinas took action to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism as an intermediate step to reach its long-term goal of increasing high school graduation rates in Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.
- When a consortium of out-of-school time providers in the Eastside Promise Neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas, saw IDS data that showed their enrollees were not improving their proficiency in reading and math, the organizations revamped their programs to focus on these two subjects. And the local United

An integrated data system (IDS) periodically links individual-level administrative data from multiple public service agencies and contracted service providers, creating a rich picture of individual service needs, participation and outcomes over many years. In some systems, individual records are linked together to form comprehensive, longitudinal household and family records. An IDS can be operated at the state, county or city level within government or by nonprofit or university partners. By offering large sample sizes, longitudinal data and the ability to identify multisystem clients, integrated data systems are valuable tools for policy analysis, program planning and monitoring and evaluation. Due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the data, organizations that house an IDS carefully follow privacy laws, securely store data and maintain rigorous standards for use and access. For additional information, visit www.aecf.org/IDS, www.aisp.upenn.edu and www.neighborhoodindicators.org/resources-integrated-data-systems-ids.

Way repurposed some in-school programming at the elementary level to middle schools and high schools, where the in-school supports were more effective.

MAKING MID-COURSE IMPROVEMENTS: CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

The United Way of Central Carolinas (UWCC) adopted a collective impact model in September 2011, when it launched a 10-year initiative to increase the graduation rate among at-risk children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. (A second collective impact effort, focused on reducing homelessness, began in 2013.) The collaborative includes 16 nonprofit human service and health-related organizations funded by the United Way. These organizations work with about 16,000 youngsters per year. UWCC commissioned the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute (UNCC UI) to track the initiative's progress by matching participant data from the agencies to school data in the Institute for Social Capital (ISC) Community Database. When the United Way agencies saw the results in 2015, they zeroed in on attendance and chronic absence as a focus for their common work.

IDS data revealed a link between chronic absence and poor school performance

The UNCC UI researchers use the ISC Community Database to match person-level data collected by 14 UWCC-funded programs that work directly with school-aged children with Charlotte-Mecklenburg school records. UWCC and its grantees get two reports: one that shows how all the enrollees are doing on various educational indicators and one that shows how the enrollees in specific agencies are doing. (The agencies see only composite data, not information about individual students.)

The annual reports developed by UNCC UI provide aggregated information about participants' demographics, attendance, chronic absenteeism, suspensions, performance on standardized tests and graduation rates. Data on the 12,040 unique program participants enrolled in United Way agencies in 2012–2013 (data which became available in 2015) showed that the enrollees include a higher

The Institute for Social Capital (ISC) Community Database, the only IDS in North Carolina, includes data gathered by governmental agencies (the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office and the Homeless Management Information System) and more than 40 nonprofit agencies focused on housing and youth services in the Charlotte region. Established in 2004, the ISC Community Database has been administered by the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute since 2012. This database can link individual data across agencies, but all released data are de-identified and aggregated. The database supports university-based research and data-informed decision making in the community. For more information, visit <https://ui.uncc.edu/programs/isc>.

“Before getting the IDS data, we focused on school promotions and thought we were doing well. But the IDS data showed that, even though our students were being promoted, less than 20 percent were proficient in reading and math. And their attendance lagged far behind other children.”

- Susan Hansell, *Executive Director, A Child's Place*

proportion of non-white and economically disadvantaged students than the school population as a whole. Students who spent three or more years in the UWCC-funded programs did better on most measures than those who participated for only one to two years. But overall, the enrollees did worse than other students on key measures: They were more likely to be chronically absent from school (defined as missing 18 or more school days per year), and those enrollees who were chronically absent were less proficient in reading and math than other students.³

These findings were not surprising, but they were catalytic. When UWCC agencies reviewed the data, they focused on chronic absence and its relation to school performance. Victoria Manning, the former director of Community Investment at the United Way, explains, “We saw that the children who were served by the organizations we funded had strong attendance challenges, and this affected their school performance. So we moved forward to focus on attendance and chronic absenteeism.”

Not all organizations funded by UWCC focus on academics — the collaborative includes Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts as well as Communities in Schools — but they can all have an impact on their enrollees’ school attendance, Manning notes. Given the strong connection between chronic absence and school performance — established by national data and confirmed by local data — the UWCC agencies felt that doing something about attendance could begin to make an impact on school performance.

Addressing poor attendance by improving services and increasing public awareness

Mobilized by the data, the United Way staff put together an action team to develop a community awareness campaign

on absenteeism and to focus the member agencies on improving attendance among their enrollees. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system was an immediate target for action and a willing partner in the work. Participants in the United Way programs attend a total of 170 schools in a school district that serves 145,000 students per year.

Early on, the school superintendent joined a meeting of the workgroup. Emphasizing the importance of addressing attendance and chronic absenteeism as a way to support the district’s efforts to increase reading and math proficiency, the superintendent encouraged the group to reach out to the significant adults in children’s lives, not just the children. Manning made a presentation on behalf of the workgroup to the School Board, the attendance problem was discussed at district-wide meetings of school principals and the staff person responsible for attendance throughout the district quickly became a “champion” of the initiative’s work on attendance.

The United Way agencies and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system worked together to inform students and their parents and caregivers about the importance of good attendance. As part of an “attendance awareness month” campaign in September 2015, the United Way provided all the schools in the district with a one-page flyer emphasizing the importance of good attendance and reminding parents and caregivers not to schedule doctor’s appointments or other activities during school hours. The schools sent copies of the flyer home with all their students. The United Way also sponsored a poster contest to promote attendance and awarded prizes and honored students for the best posters at the elementary-, middle- and high-school levels.

As UWCC-funded organizations worked to boost school attendance among their enrollees, homeless children emerged as a particular concern. A 2015 report showed that participants who were identified as homeless had especially high rates of chronic absence and lower academic performance than other students. “It was stunning to see how poorly our students were doing compared to other children,” says Susan Hansell, executive director of A Child’s Place, a Charlotte organization that works with about 2,700 homeless children per year.

“Before getting the IDS data, we focused on school promotions and thought we were doing well,” says Hansell. “But the IDS data showed that, even though our students were being promoted, less than 20 percent were proficient in reading and math. And their attendance lagged far behind other children. That helped us to see the soft spots and have conversations about where we could improve.” Because of the data and the discussions they stimulated, tracking participants’ school attendance and researching and implementing best practices to increase attendance are now critical parts of the work of A Child’s Place. Avoiding suspensions is another emerging focus. “With the IDS data, we could see that although the suspension rate was similar, our participants were suspended for a much longer number of days than other students,” Hansell says. “Now we are working to improve the children’s behavior and emotional well-being in order to reduce the number of days they are suspended. That will also help to increase the number of days they attend school.”

IDS data galvanized collective action

“Without the IDS data, we wouldn’t have worked on attendance as a collaborative,” says Manning. “We knew from national data that there is link between attendance, chronic absenteeism and school performance. But having the local data show that connection made a big difference. By seeing what was happening to the children we serve,

we could bring people together to talk about what to do and encourage organizations to pay more attention to attendance and absenteeism. We know we won’t solve everything by focusing on attendance, but we also know that if we can address attendance, we can support our other academic goals.”

It is too early for the United Way agencies to see the results of their public awareness campaign and organizational efforts to improve student attendance, but UNCC UI will track these outcomes in the IDS over the course of the initiative. In the meantime, the collaborative continues to emphasize chronic absenteeism, build new partnerships, explore additional strategies and consider related areas of work (such as the relationship between suspensions and chronic absence) that can heighten its collective impact.

MONITORING AND MANAGING A COLLECTIVE IMPACT EFFORT: EASTSIDE PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD IN SAN ANTONIO

In the Eastside Promise Neighborhood Initiative, a broad consortium of partners works to improve outcomes for 6,000 children in a five-year cradle-to-career initiative in a San Antonio neighborhood of 3.5 square miles (www.eastsidepromise.org). In 2012, Eastside Promise became one of the first five federally designated Promise Neighborhoods in the United States. The United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County, which oversees the implementation of Eastside Promise, commissioned its data partner, Community Information Now (CI:Now), to develop an IDS that could be used in Promise Neighborhoods and that would eventually be expanded to serve organizations, agencies and policymakers throughout the city. Partners in the Eastside Promise Neighborhood Initiative have used linked data in the CommunityViewer IDS to improve service delivery in out-of-school and in-school programs.

“Without the IDS data, we wouldn’t have worked on attendance as a collaborative.”

- Victoria Manning, formerly with the United Way of Central Carolinas

Initial IDS data showed little improvement in enrollees' school performance

CI:Now matches information on the participants in out-of-school programs collected by nonprofit providers to education data collected by the San Antonio Independent School District. The United Way accesses CommunityViewer's summary results and shares the data with the individual agencies. Providers see summary data on the participants' standardized test results, grades and school behavior, including disciplinary actions, suspensions and attendance. (If a provider wants to discuss the progress of individual students, the United Way arranges for school officials to be involved in that conversation.)

To understand the results and use them in decision making, the United Way formed a community of practice with the service providers that operate out-of-school time (OST) programs in Eastside Promise. Representatives (typically, the executive director) of 8–10 organizations met twice a month for about seven months in 2014. In calendar year 2014, OST programs funded by the United Way served between 500 and 800 students in each school semester and during the summer. Examining the data from the IDS, organizations in the group discussed ways of targeting their resources and improving program offerings to have the most impact on the greatest number of students. "Having active partners who think through what the data mean and their implications for practice is a critical element in using data to improve collective impact," says Henrietta Muñoz, vice president for Grant Research and Evaluation at the United Way. Each organization in the community of practice agreed to

share its enrollees' school results with the other partners. The shared data and open dialogue helped partners work effectively as a group to identify and strengthen weak spots in their programs, with the goal of serving students better.

CI:Now worked closely with United Way and the service providers to analyze and stratify the data, enabling the providers to develop a fuller understanding of their enrollees and their school performance. Providers could see how well they were doing with certain types of students — for example, those who started out as lower performers — and determine how well their enrollees were doing compared with other students in the same schools.

The community of practice learned that while the overall pass rate on standardized reading and math tests was going up in local schools, enrollees in OST programs were not improving their scores. These data led the group to focus on reading and math proficiency and improvements in English and math grades as key indicators of progress and to treat reading and math help as critical elements in their after-school programs.

Reshaping programs and allocating resources more effectively

Out-of-school time programming.

Once the direction and targets were clear, one faith-based organization modified its after-school curriculum to help its enrollees boost their reading and math scores. While it had previously offered mentoring and tutoring in a variety of subjects, the organization refocused its program to concentrate on English and math and increased the amount of time enrollees spend on those two subjects.

CommunityViewer is an IDS developed and managed by Community Information Now (CI:Now), a data intermediary in the San Antonio region. Established in fall 2012, the CommunityViewer database links together individual-level information from multiple private data sets. As of 2016, CommunityViewer contained data from the San Antonio Independent School District and data collected by 15 local service organizations. Currently, the primary users are the partner organizations operating the federally designated Promise and Choice Neighborhoods initiatives in San Antonio. CommunityViewer is supported by the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County. For more information, visit <http://cinow.info/communityviewer>.

The United Way continues to use IDS data on enrollees' school performance to monitor the providers' collective and organizational performance. Annual reviews of the data show that the OST program students are making small, durable improvements. "Program participants have made modest gains and maintained slightly improved grades in English and math," says Muñoz. "We would be hard pressed to argue that they will move from a C to an A, but they can move from a D to a C, and they can maintain the gains they make. Considering where they started, that's a victory."

In-school programming. United Way also used data from the IDS to make decisions about the most effective use of resources for in-school programs in Eastside Promise. Impressed by an evidence-based in-school program using peer mentors and other classroom supports in middle schools and high schools, the United Way asked the organization to operate the program in two elementary schools. But when the participant data was matched to school records data in the IDS, CI:Now found that this program model was not effective at the elementary-school level. Instead of showing educational gains, enrollees were showing declines. Concluding that more specialized help was needed for younger children, the United Way stopped funding the program in the elementary schools. It redirected the money to operate the program in more middle schools and high schools (where it was effective) and tried a different approach in the elementary schools.

IDS increases impact of service providers, United Way and Eastside Promise

Muñoz points out that the IDS data on enrollees' school performance is information the out-of-school providers never had before. Previously, they had only self-reported information from the participants — information that is inevitably incomplete or inaccurate. For the first time, providers can see an accurate picture of how their enrollees are doing in school, how they compare with other students in the schools and how they compare with enrollees in other OST programs. Having these data is equally eye opening for the United Way, which funds a total of 80 organizations and 120 different programs. In the past, the United Way had to measure success in terms of activities and outputs — such as, the number of participants served and the services they received. Now, the United Way can see how the participants are faring on a variety of educational outcomes and track their progress over time. "Having the IDS data allows us to understand what it means to have impact in the community," says Muñoz. "We can tell whether the programs we fund are making a difference. This is taking the United Way organization into the next generation of accountability for impact." CI:Now Director Laura McKieran agrees. The IDS allows Eastside Promise and its partner agencies to make "the most effective use of resources among the population the programs are intended to serve," she says.

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- Henrietta Muñoz, United Way of
San Antonio and Bexar County

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Endnotes

- 1 This case study is one of a series that shows how state and local policymakers and practitioners use IDS data to improve policies, programs and practice. For more information, visit www.aecf.org/IDS
- 2 The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) comprises independent data intermediaries in 30 cities that have a shared mission to help community stakeholders use data for better decision making. Several NNIP partners, in addition to those in Charlotte and San Antonio, maintain or work with an IDS. For more information, visit www.neighborhoodindicators.org
- 3 Nineteen percent of the United Way enrollees were chronically absent, compared to 10 percent of all students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Only 14 percent of the chronically absent United Way enrollees were proficient in reading, and only 9 percent were proficient in math. In contrast, among all CMS students, proficiency rates were 27 percent in reading and 25 percent in math.



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