



How state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region support data-driven decisionmaking in districts and schools



Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education



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Summary

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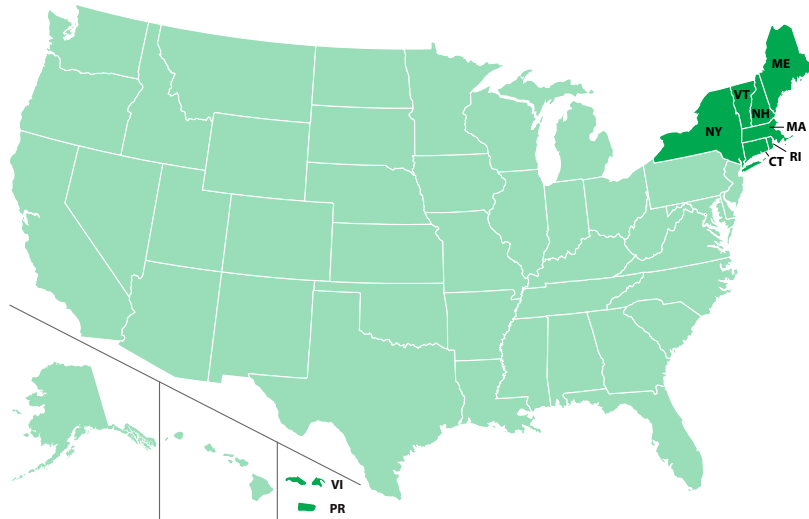
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How state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region support data-driven decisionmaking in districts and schools

The report examines the initiatives of state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region to support data-driven decisionmaking in districts and schools and describes the service providers hired to support this work. Identifying four components of data-driven decisionmaking initiatives, it finds that not all initiatives include all four.

Data-driven decisionmaking is receiving increasing attention from the education community because of federal and state accountability requirements; the enhanced capacity of states and school districts to collect, manage, and distribute data; and a better understanding of the importance of data-driven decisionmaking in improving instruction and student achievement. The report responds to a request by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for information about how other state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region support districts and schools in effectively using data to inform a range of education decisions.

Two research questions guided this study:

- What state education agency initiatives support data-driven decisionmaking by

districts and schools in the Northeast and Islands Region? What are their similarities and differences?

- What service providers do the state education agencies work with to support educators in using data to inform education decisions, and what services do they provide? What are their similarities and differences?

The descriptions of initiatives by state education agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region to support data-driven decisionmaking in districts and schools are based on examinations of state education agency web sites, interviews with agency officials, and a review of the documents they provided. State education agency officials also identified the service providers they have hired to support this work. Three providers were selected for more in-depth profiles. Descriptions of the three service providers are based on interviews with service provider staff, observations of professional development activities, and additional materials provided by the service providers. Appendixes to the report include profiles of each state education agency initiative, a catalogue of nine service providers identified by the state education agency officials,

and profiles of three service providers. This study has several limitations, including the small number of respondents interviewed, the focus on state education agency data-driven decisionmaking supports for districts and schools rather than on district and school implementation of data-driven decisionmaking, and a lack of information about the decisions made by state education agency officials.

Analysis of the state education agency data-driven decisionmaking initiatives across the region revealed that state agencies have implemented one or more of four components to support data use by schools and districts:

- *Centralized data system/warehouse.* A centralized data system/warehouse combines data from multiple sources into a centralized repository. Data can include a range of evidence, such as classroom assessment data, school-level information on students and staff, demographic data, and state test scores.
- *Tools for data analysis and reporting.* Data tools allow users to collect, organize, and analyze data for use in decisionmaking.
- *Training on data systems/warehouses and tools.* Training helps educators learn to effectively and efficiently use the data analysis tools to better understand the available data.
- *Professional development in using data for decisionmaking.* Teachers and administrators require extensive professional development to build their expertise in identifying and analyzing relevant data and adjusting instructional practices

and school processes in response to such data.

Each state education agency's initiatives were reviewed within the framework of these components. Only New Hampshire appears to provide all four components to every school in the state. Maine and Vermont provide all four components but target only specific schools. New York provides a data system, data tools, and professional development, but as separate initiatives with little overlap. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and the Virgin Islands are creating a longitudinal data system and data tools and developing training in their use. Connecticut focuses solely on the process of using data for decisionmaking and targets that support to low-performing districts.

Despite a dearth of comprehensive initiatives, state education agency officials across the region mentioned the importance of providing a range of data-driven decisionmaking supports to schools. But they noted that limited funding and a lack of capacity force them to make choices about which components to provide.

Analysis of the four components across the state education agency initiatives revealed that implementation is affected in part by available funding and capacity:

- *Funding.* State education agency data-driven decisionmaking initiatives were shaped by the funding available. External funds (such as Title I) may restrict who can receive services or prescribe the types of services that can be offered. State funding must be stretched to cover a range of education services, and support for data-driven decisionmaking must

compete with teacher salaries and book and supply purchases.

- *Capacity.* State education agency staff may lack the capacity to support their data-driven decisionmaking initiatives because of time or expertise. To help provide needed services to schools and districts, state education agencies have contracted with external service providers.

State education agency officials identified the following providers of support for data-driven decisionmaking initiatives in the region: Center for Assessment, Cognos, the Connecticut Regional Educational Service Centers Alliance (RESC Alliance), ESP Solutions Group, Measured Progress, the New York Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), Pearson School Systems, Performance Pathways, and TetraData. Three of these nine service providers were selected for in-depth profiles: the Connecticut RESC Alliance, Measured Progress, and Performance Pathways.

These three service providers assist state education agencies in implementing the four key data-driven decisionmaking components identified in this study:

- *Centralized data system/warehouse.* Performance Pathways and Measured Progress support state education agencies in creating a central repository for storing data.
- *Tools for data analysis and reporting.* All three service providers use various tools to support data analysis and reporting, ranging from paper and pencil to computer-based spreadsheet software and online programs capable of generating

customized reports from the centralized data system.

- *Training in data systems/warehouses and tools.* Performance Pathways and Measured Progress not only support the creation of a data warehouse system but also provide training in using the system and its tools. To reach a broader audience, both providers use a “train the trainer” model, training groups of educators who are then responsible for training colleagues.
- *Professional development in using data for decisionmaking.* All three providers offer some professional development in using data to guide decisionmaking. Offerings vary, depending on the organization’s focus on creating a data-driven culture, using assessment data, or developing software tools. Providers work with teams from districts or schools who are expected to train their colleagues in the process.

This study outlines several considerations for education decisionmakers and researchers on the potential benefits of implementing additional components of a data-driven decisionmaking system, sources of funding, and strategies to enhance their capacity to support teachers and administrators. Ideas are proposed for further research, including examining how state education agencies scale up their data-driven decisionmaking initiatives; exploring how state education agencies, schools, and districts implement data-driven decisionmaking; and analyzing the impacts of data-driven decisionmaking on student and school outcomes.