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State Longitudinal Data Systems for Tracking Outcomes for Students with Disabilities through Postsecondary Activities

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In recent years, an increasing number of states have been moving towards the development and implementation of longitudinal data systems for tracking the progress of individual K-12 students with disabilities across their academic careers up to and including their postsecondary activities. In an effort to avoid duplication of data collection efforts (i.e., specifically the overlapping data requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA][1] and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA][2]) and streamline the data reporting process, some states have either integrated special and general education data systems into a single unified system or created a means for the two separate systems to "talk to" one another. A further impetus to combine the collection of individual K-12 general and special education data has been the Obama administration's priority that education data collection be integrated. President Obama's administration has made the development of longitudinal data systems that are able to track individual students from prekindergarten through their postsecondary activities a key component of education reform. The administration has adopted the 10 key components set forth by the Data Quality Campaign[3] as the minimum requirements for what it considers to be a solid data system.

The purpose of this document is to describe whether and how states are

- implementing longitudinal data systems for tracking the progress of *individual K-12 students with disabilities* across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary activities; and
- integrating systems for tracking the progress of students with disabilities into a longitudinal data system for tracking the progress of *all* students across their academic careers including their postsecondary activities.

This analysis was conducted by Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) as part of its cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

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[1] The current version of IDEA was reauthorized in 2004.
[2] The ESEA was last reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act and is often referred to by that name.
[3] You can view these key components from the Data Quality Campaign at www.dataqualitycampaign.org.

DATA COLLECTION

Project Forum conducted a survey during the months of June and July 2010 using Zarca Interactive$^©$ (an online survey management program). Project Forum received responses from 41 states and non-state jurisdictions, hereafter referred to as states. Data were analyzed using Zarca and the survey findings are reported in the remaining sections of this document.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Planning and Implementation of Longitudinal Data Systems

Fifteen of the 41 responding states have already implemented a longitudinal data system for tracking the progress of *individual K-12 students with disabilities* across their academic careers up to and including their post-secondary activities.

However, respondents from an additional 21 of the 41 states reported either being in the preliminary stages of developing a longitudinal system for tracking the progress of students with disabilities or being in the process of expanding their longitudinal K-12 systems to include postsecondary outcome data. Of these 21 states, nineteen described the work on their systems in progress. For example:

- *Louisiana* was awarded a $4 million Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant to develop its Educational Data Repository System (LEDRS), a PreK-12 longitudinal data system that is expected to be fully operative by April 2013. The state education agency (SEA) plans to apply for an additional grant with the federal government that will extend LEDRS into the collection of post-secondary and workforce data.

- *Illinois* is working with consultants to design the necessary infrastructure for a longitudinal data system.

- *Ohio* is pursuing the legislative changes necessary to enable various agencies to share individual postsecondary data with the SEA while preserving privacy.

- *North Dakota's* statewide longitudinal data system committee is in the process of linking K-12 data with higher education, workforce and the Department of Human Services (DHS)[4] data.

- *Idaho's* longitudinal data system currently covers PreK-12. The SEA is working with the Idaho Board of Education that governs postsecondary education to enable the sharing of postsecondary data.

- The *Texas* Public Education Information Resource (TPEIR) includes PreK-12 data and higher education data from *Texas* institutions of higher education (IHEs), as well as information on teacher certification and teacher preparation programs. TPEIR will be expanded to link missing PreK, college readiness and workforce (e.g., wage, industry and employment) data. When complete, TPEIR will enable monitoring of an individual

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[4] North Dakota's DHS is responsible for collecting IDEA Part C data.

student from enrollment in the public education system through matriculation and graduation from *Texas* colleges and into the labor market.

The remainder of this section of the document provides detailed information pertaining to the 15 states with longitudinal data systems already in place for tracking the progress of individual students *with disabilities* across their academic careers up to and including their postsecondary activities.

Staffing

The 15 states reported a range of full-time staff equivalency (FTE) devoted to the development and maintenance of their states' longitudinal data systems for tracking the progress of individual students with disabilities across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary activities. Two states reported dedicating fewer than 1.0 FTE; seven states reported dedicating between 1.0 and 5.0 FTE; and five reported dedicating more than 5.0 FTE. Several states noted that these figures were estimates only and two noted that dedicated staff members in their state were responsible for maintaining the longitudinal data systems for *all* students, not just those with disabilities.

Types of Data Collected

All 15 states with longitudinal data systems for tracking the progress of students with disabilities across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary activities collected the following three types of data: demographic information, types of state-wide assessments taken and scores from those assessments. Additional types of data commonly collected by states include history of placement information (11 states) and enrollment in postsecondary programs and/or competitive employment (7 states). Several states also self-reported collecting data pertaining to 619 services[5] (4 states), Part C services (3 states), graduation status (1 state) and suspension (1 state).

Collecting Postsecondary Data

Most commonly states reported collecting postsecondary information for students with disabilities using surveys of students and/or their families (9 states). For example:

- *Rhode Island* uses a census approach whereby data are collected annually for all leavers based on an interview conducted by the student's former special education teacher.

- *Wisconsin* collects postsecondary information for students with disabilities via the *Wisconsin* Post High School Outcomes Survey (WPHSOS) conducted one year after the student leaves high school. Local education agencies (LEAs) participate in the survey on a cyclical basis. Every year, approximately one-fifth of LEAs participate. Former students are contacted for a telephone interview to assess areas such as independent living, participation in postsecondary education and employment.

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[5] This refers to §619 of IDEA, early childhood special education for children ages three through five.

Other approaches include collaboration with IHEs (4 states) and access to workforce/labor data (4 states).[6] For example:

- *Florida* collects postsecondary data via the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program, which includes data linkages to the Florida Department of Education, IHEs, Agency for Workforce Innovation[7], the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the U.S. Postal Service and the National Student Clearinghouse.

- *New York* maintains a higher education data system with aggregate enrollment and degree completion information. The SEA also collaborates with IHEs and other national organizations such as the National Student Clearinghouse to obtain postsecondary information on all students and contracts with a vendor to collect the required information for special education.

Funding

The 15 states most commonly reported using the following source(s) of funding for the development and maintenance of their longitudinal data systems for tracking the progress of students with disabilities across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary activities: SLDS grants (11 states), IDEA Part B funds (8 states), state funds (6 states) and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds (4 states). Other funding sources reported by no more than one state included Enhanced Assessment Grant (EAG), Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Federal EdFacts/Education Data Exchange Network (EDEN) funds.

Integration of Special and General Education Data Systems

All 15 states that reported that they have already implemented a longitudinal data system for tracking the progress of *students with disabilities* also reported that this system was integrated into a longitudinal data system for tracking the progress of *all students* across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary activities. All of these states include a field or flag that identifies whether a student is a student with a disability. The remainder of this section of the document pertains to states' integration of special and general education data systems.

Collaborative Activities

States reported that the following parts of their longitudinal data systems for tracking the progress of students with disabilities across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary activities are developed and maintained collaboratively with general education: collecting data (15 states), reviewing the accuracy of data (14 states), analyzing data (13 states), reporting data (13 states) and funding (e.g., ARRA) (8 states). *New York* provided an additional example of how collaboration takes place, noting that administrative staff members

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[6] Because some states reported more than one strategy for collecting postsecondary outcomes data, totals do not add to 15.

[7] Florida's Agency for Workforce Innovation serves as the state's primary state workforce agency and administers the state's Labor Market Statistics program, Unemployment Compensation, Early Learning and a variety of workforce development programs.

who focus on data for students with disabilities are housed in the same office as administrative staff that focuses on data for all students.

Data Governance Boards

Ten states reported having data governance boards and of these, eight reported that their state's governance board included a representative from the office of special education.

Reports

States reported generating the following types of reports based on their state's integrated longitudinal data system for tracking students' progress across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary: test results (15 states), disaggregation of data for students with disabilities (15 states), progress over time (11 states), data for students who have received certain services compared to the overall student population (9 states) and postsecondary outcomes (8 states).

Barriers to the Development of State Longitudinal Data Systems

Respondents from several states identified barriers their states have encountered to developing and maintaining a longitudinal data system for tracking students' progress across their academic careers up to and including postsecondary activities. Most commonly respondents mentioned:

- securing adequate funding (6 states);
- finding and retaining qualified technical staff to provide support and maintenance of the longitudinal data system (3 states);
- developing interagency agreements across state agencies to ensure Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) compliance (3 states); and
- selecting/designing a common identifier that can extend from PreK through postsecondary activities (2 states).

Other barriers mentioned by no more than one respondent included:

- failing to include the office of special education in the planning of the state's longitudinal data system;
- using consistent definitions for data fields;
- ensuring data quality;
- lack of integration across special education and general education data systems; and
- multiple databases at the LEA level.

Benefits of Developing State Longitudinal Data Systems

Respondents identified the primary benefits of their state's longitudinal data systems for tracking the progress of all students as well as students with disabilities in particular. These benefits include:

- easing compliance with federal reporting requirements under ESEA and IDEA (5 states);
- assisting schools and LEAs in submitting more accurate data (3 states);

- providing tools for retrieving reports of interest to the SEA and LEAs, as well as researchers, legislators and members of the public (3 states);
- enabling better tracking of student progress and/or mobility across academic years (3 states);
- allowing for data-based decision making (2 states);
- allowing cross-year comparisons as well as comparisons between students with disabilities and all students (1 state);
- enabling access to data from previous years without having to pull archival files (1 state); and
- helping promote policy agendas such as improving dropout rates and providing access to the general education curriculum (1 state).

In terms of collaboration between special and general education, respondents described a variety of ways in which collaboration enhances the tracking of outcomes for students with disabilities. Most commonly, respondents noted that special education data is now viewed as a standard subset of all data tracked in the state's longitudinal data system. For example, the respondent from *New York* noted that all staff members who review reports of state assessment results sees results for all students disaggregated by subgroups, thereby facilitating the work of school improvement teams and other teams that use data to improve results.

Other examples of ways in which collaboration has enhanced the tracking of outcomes for students with disabilities include the following:

- Involvement of both general and special education staff in database planning has ensured that the needs of all stakeholders are being addressed.
- Analysis of shared data makes it easier to compare outcomes for students with disabilities to outcomes for *all* students.
- Specialized tracking can be conducted upon request (e.g., five-year graduation rates for special and/or general education students).
- Professional development can be targeted based on data analysis of students at risk for failure (e.g., students with disabilities, with limited English proficiency and/or from households with low incomes).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the most recent reauthorization of IDEA, introducing overlapping data requirements with ESEA, many states have been working to streamline their data systems. This survey reveals how states are specifically addressing the data requirements of IDEA and ESEA by integrating data for students with disabilities into a single system that meets the requirements of both laws and how states are beginning to address the Obama administration's priority regarding the integration of education data for decision making and building evidence of effectiveness.

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