

# SITE VISIT REPORT

## WISCONSIN'S LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM

FY09 & FY09 ARRA  
SLDS GRANTEE

May 30, 2012



Statewide  
Longitudinal  
Data Systems  
Grant Program

## INTRODUCTION

The Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program conducts site visits to its grantee states to assess progress on SLDS grant-funded work, provide technical assistance, and learn best practices. The SLDS team visited the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on May 30, 2012 to review the state's FY09 and ARRA SLDS grants.

## HISTORY

Wisconsin received its first SLDS grant in February 2006. The purpose of the grant was to construct a longitudinal data system to better inform curriculum, assessment, and school operational decisions. With the first grant award in 2006, DPI built its first student-centric data warehouse to link student and school data from a variety of sources over time for analysis and reporting. Matching programs are used to match data and an LDS Student Key is assigned to link the student data across the data sources. Wisconsin received a second SLDS grant in May 2009 to continue the development of its longitudinal data system. Wisconsin has several central education priorities: closing the achievement gap, building 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and moving toward a P-20 model in which all stakeholders—educators, students, business, and government—can make informed decisions based on sound longitudinal data. Using the FY09 funds, DPI has built a data warehouse that satisfies federal requirements and reporting while also supporting school and district improvement by enabling longitudinal research and tracking student performance over time. DPI has upgraded its SLDS foundation to support additional student-level data collections and other incorporated data sets; has built dashboards, reports, and analysis tools; and is working to create a comprehensive education portal. Each of these efforts has helped DPI move forward with defining and developing Wisconsin's P-20 system.

Wisconsin also received an FY09 ARRA grant in July 2010. The grant is primarily used to implement additional capabilities, which promote a more robust, sustainable, and interoperable PK-16 data system. DPI plans to focus on three major goals: improvement of postsecondary alignment efforts, incorporation of teacher licensure data into the SLDS, and study of early childhood data collections. For the first objective, DPI will provide sub-grants to postsecondary partners to implement system updates. DPI will also create common, aligned data elements and standards, as well as an interoperable data exchange for research and reporting. For the second objective, DPI will create a web module to manage and

process both initial and renewal license applications as a part of the Teacher, Education, Professional Development, and Licensing (TEPDL) project. Lastly, DPI will complete a feasibility study to evaluate current early childhood education data collections and create a plan for eventual data sharing between DPI and partner agencies.

With the FY09 grant, DPI has increased transparency and incorporated stakeholder feedback into the SLDS project. Wisconsin has worked to identify the goals of the data warehouse, and more importantly, to communicate these goals to both internal and external stakeholders. DPI has also generated momentum around the field of education data and the use of data to promote educational success. Wisconsin recently launched the Coursework Completion System, an additional collection module within the Individual Student Enrollment System, and completed the first statewide collection of course data. This new system provides the link between a teacher, course selection, and student. The Coursework Completion System will provide data about course taking patterns, program participation, and trends that support high school graduation and later success in postsecondary education and the workforce. With the help of the SLDS grants, Wisconsin has made considerable progress in collecting data, designing and building a data warehouse, and creating tools for stakeholders to access the data for analysis and reporting. While Wisconsin had made great progress in providing tools for districts to access data for decisionmaking (Multi-Dimensional Analytic Tool (MDAT), Secure Access File Exchange (SAFE)), Wisconsin felt that it made sense to purchase a solution to help create dashboards and reports in a more timely fashion for users instead of having to build a new application to visualize each dataset. In February 2011 DPI purchased a suite of data, dashboard, and reporting tools that eventually became WISEdash, DPI's dashboard and reporting tool. WISEdash is currently being piloted to a limited number of districts. DPI has increased collaboration with postsecondary groups, early childhood partners, and Regional Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESAs). DPI has also established partnerships with external stakeholders to provide professional development related to WISEdash user capacity.

Recent progress in Wisconsin has also focused on DPI's three primary objectives for the ARRA grant: postsecondary alignment efforts, teacher licensure data in the SLDS, and study of early childhood data collections. For the first objective, DPI has used ARRA grant funds to solidify partnerships with higher

education partners and to strengthen the connection between P-12 and higher education data. In October 2011, DPI made one-year sub-grants to higher education partners, including the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System, and the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. The project now has a dedicated team to assist with data analysis, data policy, and technical infrastructure. In the past year, DPI also decided to use the Wisconsin Student Number (WSN) to link K-12 data to higher education, and DPI is in discussions about whether to use the WSN for pre-kindergarten. To accomplish this goal, DPI is working to add the WSN to high school transcripts (including e-Transcripts) and to create a secure web service that matches student names to WSN. For the TEPDL objective, DPI has established an operable project team with a Project Charter. DPI analyzed programs in 48 other states to explore the possibility of using a licensing system that already exists, versus creating a unique system for Wisconsin. DPI will finalize the approach for the licensing system by September 2012. Lastly, the project steering committee for early childhood has partnered with the Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care. The committee includes representatives from three main state agencies: Department of Children and Families, Department of Health Services, and Department of Public Instruction.

## **GRANT STATUS**

Wisconsin received \$5,552,270 in federal funding for the FY09 SLDS grant. In Year 1, Wisconsin claims to have spent 71 percent of its Year 1 budget (\$1,016,779.60 of \$1,430,959.00). However, the award history report in GAPS indicates that Wisconsin drew down \$816,440.43 during this same period. This discrepancy is due to funds that were expended and obligated by March 31, but not yet drawn down. The under-spending is partially due to the fact that the annual report project Year 1 end (3/31/2010) is one month before the budgeted project Year 1 end (5/1/2010) and partially due to the delays Wisconsin experienced hiring new team members. In Year 2, Wisconsin spent approximately 81 percent of its Year 2 budget (\$1,885,720.00 of \$2,319,249.00). Again, there is a discrepancy between the amount listed in Wisconsin's annual report budget (\$1,885,720.00) and the amount listed in the G5 award history report (\$1,645,619.35) due to funds that were expended and obligated by March 31, but not yet drawn down. The under-spending is partially due to shifts in the reporting period and partially due to the delays Wisconsin experienced in VersiFit contracting and implementation efforts for the software and hardware to support the business intelligence solution. In Year 3, Wisconsin spent \$1,665,208.24, which

was more than the projected year 3 expenditure (\$1,593,033.00). The over-spending is due to greater costs to implement the VersiFit Edvantage solution than initially planned. Wisconsin's grant is scheduled to end in May 2013.

Federal funding for Wisconsin's FY09 ARRA SLDS grant totaled \$13,809,040.00. Wisconsin spent approximately 20 percent of its Year 1 budget (\$842,025.39 of \$4,275,729.00). The under-spending is mainly due to the planning phase of the FY09 ARRA SLDS grant, which involves procurement processes, hiring staff, and conducting requirements-gathering. Under-spending is also due to reduced contractual costs from expenditures by the P-20 partners that have not yet been reimbursed by the grant; purchasing delays around the teacher licensing system since the technical architecture is not yet finalized; and reduced personnel costs from delays around the teacher licensing system and staff turnover. Wisconsin anticipates expending the remaining Year 1 funds during the second and third years of the project. Wisconsin's grant is scheduled to end in June 2013.

#### **STRENGTHS AND BEST PRACTICES**

- **WISEdash collaboration involves several program areas, including local education agencies (LEAs), which increases the sustainability of the system.**
  - The creation of a single point of entry into the WISEdash system is crucial. Wisconsin has created a secure landing page for users to access all tools they have been set up to use.
  - Through Act 166, teacher preparation data constitutes an important state priority, and this data also helps to maintain positive relationships with institutions of higher education.
  - Wisconsin has created the Wisconsin Education Research Advisory Council to establish a research agenda with various stakeholders.
  - Wisconsin has incorporated stakeholder feedback through the establishment of a strong and useful collaboration with the creation of the External Advisory Committee (including college systems, other early childhood stakeholders and Wisconsin CESAs) to discuss WISEdash decisions.
  - Wisconsin continues to entice private schools to use the WSN, which provides a crucial link between K12 and postsecondary data for both public and private school students.

- **The Wisconsin data system has three unique positions that have aided in the success of the different projects associated with the SLDS grants: Data Governance Lead, Communications Lead, and Research Analyst.**
  - The Data Governance Lead continues to improve data governance around the data system by focusing on implementation rather than policy and rule creation. The Communications Lead assists in the successful communication between internal and external partners, and brings stakeholders together to connect the dots between all strategic projects and initiatives. Ultimately this level of increased communication will help with sustainability. The research analyst provides valuable information and statistical analyses in order to continue to improve education in Wisconsin.
  
- **The Wisconsin SLDS staff is very integrated.**
  - The large size of the steering committee ensures that many stakeholders remain up-to-date with LDS progress. The committee also maintains support and interaction between different offices.
  - The Office of Educational Accountability is included in discussions about the project, which ensures that they have the necessary information.
  - Wisconsin presents brownbag presentations on the LDS and WISEdash for state education agency employees.
  
- **Wisconsin prioritizes sustainable and efficient practices.**
  - The statewide student information system has recorded \$30 million in savings.
  - Wisconsin relies on open source tools when possible and is considering the use of identity management tools from other states in order to cut expenses. Wisconsin is also considering using these tools to consolidate efforts and become more efficient with matching and identity management.
  - Wisconsin aims to use the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) to align variables from different sectors.
  - Wisconsin is open about project challenges. Presentations focus on these obstacles in order to spread knowledge to other states.
  - The project embraces relationships in order to move forward.

## AREAS OF CONTINUED FOCUS AND ACTION ITEMS

Below are areas of continued focus and associated recommended action items for Wisconsin's data system efforts.

Focus Area 1: The Wisconsin DPI understands the importance of the SLDS system and the work involved in this process; however, the state must continue to intentionally and actively promote the significance and value of longitudinal education data.

### *Recommendations:*

- Continue to document return on investment.
- Continue to utilize state funds to maintain and enhance the data system when possible.
- Eventually consider the SLDS project as a state effort—this could potentially assist in receiving more funds from the state.
- Create a document that provides information on additional state funding sources for SLDS (e.g., Title I, Perkins, and special education).

Focus Area 2: Wisconsin must promote a culture of cooperation and collaboration between all partners involved in the P-20 SLDS project.

### *Recommendations:*

- Take advantage of work completed by other partners, and more importantly, continue to build upon this strong foundation—particularly the elements related to postsecondary and early childhood objectives.
- Learn from the diverse array of challenges and processes experienced by different members of the P-20 project.
- Use the P-20 data to present analysis similar to the existing analysis of the K12 data.

Focus Area 3: Although Wisconsin has initiated interaction with LEAs, few LEAs participated in the 2012 site visit. It is important to continue local outreach and to solicit LEA feedback on the SLDS project.

- Consider additional reports for LEAs, expanding the existing reports being created for LEAs that demonstrate how the SLDS project reduces burden. By providing these key points, this report would serve as a valuable asset to state legislators.

- Provide more consistent communication with LEA stakeholders regarding WISEdash and data collection and use more broadly.
  - Consider hosting an LEA collaborative conference to assist in cross-district communication, which was an identified need among district staff.

**Focus Area 4:** Update the data governance policy, and put P-20 data governance structures and processes into operation agency-wide to unify K12 and postsecondary standards.

*Recommendations:*

- Document and implement effective, statewide governance policies and processes, including key roles, responsibilities, and decisionmaking authority. Once the policies and processes have been vetted with agency stakeholders, disseminate them to all applicable agency staff and create an implementation plan for putting them into practice.

**DOCUMENTS AND TOOLS FOR THE PUBLIC DOMAIN CLEARINGHOUSE (PDC)**

The following documents and tools are recommended for inclusion in the PDC:

- Data Exchange Charter
- Student Growth Percentile & Value-added information
- Guided Analysis Example