CEDS in the Field

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

*While education institutions across the P-20W (early learning through postsecondary and workforce) environment use many different data standards to meet information needs, there are certain data we all need to be able to understand, compare, and exchange in an accurate, timely, and consistent manner. For these, we need a shared vocabulary for education data – that is, we need common education data standards. The **Common Education Data Standards (CEDS)** project is a national collaborative effort to develop voluntary, common data standards for a key set of education data elements to streamline the exchange, comparison and understanding of data within and across P-20W institutions and sectors.*

The "CEDS in the Field" series of briefs addresses various ways that different data stakeholders are using CEDS and its associated tools. CEDS is built in a way to support a variety of implementations that are all different; there is no one way to "use" CEDS. This brief focuses on how a regional compact, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, used CEDS as a tool in one of its initiatives.

About the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) is a regional organization created to facilitate resource sharing among the higher education systems of the West. WICHE and its 16 member states and territories work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life.[1]

CEDS is a WICHE Tool

In 2010 the Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange (MLDE) project began. Coordinated by WICHE, the project was designed as a pilot data exchange incorporating longitudinal information captured by the K-12, postsecondary, and workforce sectors in four states. With the goal of yielding a rich resource for research to inform public policy, this project focused on the necessary architecture, governance structures, and standard reporting, all while complying with applicable privacy laws.[2]

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[1] Information on WICHE and its mission is from the WICHE website, *http://www.wiche.edu*.

[2] Information on MLDE is from the WICHE website, *http://www.wiche.edu*, and from interviews with Brian Prescott of WICHE and Hans L'Orange of the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO).

Four states participated in the MLDE pilot. Early in the initiative, they agreed on the data necessary to explore the following issues:

- The return on higher education investments,
- Aligning educational production with state and regional workforce needs,
- Planning for economic development, and
- Understanding the mobility of talent.

To accomplish these ends, the four states submitted K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data to the National Student Clearinghouse, the contractor hired to handle the data. The data was matched and analyzed within and across the four states, with the results then returned to the applicable participating states.

However, before the data from all four states could be analyzed across states, the participants had to make sure the data elements submitted from each state matched. For example, does each state use the same demographic categories? Does each state use the same criteria for classifying a postsecondary student as full-time? To address these issues, a group of data managers from each state met and walked through each data element they wanted to use in the MLDE. Rather than develop an independent system to ensure the elements from all four states matched, the states were able to use CEDS as the basis for element alignment. MLDE built a data exchange protocol with common definitions from CEDS; after analysis is complete, each state can then translate their data back to the definitions used within its state.

> "In the absence of CEDS, common data elements would have been developed by the group. But CEDS allowed them to short-cut what would have been a lengthy dialogue about how the various states (and agencies within) were defining the things of interest to us."
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> **Brian Prescott, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education**

> "From the data contributor perspective, using CEDS made us more comfortable that everyone was providing similar data. I trusted the output more because I knew that the differences would not be due to differences in how we defined data."
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> **Melissa Beard, State of Washington Education Research & Data Center**

Discussion

The Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange, facilitated by WICHE, brings together K12, postsecondary, and workforce data elements from four states for matching and analysis. The parties involved agreed that CEDS was the best common language for their elements, and so aligned their data to CEDS. Matched data aligned to CEDS were returned to the states; analysis was completed by building off of the CEDS definitions.

Using CEDS for the MLDE did not require each participating state to adopt the CEDS standards. CEDS was used to make sure each state, and the analysis results, spoke a common language. CEDS provided a common vocabulary for the four states, allowing cross-state data to be accurately analyzed. While CEDS has only been a small part of the Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange, it was important to its success.

For More Information

For additional information on the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) or the Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange (MLDE), please visit the WICHE web site, ***http://www.wiche.edu.***

For more information on the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS), to explore the standards, or interact with any of the associated tools, please visit ***https://ceds.ed.gov.***