Louisiana Final Report

Executive Summary:

The Louisiana State Department of Education (LDOE), in collaboration with the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology (CELT), worked on the Teacher-Student Data Link (TSDL) Project funded by the Gates Foundation with support from the Data Quality Campaign (DQC). Louisiana specifically incorporated three projects within the TSDL project: a roster verification system, data movement architecture, and the New Orleans district data architecture.

All three of the Louisiana projects were completed within the TSDL time frame. Key major accomplishments of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) that came from these projects include the adoption of a new teacher of record definition, improvement of LDOE data systems, better systems documentation, successful validation of pilot data collection processes, increased local districts' involvement and input in pilot projects, and greater collaboration and shared learning with other states involved with the TSDL project.

Some of the lessons learned from LDOE's TSDL projects were the importance of involving district personnel in decision making and gathering feedback on new projects, new ways to handle various data issues, the need to address the complexity of individual districts, and more effective and efficient ways of communicating with district personnel.

New projects inevitably create challenges that must be solved. One of the biggest ongoing challenges the LDOE faces is communication with all stakeholders involved - especially in developing and implementing new initiatives. The overall design of the TSDL project required and enabled LDOE to employ improved communication methods such as ensuring districts designate a contact person for all projects, hiring a communications company for assistance, and soliciting and using feedback from district personnel. Also, numerous communication vehicles, such as in-person meetings, internet resources, live webinars, and recorded webinar sessions posted online, were used to disseminate information to stakeholders.

As noted, it is important to have district and school personnel actively participate and be supportive of the TSDL projects, but they frequently have many responsibilities that compete for their time, attention and resources. Often by default, a new project from the DOE carries less priority than local issues. LDOE found that by including local personnel from the beginning of a project and actively seeking and using their feedback, cooperation and support improved as negativity and stress related to the extra work involved in new projects diminished. This approach was supported by the annual TSDL summits. In addition to providing a collegial

environment for different states to work together, the summits gave state team members the opportunity to learn each other's strengths and to strategize on work plans.

From our work on the TSDL project, the states and districts involved benefitted in numerous ways. The lines of communication formed through the work helped both the state and districts work together more effectively. They discussed ways to organize data more efficiently, think about new uses for data, and provide more accurate data. A final and critically important benefit coming from these projects is that they helped all parties meet requirements of new state laws.

The following project narratives describe in more detail each of the three Louisiana TSDL projects.

Project narratives for each of the project(s)

I. **Project One: Roster Verification**

Louisiana created a roster verification system (the Curriculum Verification and Results (CVR) Reporting Portal) in 2009. The CVR was created by the state's own Information Technology team of programmers. The CVR had been tested by a small number of schools before collaboration with CELT and before the TSDL project began. These schools were able to go through the verification process and provide feedback on how to make the system more user friendly and informative. Once Louisiana joined the TSDL project (receiving the available resources) and roster verification became a major focus, system modifications based on feedback from the initial trial schools began. Some of the modifications included having alternative methods for registering for an account, creating simpler methods to add students to a roster, and providing more detailed directions on each page. A new teacher of record was also established to help guide this work. Louisiana's teacher of record definition is, "Teachers of record are educators who are responsible for a portion of a student's learning outcomes that are within a subject/course."

The CVR allows teachers and principals to access the class rosters that are submitted to the state by their local district. Teachers and/or principals correct inaccuracies in the data, and then verify the data which links classes and students to specific teachers. This is an important process as the data that comes from roster verification is vital in the state's new teacher evaluation protocol.

With the help of CELT, districts participated in a CVR pilot during which they provided feedback on the process and use of the online roster verification system. Modifications to the system were made based on user input. The project also allowed for collaboration with other states and organizations to learn alternative methods for conducting roster verification.

Accomplishments

One of the biggest accomplishments from the project is that Louisiana has an active, working roster verification system that allows teachers to make appropriate changes. This will enable an accurate class roster of students for whom they will be held accountable in the teacher evaluation system. Although the teacher evaluation system was created before the initiation of this project, the TSDL project enabled LDOE to make needed improvements to the CVR system, which in turn supports the evaluation process. High quality training materials, including manuals and power points, were developed to help the users navigate the CVR system with ease. A final major accomplishment was to create the necessary process and programmatic changes to enable other states to use the Louisiana roster verification system as their model. Changes were made to the programming code to facilitate this, and a sample Memorandum of Understanding was developed. Louisiana will work with other states in providing the code for creating an online verification system and technical documents to support others in this endeavor. This is a great resource and means of cross-state collaboration. The MOU and training materials were made available to other states on the TSDL website and through the USDOE Public Domain Clearinghouse.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

Although much has been accomplished, challenges remain. By far the largest challenge is one of communication; specifically, getting all relevant information to those who need it most. One lesson learned from the project is that using multiple sources within a district helps to remove some of the communication barriers. By having communication with multiple levels within the district (District Superintendents, District Data Managers, school personnel) and by having everyone receive information from one source and at the same time rather than having a top-down system, many barriers were eliminated. Working on the entire TSDL project allowed the State Department, local district personnel (teachers, leaders, data managers) and even vendors to collaborate more effectively, which in turn helped to reach more people who needed the information.

Another on-going challenge is the lack of resources to regularly maintain and modify the roster verification system in the face of changing state laws and state and district needs. This is a tough challenge since state resources continue to be scarce. A final challenge is data integrity and accuracy. The CVR system was created to be easy for users to operate; however, human error is always a factor. With the help of CELT, CVR training has been created to build staffs' capacity to use the system. This training will continue to be an excellent resource for users of the CVR system.

II. Project Two: Data Movement Architecture (DMA)

The Data Movement Architecture (DMA) project began as a recommendation from TSDL pilot districts. The purpose of the DMA was to pilot a data collection process in which the state collects teacher and student data. This approach pulls data from different local systems on a nightly basis using a controlled, semi-automated process rather than requiring the local district to upload files at specific points in time. Data collected from the districts is used for roster verification data, for conducting on-going and longitudinal data analysis, and for linking students to teachers while following FERPA privacy guidelines. Two separate districts, Bossier Parish and Vermillion Parish, participated in the DMA project.

Accomplishments

The DMA work required the collaboration between the state, local districts, and the district data vendors (when applicable). This project successfully provided daily data uploads to the data warehouse. The biggest accomplishment of this project was to prove, on a small scale basis, that daily data uploads could be completed efficiently and effectively. The work of this project led into project three as discussed below.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

Some of the challenges associated with the DMA were working with contracted vendors, and ensuring all stakeholders were getting the most use out of the data, while minimizing the extra work involved. Working with the vendors enabled LDOE to build more positive relationships with them and better understand vendor processes, as well as business and data requirements. Having multiple vendors with different processes and requirements also complicated the project and created issues for the state and districts. Another associated challenge was making sure that the data being collected was the appropriate data, and that the project was as efficient as possible and, therefore, not just creating extra work. Data use was carefully examined and understood by all to make sure the proper data was being collected. Business rules were put in place to test the pull of more precise data for different uses. It was important to make sure the project was going to be beneficial to all parties which, in the end, was found to be the case.

No new paragraph here. The success of this small scale DMA project led to the creation of Louisiana's third project, the New Orleans Student Attendance Tracker System (NOSATS).

III. Project Three: New Orleans Student Attendance Tracker System (NOSATS)

The New Orleans Student Attendance Tracker System (NOSATS) was initiated to test the process of uploading near real-time student attendance, discipline, and calendaring records to the LDOE from Orleans Parish schools in the Recovery School District and charter school sites. The process involved creating a Vertical Data Submitter (VDS), which consisted of a small application running on a local computer that would automatically extract data from the local district's databases and upload it into the LDOE's system daily.

Accomplishments

At the completion of this project, 52 schools were successful in implementing this system. The project demonstrated that daily data uploads is a feasible, effective process for data collection. NOSATS proved that the LDOE could successfully collect specific data from schools every twenty-four hours through an improved, automated data transmission, thus providing evidence that this system could be replicated across the state to collect data on a daily basis.

The NOSATS data collected was used to create five reports on student attendance for specific state programs. These reports identified schools with the highest attendance problems and, subsequently, helped the schools to focus on improving attendance rates. This type of data collection was beneficial in fostering collaboration between LDOE and local districts to identify problem areas and work together to solve the issues.

As with the other projects, communication was one of the biggest challenges. Getting the project information to the appropriate persons in the schools to garner support was difficult and led to delays at the start of the project. Collecting all the appropriate information needed to start the project was complicated due to the many levels involved in the project (state authorities, district authorities, and charter/school authorities) and the approval processes. Some of the vendors proved to be a large support for this endeavor, and were very helpful in collecting and organizing a large portion of this information.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

Although some vendors proved to be very supportive, others were not. Some schools were not able to participate because the data vendor did not want to use the project's data pump with their servers. This is one hurdle that comes with working with various vendors.

Overall, the NOSATS data collection proved to be a success and can be a very useful tool in the future.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The state learned much from the districts, and new lines of communication were opened that will also be beneficial as future work is rolled out. A new definition of teacher of record was adopted; the roster verification system was improved; and new data collection methods were identified and successfully implemented. Another strong benefit of the project was the ability to discuss models, processes, and problems with the other TSDL states. Relationships were formed in-and-across states that will enable future sharing. Also, having technical assistance on issues such as roster verification available with a quick phone call or email was a definite plus.

The LDOE's next steps are to further improve the roster verification system. This work will continue to collect verified roster information for all teachers in grades 3-8, teaching a core content area across the state, and to continually make modifications as the system expands and matures each cycle. This is an on-going project that will continue for many years. The success of the NOSATS data collection has the potential to open the door for new data collection to occur statewide. The biggest challenges for LDOE's next steps will be money, resources, and time. As with many other states, Louisiana is facing financial hardships; and, thus, finding the money to allocate to these projects may become more difficult. Resources are also limited due to these financial hardships. However, it is important to note that the grant money that was used for these projects, funded by the Gates Foundation, was invaluable for the start-up and successful trials of all of these projects. The TSDL project helped LDOE put in place and strengthen critical building blocks for establishing valid, reliable links between teachers and their students.