Q&A with Dr. Hazel and Insights from Onboarding

VLDS

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Q&A with Dr. William Hazel, Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources: Keynote Speaker at Insights Conference 2015

VLDS: What first interested you about VLDS?

Dr. Hazel: The Virginia Department of Education created the first VLDS system in the Commonwealth, showing other Secretariats how it could offer integrated multi-agency reporting even with the data sharing challenges of FERPA. It then made sense to explore how our VLDS could be extended to support reporting under HIPAA, SAMPSA and other confidential sources.

VLDS: What role do you think the careful use of data plays in health and human resources programs in Virginia? How do you think it is evolving?

Dr. Hazel: Health and human resource programs have a long and rich history of using claim, application or other transactional data to help guide their services. For many years, these "cylinders of excellence" could work independently of each other, performing their agency roles.

Changes in the socio-demographic fabric of citizens, communities and states are forcing us as HHR leaders to take a more integrated, data driven approach to managing our programs effectively and connecting the "silos" to present a streamlined, proactive set of services to citizens.

VLDS: How do you view the value of the insights powered by VLDS in your role as Secretary of Health and Human Resources for the Commonwealth of Virginia?

Dr. Hazel: VLDS provides a holistic view of the community, because it overcomes privacy concerns (safely) and provides a 360 degree view of citizens. Through this unified view, VA HHR is able to see at-risk groups within the community and target campaigns to assist them.

VLDS started with education attributes, then extended to include social services and in the near future will include healthcare measures. Perhaps a bit further out, we can find ways to use VLDS to better help homeless and veterans populations.

It's realistically the only venue where this type of broad, integrated analytic perspective can be achieved, given the privacy and interoperability differences that exist across federal and state programs.

VLDS: Can you share some of the administration's initiatives that you might highlight in your Insights Conference address? How does VLDS fit with those initiatives?

Dr. Hazel: In August 2014, Governor McAuliffe by Executive Order created a cabinet solely dedicated to the education, health, safety, and welfare of Virginia's children and youth. The newly launched Children's Cabinet will develop and implement a policy agenda that will help better serve Virginia's children and will also foster collaboration between state and local agencies.

The Children's Cabinet will focus on five specific priority areas:

1. Eradicating the achievement gap in schools in high poverty communities.
2. Increasing access to basic needs including housing, healthcare, and proper nutrition.
3. Improving outcomes for youth transitioning out of Virginia's juvenile justice, mental health and foster care

systems.
4. Increasing workforce opportunities for parents and for youth as they transition out of high school.
5. Improving early childhood care and education

VLDS serves as the compass to steer our Children's Cabinet course. Education, health, safety, welfare are all bigger than any one agency or even one Secretariat. While it's complicated to get three or four agencies to work together, that coordination yields the best result to help children in the Commonwealth. Through the VLDS, we understand the result of our efforts in a measureable form.

VLDS: How do you see longitudinal data systems like VLDS affecting policy?

Dr. Hazel: VLDS, All Payer Claims Database (APCD), Big Data, Open Data … taking data and turning it into meaningful analytic information is the key. Information makes our health and human resource programs more effective, smarter and more efficient. Data is the fuel that powers advanced analytics.

Using data and advanced analytics intelligently in our state government is a cornerstone to building a New Virginia Economy. The information provided by advanced analytics can help us automate our agency business processes and evolve program policy to be more measureable. The resulting "pay for performance" shift in our care delivery model is needed to guide all those involved in health and human services.

Virginia benefits from the wonderful diversity of our citizenry. Many of our localities are experiencing swift demographic changes. We can no longer assume a one size fits all approach for providing services to citizens. Instead, we need an analytics-based approach to delivering the right service to the right citizen at the right cost.

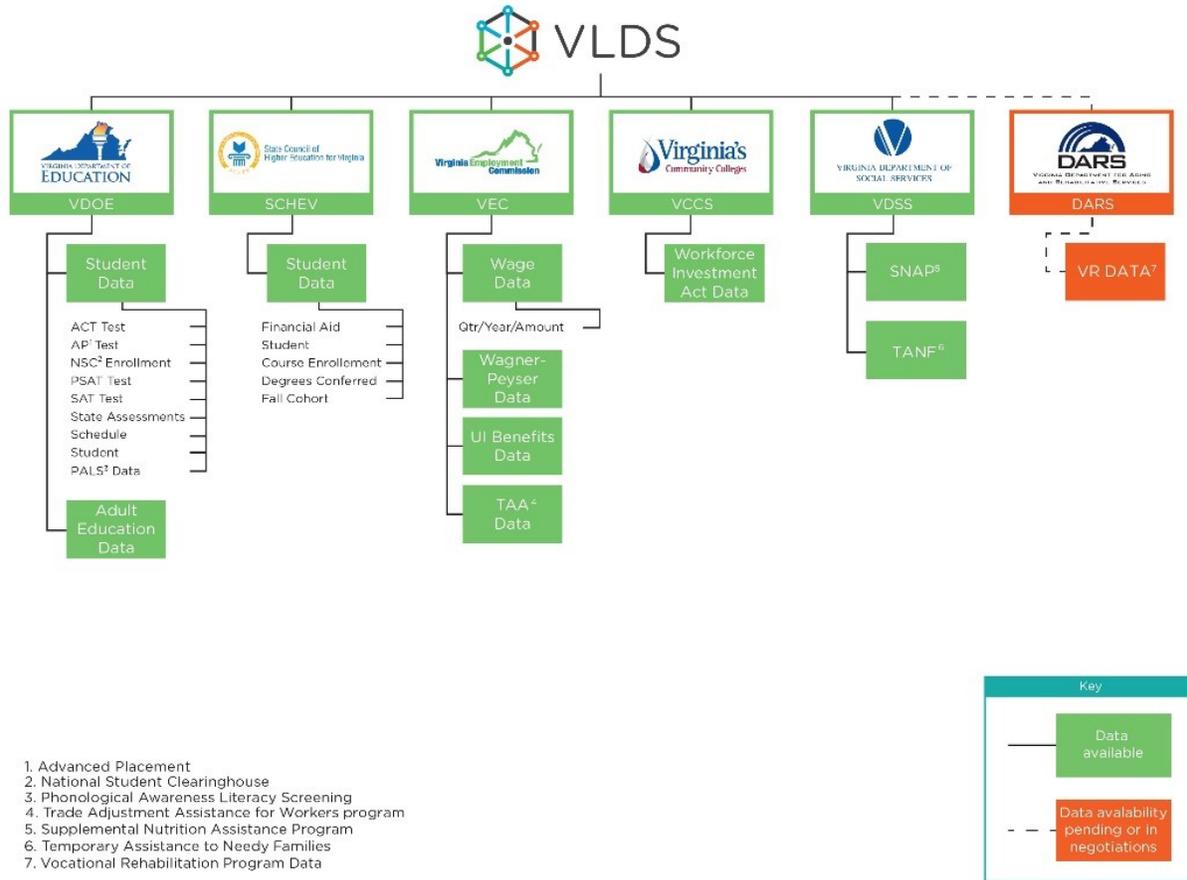**VLDS:** How do you see data use affecting the future of health and human resources?

Dr. Hazel: Always being mindful of security and privacy concerns, we need to safely and securely look at ways to collaborate across agencies with data and analytics and think outside one agency for data that can make business services smarter.

These are the kinds of smart, data-driven systems we need to recruit new millennial workers into state government service.   With major state systems having a lifespan of more than 20 years, the smart analytic models we include today will help these systems have a full and productive lifespan.

Insights from Onboarding

In fall 2014 the founding state agencies of VLDS were joined by the Virginia Department of Social Services, giving researchers access to more data points than ever before. The onboarding of VDSS data includes information from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance for Workers Program (SNAP) and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Adding a new participating agency takes month of cooperation from various stakeholders. Before the technical process of adding new data points is even discussed, a fair amount of time is spent educating agency executives and program managers about the purpose of VLDS, how it works, which agencies are participating and sharing data, and what the agency could do with the VLDS.

Interested agencies must abide by the data governance policies set out by the VLDS Data Governance Group and sign the Data Book of Governance and a Data Sharing Agreement. Together, the founding agencies and participating agencies that are onboarding must work through the technical challenges of adding new data sets.

This chart shows what data (and potential data) is available to researchers through VLDS.

Art Ritter, Data Warehouse Team Manager for VDSS gave this advice to interested agencies:

1. Plan on it being a little more complicated than expected.
2. Data sets should be of value to researchers and of good quality.
3. Work closely with the VLDS group to resolve questions and designs early on, and have them on hand to install and configure the Data Adaptor software.
4. Plan on dedicating a good technical design person and a good programmer to the effort.

Agencies should also keep in mind that although it is possible to set up and share data through VLDS with the work and assistance of very few people, it is not advisable. It is best for an agency to have many people involved in the onboarding process to work on both the technical and non-technical side of the process. Identifying those persons within an agency who should be involved with tasks such as developing research questions, identifying the data needed to investigate those research questions, and designing the tables and developing scripts to move data into the agency's exposure database, are a huge part of the puzzle when ensuring an onboarding agency's success.

Insights Conference Session Spotlight

New Agency Partnerships: Is your agency interested in joining VLDS? Panelists Justin Crow, Jeff Price and Kirsten Rowe can tell you all you need to know about becoming a partner agency and how to work within your agency to make it happen.

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Apps4Va Teacher wins RichTech Award

Apps4VA High School teacher, Lynn Norris, won RichTech's Innovation in Education Award. The Innovation in Education Award is awarded to the educator who provides exceptional technology leadership and encourages students to pursue higher education or training in science, technology, engineering and math. Congratulations, Lynn!

Photo credit: Richmond Technology Council, The 2015 RichTech Gala.

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