

Q&A with Nancy Sharkey and VECF releases new report

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Q&A with Nancy Sharkey, Program Officer, Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program, National Center for Education Statistics

VLDS: What do you think have been the main benefits states have derived from building these longitudinal data systems?

Sharkey: States now have the benefit of state longitudinal data systems (SLDS) to support data driven improvements in education policy as well as practice. They have used grants to enable their districts to have quicker access to transfer students' records; to help high schools have a better sense of how their graduates are faring in college; to help teachers have quicker access to more complete information student performance; and to help policy makers have access to data to help them implement data-based policies.

In many states, the process of building an SLDS has brought together stakeholders from across sectors to identify data that would be useful to collect and questions that would be useful to answer. Many of these questions that are needed to provide feedback about the success of education, training, and other programs simply could not be answered without the development of an SLDS type of system. This enables states to move beyond indicators of future success such as SAT or ACT scores to being able to examine real outcomes like actual college-going and success rates. From a purely practical standpoint, states have leveraged their SLDS to help decrease school-and LEA-based reporting to the states and to improve the quality of their own reporting.

VLDS: What kind of progress have you seen since the 2012 FY grants were awarded?

Sharkey: Some states that didn't have reporting capacity in their SLDS systems are now developing that capacity. States that had piloted systems are now scaling up to include all districts. And, states are creating more feedback reports and workforce-data policy analysis to help the P-16 education systems meet state workforce needs.

VLDS: Have you uncovered any unexpected results and how have these insights changed policy or outcomes?

What's surprising is the diversity of SLDS systems and needs among the states. While states could apply for funding specific to K12, early learning, and postsecondary/workforce data in the FY12 grant round, their implementations vary tremendously, from systems focusing on helping to provide feedback to teacher preparation programs to states focusing more extensively on identifying state workforce needs and identifying the extent to which educational opportunities in the state are aligned with those needs. One of the surprising benefits that we have

seen is the increase in collaborative efforts to develop these systems. The new information states have to work with has helped to foster a more statewide perspective in some states where the agencies work together viewing the education to workforce process as a continuum instead of just looking at their individual parts of the process.

We're always reminded, too, that the interrelated efforts of data governance, data use, sustainability planning, and stakeholder engagement are never completely done. In addition to leadership transitions at SEAs [State Education Agencies] and LEAs [Local Education Agencies], whenever states bring in new data, craft a new report, develop new training, or enter into a new data sharing agreement, they have to reconsider how governance, sustainability and stakeholders need to be involved, and how they will affect or how they will be affected by the new data use or data-related relationships.

VLDS: With this new round of grant funding what does the National Center for Education Statistics hope to achieve? What are the goals and objectives of the program?

Sharkey: NCES has invested more than \$600 million in helping states build Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. While some current and previous state grantees have crafted projects around data use, this grant round focusses much more explicitly on supporting their efforts to use data to inform policy and practice.

Based on our conversations with states, we have learned that they often lack the capacity to conduct research. While research partners can often help fill the capacity gap, these relationships still use state staff and IT resources that are often in short supply. With this grant round, NCES expects to help states to fill this resource gap. They can make use of the data that are currently in their SLDS systems to help address the needs of all students, including at-risk students, such as children and youth who are or have been homeless or who are in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. As with the FY09 and FY12 grant rounds, states may choose from multiple options to apply for funding that best meets their current and expected data use needs. The end goal has never been to simply build technical infrastructures, but to use those resources to make real improvements in education.

VLDS: What will this grant funding allow states to do?

Sharkey: States may apply for funds to carry out projects to address up to two of the following data use priorities:

1. Financial Equity and Return on Investment (ROI)
2. Educator Talent Management
3. Early Learning
4. College and Career
5. Evaluation and Research
6. Instructional Support.

States can use the funds for a variety of purposes, including, for example, to conduct research, to support professional development, to improve data access, to locate gaps in services, and to identify successful programs. The focus is on supporting States' efforts to use data in statewide, longitudinal data systems (SLDS) to inform their efforts to improve education in critical areas. Many states have made considerable state investments in their longitudinal data systems; this grant is intended to supplement, but not supplant, these local investments.

VLDS: How will these systems help or affect citizens?

Sharkey: The long-term goal for the Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grant Program is to enable all states to create comprehensive early learning through workforce (P-20W) data systems that:

- Permit the generation and use of accurate and timely data, support analysis and informed decision-making at all levels of the education system
- Increase the efficiency with which data may be analyzed to support the continuous improvement of education services and outcomes
- Facilitate research to improve student academic achievement and close achievement gaps
- Support education accountability systems
- Simplify the processes used by state educational agencies to make education data transparent through federal and public reporting.

Depending on local goals, parents may see easier access to information about their students' academic performance; students may see more information helping them make informed choices about college enrollment and course taking; high schools may have information to help them better prepare students for college; colleges may have better information about how to better prepare students for the workforce; and parents with young children might have more information about how to identify and where to find high quality early childhood settings.

Insights Conference Session Spotlight: Harnessing the Power of VLDS



Using VLDS to predict 8th grade outcomes for Virginia's preschoolers

The Virginia University Research Consortium used VLDS to assess how public preschool participation was associated with students' long-term outcomes. Results showed on-time promotion advantages through 8th grade to students who had attended public prekindergarten compared to peers, but no group differences in 8th grade literacy achievement. Encouragingly, most students could be followed across the nine years (N= 77,451) and secure matching and data delivery worked smoothly. Using available data, it was not possible to specify children's preschool program. Findings will be contextualized and insights discussed regarding ways to improve the state's capacity to evaluate early educational programs using the VLDS.

The Return on Investment of Virginia's Vocational Rehabilitation Program

We will present findings from a scientifically rigorous approach to estimating return on investment (ROI) of the Virginia vocational rehabilitation program for people with disabilities. This approach uses readily-available administrative data on longitudinal earnings and VR service provision to estimate earnings impacts of specific VR services provided to individuals with various types of disabilities. We will discuss how these findings can inform VR policy and programmatic decisions.

Data-Driven Support for Students on the Path to College: Identifying useful variables for college planning throughout high schools

The path to college consists of a complex set of choices and achievements completed over a long period of time. In this session, we will provide an overview of how our research team took up the challenge of identifying ways to make more information about postsecondary education available by exploring how college readiness data can be brought directly to guidance counselors, students, and families in an easy-to-use manner to help them make important and difficult decisions. We investigated this issue from a variety of perspectives, including defining and understanding the problem by engaging high school counselors and advisors, and exploring how the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS) might be leveraged to better understand the system and inform policy and practice.

Using SOL Data to Inform Program Impact

The Rural Math Excel Partnership study funded by an i3 grant from the Department of Education is using Standards of Learning (SOL) test scores from the Virginia Department of Education to measure student achievement in mathematics as it relates to the effects of the initiative being studied in six participating districts across treatment and comparison conditions. Analyses will be conducted at the individual student level and linked to the teachers from each participating school division.

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VECF Releases Report on Achievement in Eighth Grade in Relation to Public Pre-K

The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) recently released a report based on de-identified data provided by VLDS. The study examined middle school outcomes related to on-time promotion and literacy achievement for students who attended public pre-kindergarten programs in Virginia. Although researchers previously examined the performance of kindergarten through third grade students to determine whether there were any benefits associated with attending pre-K programs, they had not, however, investigated whether those benefits lasted over time.

According to Kathy Glazer, VECF president, "VLDS has made a study like this feasible. This is the first study in Virginia to follow children from preschool to 8th grade, and it sets the stage for our ability to learn more about the long-term benefits of Virginia's early childhood support services."

The study found that students who attended public pre-kindergarten programs in Virginia were 3.9 percent more likely to be promoted to the eighth grade on time, and on-time promotion is closely tied to higher high school graduation rates. It also revealed that grade retention (students repeating a grade) is costly to the Commonwealth and adversely affects students both socially and academically.

Read the [full report](#) and [FAQs](#).

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For more information on VLDS, visit

<http://vllds.virginia.gov>

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