



CEDS in the Field

Alaska

*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 Alaska, while building its P-20W data system, used CEDS as a tool in the development process.

Alaska Partner Organizations Build an SLDS

The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) was awarded funding from the US Department of Education’s Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Grant Program in 2012 to build a P-20W system. The P-20W system is intended to link data from the DEED, the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE), the University of Alaska (UA), and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce (DOLWD). The data will include information from:

- the existing K-12 data system, including student demographics, program participation, assessments, performance, financial aid, and interventions;
- the postsecondary data system including enrollment, remediation and success, teacher preparation, demographics, certification, and employment data; and
- the state’s labor and workforce system, including information about individuals’ employment, their related industry, employer information, and earnings. In addition, Alaska’s DOLWD collects information on workers’ occupations, and will incorporate this data in order to better link educational efforts to labor force demands.

Alaska’s P-20W SLDS, called ANSWERS, the Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce and Education-Related Statistics, will replace a series of ad hoc memorandums of agreement (MOAs) across the departments for specific data elements needed for analysis and reporting.¹

¹ Information gathered from Alaska’s SLDS grant application, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/state.asp?stateabbr=AK>, and interviews with ACPE staff.

Alaska Uses CEDS

Alaska used CEDS to address the interoperability requirement of the SLDS grant. As a first step toward building their new P-20W system, Alaska created a development team from the partner organizations to:

Alaska used CEDS standards to align as many elements as possible across the data systems.

- catalogue the data available in each department;
- determine the policy questions being asked of the departments; and
- identify the data needed to answer the questions.

The development team then aligned all possible elements in the various data systems to CEDS before taking the next step toward building the SLDS.

The team discovered early on that across the various data systems, they collected – and needed to collect – more data elements than CEDS addresses. As a result, the ANSWERS team did not adopt the CEDS standards, but used it to align as many elements as possible across the data systems. CEDS is not the driving force for the structure and elements of the SLDS. ANSWERS staff refer to it as a “CEDS compatible” system, not CEDS compliant.

“As our SLDS matures, we plan to take advantage of the CEDS Align and Connect tools, share our data dictionary, and explore the policy questions and logic flows developed by our state and others.”
Kerry Thomas, Alaska Commission on Post-Secondary Education

As the development team moved forward with the SLDS, they developed a conceptual flow for the data system, and released a request for proposal for software development in January 2014. After investing so much time in the front-end work, the team decided to drive the technology component themselves, rather than let the technology drive their planning. As such, the RFP does not specify vendor solutions including CEDS compatibility; the team will use vendors and a team of technology resources to build the system rather than trying to customize an out-of-the-box solution.

Discussion

As the Alaska development team moved forward with its P-20W SLDS, ANSWERS, it needed a way to bring together the disparate data systems from the P-12, postsecondary, and workforce departments. They were able to use CEDS elements and definitions as the common denominator in this process. *CEDS served as the basis to align the common elements across the various systems into the SLDS, but using them did not require the team to adopt CEDS definitions or data structures in the process.* After the systems’ common elements were aligned, the team added its own elements and design structure to meet the needs of the state’s P-20W SLDS.

For More Information

For more information on Alaska’s P20-W SLDS, ANSWERS, the Alaska Navigator: Statewide Workforce and Education-Related Statistics, please visit <http://acpe.alaska.gov/ANSWERS>.

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>.