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Maryland Longitudinal Data System

The State's efforts to develop a comprehensive data system that spans across education and the workforce, known as the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS), are well ahead of the December 2014 deadline. An MLDS website is anticipated to go live in early 2013 with limited data dashboard reports. MLDS has been developed to initially address 15 policy questions that affect education and the workforce, and the required data privacy and security policies are in place. The next steps include establishing the MLDS Center with an executive director to move MLDS from the technical phase to the data analysis and policymaking phase.

System Development Ahead of Schedule

Chapter 190 of 2010 established the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) to contain individual-level student data and workforce data from all levels of education and the State's workforce. The legislation also established the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Governing Board and a center within State government to serve as a central repository for the data, ensure compliance with federal privacy laws, perform research on the data sets, and fulfill education reporting requirements and approved public information requests. The development of MLDS is ahead of schedule and will be operational well before the statutorily required December 2014 deadline.

Much of the infrastructure needed to link the data from the State agencies and higher education institutions has been completed, as well as the framework necessary to access the data via a website, including separate login portals for policymakers, researchers, and parents. Testing of the dashboard analytics system for several of the critical education policy questions developed by the governing board began in September 2012. Another subset of the analytic dashboards should be ready for review by early 2013. Completion of this phase of the project required the development of an encrypted, multiagency individual crosswalk identification table and electronic transcripts from most local education agencies and higher education institutions. The MLDS website is anticipated to go live in early 2013 with limited, prepared data dashboard reports, but the data will not be searchable.

The timeline for the project has been accelerated due to considerable interest in MLDS, including from the Governor, and receipt of significant federal funding for the project. In July 2012, the State was awarded almost \$4.0 million by the federal Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (LDS) grant program to aid in linking postsecondary and workforce data with the State's prekindergarten through high school (P-12) data system. MLDS is also a main component of the State's \$250 million federal Race to the Top grant received in August 2010. The State also received approximately \$6 million in federal LDS grant funds in 2006 and 2009, and a \$1 million U.S Department of Labor grant for the project in 2010. A portion of the recent

grant funds is being used to replace the outdated data information systems at the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). Previous grant funds were used by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop a student-level P-12 data system.

Data Privacy/Security Policies and Policy Questions Developed

Privacy and data security issues, including compliance with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), were a major consideration in the creation of MLDS. Prior to beginning system testing, as required by Chapter 190, the center's governing board submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly the inventory of individual student data proposed to be maintained in the system, the privacy policies of the center, and a data security and safeguarding plan for the center. Chapter 190 requires the center to ensure routine and ongoing compliance with FERPA and other relevant privacy laws and policies, including the required use of de-identified data (in which individual-level identity information, including State-assigned student identifiers and Social Security numbers has been removed) in data research and reporting; the required disposition of information that is no longer needed; the assurance of data security; and the implementation of guidelines and policies that prevent the reporting of other potentially identifying data. The center is also required to provide for the performance of regular audits for compliance with data privacy and security standards.

To meet these requirements, an expert was hired to develop the center's data security and safeguarding plan. The plan establishes that the center must employ the concept of "least privilege," that is, allowing only authorized accesses for users (and processes acting on behalf of users) that are necessary to accomplish assigned tasks in accordance with the MLDS mission and functions. The plan also outlines policies to limit access to authenticated authorized users and requires the center to assign an employee as the privacy officer.

To further reduce privacy concerns and in response to the technical issues experienced by other states that attempted to capture all state data into a single system, the scope of the data in the MLDS data warehouse is limited by the policy questions it is designed to answer. The governing board, working in consultation with the Governor's P-20 Council, has developed 15 priority policy questions that MLDS has been designed to address. These policy questions include whether Maryland students are academically prepared for college and graduate in a timely fashion; whether financial aid programs are effective in supporting access and success; and whether students are successful in the workplace. Some of the questions will require the State agencies, particularly MHEC, to expand their data collection efforts. The MLDS data inventory documents the specific data elements included in MLDS. The scope of the data incorporated into MLDS is not permanent and could be updated if new policy questions are added.

Currently, the database contains both aggregate data sets and de-identified, encrypted student and workforce data. Data associated with an individual are not available for viewing in the MLDS database, and workforce-related data are only retained for five years after an individual leaves school.

FERPA compliance concerns of institutions of higher education have been addressed through limiting the personally identifiable information entered into MLDS and by assuring the institutions that the redisclosure of personally identifiable information to the center is permitted according to revised FERPA regulations. FERPA governs the protection and permissible uses of student administrative data, including the disclosure and transfer of personally identifiable information in education records. The FERPA regulations were revised in December 2011 to reconcile them with the federal laws (*e.g.*, Race to the Top) that incentivized the development and use of state longitudinal data systems. The revised regulations clarified that FERPA does not prevent the redisclosure of personally identifiable information to researchers as part of agreements with FERPA-permitted entities to conduct studies for, and on behalf of, educational agencies and institutions.

Center Needs a Home and Budget

Chapter 190 required that the center be an independent unit within State government. As of October 2012, proposals for the physical and administrative placement of the center are being evaluated by the governing board. The center will likely be located at a higher education institution or a State agency. The governing board is also conducting a search for an interim director for the center. There is funding for the interim director and some initial research planning through July 2013, but a source of funding beyond that point has yet to be determined.

The director, under the direction of the governing board, will determine the center's next steps – moving the center from a primarily technical development phase to a primarily policy and decisionmaking phase. Prior to the center becoming fully operational, initial policy decisions will need to be made on how to present the data and the level of access to the data that will be permitted to the public, teachers, parents, researchers, and other interested parties. Other initial tasks for the director include developing the center's initial research agenda, policies to approve outside data requests, and the center's research team. These decisions require more direct involvement than the governing board can provide.

To succeed in meeting expectations, the center needs operating funds. The federal funding only covers one-time development costs, not ongoing costs such as personnel to operate the center. The placement of the center, the scope of the research agenda, and the desired response time of the center will help determine the operational funding needed. The fiscal note for Chapter 190 estimated approximately \$1 million would be needed to operate the center beginning in fiscal 2014, with an additional \$900,000 in annual costs at MHEC and MSDE to oversee data collection and linkage. The governing board has projected a \$2 million annual budget, including State appropriations, agency contributions, and chargeback fees for data and report requests.