

Longitudinal Data System (LDS) Recommendations to Georgia Department of Education

Prepared By: Georgia Student Information Systems (GSIS) Users Group

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1. Personnel / Training

1.1. Increase the Professionalism of School-Level Data Personnel – Despite the high level of responsibility and skills required to manage student data, school level data staff are often some of the lowest paid employees in the school. Some school systems have not yet even employed dedicated data staff due to budgetary concerns. Where ‘data clerks’ do exist, their job functions are often varied and they are pulled by school principals frequently to perform mundane duties that do not require a specialized set of skills.

If we are to collect accurate data that can be used to both inform instruction and ensure appropriate funding, it is critical that this role be professionalized. While it is understood that the DOE cannot require superintendents to take specific action, the following are suggestions of actions that we believe would encourage a needed change in perceptions of school data personnel.

- Development of a recommended job description, to include a suggested professional job title of ‘Information Specialist’, and recommended number of contract days of at least 210 days per school year. We believe the title ‘Data Clerk’, though widely used, does not accurately reflect the high level of responsibility entrusted in these employees. *(We would be happy to work with the Student Information System Advisory Committee on a draft for consideration.)*
- Provide a 40-hour certification program (maybe a mixed online / traditional format) for information specialists that includes a final exam in order for certification to be earned. The program should be geared towards personnel with little or no educational background. Data personnel are often hired from outside the school system and are expected to know everything about enrollment / withdrawal laws, funding, special education, gifted, remedial, etc. By having a certification program, we can be assured that school level staff are appropriately trained and that we are able to hire staff with the contingency that they complete the program and pass the certification course. With the exception of metro districts, most school systems would not have enough turn-over in a year to allow for dedicated training. By having the option of allowing the DOE to conduct the training on educational programs, FERPA, applicable laws & board rules, etc., district staff can concentrate on district-specific information and use of the student information system.

- As a long-term goal, consider working with the Professional Standards Commission (PSC) to implement a certification for information specialists (similar to the current program for paraprofessionals).
- As professionalism and job demand increases, consider working with the technical colleges to provide programs of study for information specialist certificates.

1.2. Provide Training, Training, and More Training – All educational stakeholders need to receive appropriate training on use of the LDS. Training should not be limited to district-level staff, but should include school principals, instructional supervisors, information specialists, etc. In addition to district and school staff, those in all departments of the DOE should be trained to use the data warehouse to eliminate requests of the districts to provide information that is already accessible to them.

Development of a curriculum for a train-the-trainer model should be considered for classroom teacher training. The training of ‘getting data’ and ‘using data’ should be seamless and may require coordination of DOE technology and instructional staff. Too often, educators hear the term ‘data-driven decision making’, but have no idea how to use data to make instructional decisions. Those training the teachers need to have the insight of a teacher more than that of a ‘techie’.

1.3. Create a Comprehensive Data Dictionary – Every data element collected by the DOE should have both an easy-to-understand definition and indication of how the data is used. Data will be much more accurate if personnel understand that we aren’t just ‘sending data to be sending data.’ Indicate if there is an impact to AYP, School Report Cards, or federal reporting that may lead to compliancy judgments or audit findings. If there is a funding implication, either direct or indirect, provide details. When appropriate, include hyperlinks to additional details about how the data element is used.

1.4. Provide Adequate DOE Support – From the district perspective, the current helpdesk staff is of limited value to us. Generally, they only serve as another ‘layer’ we have to get through in order to ultimately talk to a member of the data collections team about our problem. Please consider eliminating helpdesk positions with limited skills in favor of adding additional staff highly trained on Georgia laws and reporting requirements.

2. Portal Provisioning

2.1 Function-Based Portal Provisioning – Currently, the DOE Portal Provisioning process is primary role-based. There is little or no consistency across Georgia

districts on what constitutes the duties of a particular 'role'. It is a bit of a guessing game to determine which roles will create adequate security for an individual, and people often end up with more access than they need simply because they had to be granted access as a 'coordinator' in order to get access to a particular area. A prime example of this is the Consolidated Application. Various departments are charged with updating their own information, but only one person should have the ability to sign-off. Be as granular as possible, and allow 'Read Only' and 'Update' roles to various applications.

2.2 Multiple-Site Portal Provisioning – We do have teachers, data clerks, administrators, and other staff who serve multiple schools and require Portal accounts. Currently, the only way it is possible for someone to have access to multiple schools is to either grant them access to the entire district or have them create separate accounts with separate e-mail addresses. The Portal should accommodate users who require access to more than one site without requiring them to have separate e-mail addresses.

2.2 Automatic Generation of Portal Accounts – Earlier this year, we found out that DOE would begin automatically generating Portal accounts for employees if we sent a file in a specific format. Please contact the HR / Finance vendors or schedule a conference call to explain the file layout to them so they can make necessary changes in their software packages to create the file. Please do not attempt to automatically assign permissions to employees reported with Central Office facility codes. We would prefer to handle security on district-level staff on an individual basis.

3. Implementation Timeline / Frequency of Data Transmissions

3.1. Extended Transmission Windows / Data Validation 'On Demand' – At this point the words 'nightly uploads' will likely not be well received, considering the failure of past attempts to achieve this. Districts would, however, respond favorably to the current FTE, CPI, and Student Record windows being open longer or even all year to allow uploads and error validation to occur as frequently as the district chooses. As districts see the benefits of continual data cleansing, there will be less resistance when the mandate for uploading on a frequent basis is made. The biggest issue with extended transmission windows would probably be the need for the DOE to look at each validation rule to determine when certain edits should be turned off. For example, we don't really need to see errors and warnings regarding completed courses or retained students until the end of the school year.

3.2. Frequency of Required Uploads – Consider whether daily uploads are really needed. If data is expected daily, there is little to no opportunity for data cleansing at the district level. Districts have many issues related to special entities, charter school students, students concurrently enrolled at multiple facilities, students attending programs such as GNETS, etc. that may require some scripts to be run against vendor extract files to correct data problems.

While not necessarily an extensive process, these routines would preclude the possibility of direct, automated push or pull of data to DOE servers. District personnel might, however, be more willing to commit to a weekly load of data that still allowed them the ability to run the files through their own scripts and processes to ensure that the data being sent is reasonably clean.

3.3. Data Review / Sign-Off Periods – While we understand that the data will be used for certain reports (i.e., Student Profile) as it exists in the system at any given time, it is still important that there be data review and sign-off periods to ensure the accuracy of the data prior to ‘official’ release. As just one example, we would want an opportunity to review and sign off on state-reportable discipline before that data becomes official and is released to outside agencies, including the news media. It would be very easy for an administrator to accidentally choose ‘Homicide’, instead of ‘Horseplay’ when entering a discipline event. We certainly wouldn’t want the AJC to get a hold of incorrect information that existed in the system simply because a data entry mistake was made. There still needs to be process by which the data is reviewed prior to being made available for official purposes.

4. Outputs of LDS

The success of the LDS will depend upon its ability to provide useful information to school and district personnel. The information that is provided should be useful in increasing efficiency and informing instruction. The technology used must be simple enough for non-technical staff to easily navigate and should not replicate functionality already available in the student information systems used in Georgia.

4.1. Timeliness of Information – The data must be returned in a timely manner in order for it to be useful. For example, assessment data should be loaded into the data warehouse within days, not months, of the data files being received by district personnel. As soon as assessment results are in, educational leaders begin conducting extensive data analysis to determine how the district and schools performed. If we have already had to manually analyze the data from the data file, then there isn’t much useful about data given to us months later. If necessary, use grant funds to contract any data cleansing that must occur very quickly and requires more staff than the DOE can dedicate. Also, as soon as a student is claimed on GTID, the Student Profile should be immediately accessible to that school. Initially, I believe the report was working that way, but now permissions seem to be refreshed on an inconsistent basis. The Student Profile is most useful the day the child enrolls and placement decisions are being made when a previous school hasn’t yet sent records.

4.2. Format of Reports – All data provided should be downloadable in both .csv and .pdf format. Print options should include the ability to print selected reports for one or more schools in bulk, with appropriate page breaks by school. For

example, currently if a district wishes to print all FTE 2 reports for every school in the county, each individual report has to be printed for each individual school. This is a very time-consuming process.

4.3. Access to Reports – Portal provisioning should not require principal role access in order to view school or district level reports. There are multiple administrators and data personnel who need easy access to data and reporting tools without being granted authorization to sign-off on AYP and conduct other tasks that are assigned specifically to the school principal. An immediate concern would be the lack of ability for school data personnel to see their data collections reports and errors without being provisioned as a principal on Portal.

4.4. Specific Reporting Suggestions – Following are some suggestions for reports that we believe would be useful to school personnel and are not easily obtained through student information systems.

- Provide assessment profile reports at the class, teacher, grade level, school, and district level. These reports should break down performance based on FAY status and AYP subgroup membership; and, in addition to individual student scores, should provide mean and median scores for those groups. Currently, we only include the homeroom teacher for assessment labels and this is not the teacher who teaches the student all subject areas. If there were a tool that had a profile by teacher that reflected the students he or she was responsible for teaching for that specific tested subject, this could be very useful to school administrators in identifying teacher strengths and weaknesses for program improvement and teacher evaluations. At the beginning of each school year, teachers are both studying the performance of the students they taught during the previous school year and analyzing the test scores of the students they are charged with teaching during the current year. It will be important that teachers retain access to both current and previous year students, at least for a period of time at the beginning of each school year.
- Create reports that show growth of students from prior to current year. Each classroom has a unique set of learners. Administrators struggle to fairly evaluate teacher performance. One teacher may have all Gifted learners and have great test scores, while another has Remedial students and has average test scores. It is not fair to judge the teacher of the Gifted students as being a better teacher. By creating reports that show the growth of a cohort of students from one year to the next, administrators can more fairly judge the success of a teacher or a newly implemented program.
- Provide district ranking reports, as well as the ability to search for better performing Georgia districts with similar demographics. Schoolmatters.com has a tool like this, but the data is not uploaded quickly enough for it to have immediate use for school improvement.

- Now that addresses are collected, provide map reports that assist districts in finding geographic pockets of poor performers and drop-outs, as well as identifying areas of student population growth for facilities planning.
- Include discipline history on students in grades 6-12 on the student profile report. Middle and high school principals are very hesitant to admit a student without a clearance on behavior and this is often difficult to get during the summer months. We need to see if a student has serious discipline events prior to making decisions about admittance and appropriate placement.
- Populate transcript data to the Student Profile and allow a download option. Work with software vendors to ensure that they are able to build tools within their software that will allow counselors or data personnel to import directly into the student information system. At the high school level, the keying of transcript data is one of the most time-consuming aspects of entering a new student.
- Consider re-vamping the Online Assessment System (OAS) project to auto-generate practice questions and tests to students based upon areas of weakness from the prior CRCT, GHSGT, or SEOCT administration.

5. Working with Other Departments / Entities

5.1. DOE Departments – Please provide coordination to all DOE departments to ensure that school districts do not receive data requests for information that is already included in the data warehouse. Also, please work with the School Nutrition Program regarding confidentiality of Free & Reduced lunch status. Teachers are held accountable for the performance of economically disadvantaged students as part of AYP, but districts report that School Nutrition offices are hesitant for principals to have access to this information, much less teachers. Somehow, this issue needs to be resolved. Teachers need to be fully aware of student free & reduced lunch status if they are expected to be accountable for those students as an AYP subgroup.

5.2. Outside Entities – Following are some suggestions for reports that we believe would be useful to school personnel and are not easily obtained through student information systems.

- Share data to the Department of Human Resources immunization system, GRITS, to allow them to generate files that provide compliancy status so that schools can, at any time, pull a list of non-compliant students. Individual districts are supposed to be able to do this, but the process has never worked properly.

- Calculate Teenage and Adult Driver (TAADRA) compliance from information stored in the data warehouse. Send nightly file to the Department of Driver Services (DDS) of student compliance status. Provide for a mechanism by which districts can 'override' calculated compliance by sending in a paper form to DDS with the student. Currently, whenever a student wishes to apply for a learner's permit or driver's license, the school must look up the students current and prior year attendance and current year discipline, before completing and notarizing a form for the student to carry to the DDS. This is an extremely time-consuming task for high school office workers.

- Pull data directly from the data warehouse for Pre-ID labels. Work with Riverside Publishing to ensure this can also be done for ITBS labels and any other assessments that a majority of districts participate in. Be sure to include the current teacher for any courses being taken in each of the subject areas so that testing reports can be reported back to districts according to the teacher who was accountable for teaching the student that subject. The only test where this may not be possible is GHSGT where multiple high school teachers were responsible for the content of a particular subject over a student's high school career.

- Calculate eligibility under Georgia High School Association (GHSA) rules and send a report to GHSA. (Allow districts the opportunity to review, adjust, and sign off)

- All Georgia high schools were recently provided with accounts to the StudentTracker service which provides information about the nation-wide post-secondary experiences of graduates from the school. Currently we being told that each district will have to upload a file to them each year, then send them an e-mail asking them to refresh all data in the system. It would be great if the DOE could just provide them a state-wide file of graduates and have the information refreshed every summer.

- Send data directly to the military recruitment centers each year on behalf of the entire state.

- Transmit data to Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) on a scheduled basis to populate GaCollege411 and calculate HOPE GPA.

- Make sure all feasible data required by the Office of Civil Rights is collected in the uploads and complete this report or pre-fill as much as possible for the districts. If this is not possible, please make sure that the reports that provided back to districts are sufficient for districts to be able to quickly find the totals that are necessary for completion of this report.

- Work with the vendor to pull all Online Assessment System data from existing data in the data warehouse and refresh the site on a regular basis.
- Contract directly with the College Board to provide SAT scores in electronic format for Georgia testers after each administration. Allow districts to download these for a specified date range for import into the district's SIS.
- The Title I, Title II, and Remedial Education programs require the submission of an Equity Plan that provides information to the feds about teacher certification and experience for certain subgroups of students. The report is designed to force districts to show evidence that economically disadvantaged students, minority students, and students participating in remedial programs have high-quality teachers that have as much education and experience as those teachers serving students who do not fall into these categories. This information has been difficult to gather in the past. Reports should be available that allow this information to be monitored throughout the year and make it easy for districts to complete this required federal reporting.
- Research the legalities of private school reporting to determine if they can be required to direct report to DOE. They often seem a bit aggravated with having to provide data to multiple school districts from which they have students attending. It would be much simpler if they reported directly to DOE and DOE provided the districts with a list of private school attendees.

6. Desired Changes to Existing Data Elements

- In order to make TAADRA reporting from a Data Warehouse workable, it would be necessary to capture a non-compliance date as the date of the discipline infraction or the date the 10th unexcused absence was captured.
- Change suspensions to be a separate reporting category from 'excused' and 'unexcused' absences. Add an element to the district profile that indicates whether or not the districts consider suspensions to be excused or un-excused for local purposes. Currently, the DOE will not allow suspensions to count against students for TAADRA or compulsory school attendance purposes, but many districts do consider suspensions unexcused in local policies and procedures.
- Collect an indicator of parents who have restricted districts from releasing directory data to military so that the DOE can provide directory information to the military branches annually.
- Add elements for course HOPE weighting indicator, bonus points, and middle school credit indicator so that complete data can be sent to GSFC.

- If Pre-ID continues as a separate transmission window, design the extract to pull in the specific teacher who teaches each of the content areas on the assessment so results can be accurately reported back to us.

- Give consideration to how special entities will be dealt with in the Data Warehouse. Students often attend sites that are not directly earning FTE dollars or being held accountable for AYP. In these cases, students are reported back to their 'home schools' for funding and accountability purposes. Such sites include certain charter schools, concurrent enrollment vocational campuses or remediation programs, alternative schools, and Georgia Network for Therapeutic Services (GNETS) programs. In some cases, GNETS programs serve multiple school districts. It would prove extremely time consuming for staff at the 'home schools' to try to keep up with data on these students on a daily basis when they do not even attend their campus. Separate data elements for 'site physically attended' and 'FTE site' might assist with this problem while allowing the school/district where the child attends to report data, even if it is ultimately the child's home district that is responsible for the student. This is a very complicated situation that will require additional study to determine the best way to handle data for these students.

- Make sure a 'current status' for Special Education, Gifted, Remedial, and Early Intervention Program (EIP) services is always pulled into the data warehouse and that the current status is reflected on the Student Profile. Currently, I believe the flags indicate only that the student was in the program at some point during the year (this is what is reported for SR – AYP purposes). EIP participation is not collected at all and is only known by DOE if EIP segments are reported on FTE. Schools need to know when a new student arrives what their status is at that moment in order for appropriate services to be scheduled.

- Another complicated issue is that of course numbers. This is an immediate concern, as we are being told we can no longer show special education course #s on transcripts. Software vendors currently rely on the course # to determine the type of FTE segment that should be pulled for the student. Several of us have heard responses from DOE that we can continue to use those course numbers in our local SIS as long as they do not show on transcripts. It must be understood that the transcript is generated from our SIS so this is not a valid response to our concerns. This issue needs to be immediately addressed, but, in the long term, course #s, in general, should be studied. We have come to the point that too much data is embedded in that course number. For example, we can only report *.2 course numbers for Gifted students, and we must report *.0 course numbers for general education students.

The problem is, we have advanced content courses that have both Gifted and non-Gifted students. This creates a situation where the teacher has two

separate sections for one classroom of students that are doing the same work. Tasks must be copied from one grade book to another. The teacher must go to two different spreadsheets to enter grades. We should not have any data requirements that place additional burdens on our classroom teachers. The existence of two, separate sections also makes it very difficult for administrators to monitor class size. This is only one example. The same thing occurs with Remedial, Collaborative Special Education, and Early Intervention Program (EIP) classes.

It is recommended that consideration be given to adding additional data elements that capture the type of instruction the individual student is receiving in the classroom. For example, vendors could most likely add a field to the section that identifies it as a Gifted section so that designation defaults to all students, but can be overridden on a per student basis to reflect that some students are actually receiving general education services during that class. The same could be done to capture any type of instructional service that might be occurring in that classroom. Any changes to the course catalog need to be well thought out and planned for well in advance. This would be a major software change for vendors and would impact their current methods of calculating FTE.

- Consider whether the detailed subject and certificate codes reported through CPI are really needed. That is a tedious report and any steps to simplify it would be greatly appreciated. If schedules are reported on students that have the teacher attached, then the subject area should be determined by the course #. The PSC should also be able to determine, based on the course #, whether or not the teacher is highly qualified.
- If the Data Warehouse is to be effective in providing useful information back to the districts, it is expected that there will be a return to requiring the reporting of elementary schedules. We ask that the DOE remember that elementary schools are unique and showing accurate times and periods when instruction is delivered in different subjects will be impossible. Please do not require a period or time indicator to be reported. Also, we must know if elementary schedules are going to be collected in the Spring prior to the upcoming school year. We also must know if the DOE will accept all courses reported as *.0 course numbers for elementary or if they will use the same validations they use for middle and high schools to check for *.2, *.1, *.8, and *.9 numbers based on FTE segments that have been reported. Anything changes that impact schedules must be known well in advance. Once a school year has begun, changing schedules has a huge impact on teacher grade books.

7. Validation / Error-Checking

- Faster validation on submitted files.

- Allow school data personnel access to school level reports and error reports for all FTE and SR-related data collections. Currently, an individual must be provisioned as a principal in order to gain access to these reports.
- Include student names on all error reports.
- Design error reports to have the appropriate margins, text wrapping, column sizes, grid lines, and text size to print appropriately on 8 ½ x 11 paper. Use a text size that is small, but readable. Currently, if you print directly from screen, the margins and text are very large and paper is wasted. It is difficult to work from error reports without having them printed in front of you.
- Provide an indicator of where a district stands in the processing queue. (i.e., approximate wait time for validation). We are often in a ‘hurry up and wait’ mode because getting FTE or SR signed off is our priority and we have no idea whether our file will process in 5 minutes or 5 hours. This makes it difficult for us to budget our time.
- Ask software vendors to provide a table of error descriptions and possible resolutions for each DOE edit in the language of their particular software package. Return error descriptions and possible resolutions to the district in the language of the software system used by their district. This would make it much easier for school-level data personnel to understand how errors are to be resolved.
- Allow districts to enter error comments on an ongoing basis and store these comments. Once comments are approved, the error should not continue to be displayed on the error report. Provide a separate report of errors that have been relieved through comments. Currently, we have to wait until the end of a data collection cycle, when all legitimate errors (including duplicates caused by other systems) are cleared until we can enter comments on the ones that have been reported with correct data but have an error that we cannot do anything about.
- Where general comments may be selected to explain certain frequently occurring relievable errors, these comments should be selected on a per-student basis. Many times, there are various reasons why multiple students have one of these errors. We need to be able to select the response by student and not for the entire group of students who may be reported with that error.

8. Avoid Providing Functions Already Available in Most Student Information Systems

8.1. Survey Districts / Vendors – Please take the time to survey all district CIOs / SIS coordinators to find out what their needs are. To our knowledge, this has not

been done in a formalized manner. For example, you may want to ask the following questions:

- Does your SIS vendor provide a Parent or Student Portal? Have you implemented? Do you plan to implement? If not, why not?
- Do you currently store standardized assessment scores in your SIS? If not, do you have a separate assessment system that stores and provides reports on your assessment scores?

Survey the SIS vendors to find out what information can be shown on their online Parent / Student Portals. Find out what types of canned or interactive assessment reports they already provide at the student, class, school, and district level. Concentrate on providing what the vendors cannot provide, such as state-wide comparisons and reports that encompass multiple years. Determine what data is already available in the student information system that can be made available to teachers.

8.2 Reconsider Parent / Student Portal at DOE level – The DOE should carefully re-consider the necessity and practicality of having a Parent / Student Portal at the DOE level. Most, if not all, systems should now have student information systems that include an online Portal. If any do not, it would be a more appropriate use of resources to fund the purchase of a Portal for those specific districts by making grants available. Parents use the Portal for one primary reason – to review daily assignment grades. The sending and storing of that level of data on DOE servers would be impossible without massive expense and districts would not respond well to sending that much detailed information to the DOE. Please consider whether any data could be provided on a DOE Portal that is not already housed on the SIS Portals already used by the individual school systems. Parent and Student logins to the DOE Portal would also create a user account nightmare for both the DOE and district personnel. Students come with all sorts of guardianship and custody issues that require us to use extreme caution in allowing access to any data without careful verification of identity and guardianship status.

8.3 Reconsider Access of Teachers to Student Profile – It seems that a lot of emphasis is being placed on the Student Profile. While this is a great tool for scheduling a student for servicing pending receipt of records from a prior school, it may not be necessary to extend this to being available to classroom teachers. Again, if the information is keyed into the SIS by the registrar at the time the student enrolls (and it must be for state reporting), then the student profile is providing redundant information. Given the option, the teacher will use the SIS to view all student data since this is where they are accustomed to working on a daily basis.

