State Spotlight on Data Use

Maryland: Establishing Partnerships to Build Data Use Capacity

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This spotlight describes how a state agency and an institution of higher education (IHE) can share resources and expertise to promote data-informed decision-making for programs that support children with disabilities and their families. Marcella Franczkowski, Maryland Assistant State Superintendent for Special Education/Early Intervention Services, Jacqueline Nunn, Director of the Johns Hopkins University School of Education's Center for Technology in Education, and members of their respective teams gave DaSy staff insights into their partnership.

State Agencies and Institutions of Higher Education as Partners

In an assessment of their technical assistance needs, states identified the meaningful use of IDEA Part C and Part B 619 data as a key priority (see the *IDEA Part C and Part B 619 State Data Systems: Current Status and Future Priorities* available on the DaSy website; Derrington, Spiker, Hebbeler, & Diefendorf, 2013). But state agencies do not always have the needed capacity to make full use of those data. The partnership between the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Johns Hopkins University Center for Technology in Education (JHU-CTE) is an example of how a state can collaborate and leverage resources with an IHE not only to build a statewide longitudinal data system with linkages across early intervention, early childhood special education, school-age special education, and general education, but also to use those data to inform programmatic, personnel, and funding decisions.

This spotlight describes how the research-to-practice/policy center, the Johns Hopkins University Center for Technology in Education, created by the Maryland partnership is developing and implementing a data-informed, results-focused system of services and supports for the state's children and students with disabilities and their families. We also offer questions for state agencies to consider when pursuing partnerships with IHEs.

DaSy Data System Framework connection: Three indicators of quality for data use (http://dasycenter.org/resources/dasy-framework/data-use/)

1. Planning for Data Use

2. Analyzing and Disseminating for Data Use

3. Using Data and Promoting Capacity for Data Use

The Maryland Partnership: History, Needs, and Solutions

The mission of the MSDE Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services is to provide leadership, support, and accountability for results to local school systems, public agencies, and stakeholders through a seamless, comprehensive system of coordinated services to children and students with disabilities, from birth through age 21, and their families. MSDE has been partnering with Johns Hopkins University since the early 1980s, when it recognized the need for additional technical resources and supports to effectively implement this mission. Initially, the partnership included Maryland's state superintendent of schools and assistant superintendent of special education and two Johns Hopkins faculty members. Believing that technology could unleash the potential of children and adults with

disabilities, these individuals combined MSDE's leadership and policy knowledge with the university's research, teaching, and technology resources to create the Center for Technology in Human Disabilities, a unit outside the state agency structure operated by the university to examine issues related to individuals with disabilities. MSDE had formalized the partnership with Johns Hopkins University to create the center through a memorandum of understanding and worked with the university to develop the center's scope. The vision and mission of the center were later targeted to improving outcomes for individuals from birth to 21, with a focus on instructional technology. With those changes came a new name, the Center for Technology in Education.

Together, MSDE and JHU-CTE have identified each partner's strengths for using data to inform decision-making in early intervention and special education. Those strengths are combined to collaboratively develop solutions to the state's needs (see Exhibit 1 for examples). As Marcella Franczkowski told us, "MSDE's Division of Special Education and Early Intervention Services, in collaboration with JHU-CTE headed by Dr. Jacqueline Nunn, has developed a longitudinal accountability system for special education and early intervention data. The system includes demographic and outcomes data, as well as tools that support data analysis and use. The iterative design process adopted for the system involves the continuous use of stakeholder feedback to identify needed system upgrades."

Exhibit 1. Examples of MSDE/JHU-CTE Partnership Needs-Based Solutions

State Need	Partnership Solution	Key Years for Work
Link Part C and Part B 619 data	Develop the Special Services Information System	2004–06
Improve IFSP and IEP data quality	✴ Develop standardized statewide IFSP and IEP forms and Online IFSP and Online IEP data systems	2004–06
	✴ Embed data validation checks, predefined and dynamic reports, and wizards/other professional development resources in Online IFSP and Online IEP	2005–07
Facilitate local collection and use of early childhood outcomes data	Develop the birth through kindergarten Early Childhood Accountability System	2005–07
Connect special education data to state enrollment, assessment, attendance, and discipline data	Create unique student ID under IES Statewide Longitudinal Data System grant	2006–09
Provide access to longitudinal child/student data for state and local early intervention and special education leaders' decision-making	Develop and enhance the Maryland IDEA Scorecard longitudinal data system	2008–13
Evidence to demonstrate impact of early intervention and special education on child/student outcomes	Conduct longitudinal analysis of data on cohort of children receiving early intervention and special education services	2008–15
Provide access to child/student data and analytic tools for progress monitoring by IFSP/IEP teams and local leaders; support use of those data and tools	Develop the Student Compass data system and integrate it with the Online IEP; develop statewide process for data-informed decision-making and associated high-quality online professional development	2013–15
Facilitate communication with families, including access to data	Develop Online IFSP Parent Portal and statewide online early intervention referral	2015–16

Benefits to Partners and Stakeholders

As states consider partnerships with IHEs, we recommend that they clearly articulate the benefits for their state agency, IHE partners, and stakeholders. The partnership between MSDE and JHU-CTE has produced and continues to yield many benefits for the state agency, university, local early intervention and special education programs, and families of children and students with disabilities. Even though these benefits are specific to Maryland, many are likely to be applicable to other states pursuing such partnerships.

* *Benefits to the state agency.* With access to IHE resources and faculty expertise, state agencies can conduct sophisticated data analyses to answer a range of questions about early intervention and special education programs and the children, students, and families they serve. For example, analytic strategies that JHU-CTE researchers developed for longitudinal studies enable MSDE to provide state policymakers with data demonstrating the positive impact of early intervention services on child and student outcomes through the elementary years. MSDE posts annual informational booklets for state policymakers and local district leaders on the Maryland Learning Links website, a central source of information and resources about the state's early intervention and special education services.

> *All of this work has supported the Division of Special Education and Early Intervention Services as we move from an emphasis on compliance to improving results for children and families. The integration of data systems allows teams to develop higher quality IFSPs and IEPs and allows educators at all levels to use data routinely in instructional and programmatic decision-making.*
> —Marcella Franczkowski, Maryland Assistant State Superintendent for Special Education/Early Intervention Services

* *Benefits to the IHE.* Gaining access to de-identified state agency data offers IHEs opportunities to expand content expertise and can facilitate other research collaborations. Such access also gives graduate students experience in working with large, complex datasets that are not always available to academic programs of study. John Hopkins University School of Education graduate students contribute to research that has a direct impact on policies, children, and families by conducting analyses and presenting findings at research conferences in collaboration with MSDE.

* *Benefits to local programs*. In Maryland, local early intervention and special education leaders have been trained to use a structured model of data-informed decision-making developed by the MSDE and JHU-CTE partnership. In their discretionary grant applications to the state, the leaders are expected to use the model and present a rationale supported by data to justify, for example, requested funding to implement program improvement activities. In this way, local programs are actively involved in using data in ways that have tangible benefits for them.

* *Benefits to families.* The MSDE/JHU-CTE partnership prioritizes family engagement and is committed to using data to share information with families. This is done by collaborating to support a variety of activities, such as the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC), Professional Learning Institutes (to which family representatives are invited), and the development of a number of resources specifically for families (e.g., Maryland's Birth through Five Parent Information Series).

> *The partnership affords a wonderful opportunity for university faculty and students to examine critical issues in education and contribute to real-world solutions.*
> —Jacqueline Nunn, Director, Johns Hopkins University School of Education, Center for Technology in Education

Lessons Learned

The collaboration between MSDE and JHU-CTE has evolved, with the partners committed to answering critical program and policy questions and pursuing greater data use by stakeholders. From their experiences, MSDE and JHU-CTE offer state leaders considering building partnerships with IHEs the following lessons learned:

✳ *Relationships matter.* Relationships form the foundation for collaborative work. The partners recognize and respect each other's strengths, identify roles and responsibilities based on those strengths, trust each other's commitment and motivation, and jointly prepare scopes of work.

✳ *Partnerships evolve over time.* The Maryland partnership started with small steps, such as building individual data systems, and then moved into the more sophisticated work of developing advanced technology to link data systems and analytic tools to monitor children's progress over time. Funding from federal, state, and other entities has been instrumental in supporting this increasingly complex work.

✳ *True collaboration requires that both parties take responsibility for seeking funding.* The partnership between MSDE and JHU-CTE is successful because of commitment to a shared vision and joint responsibilities for seeking funding. MSDE has been and continues to be a primary funder for JHU-CTE though the use of federal funds, but both agencies seek grants to support innovations that will expand data use capacity in Maryland.

✳ *Data use needs drive data system technology enhancements.* The partnership uses an iterative process to identify and implement system technology enhancements to respond to the state's evolving data use needs, including federal reporting. For example, to conduct longitudinal analyses the partnership sought resources (a Statewide Longitudinal Data System grant) to overhaul and link the infrastructure of three separate data systems.

Guiding Questions to Support Planning for Partnerships with Higher Education in Your State

The Maryland example has shown that state-IHE partnerships can be helpful in building state capacity for data use. Such partnerships range in complexity and depend on several considerations that can move states closer to achieving benefits like those that Maryland stakeholders have experienced. DaSy recommends that states use the key questions in Exhibit 2 to identify the partnership approach that best meets the state's needs.

Our partnership with JHU-CTE has helped ensure that all programmatic decisions are based upon data.
—Brian Morrison, Part C Coordinator, MSDE

Exhibit 2. Guiding Questions for State Agencies

Relationships and opportunities for collaboration

* Do you have an established relationship with a specific IHE or a range of faculty across IHEs?
* Are there opportunities for state agency staff and faculty to meet?
* Do these opportunities include time for state agency staff and faculty to share their work and identify potential areas for collaboration?

Shared vision, capacity, and expertise

* Do you share a vision with potential IHE partners, or can you get together to begin a conversation to develop a shared vision for a partnership?
* Do state agency staff and faculty have similar or complementary questions about early intervention and special education?
* Do the state agency staff and faculty have unique expertise in developing strategies to answer these questions?

Shared vision, capacity, and expertise (continued)

* Would the state benefit from building a research-to-practice or policy center to investigate targeted questions, or would it be more efficient to seek out faculty with expertise to conduct specific analyses to answer state agency and constituent questions?
* Does your state have existing IHE policy centers with which you could develop a partnership?
* Are IHE faculty seeking opportunities to build and/or apply their data analysis expertise?
* Are IHE faculty able to access data via a comprehensive, dedicated system to run analyses or must the state agency provide the access?
* Is there an agreed-on process or guidance for analyzing, using, and disseminating state data?

Funding and a shared commitment

* Is funding available to explore and answer shared questions?
* Can priorities for state agency and IHE collaboration be embedded into existing funding opportunities?
* Will additional external funding be needed to support any shared work?
* If additional external funding is needed, are partners committed to the shared work and to seeking the funding?
* How will the state and IHE formalize its partnership?

Resources

DaSy recommends states start partnership considerations by completing the DaSy Framework Self-Assessment for the Data Use Subcomponent (DaSy Center, 2014). States can consider the results of the self-assessment in conjunction with answers to the questions above in thinking about the type of partnership and work focus that will best meet their needs. Finally, with a sense of their current capacity and intended plans, states may request technical assistance from the DaSy Center.

References

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Acknowledgments

Suggested Citation

Ruggiero, T., Gupta, S., Nicholas, A., & Mauzy, D. (2016). *State spotlight on data use. Maryland: Establishing partnerships to build data use capacity*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

About Us

The DaSy Center is a national technical assistance center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The DaSy Center works with states to support IDEA early intervention and early childhood special education state programs in the development or enhancement of coordinated early childhood longitudinal data systems.

To learn more about the DaSy Center, go to http://www.dasycenter.org/.