

Processes and protocols are in place to ensure effective data governance.



CASE STUDY: MARYLAND

Longitudinal Data System Center

An effective career readiness data ecosystem has a clear governance structure in place that designates roles and responsibilities for collecting, validating and reporting career readiness data as well as for setting a strategic vision for the publication and use of data. The absence of a clear and effective data governance structure can lead to entities collecting data in silos, a lack of alignment across data collection and analysis, inconsistent quality of data analysis, and an overall mistrust in the data being collected and reported.

States can establish a clear and effective governance structure by designating clear roles and responsibilities for collecting, validating and reporting career readiness data and by setting a strategic vision for the publication and use of data. States must also build the capacity to ensure that data is high quality, learner records are protected, and measures are taken to prevent disruption in the inevitable event of personnel or political transition.

One state that has established a strong and sustainable data governance structure is Maryland. Maryland created a statewide longitudinal data system, which is operated by an independent state agency and overseen by a cross-agency governing board. This governing structure has provided Maryland with trusted, reliable and consistent data, allowing for the effective analysis and reporting of learner and workforce data.

The Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center

In 2010, Maryland S.B. 275¹ created the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) Center as a way to generate timely and accurate information about learner performance across K-12, postsecondary and workforce education. Prior to the creation of the MLDS, learner-level data lived within individual agencies. To conduct cross-sector data analysis, the state had to rely on costly independent contractors. And for each analysis, the state needed to explain what the data was, what it meant and how it should be used.

Then-Governor Martin O'Malley saw the need for a longitudinal data system that every stakeholder could benefit from. O'Malley gathered support from state leaders, education leaders and the state Legislature for the creation of the MLDS, resulting in the authorizing legislation in 2010. Today, the MLDS is operated by the MLDS Center, an independent state agency that is overseen by a 13-member governing board. Eight members are designated by statute, including the:

- Chancellor of the University System of Maryland;
- State Superintendent of Schools;
- Secretary of Maryland Department of Higher Education;
- Secretary of Maryland Department of Labor;
- Secretary of Maryland Juvenile Services;
- President of Morgan State University;
- Executive Director of the Maryland Association of Community Colleges; and
- President of the Maryland Independent Colleges and Universities Association.

The other five members of the governing board are appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the state Senate. Of those five members, one must be a representative of local superintendents of schools and another must have expertise in large data systems and data

security. The governing board meets quarterly and is responsible for overseeing the operation of the MLDS Center. The MLDS Center relies on a partnership with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Maryland Department of Labor, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, and the University of Maryland's School of Social Work and College of Education.

The University of Maryland's School of Social Work and College of Education provides research services to the MLDS Center and serves as its headquarters. The MLDS Center has a staff of 12 full-time employees, who support the design, development and maintenance of the data system. MHEC, MSDE and the Department of Labor have liaisons working at the MLDS Center. All stakeholders have representation on the Center's advisory boards – the Data Governance Advisory Board and the Research and Policy Advisory Board. The MLDS Center's staff and operations are supported by a line item in the state's annual budget that has evolved from almost \$1.4 million in Maryland's Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 budget to nearly \$2.5 million as recently as FY 2021.²

The MLDS Center's Impact

Today, the MLDS Center is essential to policymaking and evaluation across the state. The MLDS Center's longevity has helped it to establish importance and value, thus withstanding personnel and political changes. Researchers, elected officials and state leaders regularly consult the MLDS Center to provide data analysis on a variety of issues, including the impact of poverty on learner outcomes, teacher pipelines and various federal reporting requirements. The MLDS Center also advises the Legislature on the impact of legislation and supports the development of state reports as required by law, including the state's annual report on the Career Preparation Expansion Act,³ which documents employment outcomes for high school graduates five years after graduation.

Every year, the priorities of the research team – influenced by the previous year’s policies, stakeholders and legislative inquiry – are presented to the governing board for feedback. The MLDS Center’s 2019 annual report boasts adding 167 new data elements to its data inventory, including data collections for apprenticeships; responding to more than two dozen data requests; creating or updating 20 data dashboards; and supporting several grant applications.⁴

Overcoming Challenges

After the Legislature authorized the creation of the MLDS in 2010, there was immense pressure to get the system up and running, which presented some challenges. First, there was little data to work with. The MLDS started with about six years’ worth of data, and not all of it was high quality. This situation created a challenge with how much longitudinal data analysis the MLDS Center could conduct.

Another challenge was linking data across agencies because, unlike the Department of Labor, MSDE does not uniformly collect Social Security numbers. The state had to get creative and incorporate data from the Maryland Vehicle Administration into the MLDS to fill any gaps. According to the MLDS Center’s 2019 annual report, there is a 94 percent match rate for students from MSDE with at least one other sector.⁵ The state also had to overcome data security and privacy concerns. Maryland addressed these concerns by creating an encrypted master data management system that only MLDS Center staff – who all undergo background checks – can access.

Over the past decade, the MLDS Center has also been responsive to changing needs and stakeholder interests. The MLDS Center initially did not collect student discipline data and juvenile delinquency records. Responding to inquiries from stakeholders seeking to understand and solve the school-to-prison pipeline, the Legislature authorized the MLDS Center in 2019 to collect

the data and modified the makeup of the governing board to include the secretary of the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services.

Conclusion

Maryland’s MLDS Center demonstrates the importance and power of establishing effective, cross-sector data governance. After state leaders identified the need for a high-quality longitudinal data system, the state passed authorizing legislation in 2010 to establish an independent agency with authority over the system. Not only did the state make the necessary financial investments to create this system, but it also implemented a strong data governance structure designed to function independently from other state agencies and withstand any political or organizational changes. The result has been a longitudinal data system that is trusted and relied upon by education leaders, state policymakers and the general public to evaluate policy and make data-informed decisions related to education and the workforce.

NOTES

¹ Education - Maryland Longitudinal Data System, MD Stat. Senate Bill 275 (2010). Retrieved from http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2010rs/chapters_noln/ch_190_sb0275e.pdf

² Maryland State Archives. (n.d.) *Maryland longitudinal data system center budget*. Retrieved from <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/25ind/html/50longitudb.html>

³ Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center and Maryland Governor’s Workforce Board. (2018). *Career Preparation Expansion Act: Annual report to the Governor and General Assembly*. Retrieved from https://mldscenter.maryland.gov/egov/Publications/BoardAgenda/MeetingMaterials/2018/December/03B_CPEA_Final.pdf

⁴ Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center. (2019). *2019 annual report on the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center*. Retrieved from https://mldscenter.maryland.gov/egov/publications/CenterReports/AnnualReports/MLDSC_Annual_Reports_2019.pdf

⁵ *Ibid.*