Monthly Report for April 2015
Submitted May 6, 2015

Staffing

Service Recognition

This week, Jamese Dixon-Bobbitt was recognized for her 30 years of State service. MSDE hosted an award ceremony where Jamese and other employees were thanked for their dedication to State service and presented a plaque by State Superintendent Lillian Lowery.

Network Administrator

Marshciene Moor, MLDS Center's network administrator, has submitted her letter of resignation, effective later this month. Ms. Moor has a new job opportunity closer to home. We wish her well in her new endeavor and have already submitted the Hiring Freeze Exemption Request so that we can immediately begin the process of searching for a replacement.

ETL Developer and Database Administrator

The ETL Developer and Database Administrator positions were advertised on the State's JobAps website. Unfortunately, that   process did not result in any qualified candidates applying for either position. We are now expanding our search by advertising with Indeed.com - a national job search aggregator. Both positions are currently filled by contractors through the end of the calendar year.

Meetings

Ross Goldstein and Laia Tiderman attended a meeting hosted by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to learn about an initiative being led by WICHE to establish a Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange (MLDE).   The value of a data exchange is that it would expand the ability of a participating state to understand the patterns of mobility, secondary and postsecondary enrollment, and employment of current and former students and participants in job training programs. Currently, State law (which only permits disclosure of aggregate data in response to data requests) and the agreements with the partner agencies (which prohibit redisclosure of data received from the agencies) would prohibit Maryland from participating in this type of project.

Data Center

Staff has finalized Oracle ODI and EDQ product evaluation and have started the procurement process to acquire both ODI and EDQ for both MLDS Center and MHEC. Also, the procurement process for firewall and switches has been completed. These will be installed as soon as they are received. All servers and backups at MSDE data center have been configured. Staff is testing the virtual machines and will be testing VPN access for researchers. Staff is in the process of building active directories in order to establish user groups. The Oracle software that was required to be installed under the Universal License Agreement has been completed. There is also planning going on for storage upgrade as well as moving data from DPSCS to MSDE/MLDSC data center. Data migration and shutdown of services at DPSCS are scheduled to be completed by June 30, 2015.

Data Loading

Staff has loaded the quarterly Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage data files, UI claimant data, and GED data received from DLLR. High School Graduates System (HGS) data from MHEC has also been loaded. Staff will be working with data stewards to resolve rejected records. K-12 Enrollment and Attendance data was received from MSDE and will be loaded this week. Staff will also be discussing K-12 Assessment file layouts so that data can be loaded next.

Audit

MLDS Center team is actively working to answer all the Legislative Auditors' requests. Some of the major audit topics involve – Network diagram, IT contacts, server setup, firewall rules, and backup and encryption of data.

SLDS Grant Proposal

The U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (IES) has announced a new round of SLDS Grants. The grant may only be applied for by the state's K-12 education agency. Nonetheless, the grant encourages broad participation from all education and workforce sectors. To this end, MSDE has organized a working group, attended by MLDS Center staff, to identify projects that are responsive to the two priority areas selected by MSDE - Instructional Support and Evaluation and Research.

MLDS Center is developing a project proposal under the Evaluation and Research priority area to expand MLDS data access and research capacity through the development and use of synthetic data sets. The Center needs to make data accessible to researchers, policy makers, and stakeholders. However, the Center is only permitted to release aggregate data in response to a data request. To address the competing interests of confidentially and researcher accessibility to the collected data, some agencies such as the U.S. Census Bureau have started using synthetic data. As a general overview, the idea behind synthetic data is to use the raw, confidential data to produce artificial data that are similar to, but distinct from, the raw data. That way, researchers have access to non-aggregate unit record data that closely mimics the properties of the raw data from which they can ask and answer a variety of important research questions that cannot be addressed from mere aggregate summaries while the data collectors can be assured that the true data remain confidential and that individuals in the data are not exposed to adverse risk. This allows confidentiality to be strictly maintained while also giving both researchers access to meaningful data.

Research Series

The topic of the May 1st Research Series presentation was - *Visual Representations of Data: Review and Recommendations.* The presentation was provided by Alison Preston, a Student Fellow with the MLDS Center Research Team. The presentation focused on the need to create quality visuals due to the diversity of the intended audience and the need to effectively communicate accurate information. Ms. Preston highlighted research that shows that stakeholders identify with graphics that are familiar, easy to interpret, and relevant to their needs and noted that it is therefore important to consider each individual graphic as well as the publication as a whole and make conscientious choices about the data representation. Ms. Preston also highlighted elements of successful graphics (graphs and tables), which include the selection of an appropriate format, color scheme, scale, and style. Close to 20 people attended the presentation and the feedback was very positive.