

Creating New Infrastructure in Wisconsin: Adding School Choice to the WISE System

SLDS WEBINAR SUMMARY

October 2021

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Publication of the National Center for Education Statistics at IES

This product of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program was developed with the help of knowledgeable staff from state education agencies and partner organizations. The content of this publication was derived from an SLDS monthly topical webinar that took place on October 26, 2021. The information presented does not necessarily represent the opinions of the IES SLDS Grant Program.

For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program or for support with system development, please visit <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/SLDS>.

WEBINAR PRESENTER

John Raub, *Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction*

MODERATOR

Kathi Gillaspay, *SLDS Grant Program State Support Team*

Many states have education choice programs, which allow parents to choose the K12 school where their children are enrolled regardless of residency. Data from these programs provide a better understanding of how parents make decisions about schools, but they sometimes can be difficult to acquire if the schools are not publicly funded. In these cases, the school's student information system (SIS) may not be tied into the state education agency's statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS).

Wisconsin is using its fiscal year (FY) 2019 SLDS federal grant to integrate data systems related to the state's School Choice Program into its Wisconsin Information System for Education (WISE) data suite to ensure that data from all Wisconsin's education system services are included in the SLDS. A Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) representative introduces some of the initial infrastructure changes underway, including application modernization, system integration projects, and transportation reimbursement systems, that will improve access to and collaboration with Wisconsin's various school choice programs.

Wisconsin's WISE System

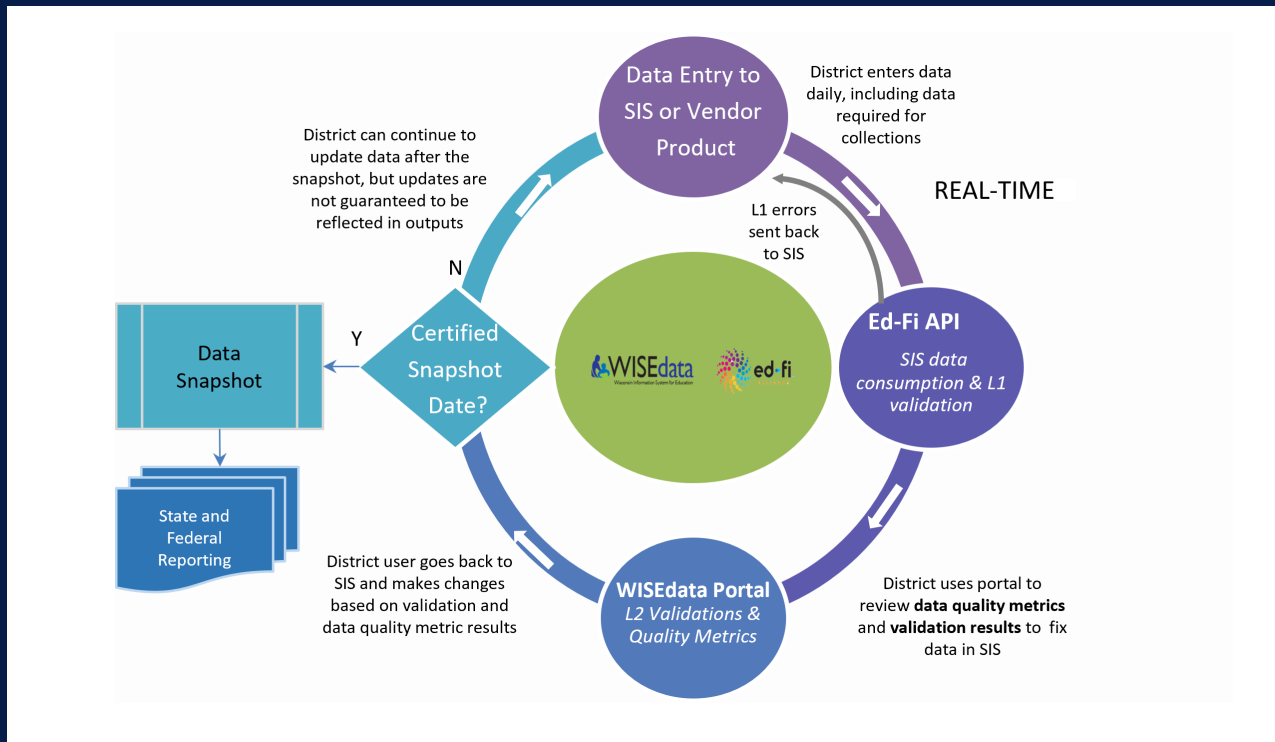
The DPI serves 830,935 students at 2,173 schools in 421 public school districts. The state also has 782 private schools with 118,862 students.

DPI manages WISE, which is composed of multiple tools that generate unique identifiers and collect data from districts and schools to meet all required state and federal reporting mandates (**FIGURE 1** on page 2). Data collected via WISEdata are loaded to the WISEdash data warehouse and displayed in the WISEdash Public Portal. The WISEdash Public Portal gives education stakeholders an interactive way to view data through dashboards and to select and filter Wisconsin public school data from the 2005-06 school year forward. Data are summarized and redacted to protect student privacy. WISEdash for Districts, a secure portal, is available to school staff members to view their school's data.

Other WISE tools include

- WISEstaff, which collects staff information;
- WISEid, which generates the unique IDs for Wisconsin students and staff;

FIGURE 1. Data flow through the WISEdata Pipeline



- WISEgrants, which tracks the allocation of grant money to districts;
- WISEsecure, which provides role-based access to the data in WISE;
- WISEexplore, which is used for data-driven school improvement planning; and
- WISElearn, which stores the WISElearn Resources Library, as well as additional materials provided by DPI.

Wisconsin chose educational choice as a priority area for its FY 2019 SLDS grant project, in which states must use funds to improve their data systems to better support education choice initiatives. Parents in Wisconsin have a variety of choices when deciding where to enroll students. The state has an open enrollment program that allows students to choose to attend school in a nonresident district, four private school choice voucher programs, and a charter program, as well as a home-based private education option. The following outcomes are part of DPI's FY 2019 SLDS grant project:

- Modernize enterprise data systems.
- Integrate DPI's Education Choice systems into WISE.
- Streamline the School Financial Membership Application (PI-1563).

Data governance

DPI uses several resources to ensure that staff members produce high-quality data and projects from WISE. The WISE Steering Committee is composed of key stakeholders around the agency who meet monthly to review and prioritize information technology (IT) projects. In addition, this group acts as a data privacy committee or top tier of the data governance hierarchy. The WISE Leadership Team, whose members are all WISE product owners, meets weekly to define project scopes, review IT requests, make assignments, and coordinate work and improve processes. DPI also uses application-specific external advisory groups of parents and school staff members to inform WISE projects and products.

FY 2019 Outcomes

Modernize enterprise data systems

DPI data are housed in many data systems other than WISE, from district SISs and vendor collection systems to other systems used throughout the department, such as the Open Enrollment Application Log (OPAL). DPI needed an easier way to collect, maintain, and share core education data across the agency while improving usability for external users. These data

often control validations for different business rules in the system and other applications. Having the systems linked or interoperable in the future will increase data quality and decrease duplicate data submission. For one of its first projects, DPI created a School Modification Workflow that asks local education agencies and private schools to submit core information to WISE, such as whether the school is open or closed permanently, grade levels offered, and whether the school is public or private. Like other data submitted to WISE, this information will go through a review and approval process. Previously, one employee in a single department collected and maintained this information, despite several departments in the agency needing it. This workflow will ensure that the data collection process is not disrupted even if a key employee departs.

DPI also has modernized its private school data collection. Previously, private schools filled out a PDF survey with information such as the school's primary program enrollment and what grades it offered. DPI created an application that allows schools to upload, confirm, and update their data more easily. The application also includes DPI administrative functions. As DPI builds new applications and modernizes them in this grant project, migrating from Oracle to SQL Server will be more cost effective for the agency. DPI has also started working on a new school directory application which, is a foundational data collection for all other data submitted.

Integrate DPI's Education Choice systems into WISE

DPI intends to automate data collections programs that currently use paper records and will focus on integrating new and current systems with WISE. As part of this work, DPI has created an application that connects data from the Open Enrollment Transportation Reimbursement Program (TRIP) to WISE. This program collects transportation cost data from low-income families with students who, through open enrollment, attend a nonresident public school district so that families can be reimbursed for these costs. The new application uses WISEdata to verify family income eligibility and OPAL to verify student eligibility. With the new application, deployed in summer 2021, claims requiring adjustment decreased by 72 percent.

Next, DPI will build an application to submit and house data from the Special Needs Scholarship Program (SNSP). Students living with disabilities may apply to SNSP to receive a state-funded scholarship to attend a participating private school. Currently, applications for the program are submitted through paper forms, and program reports are largely completed using Microsoft Excel. DPI also will be integrating WISEid with the Wisconsin Private School Choice Programs' system and OPAL. This integration will allow school choice programs to use or create a state-generated student ID for matching purposes, rather than creating a separate system ID that must be matched to the state ID.

Streamline the School Financial Membership Application (PI-1563)

Much of Wisconsin's school funding is tied to membership, which is the number of students residing in a district deemed in law to be financially responsible for providing education. Although larger districts obtain aggregate student counts through their SISs, many smaller districts do not have the ability or programming staff to perform the task. DPI plans to integrate data used by the School Finance Reporting Portals with WISE, building off the data pipeline already established. These data would flow into a new pupil count application that will allow districts to explore their student count data in more detail, such as obtaining aggregate counts of students by grade level. The new data flow would eliminate duplicate data collections, streamlining processes to save time and improve data quality.

Additional Resources

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
<https://dpi.wi.gov/>

Wisconsin Information System for Education (WISE)
<https://dpi.wi.gov/wise>