DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

ED-FI in Minnesota

Regional Management Information Centers (RMIC) Roles

Background

In 2016, the Minnesota Legislature passed changes to existing statutes that require school districts, including charter schools, to collect and report more detailed demographic information about graduation and assessment results for students who are American Indian and students of color. We refer to these new requirements as data disaggregation. This legislation is referred to as the "All Kids Count Act," and the more detailed reporting is called data disaggregation. Read the full text of the legislation: Minnesota Statutes, sections 120B.31, subdivision 3a, and 120B.35, subdivision 3.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Minnesota Information Technology agency (MNIT) sought to understand school districts' capacity to meet this new requirement. They began to fully understand the complexities and magnitude of the tasks ahead of them, at the state and school district levels.

MDE and MNIT requested and received funds to help understand the situation better. They studied the feasibility of school districts carrying out the new data disaggregation requirements. They spoke with stakeholders (people who would care about this and/or be effected by this) and learned that there is a need for a more flexible and streamlined system for school districts to use to report their data. And they realized that, although the purpose of the new data collection is to allow for more detailed analysis of educational data for more specific groups of students, the changes that result would impact other areas at the state level that use student demographic data, such as school finance.

MDE and MNIT had two important tasks ahead of them:

1. To find a way to use technology to minimize the burden on school personnel and to better connect different data sources at the state level as the new requirements are implemented; and,
2. To communicate the new requirements in a way that is culturally sensitive and respectful, but also is clear, and results in collecting the most accurate information. You can read more about the requirements for the new data disaggregation and considerations for communicating these changes with families, schools and other stakeholders. Counting all Students webpage.

Introduction

In preparation for implementing some new data collection requirements, MDE and MNIT conducted a feasibility study. After talking with stakeholders about the new data collection and disaggregation requirements, MDE and

MNIT determined that a new technology system was needed to minimize burden on school districts as they collect and report this additional data.

The existing state data reporting systems are not as flexible as necessary, and the same data may be collected more than once from districts. Recently, there have been increasing requirements from state and federal government to report more and different data elements. Some sources of these new requirements are the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Minnesota Statutes, sections 120B.31 and 120B.35.

Whenever Minnesota school districts are required to collect a new data element, MDE and Student Information Systems must re-program existing systems to implement each required change. Each time there is a new requirement, such as reporting of a student with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) whose education has been interrupted, for example, state staff must spend time and resources trying to determine in which system the new element should be added.

The re-programming and maintenance of multiple systems is difficult and costly. Given the increased rate and volume of required changes and constraints of current systems, extensive changes need to be made or a new system implemented. In 2017, through the feasibility study mentioned above, MNIT and MDE reached out to other states to find out if and how they approached similar concerns and situations. Vendors, school districts and other stakeholders were interviewed also as part of the feasibility study. The feasibility report is Attachment 1 in the Data Disaggregation Legislative Report to the Legislature.

In the end, Ed-Fi was chosen as a technology solution that seemed best able to address the concerns. Ed-Fi has standard data collection architecture that allows for changes to be made simply and cost-effectively.

What exactly is happening, and when?

The technology changes will happen in two ways.

First, the vendors that provide current Student Information Systems (SISs) used by school districts will work with MDE to make changes to how data is provided to MDE and will add the necessary data elements to comply with state law. These changes will assist in collecting the new and current data while improving flexibility and efficiency. Second, at MDE, this new technology called Ed-Fi is being implemented to help connect the various data systems used in MDE, to minimize disruption to necessary day-to-day work, like calculating and distributing school funding, and sharing data with testing companies.

Ed-Fi is being implemented in phases.

In the first phase, five pilot districts will implement some aspects of the new system in the 2018-19 school year. The aspects they report will include the new race ethnicity categories required by the "All Kids Count Act," plus a subset of the MARSS data. During this pilot phase, the five school districts and all of the Student Information System (SIS) vendors in the state will meet regularly to share their experiences and learning so they can be a resource during statewide implementation. (These meetings have already begun.)

Phase 2 will start in 2019-20, when all school districts will be invited to start using Ed-Fi, but will be asked to also continue to report through MARSS the same way they do now. School districts will be required to do dual reporting for the first year. Any school district that does not have its data certified through Ed-Fi will need to continue dual reporting for an additional year to work through issues.

Implementation will continue in year 2020-21, when 90 percent of Minnesota school districts should report all MARSS data using Ed-Fi and beginning to see the benefits. By 2022-23, all Minnesota school districts should be fully on board.

What do I need to know and do?

MDE requests that RMICs continue to support their school districts with student reporting. Some RMICs may also provide assistance in using the local student information system (SIS) software. Here is some information that should help answer initial questions.

During a school district's first year of Ed-Fi the school district will be reporting via Ed-Fi as well as MARSS WES. So the MARSS A and B files will need to be generated, uploaded to MARSS WES and edited. Errors will need to be corrected, local and statewide MARSS WES reports reviewed and verified. This will continue until the district is certified for Ed-Fi at which time the district can discontinue the submission of A and B files, ideally by the second year of Ed-Fi. However, the need to correct errors will continue under Ed-Fi. The need to review both local and statewide reports for accuracy and completeness will continue.

Although Ed-Fi removes one step of the MARSS state reporting process, it does not replace the need for the school district to assure that the local SIS database has accurate and complete data.

School districts will continue to have the same questions regarding coding, correcting errors, reading reports, etc. None of that changes. The coding in the SIS remains the same. The errors that are generated will be the same as in MARSS. The reports may look a little different but they will be designed to assist school districts in editing their data – just like the MARSS reports.

The only thing that changes is that the school district or RMIC won't upload a MARSS file. There will still be turn-around reports generated; we just don't know yet how frequently, or how the school district will access them.

District staff will need to familiarize themselves with the Ed-Fi portal and reports. There will be new errors generated that don't exist in MARSS because the data has not been collected in MARSS. This will include data currently collected in the Student Support Data Collections plus data that is currently collected in other ways; and there will likely be new data collected. Data that has been collected from a variety of staff in the school district will now be collected via Ed-Fi.

The school district is going to continue to need a resource for reviewing reports, as is currently the case for MARSS; assistance with determining correct reporting procedures, whether this is data currently collected via MARSS or data not currently collected via MARSS; advice on how to correct identified MARSS and/or Ed-Fi errors; using the local SIS software, etc.

Once the school district is Ed-Fi certified, it will no longer need to upload the A and B files, but the same coding questions will continue, in fact there may be more because of the wider range of data that will be collected via Ed-Fi than MARSS WES. The school district will need to edit its data using the MARSS WES local edit program. There will be a link from the Ed-Fi portal, but the school district will continue to get error reports identifying student records that need correcting. The RMIC can position itself to be the first place that the member districts turn if they need assistance.

School districts with staff turnover benefit from having a resource that is familiar with the district, its schools and student records. RMICs can be that resource by providing training and support to school district staff regarding appropriate reporting, reviewing reports and correcting errors, as well as the Ed-Fi submissions and portal. MDE will continue to provide training and documentation, but not for individual school districts. This is service that the RMIC can provide.

What are the potential benefits to me?

The time that RMIC spent uploading and editing files under MARSS WES can be used for assisting districts in editing and validating the data once on Ed-Fi.