

# **Instructional & Technical Field Considerations For the Use of Data To Improve Student Achievement in Oregon**

*February 5, 2008*

*Oregon Department of Education and the Education Enterprise Steering Committee*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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### **The Oregon DATA Project**

In June of 2007, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences awarded Oregon a \$4.7 million grant to support the Oregon DATA Project, a statewide initiative to improve student achievement by collecting, analyzing and using longitudinal data to inform individual instruction.

The Oregon DATA Project was designed to build upon Oregon's ongoing investments in data quality by strengthening data systems and providing stakeholders with comprehensive training in effective use of data. As one of the Oregon DATA Project's first steps, a competitive award was made to Carmichael Consulting to assess the "as-is" use of data across the state, to gather ideas for improving the use of data, and to identify barriers blocking effective use of data. This report summarizes those findings.

### **Research Methodology**

Field research was conducted through the use of 1) a written survey, and 2) focus group interaction. Using resources from the National Center for Education Statistics, researchers identified a set of questions for the written survey, and another set appropriate for focus group discussions. The question sets were piloted in the field for effectiveness and clarity, and revised accordingly. The written survey was administered during focus group meetings, which were held separately for instructional and technical staff members.

From November 2007 through January of 2008, 15 focus groups met in eight locations throughout the state. A total of 184 people participated from all educational sectors, including superintendents, principals, teachers, curriculum directors, information technology directors, and classified staff.

It is worth noting here that, while the direct purpose of the meetings was to obtain information to guide DATA Project activities, it quickly became apparent that the sessions also contributed to an atmosphere of collaboration and goodwill. Participants uniformly expressed their appreciation for being invited, and were complimentary that "the state" had traveled to their region to hear what they had to say. The sessions were

also useful in providing participants with an opportunity to learn what their peers were doing with data collection and interpretation.

Upon completion of this phase, Carmichael Consulting compiled written survey results and created transcripts of the focus group discussions. These products were analyzed to identify patterns, trends and themes. Carmichael Consulting then identified macro-themes for the entire effort, which are identified below in the “Summary of Needs” section. Comprehensive details are presented in the full report.

## Summary of Needs

This field research phase of the project was broadly designed to elicit answers to one overarching question: **What do we need to improve the use of data to advance student achievement in Oregon?** Participants were surprisingly unified in identifying needs, the highlights of which are detailed below.

### 1. STATEWIDE APPROACH AND MINIMUM TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Research results clearly demonstrated a lack of understanding about appropriate use of student data to improve student learning. Participants wanted a K-12 assessment literacy culture within each district so educators clearly understand how to design formative measures and then use that information to influence instruction. Participants felt the need for a statewide approach to assessment, as well as a minimum level of training so staff members in every district are equipped with skills to implement the statewide approach.

### 2. TRAINING DELIVERY

Participants wanted to leverage the regional power of their ESDs to develop and then provide needed assessment training. They wanted training to be tailored to specific audiences and to be provided as locally as possible.

### 3. A CENTRAL REPOSITORY OF STUDENT DATA

Focus groups asked for a central repository of student data so the information is not stored in silos and is easily retrieved; so redundant reporting requirements are eliminated; and so quality of data is enhanced. Participants who currently use regional warehouse services felt that those services are successful, and should be considered as the vehicle for the central repository.

### 4. COMMON TECHNICAL DATA POLICIES AND TOOLS

Participants want to standardize technical data policies and tools (data definitions, business rules, security and confidentiality policies, and file formats). They also felt it was vital to resolve bandwidth and connectivity issues.

## 5. STATE POLICIES AND LEADERSHIP

Participants felt that the state needs to step up its role in providing policy and leadership. In addition to the statewide strategies already described, specific needs include a template for Continuous Improvement Plans (CIPs) and a manageable number of core power standards.

### Next Steps

The findings detailed in this report will be used by the statewide Data Quality Work Group to inform the development and execution of the Oregon DATA Project. The DQWG—the organization charged with leading the project—is comprised of representatives from ODE, EESC, ESD, K12 and Higher Ed.

This report will be reviewed at the February 5 meeting of the Oregon Department of Education management team, and, on February 11, Carmichael Consulting will present its findings to members of the Data Quality Work Group.