

## State Data Use Spotlight: Louisiana

**Challenge:** Can a categorical approach to data analysis create opportunities for schools to improve instructional decisions and receive tailored supports?

Similar to many states, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) does not mandate the use of specific literacy screening or progress monitoring tools. LDOE sought a measurement approach that resulted in accurate and reliable information on student progress and outcomes, yet respected local control. This state spotlight presents initial benefits and challenges that LDOE found when using a categorical data analysis approach that could be employed across multiple data types and systems.

### State Context

Louisiana's state-identified measureable result (SiMR) focuses on increasing literacy achievement for students with disabilities in third through fifth grades in nine local education agencies (LEAs) across the state. The results of the 2015–16 state assessment indicated that the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities was larger than previously reported. In response, LDOE supported LEAs in aligning their curriculum, assessments, and professional development with state standards. One piece of this much larger and structured process to improving outcomes for students was to pilot a categorical approach to measure progress toward the SiMR. Similar to other state education agencies, LDOE found that LEAs were using different data systems and data types to screen and monitor students. This created challenges for LDOE in supporting LEAs to improve instructional decision making and efficiently tailor professional development to meet its needs. Because a consistent state data system was impractical, LDOE sought an approach that could be used consistently across various types of LEA data. As a result, LDOE piloted a categorical approach using its fall 2016 and winter 2017 data. Below, is a brief summary of its initial findings from the pilot.

#### *Public School Facts: Louisiana*

Districts: 138  
Schools: 1,412  
Students: 711,491  
Students with  
individualized education  
programs: 11.1%

(LDOE, School Year 2013–14)

## Piloting a Categorical Data Analysis Approach

To pilot the categorical approach with nine LEAs across the state, LDOE calculated the number of students who moved from one proficiency category to another proficiency category (e.g., below basic to basic). The approach is similar to how students are grouped on state assessments. LDOE evaluated the efficacy and efficiency of this approach.

### Benefits of the Categorical Approach

- *Accountability.* Created an opportunity for LDOE to collect data from LEAs in the pilot at very specific time points, which also provided an indicator of how implementation efforts are improving student performance.
- *Consistency.* Ensured consistent collection and review of the data by LEAs and provided results in a consistent manner across LEAs.
- *Immediate and systematic feedback loop.* Allowed for more immediate evaluation of implementation efforts as data are collected multiple times throughout the year.
- *Increased the impact of systems coaches.* Systems coaches played a vital role in the success of the pilot. They were able to support LEAs through the process of receiving data to making implementation decisions to improve outcomes for students. Systems coaches helped LEAs in an iterative process to:
  - *Identify trends in data.* Facilitated discussions with LEAs that prompted them to look at data in ways that they had not before (e.g., looking at specific classrooms or subgroups of students to identify training needs).
  - *Increase understanding of data interpretation.* Used structured data-inquiry processes to bring key players together.
  - *Improve the problem-solving process.* Prior to the pilot, many LEAs were collecting data but were not purposefully engaging in a problem-solving process to make changes. Systems coaches met regularly with LEAs to facilitate discussions and guide more effective and meaningful conversations concerning data.

### Challenges of the Categorical Approach

There also were some challenges with the approach. LDOE recognized that there were inconsistent testing windows across LEAs, with the number of administrations ranging from three to five assessments. To increase comparability, LEAs reported data for a specific administration time frame that LDOE defined in advance. One district did not have assessment tools with cut scores aligned to proficiency categories, so an in-house data expert for LDOE created cut scores for that LEA. Placing students into proficiency categories masked improvements that students made when the increase was not enough to move into a different category (the

number of proficiency categories ranged from three to five across different assessments). To address these limitations, LDOE also reported the number of students who maintained performance in the same proficiency category and analyzed movement across one or two categories, as opposed to just one category (students who were administered assessments with three categories had less opportunity to move across categories compared with students who were administered assessments with more categories). Finally, some LEA data systems did not link to the LDOE system, so LEAs were tasked with populating the necessary data to conduct analyses. Cleaning data for reporting also was time consuming.

Although LDOE identified several limitations to the approach, it saw improvements in LEAs' instructional decision making, which was an important outcome. In addition, the approach provided data not previously available to LEAs to inform instructional decisions. The LDOE Special Education Policy Office and Strategic Research and Analytics Team are working to identify how to refine the approach to address the identified challenges.

## Recommendations for States Facing Similar Challenges

- Pilot new data analysis approaches before scaling up and gather stakeholder feedback about the effectiveness and efficiency of new data approaches.
- Conduct an inventory of assessments currently being used by LEAs to understand potential challenges.
- Account for extra training and preparation time for LEAs to enter data.
- Demonstrate the benefit of committing resources to this effort for LEAs. For example, the state can provide easy-to-understand reports.
- Utilize systems coaches to facilitate discussions with LEA leadership on how to use the data to make implementation changes.

### Available Resources

- National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI), Technical Assistance State Facilitators (find your state on the [map](#))
- NCSI Data Use Team Technical Assistance Support (contact Kristin Ruedel at [kruedel@air.org](mailto:kruedel@air.org))

*About This Resource:* This resource was developed by members of the NCSI Data Use Service Area Team, including Kristin Ruedel (AIR), Gena Nelson (AIR), and Tessie Bailey (AIR), and in collaboration with Kristi-Jo Preston, Manager of Strategic Initiatives and Communication, Louisiana Department of Education. The content was developed under cooperative agreement number #H326R140006 (NCSI) from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government. Project officers: Perry Williams and Shedah Hajghassemali.