

south dakota



STARS

Student Teacher Accountability and Reporting System

connections

## FERPA Training For SD Educators

This fall, the SDDOE sponsored trainings for districts on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law that protects student data. More than 100 people from South Dakota districts and ESAs registered to hear from three FERPA experts from the U.S. Department of Education.

Participants learned about the history of FERPA and the exceptions that allow disclosure of student data to authorized individuals.

The presenters reviewed the annual FERPA notification that informs parents about their rights under FERPA, including their right to opt out of the public release of their child's directory information. Directory information is information in the educational record that would not be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed. Some examples would be a child's name in the program of a drama production, a photo in the annual yearbook, a name listed in an honor roll, athletic rosters, and more.

Experts also discussed updates to FERPA. One update, called the Uninterrupted Scholars Act (P.L. 112-278)

**Continued on page 4**

## INSIDE:

**Data Driven Questions.....2**

**Ask the Experts.....3**

**National STARS.....4**

# Student Data Security Is A Priority At All Levels

Do you shred sensitive documents? Do you regularly change your email password? If so, you are practicing data security. These and other best practices may be enough to protect your identity, but what is done to protect students' identities in a system like SD-STARS?

Educational data has long been held to a high standard of security. It started with the passage of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) almost 40 years ago. FERPA gives parents access to their child's records and the opportunity to amend records. For educators, FERPA states that disclosure of personally identifiable information (PII) is only permitted with parental consent or under certain circumstances. For example, one exception allows school officials with a "legitimate educational interest" (ex: teachers, principals) access to students' educational records, like test results. Another exception allows school officials to share a student's data if the student "seeks or intends to enroll." This allows data from the students' former school to be transferred to the new school.

The SDDOE limits collection of data to that needed for reporting, policymaking, or services. Leaders in the Department and representatives from districts formed the South Dakota Educational Data Governance Board. The board focuses on policies and practices governing how data are collected, secured, shared, accessed, and used. Protection of student data is one of the Board's priorities. The Department also limits access to data, requires staff to sign a confidentiality policy, and provides training on data confidentiality. Any third party that the SDDOE might work with is required to sign a strict confidentiality policy and is only given appropriate (if any)

access to PII.

Because most of today's student records are stored electronically, preventing disclosure of PII is now more complex. At the state level, educational data are some of the most protected data on state servers. The SDDOE and the South Dakota Bureau of Information and Telecommunications use firewalls, encryption, and other methods to prevent security breaches. In addition, any SDDOE data systems used by districts are scanned for security vulnerabilities before being released.

However, keeping student data secure is more than a technology issue. Users have the moral and legal responsibility to protect student data. Locking paper files in a cabinet, protecting electronic documents with passwords, and picking up print jobs right away will help prevent disclosure. Districts and schools should also have a staff policy in place and provide training on confidentiality and disclosure avoidance practices.

In future editions of STARS Connections, look for more information on how the SDDOE and districts keep data secure. If you have a topic suggestion, please contact Sara Kock (sara.kock@state.sd.us) or Marcus Bevier (marcus.bevier@state.sd.us).





## About Us:

South Dakota STARS Connections is a bi-monthly publication for South Dakota administrators and teachers and is produced by the South Dakota Department of Education.

This publication is intended to communicate news and events regarding the South Dakota Student Teacher Accountability and Reporting System (SD-STARS), our Statewide Longitudinal Data System.

To view an online edition of this newsletter, go to [doe.sd.gov/publications.aspx](http://doe.sd.gov/publications.aspx).

Email story ideas or questions to [marcus.bevier@state.sd.us](mailto:marcus.bevier@state.sd.us) or [sara.kock@state.sd.us](mailto:sara.kock@state.sd.us).



# Data Driven Questions

by John Swanson, ESA 7

Work continues in ESA 7 with helping schools utilize SD-STARS. SD-STARS has the stated purpose of aiding decision making, measuring student outcomes, and informing school improvement efforts. We also think SD-STARS can help drive important questions.

As schools examine enrollment trends, they may question the capacity of their facilities or the need to increase their teaching staff. When examining attendance data, they may ask themselves about the impact of their current attendance policy. Discussions about achievement data may lead to questions about curriculum alignment, testing conditions, and other factors. In short, when schools examine the data housed in SD-STARS, they may uncover as many questions as answers.

One focus of our work with SD-STARS this year is to assist schools in identifying

reports which address local issues and questions. These reports can bring together different sources of data to produce more dynamic information. For example, schools may want a report to help them compare the ACT scores of students who have been enrolled in their school from grades 9- 12 with the scores of students who transferred in at some point during high school. Schools could also request a report to determine how strong attendance affects achievement within different subgroups of students.

To assist schools in creating the most helpful reports, SD-STARS contains a document that lists current data sources housed in the system along with the slate of standard reports which are already available. Please contact your local ESA representatives for additional assistance in producing reports for your school.

## Contact Us:



South Dakota  
Department of Education  
800 Governors Drive  
Pierre, SD 57501

Project Managers:  
Marcus Bevier,  
[Marcus.Bevier@state.sd.us](mailto:Marcus.Bevier@state.sd.us)  
(605) 773-8062

Sara Kock,  
[Sara.Kock@state.sd.us](mailto:Sara.Kock@state.sd.us)  
(605) 773-6158

[doe.sd.gov/ofm/lds.aspx](http://doe.sd.gov/ofm/lds.aspx)

## How SD-STARS Protects Data

Like many SDDOE systems, SD-STARS contains highly sensitive student data. Because of this, the system has many safeguards in place.

The data in SD-STARS are protected by multiple firewalls within SDDOE's network. In other words, these data have several "security gates" a person has to pass through before they can reach the databases that contain student data. Additionally, the Bureau of Information and Telecommunications (BIT) constantly monitors the network for irregular activity.

The SDDOE also limits SD-STARS accounts. Unless a user has an account created for them, they will not be able to access the portal. To put it another way, people can navigate to the site, but they

are not allowed to enter without having a username and password. By limiting the number of accounts created and requiring a username and password, the SDDOE mitigates the risk for security breaches.

Another way SD-STARS protects sensitive data is with the use of a role-based security system. Districts assign users certain permissions that correspond with the level of data access appropriate for their position. For example, a teacher is only allowed to see the data of students in his or her classroom. This ensures that the users only have access to the data they need in order to do their jobs.

The data residing in these systems are sensitive, and the SDDOE and BIT take every precaution to protect the data.



# Ask the Experts

## **Does the Federal Government have access to SD-STARS?**

No. The federal government does not have access to SD-STARS.

## **Can the federal government create a national database of students' personally identifiable information?**

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Education Reform Sciences Act of 2002, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) all prohibit the creation of a federal database of students' personally identifiable information.

The one exception to this is data on migratory students, or students whose families frequently move across state lines to obtain temporary or seasonal employment. Mandated by Congress, the U.S. Department of Education helps states link migrant student records to ensure greater continuity of educational services. This helps improve the timeliness of school enrollments and appropriate grade and course placements.

## **Was South Dakota required to develop an SLDS?**

To receive federal State Fiscal Stabilization Funds, which were distributed in 2009, South Dakota provided assurance that it would establish a statewide longitudinal data system to track progress and foster continuous improvement. The SDDOE's vision for SD-STARS is to do just that. SD-STARS helps the Department, districts, and educators make data driven decisions. It also increases efficiencies within the Department and among districts and assists with reporting needs.

## **Is SD-STARS a tracking system?**

Oftentimes, tracking in education refers to the practice of assigning students to different academic paths based on abilities. This definition does NOT apply to SD-STARS. SD-STARS houses multiple years of data allowing educators to identify trends in achievement, attendance, and other important measures. These trends can then be used to inform decision making. This isn't anything new. Educators were already doing this but often by hand. Now, with access to reports like the Dakota-STEP Strand, they can track changes in test scores over multiple years with a few simple clicks.

## **Is there a federal collection of sensitive data on individual students?**

This is a common misunderstanding of the National Education Data Model (NEDM) or Common Educational Data Standards (CEDS). Neither the NEDM nor the CEDS is a collection of student data. They are simply data frameworks used to organize data. These frameworks help states design data structures based on best practices with consistency and commonality among data elements. NEDM and CEDS were developed through a collaboration of states and are supported by funding from the federal government. Implementing these models is voluntary. It is important to note that both NEDM and CEDS data models contain a wide range of data elements, many of which are not collected by SDDOE and are not stored in SD-STARS.

The only federal collection of individual student data is that of migratory students. This data collection is explained in a previous answer.

## **Will data from the Smarter Balanced Assessment be available in SD-STARS?**

In spring 2014, the Smarter Balanced assessment and the new alternative assessment created by the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) for certain special education populations are undergoing field testing. This will allow time for teachers and students to adjust to the new assessments and to work out any infrastructure issues. A field test is primarily used to ensure validity and determine accurate scale scores for future years, so after this spring's testing there will not be any test scores for teachers or administrators to review.

In 2014-15 and beyond, Smarter Balanced and NCSC assessment information will be available in SD-STARS. Just like with the Dakota-STEP, teachers and administrators will be able to access information on student performance.

## **Are private schools required to participate in SD-STARS?**

Participation in SD-STARS is not required for private schools, and currently private schools cannot participate.

## **What data specific to private school students is stored in SD-STARS?**

The data specific to private school students that are stored in SD-STARS are the same data private schools report to the SDDOE through Infinite Campus—State Edition. This includes enrollment history and basic demographic information.



## FERPA Training Continued

is specific to children in foster care. It allows child welfare agencies access to educational records of foster children for the purposes of addressing the students' educational needs.

Experts also discussed data sharing permitted under FERPA. Schools can disclose Personally Identifiable Information (PII) for a study, audit, or evaluation only if certain legal criteria are met. For instance, a school might share data with a non-profit organization that offers afterschool programming.

The last part of the FERPA training focused on data security. Training participants learned about best practices to avoid a security breach and tips for protecting the data.

Reviews from participants were overwhelmingly positive. A majority of survey respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the training and would recommend this or a similar training to others in their district. One participant commented, "The scenarios that were presented allowed us to practice our decision making." Another said the training "was all enjoyable and very informative."

SDDOE plans to offer further FERPA training to districts, likely in the form of webinars, in the upcoming months.

# National STARS: HAWAII

The Hawaii Department of Education, in collaboration with the state's Executive Office on Early Learning and the University of Hawaii system (Hawaii P20 Partnership for Education) have set a goal: By the year 2025, 55% of Hawaii's working age adults will have a two- or four-year college degree. Department officials believe the ability to collect, use, and share quality data is critical in this effort.

Construction of the state's Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) began in 2008. The Department collects student data to monitor the quality of the public education system and create real-time feedback for teachers and administrators, helping them gauge student performance and construct learning interventions. For example, the state's SLDS provides a dashboard from which teachers and administrators can access student performance data, create cross-referenced reports among many data sets, and develop Response to Intervention (Rtl).

Additionally, Hawaii's data are compiled along a continuum that begins with early education, continues through K-12, and ends at college and career entrance. This gives the Hawaii P-20 Partnership for Education a deeper understanding of student outcomes.

The Department has released College and Career Readiness Indicators reports that provide data on what percentage of students took Advanced Placement exams, enrolled in college, and needed remedial classes while in college. The newest results are very encouraging. Over a two-year period, a number of high schools made double-digit percentage gains in the number of graduates entering college.

With reports like these, schools and the Department have the data they need to track progress toward their goals.

## ESA DATA STARS

Representatives from each ESA have been trained in SD-STARS. They are ready and willing to answer your questions. If you don't know your ESA assignment, go to [sdesa.k12.sd.us](http://sdesa.k12.sd.us).

Region 1	Lisa Reinhiller	<a href="mailto:lisa.reinhiller@k12.sd.us">lisa.reinhiller@k12.sd.us</a>
Region 2	Pat Hubert	<a href="mailto:phubert@edec.org">phubert@edec.org</a>
Region 3	Sara Fridley	<a href="mailto:sara.fridley@k12.sd.us">sara.fridley@k12.sd.us</a>
Region 3	Roxane Dyk	<a href="mailto:roxane.dyk@k12.sd.us">roxane.dyk@k12.sd.us</a>
Region 5	Holly Schumacher	<a href="mailto:holly.schumacher@k12.sd.us">holly.schumacher@k12.sd.us</a>
Region 5	Janeen Outka	<a href="mailto:janeen.outka@k12.sd.us">janeen.outka@k12.sd.us</a>
Region 6	Jennifer Tschetter	<a href="mailto:jtschetter@tie.net">jtschetter@tie.net</a>
Region 6	Jeanne Cowan	<a href="mailto:jcowan@tie.net">jcowan@tie.net</a>
Region 7	Melanie Hurley	<a href="mailto:mhurley@tie.net">mhurley@tie.net</a>
Region 7	John Swanson	<a href="mailto:jswanson@tie.net">jswanson@tie.net</a>