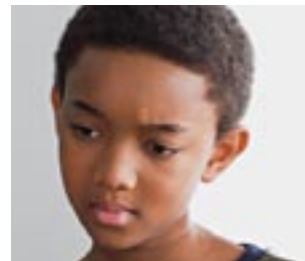




Getting the evidence for evidence-based initiatives: how the Midwest states use data systems to improve education processes and outcomes



Summary



Institute of Education Sciences

U.S. Department of Education



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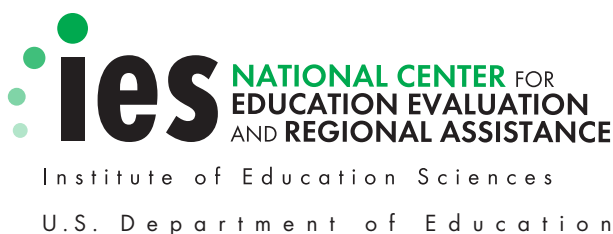
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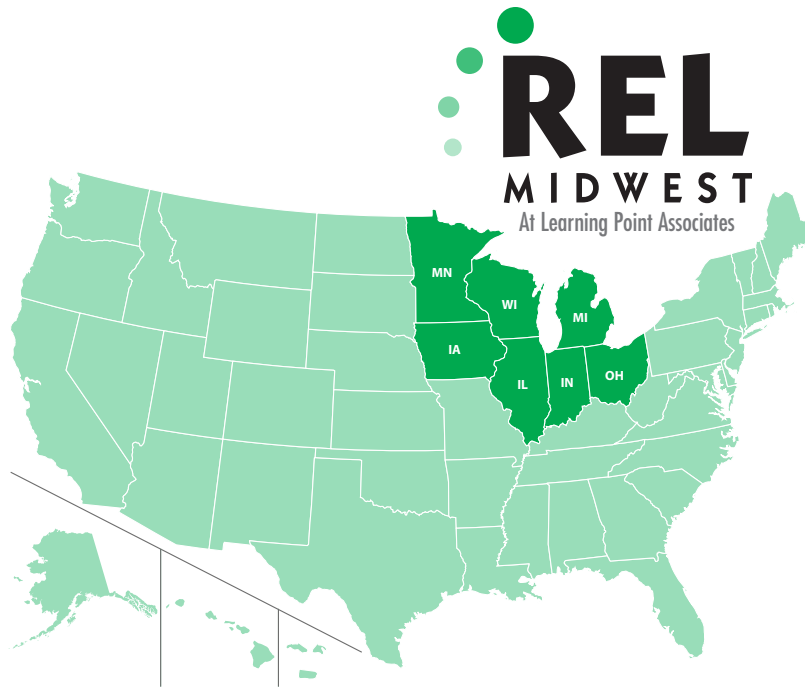
Sarah-Kathryn McDonald
NORC at the University of Chicago

Jolynne Andal
NORC at the University of Chicago

Kevin Brown
NORC at the University of Chicago

Barbara Schneider
Michigan State University





Issues & Answers is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

June 2007

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Summary

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States in the Midwest Region are developing innovative approaches to collecting and providing access to high-quality data in order to improve educational decision-making. Additional capacity-building and increased technical assistance at the state and local levels would enhance this work.

Educational improvement through data-based decisionmaking using high-quality data is a longstanding goal of policymakers and practitioners, and ensuring the quality of the evidence available to inform such decisions is a key part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The evidence-based education that such initiatives promote involves the “integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction.” A wealth of data at the school, district, state, and federal levels should in principle provide an empirical basis for developing educational policies, practices, and research proposals and designs.

The states in the Midwest Region are developing innovative practices for identifying and

addressing information priorities within their states and for meeting federal requirements. These exemplary practices involve establishing longitudinal student-level and teacher-level data collections and linking data across the educational information system. Other practices include incorporating key data elements that can leverage other data resources to identify problems that could constrain student achievement and using accountability systems to target educational resources more efficiently and effectively.

Midwest states also face challenges in meeting these goals. Data collection staff and resources for training at the local level are limited, and many states do not have enough staff with the skills and experience necessary to analyze the data. Keeping the duplication of data collection to a minimum is also a constant challenge. Finally, federal and state regulations often constrain states’ ability to collect key data elements.

Given these challenges and constraints, responding to states’ information needs and aspirations may best be achieved through a

two-pronged approach. First is to establish regional benchmarks and provide guidelines for states wishing to use local data to develop indicators for purposes of comparison. Second is to respond to specific state requests for analytic resources and develop associated training materials. Both tasks have the explicit

goals of providing immediate utility and building capacity for the future. Each may usefully be addressed by the regional educational laboratories—singly, in combination, and with external partners.

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