



Frequently Asked Questions

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Contents

What is this all about?	1
What is a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)?	2
What is Student Teacher Accountability and Reporting System (SD – STARS)?.....	2
Is the SLDS a punitive tool?.....	2
What is SD-STARS used for?.....	2
How is SD-STARS related to Common Core State Standards?	3
What are the data sources used by the SD-STARS?.....	3
What about security?.....	3
Will there be trainings on how to use SD-STARS?	3
What are the roles and responsibilities of districts as it relates to SD-STARS?	4
How can I learn more about SD-STARS?	4

What is this all about?

Good data are critical to assess and improve education in South Dakota. However, data often are kept in separate silos that are not connected to one another. For example, data known about a student are not linked to data known about the teacher, school, or district. This makes it difficult to spot areas of concern. Even separate years of data for the same student or the same teacher are not necessarily linked. Furthermore, sometimes these silos store redundant and/or conflicting data. The South Dakota Department of Education (SD-DOE) recognizes the value that could be attained when the silos are brought together and connected in a central location. With help from a federal grant, SD-DOE is working to develop a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS).

What is a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)?

A SLDS is a data system that collects and maintains the history of data for a student. The power of the SLDS comes especially from its ability to link student data at multiple levels (classroom, school, district, state) and over multiple years. Think about photography – current systems provide just a snapshot of the student, but the SLDS will put those snapshots into a video as he/she goes from grade to grade. If you put students’ videos together into a montage, then you could spot trends in students with different types of experiences. South Dakota is not the only state to recognize the benefits a SLDS will provide. At least 47 states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have created or are taken steps towards creating their own SLDS.

What is Student Teacher Accountability and Reporting System (SD – STARS)?

The Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System (SD-STARS) is the name for South Dakota’s Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). The goal is for SD-STARS to securely consolidate and link all educational data that currently resides within the SD-DOE’s various databases. In other words, it pulls data that is already available from different sources (eg., Infinite Campus), dumps data into a centralized system, and links data together. This will increase data availability for reporting and analysis for teachers, schools, districts, and the SD-DOE, as well as external stakeholders such as policy makers and researchers. In the end, SD-STARS will also allow for deeper and richer performance analysis by bringing student, teacher, principal, and financial data together. This is just the beginning of a long-term commitment to data quality and use.

Is the SLDS a punitive tool?

No. Sometimes using data in education is perceived as a hammer. On the contrary, the primary asset of SLDS is its ability to help its users determine what works and what areas need improvement. It can help teachers tailor instruction, help schools recognize warning signs to prevent dropouts, and help streamline reporting needs of the district. Furthermore, the SLDS provides a more complete and detailed view of student learning, which can provide a fairer process when used for evaluations of staff or schools. In short, the SLDS is a flashlight that sheds light on the nuts and bolts of education to aid teachers and administrators in improving educational outcomes.

What is SD-STARS used for?

SD-STARS is used by district and school leaders, as well as teachers, to inform decisions about their educational programs. SD-STARS houses important data related to students (eg., attendance, test scores), teachers (eg., certification, teaching assignments), and schools (eg., school calendar, school directory). With this information provided in a single location and with multiple years of data available, educators can see patterns taking shape and make adjustments designed to strengthen the educational experience for students.

The data housed in SD-STARS is used at the state level for holding schools accountable and to meet state and federal reporting requirements.

In short, SD-STARS houses data and presents it in a usable format, so that districts, schools, teachers, and SD-DOE can make informed decisions.

SD-STARS follows all state and federal laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). Accessing and/or using the data for purposes other than those permitted in federal or state laws is strictly prohibited. This is true for all parties. Any information that comes from SD-STARS for public consumption will be aggregated and meet minimum sample size to protect confidentiality. SD-STARS is not part of any federal database, nor will any information contained within the system be sold.

How is SD-STARS related to Common Core State Standards?

SD-STARS and Common Core State Standards are separate initiatives. Their only connection is this: Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, South Dakota's state assessment will measure student mastery of standards in English-language arts and math (also known as Common Core State Standards). The assessment data will be housed within SD-STARS.

What are the data sources used by the SD-STARS?

SD-STARS will bring together historical and current data into one cohesive, consistent, and consolidated environment for analysis and reporting. SD-STARS will be extracting data from different sources already available to the SD-DOE, such as student/teacher schedules, student performance across various assessments, special programs, state scholarships, teacher certification, and data sources to be identified. These sources include, but are not limited to:

- Infinite Campus
- MIS2000 (Migrant)
- Carl D. Perkins data (CTE)
- Annual Financial Reports
- Personnel Record Form (PRF)
- Teacher Certification
- Assessments (e.g., DSTEP, STEP-A, Access, etc.)
- School Directory

What about security?

Security to protect the privacy of individuals within districts is a high priority during the development and implementation of SD-STARS. In addition to other security measures, SD-STARS will also limit the data a user will be allowed to see. For example, a teacher will only be able to view data for the children he/she teaches—nothing else. A principal would be able to see children in his/her school—nothing else. This maintains FERPA compliance.

Will there be trainings on how to use SD-STARS?

Yes. SD-DOE will be using a train-the-trainer model. Education Service Agencies (ESAs) will be trained along with members from districts and SD DOE. They will bring this training back to the districts in their area. The logistics of these trainings are still being worked out. Read *STARS Connections newsletters* for more information or check the [SD-STARS website](#).

What are the roles and responsibilities of districts as it relates to SD-STARS?

Below is a brief review of the roles and responsibilities of the districts in the implementation of SD-STARS:

- Continue to provide data to SD-DOE, which SD-DOE will upload into SD-STARS
- Use SD-STARS to inform instruction and make decisions
- Manage the users within the district, like through a technology coordinator
- Provide primary support, like through a technology coordinator
- Provide feedback on SD-STARS
- Attend trainings on SD-STARS
- Suggest report ideas and collaborate with DOE to develop those reports
- Collaborate with other districts around SD-STARS
- Participate in data governance

How can I learn more about SD-STARS?

SD-DOE has set up a website that will be frequently updated. You can find that at <http://doe.sd.gov/ofm/lds.aspx>. In addition, SD-DOE will be publishing *STARS Connection*, a bi-monthly newsletter. The newsletter is distributed via mail and email to districts and will also be archived and available at <http://doe.sd.gov/publications.aspx>. In addition, ESAs will be an important contact for you as SD-STARS project progresses.