SLDS Topical Webinar Summary
Using SLDS Data to Support College Admissions

Statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs) often hold valuable information that states can use to help students enroll and succeed in higher education. Some states have found ways to use existing data to inform and streamline the college admissions process for students and families, high schools, and postsecondary institutions. These innovative approaches add value to K12 and postsecondary education data by using them to answer questions and support processes beyond their original administrative intent.

Applying to college can be daunting, especially for students who are the first in their families to apply. Using SLDS data to simplify the process can help ease that challenge. Such uses of data not only have a direct effect on students, they also provide opportunities for cross-sector partnerships. Representatives from Iowa, Idaho, and South Dakota explain how they use SLDS data to support college admissions and share their lessons learned about implementing a college admissions program using SLDS data.

Iowa: Automatic Admissions and Understanding College Readiness

The Iowa Department of Education first approached the Iowa Board of Regents in 2008 to discuss data sharing between the department and the state's postsecondary institutions. Since that time, data sharing has grown to include community colleges—which, like K12 schools, are governed by the Iowa Department of Education—and Iowa Workforce Development. A steering committee with representatives from each partner organization decides how the data will be used.

K12 and postsecondary data sharing support a number of policy objectives in Iowa. The Department of Education's vision is for Iowa students to become "productive citizens in a democratic society and successful participants in a global community," with the goal that "individuals will pursue postsecondary education in order to drive economic success." The statewide Future Ready Iowa initiative aims for 70 percent of Iowans to have a postsecondary

credential by 2025. Additionally, the state has defined college- and career-ready students as those who have

- achieved proficiency in essential content knowledge;
- acquired practical transition skills;
- developed key learning skills and cognitive strategies; and
- built a strong understanding of self-understanding and engagement strategies.

Figure 1. Iowa's definition of college and career readiness includes students who have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies to be successful in postsecondary opportunities.

Using SLDS data to support college preparation and admissions
The Iowa SLDS informs college admissions both directly and indirectly. The data directly support the Regent Admission Index (RAI), a weighted score to determine students' eligibility for automatic admission to any of the three public universities overseen by the Iowa Board of Regents. RAI scores are based on students' SAT or ACT scores, grade point average (GPA), completion of core courses, and high school class rank. An alternative RAI formula is used for students whose schools do not calculate class rank. Students who receive an index score of 245 or higher are automatically enrolled in any of the three universities they choose.

The RAI's core courses component initially caused some confusion as the Board of Regents and high schools needed a common understanding of which courses were considered core. The board worked with the Department of Education and the Iowa SLDS team to determine which courses among all the public high school offerings helped students prepare for college. The board uses the School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) classification system to identify core

courses for its RAI calculations and shares with high schools each year which of their courses qualify.

The Board of Regents reviews the RAI's effectiveness every 2 years. In 2017, the board used K12 free and reduced-price lunch enrollment data to ensure that the RAI scores were calculated equitably across students of different socioeconomic status (see figure 2).
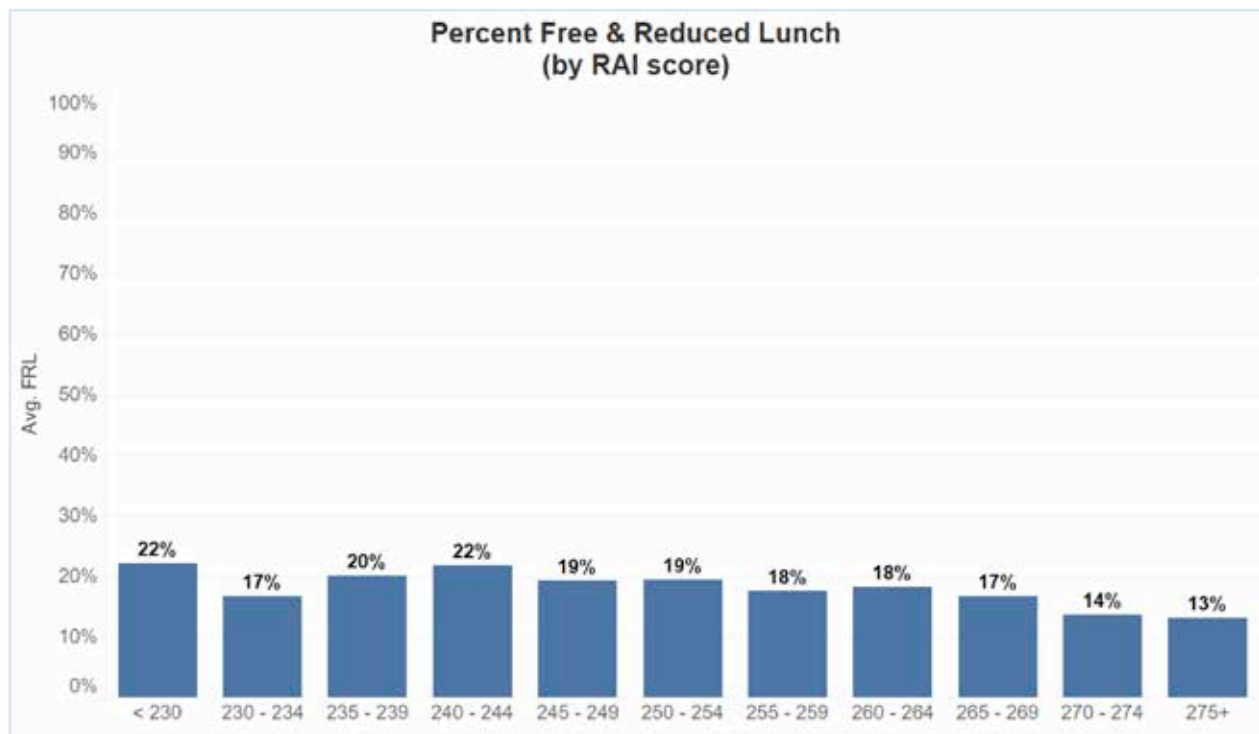

Figure 2. To ensure equity in its admissions formula, the Iowa Board of Regents examined the percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch by their scores on the Regent Admission Index (RAI). Students scoring 245 or higher are automatically enrolled at one of three public universities.

SLDS data also support college admissions indirectly by giving postsecondary and high school administrators alike a better understanding of how and why students succeed in college. The Board of Regents shares with high schools postsecondary readiness reports and other data that show students' enrollment patterns and outcomes in higher education. For example, by comparing students' eighth grade math assessment scores to their enrollment in remedial math courses in college, analysts found that the benchmark for math proficiency in eighth grade might be too low to accurately predict college readiness (see figure 3).
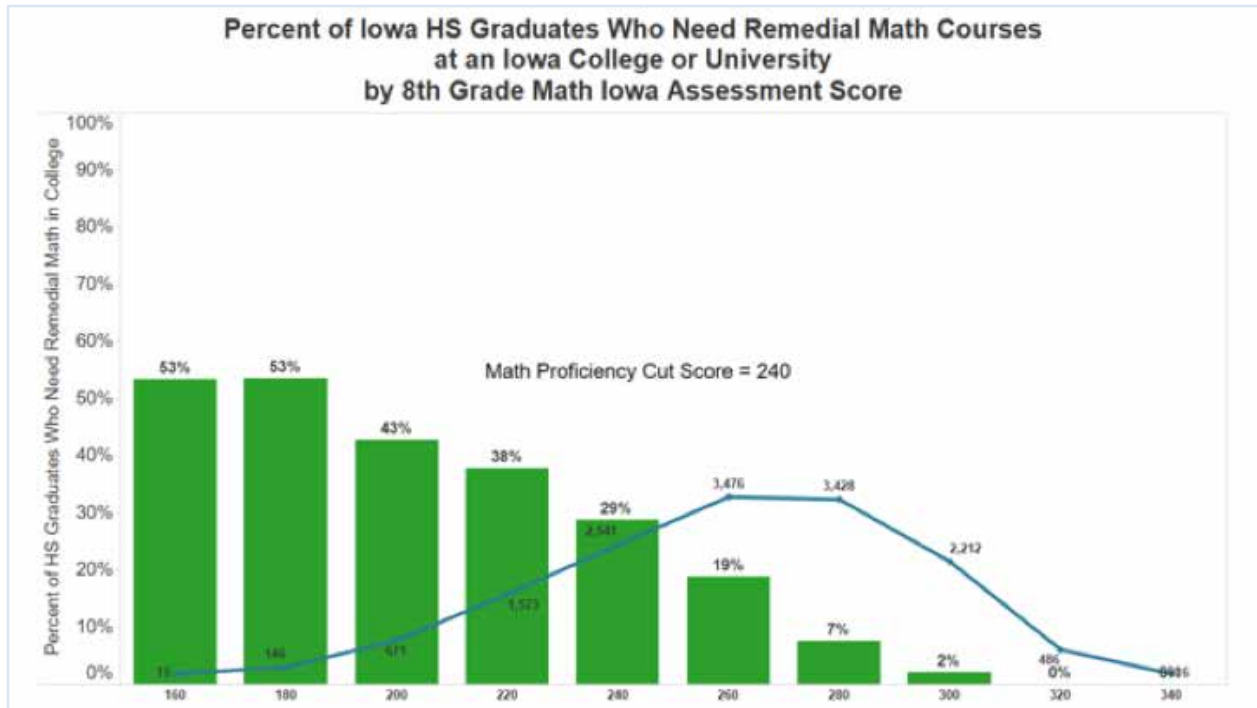
Figure 3. Iowa eighth graders are considered proficient in math if they score 240 or above on the state math assessment. However, an analysis of K12 and postsecondary data shows that 29 percent of students who achieved the threshold score of 240 later enrolled in remedial math courses in college.

Impact

Iowa's use of K12 and postsecondary SLDS data offers educators and policymakers tools and insights that can support the state's college and career readiness goals. The automatic admissions program supported by the RAI makes it easy for many Iowa students to enroll in higher education.

Postsecondary readiness reports help the Board of Regents and high schools work together to understand and improve students' preparation for college. Findings about college course enrollment and remediation rates based on students' high school coursetaking can inform support for students both before and after they enter college.

Idaho: Direct Admissions and Apply Idaho

Idaho's P-20W+ SLDS is called the Education Analytics System of Idaho (EASI). Three organizations contribute to the federated system: the Idaho State Department of Education, which oversees K12 education; the Idaho State Board of Education, which governs both K12 and postsecondary education; and the Idaho Department of Labor.

The Idaho Department of Education's position under the Idaho State Board of Education means that data sharing agreements are not required to join data from public K12 schools and postsecondary institutions. The state uses its cross-sector data for two college admissions

programs: Direct Admissions and Apply Idaho. Both programs are designed to help increase the number of Idaho high school graduates enrolling in college by informing students and families about their higher education options and streamlining the application process.

Direct Admissions
In 2015, in order to make college acceptance easier, Idaho developed a plan to proactively pre-admit high school seniors to Idaho institutions based on their high school academic performance and college entrance exam scores.

The goals of the plan were to
  · show students that they have access to a postsecondary certificate, associate's, or bachelor's degree program if they choose to continue their education in Idaho;
  · ease the transition from high school to college;
  · promote a college-going culture;
  · connect students, families, and high schools with colleges and universities earlier, giving families time to consider their options and plan for their student's future; and
  · assist Idaho's public colleges and universities with recruiting.

All Idaho students who graduate from high school are eligible for admission to a public community college or university in the state. The specific institutions to which students are automatically admitted are determined using a multistep process developed in collaboration with the college and university provosts (see figure 4). Students are eligible for automatic admission to either the "group of six" or "group of eight" institutions (see box) based on the following criteria:

Idaho Direct Admissions Institutions

Group of six
  · **Idaho State University College of Technology**
  · **Lewis-Clark State College**
  · **College of Eastern Idaho**
  · **College of Western Idaho**
  · **North Idaho College**
  · **College of Southern Idaho**

Group of eight
  · **Boise State University**
  · **University of Idaho**
  · **Idaho State University**
  · **Lewis-Clark State College**
  · **College of Eastern Idaho**
  · **College of Western Idaho**
  · **North Idaho College**

  1. **SAT/ACT score**. In Idaho, taking a college entrance exam is required for high school graduation, and the state pays for all students to take the SAT. Students who do not have an SAT or ACT score on file with the state are automatically admitted to the "group of six" institutions.
  2. **Number of high school course credits**. Students who have completed less than one year of high school coursework (12 credits) are automatically admitted to the "group of six."
  3. **GPA**. Students with an SAT or ACT score on file and who have completed at least 12 credits are automatically admitted to the "group of eight" institutions if their GPA is 3.0

or higher. Students with a lower GPA will be admitted to the "group of eight" if their GPA multiplied by their total SAT score is at least 2,835. An equivalent ACT score can be used for this calculation. All other students are admitted to the "group of six."

All acceptances are contingent upon high school graduation. Students can apply to institutions and degree programs to which they were not automatically admitted, but their admission is not guaranteed.
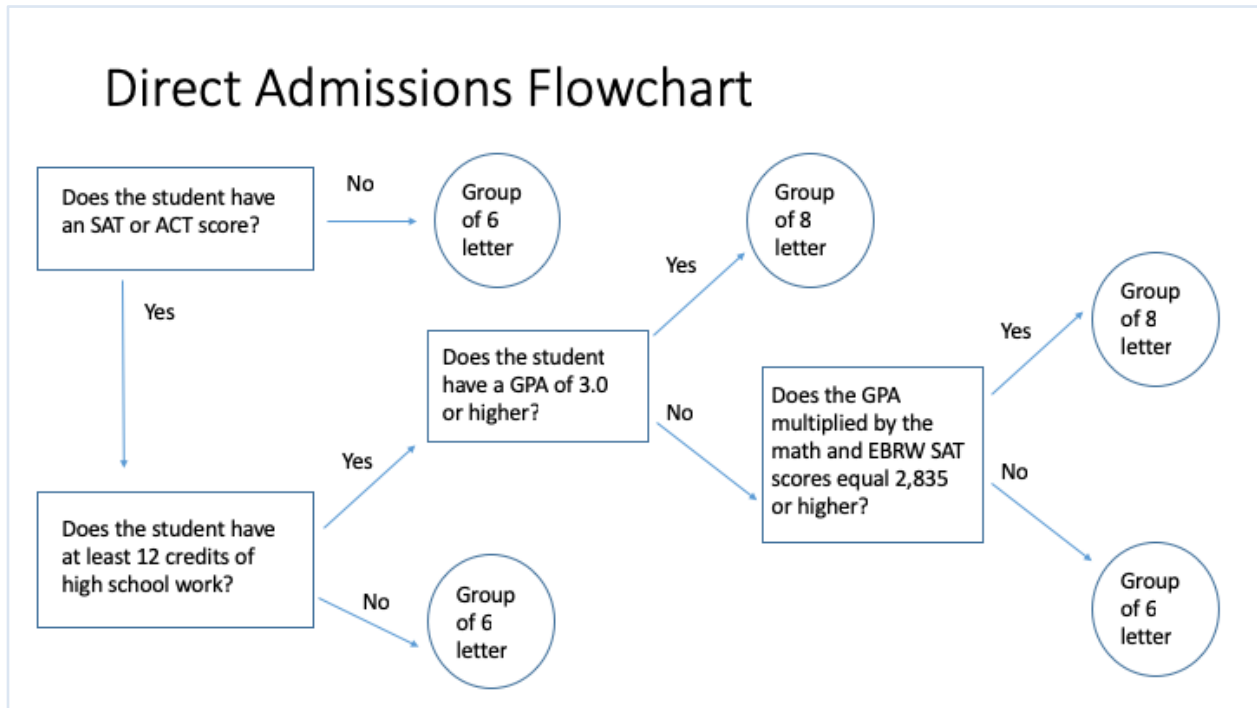

Figure 4. A flow chart explains which students are admitted to "group of eight" and "group of six" institutions in Idaho.

Letters informing students and their families which institutions they are automatically admitted to are mailed to their homes in September of their senior year. Reminder letters are sent in October. By letting students know where they have been accepted early in their senior year, the State Board of Education hopes to help all students understand that there are postsecondary options available to them.

Apply Idaho
In 2017, Idaho launched the Apply Idaho website to make the college application process even easier (see figure 5). The site pulls data from the state's SLDS to allow students to apply to multiple state institutions at once within minutes and without paying an application fee. Students enter their name, student ID, contact information, and some basic personal information, along with their anticipated graduation date, the institutions to which they want to apply, and their areas or majors of interest.

The application system then pulls other data from EASI—including students' course information, GPA, and exam and assessment scores—and sends it to the colleges to which they are applying. No personally identifiable information (PII) is visible to the applicant, which protects private data in case someone else were to use the system in their name.
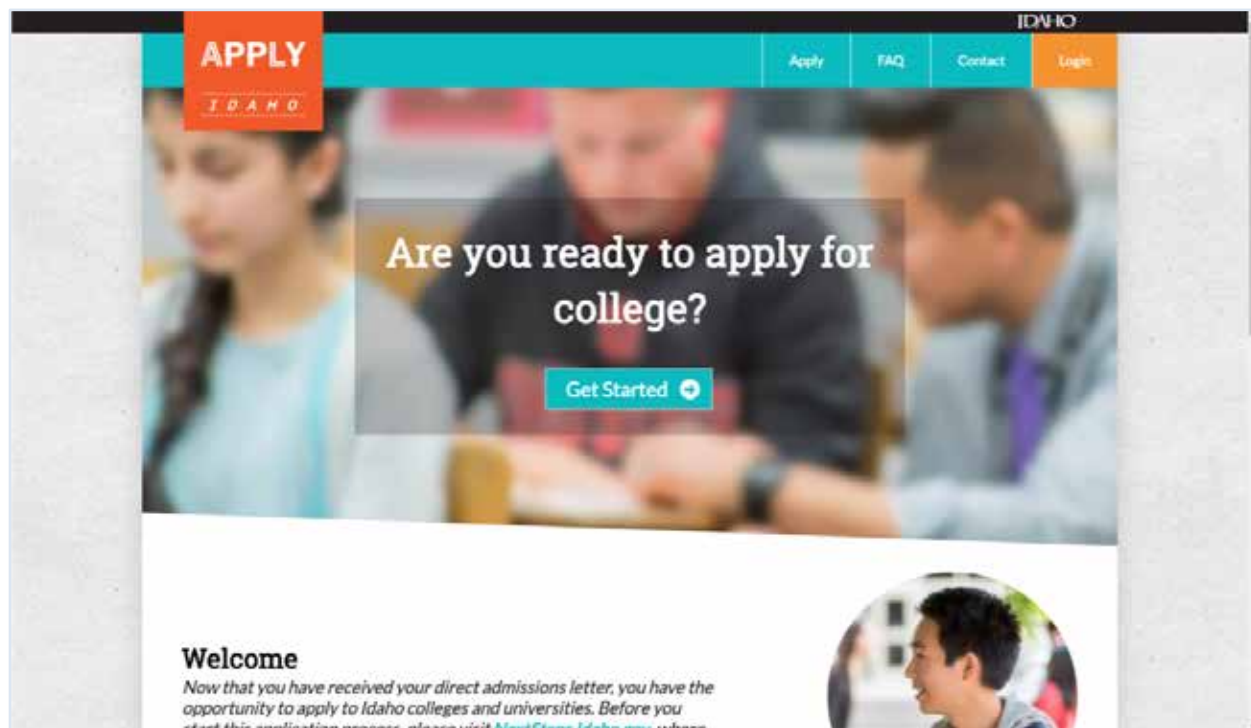

Figure 5. Apply Idaho allows students to apply to public colleges and universities in Idaho by entering limited personal information and with no application fees. The system then pulls additional student information, such as GPA and college admissions test scores, from the SLDS and sends the full application to the institution.

Apply Idaho is available through the Next Steps Idaho website (*https://NextSteps.Idaho.gov*), which provides students and their families with college and career information, application checklists, and information about financial aid. School counselors can log into the site to see how far along their students are in the college and financial aid application processes.

Impact
Since the Direct Admissions program was implemented in fall 2015, Idaho has experienced a 6.7 percent increase in enrollment in Idaho institutions, compared to a 2.2 percent enrollment increase nationally. The percentage of students enrolling in postsecondary institutions outside of Idaho declined from 13 percent to 10 percent as more college-going students decided to stay in state.

The total number of applications to Idaho institutions rose nearly 90 percent in 2017 after Apply Idaho was launched (see figure 6). Students submitted an average of 2.5 applications each through the site. Submitting an application via Apply Idaho takes approximately 5 minutes, allowing counselors to spend less time helping students apply to college and more time on financial aid forms and other support.

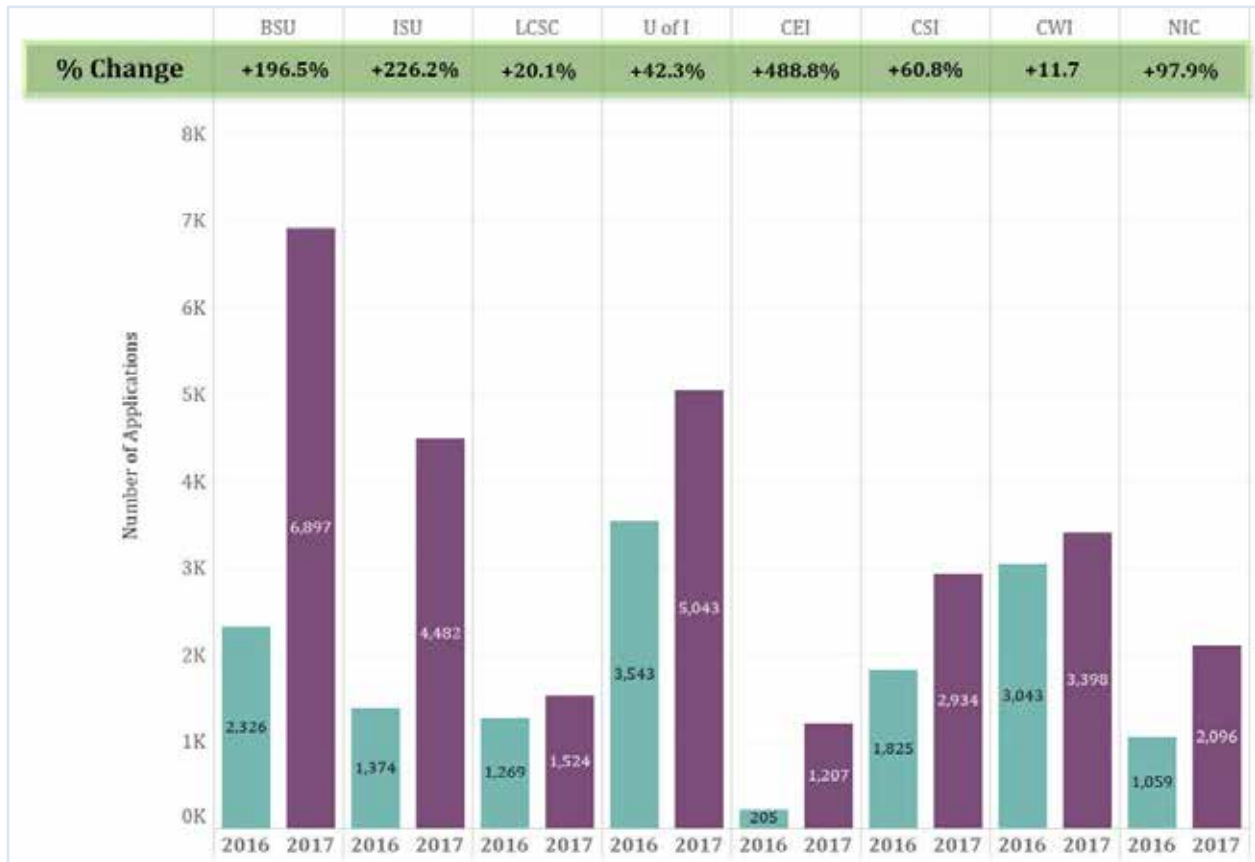| % Change	BSU	ISU	LCSC	U of I	CEI	CSI	CWI	NIC
	+196.5%	+226.2%	+20.1%	+42.3%	+488.8%	+60.8%	+11.7	+97.9%

Figure 6. In 2017, the first year that students could apply to college through the Apply Idaho system, applications to all eight public colleges and universities increased significantly. Statewide, Idaho institutions received 88 percent more applications than in 2016, with students submitting an average of 2.5 applications each.

South Dakota: Guaranteed General Acceptance for Qualifying Students

The South Dakota Department of Education maintains a P-12 (early childhood through 12th grade) SLDS known as the South Dakota Student Teacher Accountability and Reporting System (SD-STARS). SD-STARS receives nightly data updates from school districts' student information systems and is managed by an in-house staff of program and information technology (IT) personnel.

In 2017, at the direction of the state legislature, the South Dakota Department of Education, Board of Regents, and Board of Technical Education launched a project to support proactive

admissions to the state's six public universities and four technical institutions. Students who meet qualifying criteria are guaranteed acceptance to any of the 10 institutions to which they apply.

Using SLDS data to support college admissions
The Board of Regents and state IT staff developed the academic standards for the guaranteed general acceptance program. To be eligible, students must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Scores of 3 or 4 on 11th grade assessments in both math and English/language arts
- An ACT composite score of 18 or above
- A cumulative, unweighted GPA of 2.6 out of 4.0

The South Dakota Department of Education uses SD-STARS data to compile a list of high school students eligible for guaranteed general acceptance at the beginning of their senior year. In addition to evaluating students' academic performance, the department needed to create business rules to sort through grade level and concurrent enrollment data to identify students who are ready to apply for college.

Eligible students and their schools are notified by letter that they are guaranteed acceptance to South Dakota's public colleges and universities (see figure 7). The letter includes profiles of each college and university, costs, admissions contacts, and information about financial aid.
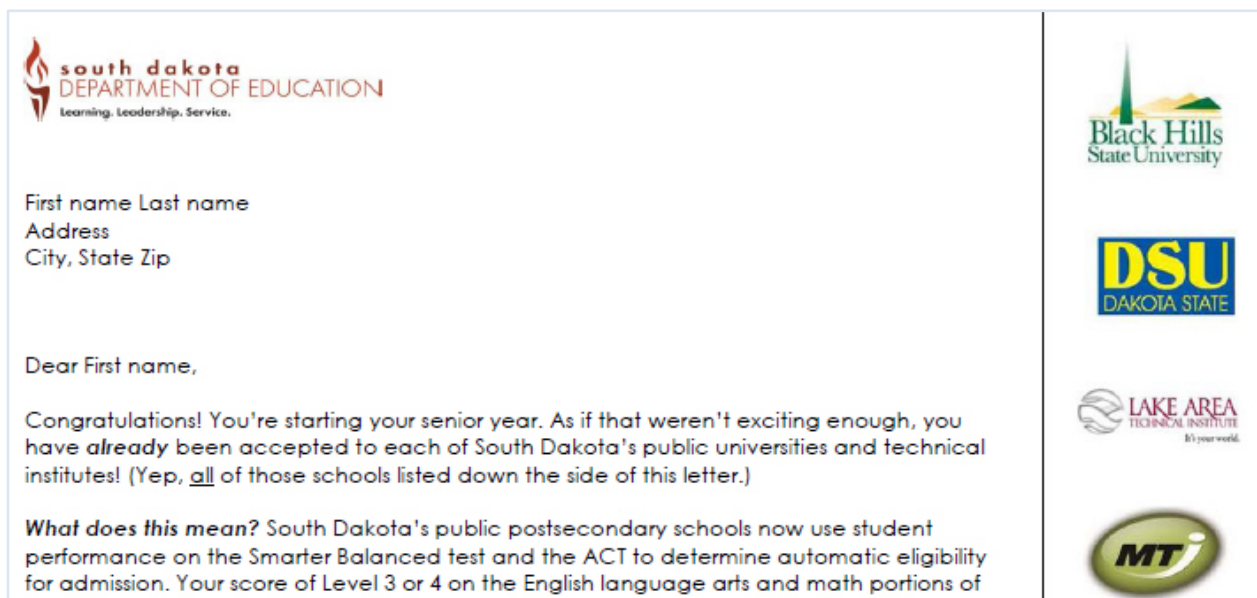

Figure 7. High school students who qualify for guaranteed general admission to South Dakota's public colleges and universities receive a letter in September of their senior year congratulating them and explaining the application process.

Acceptance is guaranteed only if students apply to an institution by December 1 of their senior year and pay the application fee; students may apply later but are not guaranteed admission. One institution, the South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, has an additional ACT math score requirement for admission. Students are not guaranteed acceptance into specific major programs, and they might still need remedial coursework once enrolled. South Dakota high schools offer remedial programs to students during their senior year to help prepare them for college.

During the first year of proactive admissions, the Board of Education communicated about the program with district superintendents and school principles, held webinars and in-person meetings with high school counselors, and spoke at conferences. A report of eligible students, whether they meet automatic admission criteria, and whether they might need remedial coursework was available to schools through SD-STARS (see figure 8). The department also publicized the program through press releases, media interviews, and social media promotions using the hashtag #ImIn.

Last Name ⊟	First Name ⊟	Met Proactive Admission Benchmark	Qualify for Remedial Math College Readiness Coursework	Qualify for Remedial English College Readiness Coursework	Math Level ⊟	Math Scale Score ⊟
Aaberg	Katrina	No	No	No	Level 1	2519
Baatz	Henry	No	No	No	Level 1	2482
Craddock	Mitch	Yes	No	No	Level 4	2723
Dobb	Irene	No	No	Yes	Level 3	2633
Eafford	Andrew	No	No	No	NA	NA
Fether	Cindy	Yes	Yes	No	Level 2	2592
Graham	Floyd	Yes	No	No	Level 4	2744
Headly	Gustav	No	Yes	Yes	Level 2	2590
Izell	Agnes	No	Yes	No	Level 2	2597
Jonovich	Otto	Yes	No	No	Level 3	2640

Figure 8. Reports from SD-STARS show high school counselors administrators which of their seniors are eligible for proactive admission, their assessment scores, and whether they qualify for remediation programs while still in high school.

Impact
During the 2017–2018 school year, about 55 percent of public high school seniors met the criteria for guaranteed general acceptance. Of those, about 9 percent would likely need remedial math coursework, less than 2 percent would need remedial English work, and less than 1 percent would need remediation in both math and English. As additional cohorts of students go through the proactive admissions process and enroll in college, data from SD-STARS and postsecondary institutions will help South Dakota agencies evaluate the program's longer-term outcomes.

Lessons Learned and Continuing Challenges

When using SLDS data to support college admissions, it is important to establish trust among students, parents, postsecondary institutions, and K12 schools about privacy and how student

data will be used. Demonstrating the value of using shared K12 and postsecondary data is an effective way to build trust. In Iowa and Idaho, SLDS partners that were initially skeptical about sharing data for college admissions projects became much more supportive after seeing the impact on students and the information available to inform college readiness initiatives. Strong communications about processes, data needs, partner responsibilities, and the project's impact are essential.

In Idaho and South Dakota, collecting valid student addresses to mail admissions letters has been challenging. Idaho initially used addresses provided by students for the ACT or SAT records, but later began collecting more up-to-date addresses from schools. If letters are returned or undeliverable, the State Board of Education sends letters to the students' schools. South Dakota uses student addresses from SD-STARS, where data are updated nightly, and sends letters to up to two addresses per student.

All three states are working to make their college admissions processes as inclusive as possible. Iowa calculates its RAI in two different ways and continually evaluates its effectiveness to give as many students as possible an easy path to postsecondary enrollment. Because state education agencies often lack access to data about students in private or tribal schools or homeschooled students, most proactive admissions programs currently are limited to public high school students. The Idaho State Board of Education has signed data sharing agreements with two tribal schools and one private school to begin including their students in the Direct Admissions program. The program's demonstrated success and the visibility of the admissions letters sent to students sparked interest among non-public high schools and parents in participating.

Additional Resources

Apply Idaho
https://apply.nextsteps.idaho.gov/

Iowa Board of Regents
https://www.iowaregents.edu/

Iowa Department of Education
https://educateiowa.gov/

Idaho State Board of Education
https://boardofed.idaho.gov/

Linking K12 Student Data with Postsecondary Data: SLDS Webinar
https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/5793

South Dakota Department of Education
https://doe.sd.gov/

State Approaches to College and Career Transitions: SLDS Issue Brief
https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/13008