SLDS Topical Webinar Summary

Managing Data Requests

As stakeholders and researchers become more aware of the information available in statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs), SLDS agencies are seeing significant growth in the number of requests for data from their systems. Establishing consistent and efficient processes for managing these requests is essential to reduce the burden on the individuals responsible for reviewing, approving, and fulfilling data requests and to help requestors understand how and when they can receive SLDS data.

Representatives from the District of Columbia, Kentucky, and Wisconsin share the processes they have developed to manage a variety of data requests—from public, aggregated information to individual-level records. They discuss how they evaluate requests for SLDS data, their tools and strategies for tracking data requests, and lessons learned from those processes.

District of Columbia: Supporting a Culture of Data Sharing With Centralized Processes

Data sharing is an important part of the culture of the District of Columbia's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). The agency's strategic plan emphasizes sharing and using data to measure progress and improve student learning. OSSE establishes data sharing agreements with other district agencies and programs—including foster care, public health, and human services—to ensure that all agencies have the information they need to support students and families. Researchers also have a strong interest in OSSE data and see the district's education system as a natural data experiment, with half of OSSE's 95,000 students enrolled in traditional public schools and the other half in public charter schools.

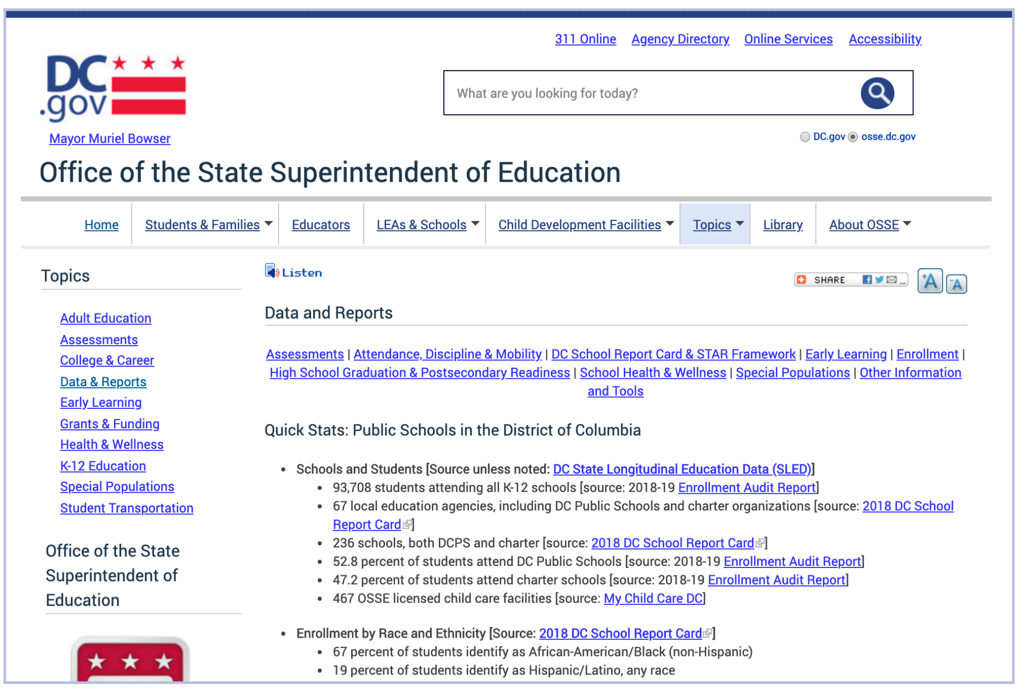

Figure 1. OSSE's Data and Reports website offers several aggregated datasets that users can download without submitting a formal data request.

This product of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) was developed with the help of knowledgeable staff from state education agencies and partner organizations. The content of this publication was derived from a Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program monthly topical webinar that took place on May 29, 2019. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the IES SLDS Grant Program. We thank the following people for their valuable contributions:

Webinar Presenters:
Linda Borkosky
Jessica Cunningham
Kentucky Center for Statistics

Carl Frederick
Kerry Lawton
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Gwen Rubinstein
District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Moderator:
Corey Chatis
SLDS Grant Program, State Support Team

For more information on the IES SLDS Grant Program or for support with system development, please visit http://nces.ed.gov/programs/SLDS.

In the first 5 months of 2019, OSSE received about 120 data requests from stakeholders within and outside the agency. During the same time period, OSSE signed 13 data sharing agreements with other District of Columbia agencies, contractors, and researchers. The high volume of requests and ongoing maintenance of data sharing agreements require formalized systems to keep data sharing on track without overburdening OSSE staff.

Data sharing approaches and priorities
OSSE uses a four-part approach to managing and responding to requests for its data:

1. *Increase publicly available datasets*. OSSE makes a number of aggregated datasets available for download through its website so that users can find frequently requested information without submitting a formal data request. Data files on topics including assessments, enrollment, attendance, and high school graduation and postsecondary readiness are posted to OSSE's Data and Reports webpage (see figure 1 on page 1). The annual DC School Report Card's webpage also allows users to download the report's underlying data.
2. *Document policies and processes*. Wherever possible, OSSE publishes its data sharing policies and processes so that data requestors know what to expect when they ask for information. Among the documents OSSE posts online are a description of its responsibilities under federal privacy laws, its policy for accepting and handing data requests, requirements for requesting data for research, and procedures for requesting data from the district's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which are not subject to federal privacy laws but are still considered highly sensitive. In addition to increasing transparency for requestors, this documentation helps OSSE identify and resolve gaps in its internal policies and processes.
3. *Centralize data request intake, assignment, review, and tracking*. All data requests, whether they come from OSSE programs or external stakeholders, are entered and stored in a single online portal. The portal tracks requests as they are reviewed by OSSE's data teams and allows administrators to assign responsibility for next steps in the process.
4. *Centralize the data sharing agreement process*. Sharing any individual-level data—whether about K12 students, teachers, or early learning program attendees—requires a written agreement between OSSE and the requestor. OSSE maintains templates for agreements that cover common data sharing provisions such as relevant exemptions to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and can be customized easily. Like data requests, data sharing agreements are entered into a portal that helps to standardize the process.

Tools and strategies for managing data requests
OSSE's data request portal is a Quick Base application linked from the homepage of the agency's website. Users fill in details about the request, including their contact information, the data being requested, and background information about the proposed study's purpose and frequency (see figure 2).

Members of OSSE's data management, data analysis, and data governance teams meet weekly to consider new data requests and review the status of existing requests. When determining whether to fulfill a data request, the data teams consider the following criteria:

- Is the proposed data use aligned with OSSE's priorities?
- Is the proposed data use aligned with the priorities of other government or education-sector partners, OSSE programs, or OSSE's leadership team?
- Does OSSE have the capacity to fulfill the request?

After this consideration, data requests might be assigned to specific data managers and analysts for fulfillment, discussed with OSSE programs affected by the request, escalated to OSSE leaders, assigned to the data governance team to create a data sharing agreement, or denied. If a public dataset is available to fulfill the request, an OSSE staff member refers the requestor to that dataset. OSSE notifies requestors within 60 days about approval decisions and next steps.

If the data request includes individual-level data, the data governance team drafts a written data sharing agreement that specifies the data management, use, and destruction responsibilities of OSSE and the data user. These agreements are entered in another Quick Base application,

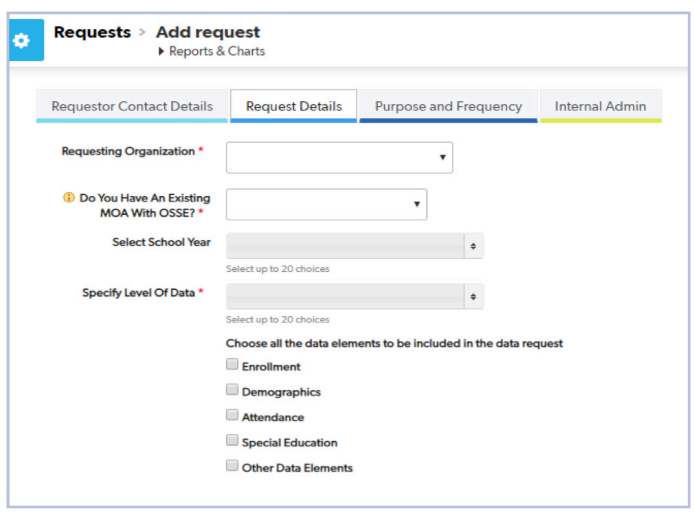

Figure 2. OSSE's online data request form uses drop-down menus, check boxes, and form fields to capture details about each data request in a standardized format. Requests are saved and tracked in a Quick Base application where OSSE staff can update their status and assign responsibility for next steps.

and OSSE staff can upload related documents and files so that all materials related to the agreement are stored in one place. The application generates a monthly report of agreements scheduled to expire within 60 days so that data managers can follow up on data destruction or work with requestors to amend or extend agreements. Bimonthly meetings with OSSE's general counsel are open to any staff members involved in data sharing to discuss procedures, issues, and concerns.

Challenges and next steps

OSSE continues to explore ways to manage expectations and procedures related to its high volume of data requests. The agency is establishing a more formal data governance structure, improving its documentation, and updating its research priorities so that external data requestors have a clearer understanding of how the agency will evaluate and prioritize their requests. OSSE also is working to improve transparency around its timelines and progress toward fulfilling requests from internal and external partners.

Kentucky: Developing Customized Tools to Manage Data Requests

The Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) manages the Kentucky Longitudinal Data System, which contains data from a range of education, workforce, and social services programs in the state. State agencies and external researchers can request data related to K12, career and technical, and postsecondary education; K12 teachers; and the state's labor market.

The number of data requests received by KYSTATS has grown dramatically in recent years, from fewer than 25 in 2014 to more than 200 in 2018 (see figure 3). KYSTATS staff members used to take data requests from partners and stakeholders informally through meetings, phone calls, or in-person conversations. The agency established a formal data request process in 2016 to handle the increased volume and to track requests systematically.

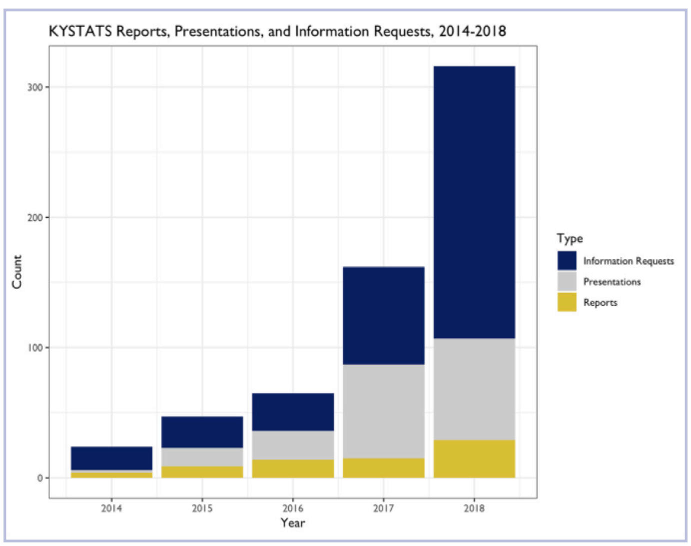

Figure 3. The number of data requests (shown in blue as Information Requests) received by KYSTATS has grown dramatically since 2014.

Data sharing approaches and priorities

Users can request aggregated or individual-level data through request forms on the KYSTATS website. Requests for individual-level data require a more extensive application form, and a signed data sharing agreement between KYSTATS and the requestor must be in place before the data are released.

KYSTATS staff members communicate directly with every data requestor to understand the proposed research question and to identify the exact data elements the requestor needs to answer it. If the request can be fulfilled by a public data file, requestors are referred to the relevant file on the KYSTATS website. This direct communication helps ensure that KYSTATS provides requestors with the information they need efficiently and without releasing more data than necessary.

KYSTATS prioritizes reviewing and fulfilling data requests for projects that align with the agency's research agenda. KYSTATS may charge to fulfill requests for grant-funded research projects. Fees are calculated using a composite hourly rate that accounts for all of the KYSTATS staff members and development time that will be involved in the request.

Tools and strategies for managing data requests

The "Request Data" feature on the KYSTATS website directs users to request forms for aggregate and individual-level data and instructions for completing a data request. Users requesting individual-level data are advised that it can take up to 4 months to process and approve requests, enact agreements, and deliver the data. Along with instructions, the website offers a dictionary of data elements available from KYSTATS and policies governing their use. Requestors provide their contact information, organization and project details, and a justification for needing individual-level versus aggregate data before specifying the data elements, years, and preferred format for the data they need.

The online request forms populate a tracking database built by KYSTATS with details of each request (see figure 4 on page 4). One staff member is responsible for managing data requests, and additional business analysts and managers are notified of request statuses as needed. A KYSTATS team meets weekly to review requests and ensure that the necessary steps are being taken to evaluate and fulfill requests. The tracking program allows staff members to upload finalized data sharing agreements. The program also helps KYSTATS easily calculate and report to its board the number of requests it receives and fulfills.

Data Requests

- ☑ Include Closed/Canceled Requests
- ☐ Contacted
- ☐ Closed Requests
- ☐ Canceled Requests

ID	Organization Name	Request Type	Contact Name	Contact Email	Submit Date	Status	Target Request Date	Title of Study	MOU/SOW	LMI	
221	Barren County Judge Executive	Agg	Michael Hale		2/20/2019	Closed			☐	✔	Edit
219	KDE Office of Career and Technical Education	Agg	Kiley Whitaker		2/19/2019	Closed			☐	☐	Edit
220	KDE Office of Career and Technical Education	Agg	Kiley Whitaker		2/19/2019	Closed			☐	☐	Edit
218	CPE	Agg	Gabrielle Gayheart		2/14/2019	Closed			☐	☐	Edit
216	KDE	Agg	Candy Johnson		2/13/2019	Closed			☐	☐	Edit
217	Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board	Agg	Melissa Aguilar		2/13/2019	Closed			☐	✔	Edit
215	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Agg			2/12/2019	Open	3/15/2019	Teacher Retention After Pay Bump Elimination: Evidence From a Synthetic Control Research Design	☐	☐	Edit
212	USDA, Rural Development	Agg			2/7/2019	Closed			☐	✔	Edit
213	KY Labor Cabinet, Office of the Commissioner	Agg			2/7/2019	Closed			☐	✔	Edit
214	Kentucky Labor Cabinet, Office of the Commissioner	Agg			2/7/2019	Closed			☐	✔	Edit
211	Division of FRYSC	Agg	Tonya Cookendorfer		2/6/2019	Open	3/29/2019	FRYSC Statewide Data 2012-2018	☐	☐	Edit

Figure 4. The KYSTATS internal data request tracking program lists each request's key details and status.

When requests are approved for fulfillment, KYSTATS pulls the data from its data warehouse and reviews them for accuracy. KYSTATS shares the data with any partner agencies whose data are included in the request. The agencies have 5 days to review state-level data and 10 days to review local or below-state-level data for accuracy and to share any concerns. After the data are provided to the requestor, the KYSTATS tracking program notifies staff members when data sharing agreements expire so that they can follow up with requestors on data destruction.

Challenges and next steps

Requestors frequently ask for more data than their research studies require, with some requesting copies of all the data that KYSTATS maintains. Speaking directly with data requestors helps narrow the focus of the requests and ensure that KYSTATS provides information that is relevant to the study or project. KYSTATS developed a video to further help users understand the data available from the agency and how they can request data.

Wisconsin: Automating and Incorporating Data Requests Into Existing Processes

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) process for sharing data from the Wisconsin Information System for Education (WISE) is shaped by the agency's decentralized data stewardship. Data governance activities like fulfilling data requests involve cooperation from many divisions and teams across the agency. Within the past year, DPI has restructured its data request process to automate tasks and reduce the effort of coordinating responsibilities across its data stakeholders.

Data sharing approaches and priorities

DPI receives three primary types of data requests:

- *Internal* requests come from within the agency and often involve giving new staff members access to WISE data that they need for their jobs.
- *General* external requests require aggregated data. To protect student privacy, DPI analysts suppress small student counts in aggregated datasets before releasing them.
- *Confidential* external requests involve unredacted aggregated data or student-level data. These requests often come from university researchers, contractors evaluating DPI programs, and interagency projects that match data from multiple state departments.

Users can submit general and confidential data requests through DPI's website, with a more extensive application and review process for confidential data requests (see figure 5 on page 5). Confidential data requests must specify the FERPA exception that would allow data sharing, demonstrate institutional review board (IRB) approval for studies involving human subjects research, and align with DPI's research agenda.

Tools and strategies for managing data requests

DPI encourages its research partners to work with program area staff and analysts from DPI's policy and budget team to develop their research proposals. This collaboration

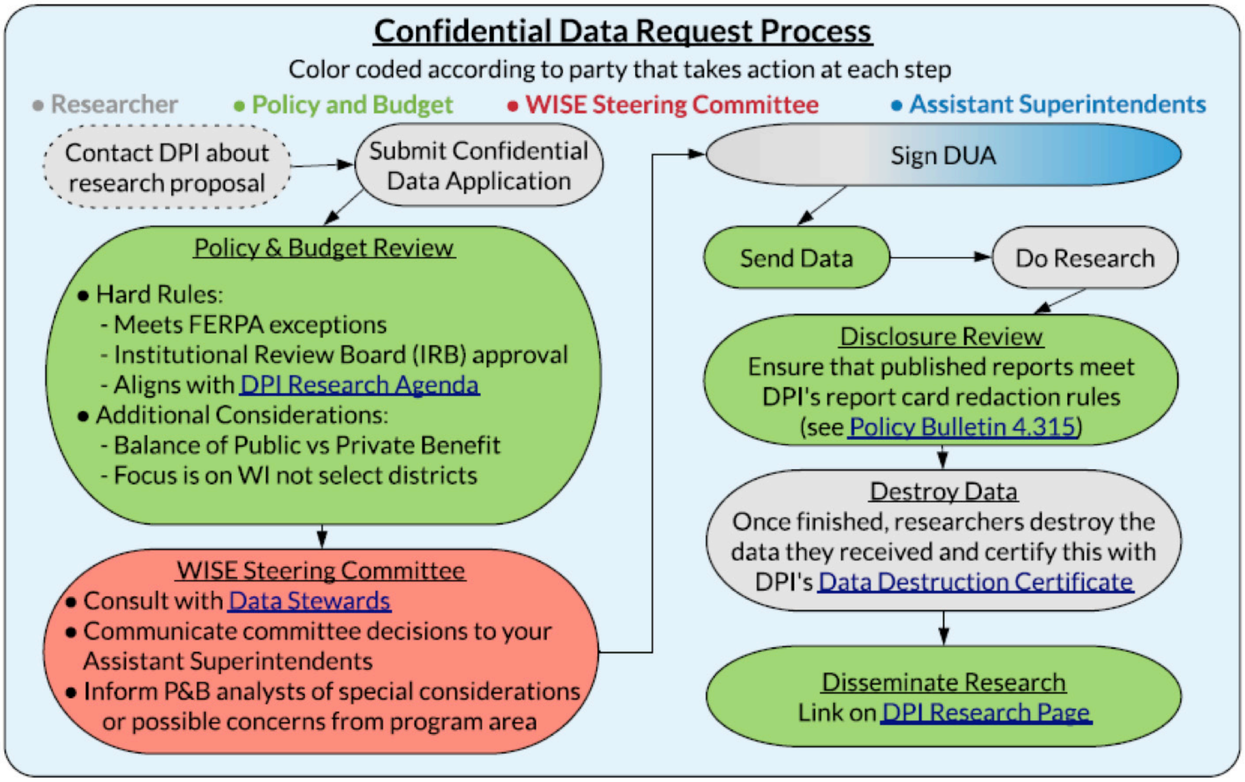

Figure 5. DPI's request process for confidential data from WISE involves review by the agency's policy and budget analysts as well as the WISE Steering Committee. Approved requests are subject to data use agreements and data destruction protocols.

ensures that confidential data request applications are as complete as possible. After an application is submitted through DPI's website, an automated ticketing system alerts DPI analysts to the request. The analysts review the request for completeness and write a recommendation for the WISE Steering Committee to approve or deny the request. As long as the request meets the agency's requirements and the research appears beneficial, DPI analysts typically advocate for its approval.

The WISE Steering Committee reviews data requests as part of its monthly meetings. Adding data requests to the meeting agenda makes discussing requests and gaining approval from senior WISE leaders easier than scheduling ad hoc meetings as requests come in. If the committee approves a request, DPI analysts create a data use agreement to be signed by one or more DPI assistant state superintendents and a representative from the requesting agency's office of sponsored projects or equivalent office.

DPI created a customized package using R statistical software to pull data from the WISE database to standardize the datasets and documentation prepared for confidential data requests. The "dpiDataPull" package extracts the WISE data specified in the request and generates an HTML data dictionary containing definitions, usage notes, and summary statistics for those data. Because the package applies standardized business rules and data cleaning procedures to the data it pulls, any DPI analyst can accurately recreate a requested dataset in the future.

In addition to certifying data destruction at the end of the research project, DPI requires that data requestors submit their final reports and presentations to the agency to ensure that those products do not disclose confidential data.

For DPI, the research generated from WISE data make fulfilling data requests valuable for the agency, its schools, and its stakeholders. Published reports and abstracts are linked to the Research page on the DPI website so that educators and others can learn about and take advantage of findings to help improve the state's education system (see figure 6 on page 6).

Challenges and next steps

The automated ticketing system that alerts DPI analysts to new data requests has helped simplify the agency's data request process, but it does not track all of the actions that DPI personnel must take to review and fulfill the requests. The policy and budget team currently runs a parallel request tracking process in the Asana project management application to cover those additional steps. The agency hopes to streamline these processes into a single system in the future. DPI also continues to consider how it can improve its processes to manage requests that do not fit easily into the standardized systems it has put in place.

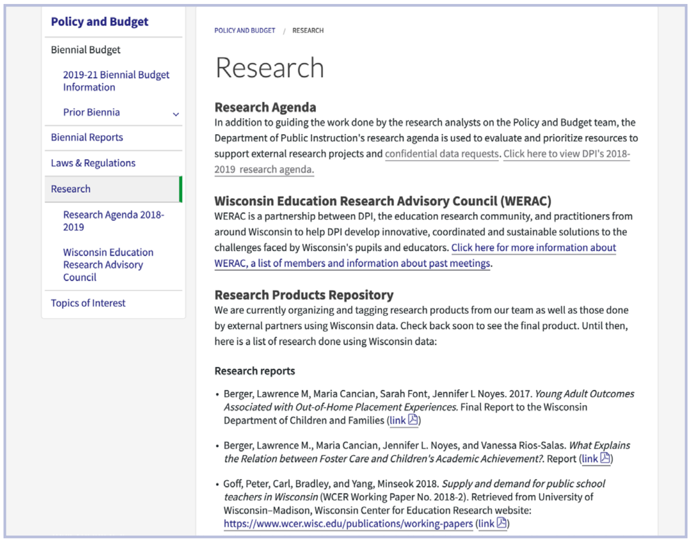

Figure 6. DPI's Research webpage lists research products created with WISE data along with links to the agency's research agenda and confidential data request application.

Lessons Learned

SLDS teams from the District of Columbia, Kentucky, and Wisconsin offer the following lessons learned and best practices for managing data requests.

Standardize processes wherever possible
Many states create templates for data sharing agreements and other essential documentation and then design their data request applications to collect all of the details required for those agreements. Aligning the content and format of all the documents involved in the request process makes customizing agreements for each request fast and easy. Additionally, automated systems such as request tracking programs and data preparation procedures lessen the risk of errors and reduce the burden on SLDS staff of managing data requests.

Take advantage of existing structures
Managing and fulfilling data requests requires collaboration and approval from many people, including data stewards, analysts, executive leaders, and partner agencies and organizations. Incorporating data request processes into existing communications and activities, such as data governance committee meetings, saves time and helps ensure that requests are discussed and approved by the appropriate people.

Work closely with data requestors
Direct communication between requestors and SLDS staff members can save time and effort by clarifying the data that requestors need at the start of the process. The District of Columbia, Kentucky, and Wisconsin all encourage contact and collaboration with data requestors during the request process. In Kentucky, requestors who show substantial interest in SLDS data often are invited to join stakeholder groups to advise KYSTATS on new projects and reports. In this way, relationships built between data users and SLDS programs can benefit the data system beyond individual research projects.

Additional Resources

Developing a Process for Managing Research Requests: SLDS Guide
https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/15117

District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
https://osse.dc.gov/

District of Columbia OSSE Data Request Policy
https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/OSSE%20data%20request%20 policy.pdf

District of Columbia OSSE Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Request and Protection Procedure
https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/YRBS%20Data%20 Protection%20Procedure%204.2.2019.pdf

Increasing Organizational Capacity: Successful Partnerships and Collaboration with Researchers: SLDS Webinar
https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/10162

Increasing Structural Capacity: Developing a Research Request Process: SLDS Webinar
https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/10488

Increasing Structural Capacities: Streamlining the Research Request Process: SLDS Webinar
https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/8882

Kentucky Center for Statistics
https://kystats.ky.gov/

Research Request Process Toolkit
https://slds.grads360.org/#program/research-request-process-toolkit

Research Request Processes: Lessons Learned and Outcomes: SLDS Webinar
https://slds.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/17610

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI)
https://dpi.wi.gov/

Wisconsin DPI Research Agenda 2018–2019
https://dpi.wi.gov/policy-budget/research/2018-2019-research-agenda

Wisconsin Information System for Education (WISE) Data Requests
https://dpi.wi.gov/wise/data-requests