

Why You and Your Data Matter: The Importance of and Decisions Made Using (or Waiting for) SCDE Data

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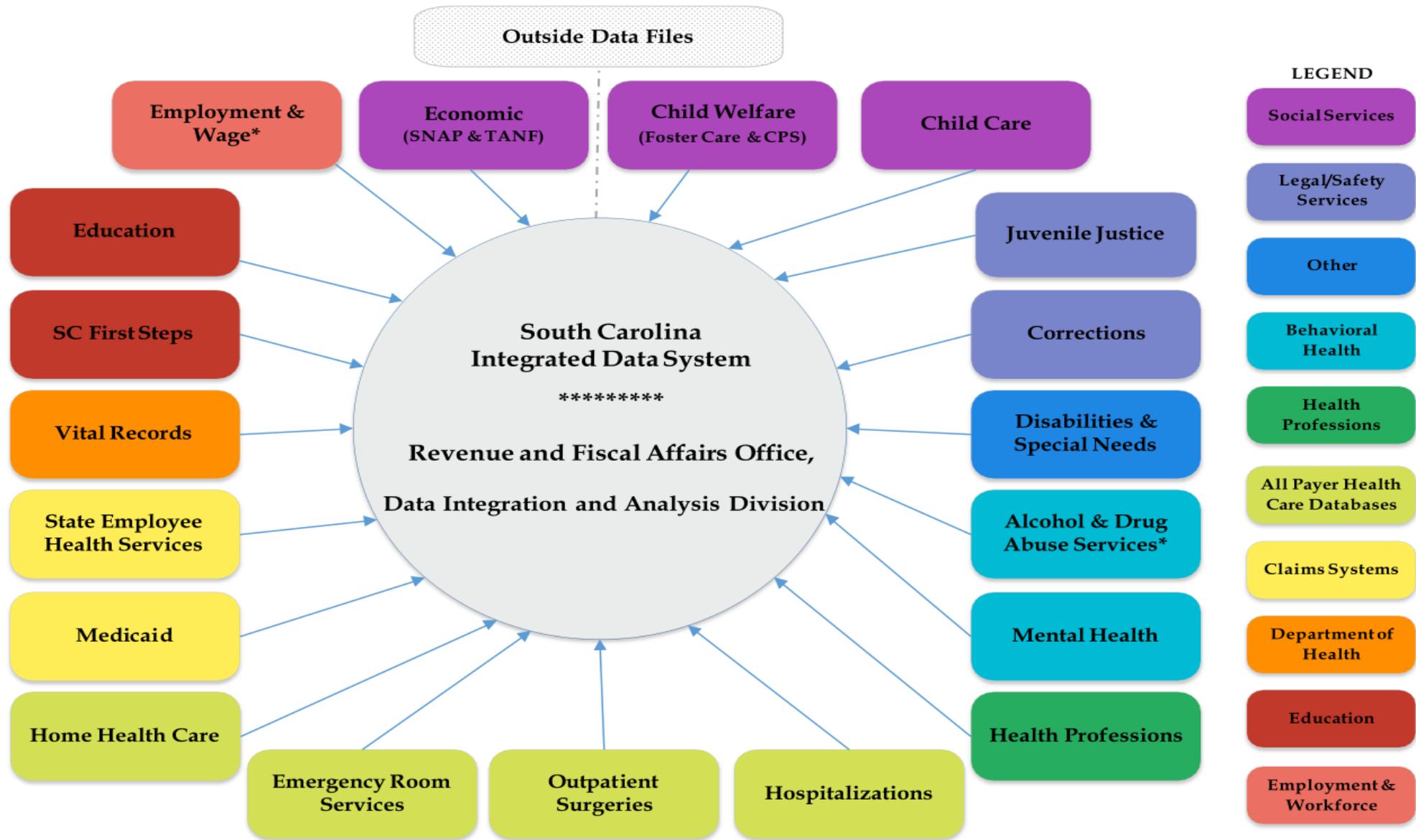


Brief Introduction to RFA Data Integration and Analysis

Purpose, People, and Process

- Team of 12 statisticians
- Process developed over time and through experience (trial and error)
- Requires cooperation and support of data owners





Common Data Issues

Purpose

- Focus on answering a question – goal is informed decision making
- Not all data are needed – “drowning in data but starving for information”
- Data are a two-edged sword – data may help or hurt your position

People

- Data are the end result of someone’s effort; need to see the full picture
- Understanding the data and usage as well as transferring institutional knowledge are crucial to providing good information

Process

- Lack of consistency in data collection and reporting – systems limitations are not good
- Expect errors – need reliable process to identify and correct errors before using data
- Need definitions and documentation
- Accounting requirements do not ensure or equal good data

Historical Example – SCDE Data and Informed Decision Making

1993 amendment changing the birth month criteria for starting first grade

- Previously, SC Code of Laws §59-63-20 required students to be age 6 on or before November 1 to enter first grade
- Part II, Section 29 of the FY 1993-94 Appropriations Act amended the date to September 1
- Lots of debate, upset parents
- One Key Factor – during the House debate, members were shown data on readiness test scores for first graders by birth month; the data showed a steady decline in the average score by month from the oldest age (Nov.) to the youngest (Oct.)

Current Examples – General Reports Using SCDE Data

Reports and data visualizations more readily highlight trends and issues or data problems

- Education Funding Dashboard (Proviso 1.3)
 - <https://www.rfa.sc.gov/education-funding-dashboard>
- Education to Workforce Report (SC Code of Laws §59-19-1950)
 - Annual report showing the percentage and earnings of SC public high school graduates in the SC workforce
 - <https://rfa.sc.gov/data-research/education/education-and-workforce>
- Revenue Per Pupil Report (Proviso 1.3)
 - <https://rfa.sc.gov/media/10525>
- SC Coordinating Council for Workforce Development
 - SC public high school graduate outcomes related to post-secondary enrollment and SC workforce

Examples - SCDE Data in Appropriations Act

- Enrollment data
 - Enrollment records linked to Medicaid and other data to determine number of students affected by poverty
 - Enrollment data used to calculate Student to Teacher ratio in State Aid to Classrooms
- Employment data
 - Setting the teacher minimum salary schedule

Other Examples – SCDE Data used in Program Evaluation and Research

- Evaluation of SC First Steps and private 4K programs
- A researcher with the USC Arnold School of Public Health conducted a study to investigate the effect of school-based health centers on the academic outcomes of elementary and middle school students
- A researcher with the Mount Sinai School of Medicine studied the impact of Medicaid Managed Care on the outcomes of children
- A researcher with the University of Chicago examined the impact of youth homelessness as part of a report for the US Housing and Urban Development

Examples of Costly Mistakes with Data

- Incorrect GIS data have resulted in the wrong houses being demolished
- Programming errors led to
 - A Texas school changing ratings from “Met Standard” to “Improvement Required”
 - A lottery vendor issuing millions of dollars of inadvertent lottery tickets in SC
- A NASA spacecraft disintegrating in the atmosphere because different engineers used different metrics

Examples - Current Issues/Questions and Data Needs

- Timeliness of receiving data
 - ADM and teacher counts taking longer
- More data impacting student needs and resource allocation
 - Caseload of special education teachers
- Comparing cost of building maintenance versus cost of construction
 - When does maintenance become too expensive
- Budget and expenditure data at the school level
 - Are funds fairly distributed between schools within a district

Conclusion – Focus on Purpose, People, and Process

Purpose

- It is extremely important to avoid making decisions in a vacuum or based on perception

People

- The best person to ensure accurate data is the person gathering or entering the information
- Need to understand the purpose, use, and significance
- Be aware of the consequences of bad information

Process

- Need uniformity and consistency in definitions and systems
- Prioritize data collection
- At every level of review, ask if the data make sense
 - Don't “just assume” the data are right
 - Don't rely on “this is the way we have always done it”
- The accounting (or existing) data may not be the best; may require additional effort or process

Sense of urgency – start now so data for longitudinal analysis is available soon

Thank You!

Questions?



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