STATE LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEMS:
WORTH THE LEGISLATIVE INVESTMENT TO CONNECT WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION

ANNE WICKS
THE DON EVANS FAMILY MANAGING DIRECTOR OF OPPORTUNITY AND DEMOCRACY

AMANDA WIRTZ
ADVISOR, EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY

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Explore state education and workforce data

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Anne Wicks, the Don Evans Family Managing Director of Opportunity and Democracy
Amanda Wirtz, Advisor, Education and Opportunity

Determining whether a state's young people are on track for a life of opportunity is a difficult task for governors and state leaders. States can be both awash in data and unable to easily access and use that data to inform policy. State longitudinal data systems that meaningfully connect workforce, higher education, K-12, and early childhood outcome data from multiple state agencies over time are foundational to strong decision-making by state leaders.

> ### STATE LEADERS SHOULD PRIORITIZE THESE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEMS IN LEGISLATION AND POLICYMAKING:
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> - Create coordinated visions for the systems, with strong governance.
> - Ensure capacity and resources to manage the systems and analyze data.
> - Prioritize system accessibility and data-driven policymaking.
> - Prioritize transparency and consistent public reporting.

State leaders are charged with determining how to advance educational and workforce opportunities, particularly for historically underserved populations, including rural students, students living in poverty, English-language learners, and students of color. Policymakers need reliable, relevant, and transparent data from PK-12 to the workforce to inform decisions and allocate resources. Researchers need access to data to assess current conditions and to identify possible solutions. Finally, the public – including parents – needs easily accessible, user-friendly information about readiness and opportunity for young people in the state.

Well-governed and well-structured state longitudinal data systems can help. Today, most states have disparate data systems that are functionally siloed off by education level, like early childhood or K-12 or higher education. Meaningfully connected and well-governed data systems make it easier to see the relationships between metrics like early-grade reading scores, high school graduation, and wage data. Disaggregated outcome data about the youngest learners up to young adults provide invaluable insights to policymakers, researchers, and parents.

Create coordinated visions for the systems, with strong governance

A legislature can create a strong governance plan for its statewide longitudinal data system by specifying how decisions will be made, how resources and responsibilities will be allocated across agencies, and which stakeholders need a voice in the process.

Together, these steps can create the right conditions for a meaningful data system:
1. Clearly state the purpose of the system in a way that guides decision-making.
2. Establish a single agency host and leadership team (with decision-making authority and accountability) with key stakeholders from PK-12, postsecondary, labor and workforce, and noneducation agencies to guide the system toward that purpose.
3. Establish clear guidelines, a long-term vision, and goals for data management and communication.

Because data systems are typically governed formally or informally in agency-based fiefdoms, change can be slow and inconsistent. Data systems exist but may not be well-coordinated across agencies. There may be a task force charged with advising how to connect those systems, but it has no real power to meaningfully change practice or policy – or to allocate resources.

Strong systems have their governance structure codified by legislation. The data system's purpose is clearly understood and shared among stakeholders. A designated leadership team is committed to guiding the system in fulfilling its intended purpose. The system's structure is aligned effectively with its purpose.

Ensure capacity and resources to manage the systems and analyze data

In addition to the coordinated vision, state legislatures should specifically address the capacity and resources needed to ensure that the statewide longitudinal data systems can function well as usage needs evolve and data inputs grow. This includes creating sustained and predictable funding that allows for consistency of operations as well as innovation over time. And it means ensuring that there is sufficient staff to manage the data warehouse, conduct analysis, and produce reports consistently.

Strong systems have resources in place to ensure the system's sustainability and security over time and continuity through leadership transitions. Dedicated system staff have the capacity to answer policy questions, provide data to researchers, and offer the expertise and tools needed to do their jobs well.

Prioritize system accessibility and data-driven policymaking

Policymakers need access to data and analysis in their work. Transparent procedures about who can access data housed in the system – and for what purpose – are critical. A strong privacy policy allows for logical use of the data while protecting the privacy of individuals.

It can be difficult for researchers and policymakers to access state data without a clear and codified process in place. In that case, only those with personal connections within the agencies can access data, limiting access to a publicly shared resource.

Strong statewide longitudinal data systems have consistent safety and privacy protocols that adapt to new threats. Data definitions are established through data dictionaries which are easily accessible on a website. Finally, clear access policies set the conditions for analysis to inform legislative, gubernatorial, and agency work.

Prioritize transparency and consistent public reporting

Strong statewide longitudinal data systems regularly and publicly report out progress to key state opportunity goals in easy-to-understand ways. Data should always be disaggregated across critical subgroups (i.e. race, ethnicity, economic status, etc.). A single public hub for reports and dashboards will allow many to review and engage with the data. Good policy will ensure that the public has access to the necessary information to build confidence in state policy direction and inform voting and advocacy choices.

Strong state economies and thriving communities require that all young people are on a path to a life with opportunity. That means that our PK-12 education, higher education, and workforce systems should connect to show a more complete picture of outcome data points. Statewide longitudinal data systems help us understand the gaps and the wins more clearly.

Connecting disparate state data systems in a well governed and transparent way in each state will help guide researchers and policymakers in the years ahead. Without strong legislative governance, the sustainability of state longitudinal data systems is fragile. Legislated governance is the cornerstone of each state's system, safeguarding it from the uncertainties of changing state leadership. Each American deserves equal access to a quality education and control over their future; strong data systems are the bedrock required to help make that real.

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2943 SMU Boulevard | Dallas, Texas 75205