

What Are Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems?

Fast Facts for State Policymakers

State policymakers have a critical role to play in supporting data use and system development across education and the workforce. By connecting data over time and across sectors, statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs) help individuals, the public, and policymakers make decisions about education and workforce pathways.



SLDSs Are . . .

Longitudinal: Capture data from the same population over multiple years.

Individual Level: Include data that is specific to individual people. (May contain identifiable information or be anonymous.)

Statewide: Bring together and connect data or records from multiple state agencies.

What are SLDSs?

- SLDSs connect statewide information from early childhood through K–12 education, postsecondary education, and the workforce.
- SLDSs may live in different places depending on the state context, but best practice is that the SLDS itself is not owned by any one contributing agency alone.

Why do they matter?

- These systems enable cross-sector data insights that help leaders answer pressing policy questions, direct resources, and better support individuals along their education and workforce journeys.
- SLDSs also have the potential to help other people—such as families, educators, local leaders, and members of the public—get answers to their questions and make informed decisions.

Where do states stand?

- **Every state has the ability to link individual-level data over time**, and many can connect information across multiple sectors. This ability is the product of more than 20 years of coordinated investment and action from state and federal leaders, primarily in the K–12 system for specific purposes like reporting and accountability. These efforts have helped to improve data quality, produce more meaningful measures of student progress and success, and promote transparency.
- **But data is not a one-time investment.** Even states with robust data systems must continue to ask how they are meeting people’s evolving needs and identify new opportunities to grow and improve their systems.
- **The most successful states have integrated data into their practices and decisionmaking processes.** Creating a culture of data use is essential to maintaining an effective data system that meets people’s needs and answers their questions.

Policymaker role in advancing education and workforce goals

State policymakers can support effective SLDSs by:



Enabling meaningful access for different data users. State data systems have historically been designed with state agencies and researchers in mind, but leaders should also consider how data systems can meet the needs of other users. For example, school superintendents, community college leaders, and local workforce boards can use SLDS data to explore local education and workforce pathways and provide targeted supports to ensure that individuals can get the credentials they need to meet their employment goals.



Championing cross-sector data governance. Strong data governance ensures system sustainability and protects state investments in data. Policymakers must establish leadership-level data governance bodies with policies that define a clear purpose, roles and responsibilities for participating agencies, and forums for communication and decisionmaking that include input from the public. The best governance bodies are codified into law and include not only the heads of the agencies that are the data stewards but also stakeholders who represent data users.



Centering privacy. The privacy of individuals' data must be a day-one priority for the SLDS to be successful. Policymakers can highlight this priority by ensuring that clear data access, sharing, and use policies are in place and proactively communicating with the public about how their information will and will not be used.

Conclusion

Leaders in every state need data to answer their most pressing questions. People deserve access to timely, accurate information to identify needs and inform action. To do this, policymakers must continue to invest in expanding and changing SLDSs to meet people's needs, while continuing to explore how data can be used to support communities and drive systemic improvement.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Following are some additional resources readers can explore to learn more about how SLDSs work and how people are using data to help individuals along their education and workforce journeys.

Data Quality Campaign (DQC). DQC is the nation's leading voice on education and workforce data policy and use. Through research, advocacy, and strategic communications activities, DQC works to ensure that policymakers, practitioners, and families can use data to help individuals excel.

- [What Now? States Must Act to Meet People's Data Access Needs](#) highlights that the time is right to set new goals for state data systems, defines what makes an effective SLDS, and describes what it takes from leaders to make the system a reality.
- [From Hammer to Flashlight: A Decade of Data in Education](#) summarizes the challenges and successes states have encountered as they have built out their data systems over the past 10 years and offers recommendations for continuing to improve and expand the effective use of data in the future.
- [The Consumer's Guide to Data](#) provides tools for state and district leaders, as well as other individuals, families, and communities, to help them better understand and talk about data.
- [Roadmap for Cross-Agency Data Governance](#) presents recommendations and resources for policymakers and state leaders on developing and maintaining robust cross-agency data governance.

Education Commission of the States (ECS). ECS's [50-State Comparison: Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems](#) includes information on cross-sector data linkages and longitudinal data structure in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

George W. Bush Institute. The Bush Institute's [Education and Workforce Pipeline Dashboard](#) captures details on each state's education and workforce data landscape, including the components and overall level of development of each state's longitudinal data system.

National Forum on Education Statistics. This community is supported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and includes representation from the federal government, state and local agencies, and national organizations dedicated to education and workforce data. On the Forum's website, users can find member resources, view recent publications, and learn about its current projects.

- [Forum Guide to Data Governance](#) outlines why data governance matters for effective data use and provides recommendations for state and district leaders on enabling effective data governance.
- [Profile of State Data Capacity in 2018: Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems \(SLDS\) Survey Descriptive Statistics](#) summarizes results from a 2018 survey of SLDS grant recipients on the current state of their longitudinal data system, including cross-sector data linkages and examples of effective data use.
- [Traveling Through Time: The Forum Guide to Longitudinal Data Systems](#) introduces resources on the history, key components, and value of longitudinal data systems for supporting individuals and strengthening systems.

NCES SLDS Grant Program State Support Team (SST). This initiative connects data system experts to states working to develop, manage, and use longitudinal data and systems. On the SST website, users can connect with experts in their region, access SST resources, and participate in virtual or in-person events.

Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI). A federal program run through the Department of Labor, WDQI provides states with dedicated funding for developing longitudinal workforce data systems. On the WDQI website, users can learn about how states have used funds and explore trends in workforce data linkages.

ABOUT THE DATA QUALITY CAMPAIGN

The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to ensure that data works for everyone navigating their education and workforce journeys. For more information, go to dataqualitycampaign.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).