



A VISION

to Transform State Data Systems to Inform People's Pathways through Education and the Workforce

People need access to data. To date, the data that state agencies collect is often defined, collected, linked, and stored in a way that, at best, serves those who need trend and aggregate data (e.g., researchers, legislators) rather than those looking to guide decisions in schools, in workforce development offices, and at home. Existing analytic tools are clunky, out of date, or too static to be useful. **For people trying to make decisions about what comes next in their education and career pathways, aggregate reports alone are not enough.** People need tailored, individualized resources with secure access that allow them to see their own information side by side with aggregate data over time to help them successfully move on to whatever comes next after high school.

The following four use cases are a tool for policymakers. They are a vision for what data systems should do and likely do not reflect what is happening in a state—yet. Enabling the type of access described in this vision requires state policy and investment. In pursuing these use cases, states have an opportunity to maximize the investments they have already made in their statewide longitudinal data systems and to advance greater access to information in service of meeting their education and workforce goals.

For more details about each of these use cases, see the [full vision](#).

Help students seamlessly navigate transitions from high school into college and career pathways



GRACE WANTS TO BE THE FIRST PERSON IN HER FAMILY TO GO TO COLLEGE. To make that dream a reality, she needs help. In addition to support from her family and teachers, Grace needs personalized information that helps her understand whether she's on track to graduate high school ready for college, which schools may be the best fit, and her financial aid options. Right now, states have robust data systems that *could* help Grace meet her goals, but they don't. To help students like Grace on their path to college and careers, states must prioritize meaningful, personalized, and secure access to data that helps individual students:

- Use information about course taking, careers, and school options to **begin planning for their future early in high school.**
- **Chart their course into high-quality careers** using data about needed skills, job options, and available training programs.
- Access data about admissions requirements, outcomes, and financial aid eligibility to **identify college programs and apply for admission.**
- Along with their families, use data to understand the availability of benefits and other services that will **simplify and support the transition between high school and college.**

Students are not the only ones who need access to data. **PEOPLE IN GRACE'S COMMUNITY** also need access to publicly available, aggregate, and open data that helps them:

- **Hold their governments accountable for college and career outcomes** through clear information about how well different groups of students fare.
- Understand how the schools in their community **help students transition from K–12 into college and career.**
- Ensure that members of their community can **navigate the patchwork of education and career preparation programs available to them.**

Students and communities can't go it alone. **STATE AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS** must use data to answer emerging questions and ensure that policies and practices are making it possible for Grace to meet her goals. Policymakers need access to tailored, aggregate, and longitudinal data that helps them:

- **Answer emerging questions** to unpack whether and how education systems are serving groups students and to prepare for future challenges.
- **Plan** for changes in programming and supports that will best serve all students in the state as they transition from high school.
- **Allocate resources** to "what works" in helping students transition from high school, including courses, work-based learning opportunities, and other supports.

Connect students to the supports they need to complete their college education



JOEY IS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT WHO ALSO WORKS PART TIME. He wants to transfer to a four-year college to complete his bachelor's degree and advance his career options. To meet his goal, Joey needs personalized information that shows him his eligibility for colleges in his area, whether his community college credits will transfer, and his financial aid options. Right now, the information that could help Joey and students like him make these decisions is lacking and is too often siloed, static, and hard to find. To help students like Joey, states must prioritize meaningful, personalized, and secure access to data that helps individual college students:

- **Transfer seamlessly** between public two- and four-year colleges.
- **Understand options for next steps** through information about college courses and how they align to students' career goals as well as how the return on investment differs among the various choices.
- **Get the support they need** through data about financial aid eligibility and personalized nudges that help them stay on track to meet goals.
- Use information about the skills they will obtain in their college coursework and how those skills align to their career goals to **plan for the future.**

Students navigating their journeys through college to what comes next aren't the only ones who need access to data. **PEOPLE IN JOEY'S COMMUNITY** also need access to publicly available, aggregate, and open data that helps them:

- **Answer questions** about the colleges and universities in their community and state, like how much each school costs to attend and whether students at that school **complete their education and are successful after college.**
- **Understand whether state investments in K-12 and postsecondary policies,** like dual enrollment, admissions, and support for college students, are paying off.
- **Effect change** by examining the outcomes for their community and advocating for increased access to counselors, advisors, financial aid, and benefits designed to support students in K-12 and in two- and four-year colleges.

Students and communities can't go it alone. **STATE AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS** must use data to answer emerging questions and ensure that policies and practices are making it possible for Joey to meet his goals. Policymakers need access to tailored, aggregate, and longitudinal data that helps them:

- **Answer emerging questions** about who is enrolling and succeeding in college and what systemic changes are needed to better support students.
- **Allocate resources** to the policies, practices, and student supports that are shown to best help students get to and through college.
- **Plan** for future workforce needs and state and local population changes that may alter students' paths to and through college.

Enable job seekers to navigate education and career pathways that lead to high-quality careers



RAJ WENT STRAIGHT INTO WORK IN ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AFTER HIGH SCHOOL. NOW THAT HE HAS A FAMILY, HE WANTS TO FURTHER HIS CAREER AND EARNING POTENTIAL. To help him meet his goal, Raj needs personalized information that helps him take stock of his skills and experience side by side with information about careers in his area, the credentials needed to get those jobs, and what training is available to him. Right now, the information that professionals like Raj need to make decisions about their next step is lacking. States need to invest in robust systems and provide personalized, secure access to data that helps people like Raj:

- **Understand the skills and credentials needed** to succeed in their field and how their experiences stack up.
- **Find programs that help them get ready for the next step**, including programs at nearby community colleges or other providers with evidence of helping students like them succeed in the workforce.
- **Find a job** that matches their credentials, experiences, and goals.

MEMBERS OF RAJ'S COMMUNITY also need to understand the careers and workforce in their area and whether job seekers have the education and programs they need to pursue high-quality careers. Community members need access to publicly available, aggregate, and open data that helps them:

- **Explore and compare** locally available career education opportunities and related requirements, costs, and outcomes.
- **Hold the government accountable** for providing resources and access to meaningful pathways into careers and postsecondary education based on the outcomes for their community.
- **Understand the long-term impact** of whether the jobs that are available in their community align with the skills and credentials held by people in the community.

People navigating their career options and communities can't go it alone. **STATE AND LOCAL POLICYMAKERS** must use data to answer emerging questions and ensure that policies and practices are making it possible for Raj to meet his goals. Policymakers need access to tailored, aggregate, and longitudinal data that helps them:

- **Answer emerging questions** about the skills needed for the current and future labor market and whether their state and communities have the talent and training to meet demand.
- **Allocate resources** toward workforce training programs that work and target those resources to the communities that need them most.
- **Plan** for how the labor market in their state or community is changing over time and identify what education and training will be needed to prepare citizens for the careers that are coming next.

Provide researchers access to the data they need to produce trusted information that **enables people to understand transitions, outcomes, and what works**



LUIS IS A RESEARCHER BASED AT AN IN-STATE FLAGSHIP UNIVERSITY. He wants to use deidentified data from the state system to evaluate the impact of a state-funded job training and employment support programs in rural areas. While state data systems are meant to be tools for research, access to information for researchers like Luis is cumbersome and time consuming. This lack of access makes it hard for state leaders to gain evidence about what's working for students and job seekers in their state. States must create clear processes that allow researchers to:

- **Conduct research** that helps policymakers, practitioners, and the public improve education to workforce pathways through systemic and local change.

Researchers have an important role to play in generating evidence, but they aren't alone. **COMMUNITY MEMBERS**, along with **NONPROFITS** and **SERVICE PROVIDERS**, also need access to publicly available, aggregate, and open data that helps them:

- **Interpret trends** in education and workforce outcomes in their community, in their region, or for certain groups of people.
- **Answer tailored questions** about their community, region, or certain groups of people—whether or not these questions rise to the top for institutional researchers or state leaders.

POLICYMAKERS have a unique role to play in ensuring that a statewide longitudinal data system is designed and governed so that it can inform education and workforce research. Policymakers must evaluate whether research practices are working and generating needed evidence by answering questions such as:

- **Is research providing useful and timely insights** into pathways through education into career?
- **How are we sharing and using insights** from research based on our state's data?