

# District Leaders Need Meaningful Access to Data

When district leaders have access to data about education and workforce pathways, they will be able to investigate local policy questions and direct resources in ways that improve opportunities and outcomes for all students.

District leaders face an evolving education landscape. They must be able to act nimbly to target interventions where they are needed, assess the effectiveness of programs, and plan for the future. As district leaders work to develop local policies that result in the best outcomes for all students, they grapple with many questions: How effective are our current K–12 programs in preparing all students for high-quality colleges and careers? Which programs should be replicated or scaled, and which should be discontinued? Are certain groups of students being tracked into certain, better, or less socially mobile pathways? What are the outcomes for historically underserved student populations? What types of financial, social, and wraparound supports help our students to prepare best for their futures after high school?

District leaders need access to meaningful data in a format that makes answering these and other questions easier. Specifically, district leaders need functionality that enables them to use data to investigate new policy questions and effectively direct the future of a district's education and workforce investments—as well as inform the state's investments in these areas. Statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs) are uniquely positioned to provide the information district leaders need to ensure that schools are providing students with the education and supports they require to smoothly navigate their journeys through K–12 and into life after high school.



## Meaningful access to data for district leaders is possible, but it will require updating and expanding existing data systems and developing the tools and resources district leaders need.

Most states have a powerful tool that *could* answer district leaders' questions but doesn't yet. For decades, states have invested in SLDSs that connect individual-level data over time from early childhood, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce data systems. But right now, even in states that do have information about education and career pathways that could help district leaders answer their

questions, that data is often hard to find, static, and outdated.

The Data Quality Campaign's (DQC) [new vision](#) provides a roadmap for state leaders to transform SLDSs so that they enable the kinds of access to information that district leaders need to make policy and program decisions that lead to better opportunities and outcomes for students.

## Changing SLDSs so they enable access to data will help district leaders:

- Determine whether changes to and investments in K–12 are resulting in increased college and career success for students;
- Examine outcomes for their schools and identify where they need to increase access to counselors, advisors, advanced coursework, career planning services, financial aid, and other benefits designed to support students in K–12 as they prepare for the future;
- Examine the landscape of college and career preparation program options, the quality of those programs, and who enrolls in them (broken down by different student groups) and make decisions about implications for K–12 programs;
- Identify and replicate programs or initiatives that are successfully preparing students for the requirements, additional on-the-job training, and education that lead to high-quality careers;

- Determine whether current investments in college and career readiness programming prepare high school students for available college and career pathways by helping them establish goals, plan and prepare for college and career preparation program applications, and successfully enroll in different programs; and
- Plan for targeted investments that will help students and their families navigate the patchwork of education and career development programs, support services, and other opportunities available to them as they make decisions about postsecondary education or career preparation programs.

### What is an SLDS?

**Statewide:** Connects information from multiple state agencies, including at least early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce data systems.

**Individual level:** Includes data that is specific to individual people (may contain identifiable information or be anonymous).

**Longitudinal:** Captures data from the same population over multiple years.

### District leaders have an urgent need for tailored access to information to guide and support their decisionmaking.

More robust SLDSs will provide district leaders access data to not only inform policies that will help all students navigate a smoother transition into college or a career but also be more forward looking in how they can work across the early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce sectors to support individuals on their journey regardless of their chosen pathway. States must act now to ensure that state data systems meet the needs of district leaders.

### Data Checklist

District leaders should have access to data that:

- ✓ Is presented in a way that allows for comparison to the state and within and across districts;
- ✓ Can be tailored to answer district leaders' specific questions;
- ✓ Enables policy creation, evaluation, and adjustments as needed; and
- ✓ Enables effective management of programs.

For more on DQC's new vision that provides state leaders with a roadmap to make meaningful access to data a reality for district leaders, visit [www.dataqualitycampaign.org/data-access](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/data-access).