DQC **Data Quality Campaign**

Legislators Need Meaningful Access to Data

Legislators need information about the education, postsecondary, and workforce sectors in their states as they ask questions and make decisions that will affect the lives of their constituents.

These important questions can include: What K–12 policies and investments are most associated with positive outcomes for students enrolling in a two- or four-year college program? Do we have job seekers in the state who match the in-demand skills and credentials needed for the fastest-growing industries? Which populations of students are prepared for success in college, and which need more support?

Answering these questions requires robust statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs) that connect individual-level data over time from early childhood, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce data systems. Although states have been investing in SLDSs for decades, legislators still struggle to get access to the necessary information to make education and workforce decisions in their states.

Legislators themselves need data to answer questions and take action to improve their state's education system and support their state's economic future. Additionally, they have an important role to play in creating policies to govern, secure, and invest in their state's SLDS so that individuals and members of the public also have access to data to help them make decisions about their education and careers—and how to navigate their options.

Data Checklist

Legislators should have access to data that:

✔ Can be viewed statewide and tailored to answer policymakers' specific questions;

✔ Enables policy creation, evaluation, and adjustments as needed; and

✔ Enables effective management of programs.

Without access to data, legislators are missing a critical tool for investigating new policy questions and directing the future of the state's education and workforce investments.

The Data Quality Campaign's (DQC) new vision unpacks the concrete steps that state legislators can take to ensure meaningful access to data so that everyone, from students to governors, can drive student success, economic mobility, and systemic change.

Data works as an effective tool only when supported by an ecosystem of policy conditions that address human capital, infrastructure, and resources. All legislative efforts to improve SLDSs so that they enable access to data must prioritize these enabling conditions to ensure that investments have the intended impact.

Recommendations for State Legislators

1. **Codify cross-agency data governance in state law.** Establish legislation that creates a leadership-level body with representation from all agencies contributing data, along with public representation.

2. **Establish an independent entity to administer the state's SLDS.** Create an autonomous and neutral data center governed by the cross-agency body to address privacy, legal compliance, and technical considerations.

3. **Map existing assets to identify system strengths and limits.** Evaluate state agencies' and local entities' current data policies and systems to leverage or build upon existing infrastructure when crafting legislation. Streamline new data collections and requirements to reduce burden on users.

4. **Engage the public to prioritize data access needs and seek continual feedback.** Involve the public in determining data access priorities and gather ongoing feedback. Anticipate evolving information needs and empower data decisionmakers to make the necessary changes.

5. **Fund SLDSs and the source systems that contribute data to them.** Consider the cost of implementing new data requirements and allocate adequate funding.

6. **Develop legal and privacy frameworks to enable and guide state data efforts.** Establish shared understanding among agency leaders and attorneys regarding the interpretation and implementation of state and federal laws, facilitating data sharing and access.

7. **Develop and act on rollout plans when building data access.** Collaborate with agency leaders, local leaders, community advocates, and trusted intermediaries to create plans that ensure that people understand and benefit from new ways of accessing SLDS data.

8. **Invest in the talent and human capacity needed to modernize SLDSs toward access.** Allocate resources to hire skilled professionals and build human capacity within SLDS centers. Support these centers with analytical, privacy and security, legal, and technical expertise.

9. **Center privacy.** Ensure that data privacy and security are prioritized alongside data use. Legislative efforts should provide for privacy protections without inhibiting appropriate data use and leave room for evolving tools and practices.

10. **Support local leaders in building their own capacity to use data.** Provide support to local data users by, for example, investing in technology or internet infrastructure, and offer professional development opportunities to enhance data use.

By implementing these policy recommendations, legislators can ensure that they have the data they need to inform policy decisions—and that their constituents have tailored access to data to make decisions about their own journeys through education and into the workforce. This data-driven approach empowers people, improves accountability, and enables evidence-based policy decisions to support education and workforce outcomes.

Additional Resources

WestEd's P20W+ project supported the planning process for California's Cradle-to-Career longitudinal data system. Its website includes key considerations, tips, and resources for codifying cross-agency data governance into law.

WestEd's Data Integration Support Center (DISC) supports public agencies in navigating the complexities of state and federal privacy and security regulations for integrated data systems. States can also turn to the Student Privacy Policy Office's Privacy Technical Assistance Center for technical assistance on privacy-related topics.

The Art of the Possible: Data Governance Lessons Learned from Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington includes key information about the managing entities in Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington, which have staff dedicated to managing linked data, performing analyses, and supporting access to data.

For more on DQC's new vision that provides state leaders with a roadmap to make meaningful access to data a reality, visit **www.dataqualitycampaign.org/data-access**.