AUGUST 2026

Education and Workforce Data LEGISLATION REVIEW

What Happened in 2026?

In 2026, state legislators across the country advanced legislation that supports secure, timely access to education and workforce data. As state leaders respond to changing education, workforce, and economic needs, they must ensure that they have strong, sustainable data ecosystems that can support decisionmaking and improve student and worker outcomes. A strong data infrastructure—including a well-supported statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) that connects data across sectors and generates insights—is critical to this effort.

This year, legislative action in the education and workforce data landscape spanned the P–20W continuum, from early childhood through K–12 and postsecondary education into the workforce. State policymakers from both sides of the aisle advanced efforts to strengthen cross-agency governance of SLDSs, expand SLDS capacity to meet evolving state priorities, and improve the underlying data within these systems. Together, these actions demonstrate that leveraging an SLDS to understand outcomes requires more than connecting data; it also requires strong leadership, shared decisionmaking, and high-quality data that fully and accurately captures individuals' education and workforce experiences.

This resource highlights legislative approaches for policymakers and advocates interested in advancing similar efforts in their own states.

Cross-agency data governance is the most important step toward making SLDSs more accessible and useful for people.

Strong cross-agency data governance helps ensure that states can securely link education and workforce data within their SLDSs and use that data to generate insights that support student success, strengthen pathways into careers, and inform policy decisions. And when state legislators codify cross-agency data governance in law, they create a durable foundation for collaboration that can be sustained throughout changes in leadership or shifting priorities.

Legislators in two states took this important step in 2026:

Georgia legislators passed a law that established the Education Data Governance Board. The law further charges the board with overseeing cross-agency education and workforce systems in the state, including the SLDS. The board is responsible for establishing policies and practices for data collection, use, privacy, security, and quality. Its membership includes leadership-level representatives from state agencies that contribute data to the SLDS, which is a best practice for cross-agency data governance. In creating a clear, durable governance structure, Georgia lawmakers are building on the state's broader education and workforce alignment strategy. With shared direction from state leaders across the education and workforce continuum, Georgia's SLDS can effectively support talent pipeline planning and the evaluation of the return on investment (ROI) for training programs.

New Jersey lawmakers codified the state's existing SLDS and established a governing board responsible for overseeing it. The legislation outlines purposes for the SLDS including meeting education and job skill demands and identifying workforce gaps. The governing board's responsibilities include establishing a research agenda and defining and maintaining standards for privacy, confidentiality, and security. This type of legislation ensures that contributing agencies engage in shared decisionmaking and the SLDS remains useful and accessible through shifts in state priorities and leadership.

WHAT IS CROSS-AGENCY DATA GOVERNANCE?

Cross-agency data governance encompasses the policies, processes, and leadership structures that guide how data shared between state agencies is connected, secured, accessed, and used. Effective governance establishes clear decisionmaking processes and identifies the people responsible for ensuring that state leaders are managing data responsibly and in ways that are aligned with state priorities. It enables agencies to work together to determine how the state collects, links, and shares data while ensuring transparency and accountability around the questions data systems are designed to answer. To learn more about cross-agency data governance, see the Data Quality Campaign's (DQC) *Data Governance 101 Toolkit*.

BILL TO WATCH

Ohio legislators introduced legislation to establish the Education and Workforce Return on Investment initiative, bringing together leaders from early childhood, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce agencies to collaborate on using data to improve student and workforce outcomes. The initiative would create a research framework aligned with state priorities, streamline data collection and reporting, and develop tools to help Ohioans navigate education and training opportunities. Like legislation in Georgia and New Jersey, this bill would strengthen the state's education and workforce data ecosystem by creating a structure for shared decisionmaking, coordination, and cross-agency prioritization.

State leaders should regularly revisit an SLDS's purpose and scope—and align them with evolving state information needs.

States with robust SLDSs and strong governance structures aren't complacent. Legislators in these states are amending SLDS statutes and introducing legislation that expands the scope of their SLDS to meet the evolving needs of their states and ensure that their systems work for everyone.

Indiana lawmakers expanded the list of audiences the state's SLDS serves, adding the General Assembly to a list that already includes educational institutions, researchers, and the public. By explicitly and comprehensively naming the audiences the SLDS is intended to serve, legislators can ensure that the system does not work just for a select few users but provides value to constituents across the state. Turning this vision into practice requires strong leadership and implementation that prioritizes these diverse audiences. Importantly, Indiana's decisionmakers are already equipped with a robust SLDS that enables insights on education and workforce programs.

Maryland lawmakers passed a law that revised SLDS and governing board statute. The purpose of this change is to grant the state's governing board the power to authorize data sharing with secure research platforms operated by entities other than state agencies for multistate research and reporting on student outcomes. It enables Maryland to participate in multistate data work, such as a joint effort with the District of Columbia (DC) and Virginia to better understand the education and workforce landscape in the region. Multistate data sharing efforts can provide state leaders with a more complete understanding of education and workforce outcomes; these efforts are especially valuable in states with high student and worker mobility, like Maryland, where individuals frequently cross state lines for education and job opportunities.

BILL TO WATCH

DC legislators passed a bill that would authorize the sharing of education and workforce data with state and local government agencies and their contractors for the purpose of program evaluation. Like legislation in Maryland, this bill would enable DC to participate in a joint effort with Maryland and Virginia to develop a better understanding of the education landscape in the broader DC region. Additionally, this bill would allow DC agencies to share human services and health data with the SLDS's managing entity, setting the framework for DC leaders to understand how health care and social service programs might affect education and workforce outcomes.

States should take steps to get a fuller picture of their workforce by making improvements to their wage data.

Efforts to improve wage data are especially important as states take on new roles in connecting education and training programs with workforce needs, including through initiatives such as the Workforce Pell Grant program. With more accurate and more complete workforce data, state leaders can better determine the ROI for state and federal dollars and provide individuals with the information they need to make decisions when enrolling in education and training programs.

At least four states introduced legislation to enhance their wage data. Legislators in California, Louisiana, and New Jersey introduced and in Virginia passed legislation that enhances unemployment insurance (UI) wage data collections by adding fields such as job or occupation title, industry of employment, hours worked, hourly wage, and work location. By securely incorporating more information about workers into UI wage records, states can develop a more complete understanding of their workforce and labor market trends. And when integrated with education data in a state's SLDS, this more robust workforce data can help leaders strengthen education-to-workforce pathways, respond to employer needs, grow their economies, and support workers in accessing family-sustaining careers.

THE CASE FOR ENHANCED UI WAGE DATA

Enhancing UI wage data—information that states collect to facilitate UI programs—would unlock new insights for individuals, education and workforce leaders, and policymakers seeking to understand and support P–20W pathways. At a minimum, three main enhancements—occupation, pay rate, and work location—are critical for generating greater insights about P–20W pathways, workforce supply and demand, and the impacts of education and training programs on participation in the workforce. These enhancements would help state leaders equip students and job seekers with information about the ROI for education and training programs so they can choose programs that lead to better-paying jobs and less debt. To learn more, see DQC's resource on enhancing UI wage data.

Looking Ahead

The strongest SLDSs are not static—they continue to evolve alongside states' priorities and information needs. Legislation introduced and enacted in 2026 demonstrates that states are strengthening not only the technical infrastructure of their P-20W data systems but also the governance and data foundations that make those systems useful. Legislators this year advanced legislation to codify cross-agency data governance, expand the scope of SLDSs to meet evolving education and workforce priorities, and improve workforce data to generate a more complete understanding of education-to-workforce pathways.

While states made important progress in 2026, additional opportunities remain to strengthen education and workforce data systems. In 2027, state legislators must:

- **Strengthen early childhood data infrastructure by investing in early childhood information data systems (ECIDSs)** that help people make informed decisions when seeking, delivering, and supporting early care and education services. California introduced legislation this year that would establish a statewide ECIDS. This system would complement California's SLDS, serving as a primary source for early childhood education data. Lawmakers in Illinois and Texas have successfully codified an ECIDS in state statute, and other states, including California, can follow their lead.
- **Ensure transparency about how artificial intelligence (AI) is used alongside state data** and, more specifically, in SLDSs. State lawmakers in Florida, Illinois, Maine, Utah, and Virginia introduced bills pertaining to the use of AI in educational settings and state agencies. Some of these bills would mandate guidance on AI usage, and others would foster environments intended to enable safe usage. As state leaders consider how to engage with AI and SLDSs, they'll need to thoughtfully center privacy.

While states made meaningful progress in 2026, the work to strengthen education and workforce data ecosystems is far from complete. With continued leadership and support, states can foster robust data ecosystems that empower individuals, equip policymakers with actionable information, and strengthen pathways from education to the workforce. Every state can and should work to ensure that data works for everyone.