Education and Workforce Data Connections: A Primer on States' Status

Data are most useful when they are transformed into actionable information that people are able to access, understand and use. Thanks to both state and federal leadership, political commitment and investment of financial resources, states have made tremendous progress in the building of statewide K-12 longitudinal data systems.

However, to ensure that state policymakers are able to better serve individuals living and working in their states, states must be able to follow individuals from early childhood through their K-12 education and into postsecondary and /or their careers as the majority of students do not follow the traditional education/workforce pathway. Most students transfer among and between two- and four-year institutions and/or the workforce.

In fact, a study from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago found that only 26 percent of first-generation students that go onto postsecondary education follow a traditional trajectory, meaning that 74 percent of first-generation students do not. [1] In order to adequately understand the particular patterns and service needs of all students, including the growing pool of non-traditional students, state policies need to support the linkage of education and workforce data.

By linking data from both the education and workforce sectors, funders, policymakers, and other stakeholders are able to answer key policy questions that these systems, individually, cannot do (for more information, see insert).

Linking Education and Workforce Data Can Help Policymakers Address Key Policy Questions

As DQC survey results show, many states have greater capacity to use their rich longitudinal data to answer key policy questions related to serving students in K 12 education. By linking education and workforce data, states increase their ability to answer new questions that affect a broader range of students.

- How do course taking patterns for students who enter the workforce directly after high school effect their success and vary among groups of students, e.g., by socioeconomic status, gender, racial /ethnic status, etc.?
- What high school performance indicators (e.g., enrollment in rigorous courses or performance on state assessments) are the best predictors of students' success in college or the work place?
- What is the employment rate of high school graduates and dropouts, and in what industries do they work? How many initial dropouts completed high school or earned a GED?
- What is the employment rate of students that have some postsecondary education compared with those that have earned a postsecondary credential (e.g., Certification, AA, BA, etc.) and in what industries do they work?
- What percentage of high school students that work while in high school? What is the relationship between concurrent employment and education for high school students, e.g., are they more or less likely to graduate and what is the tipping point?

In addition to developing the capacity to answer these questions, states must also make data access, analysis, and use a priority.

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[1] Chapin Hall. http://www.chapinhall.org/research/inside/when-students-enroll-college-do-all-roads-lead-bachelors-degree

The State of the Nation

States have made tremendous progress over the past four years in the development of statewide education longitudinal data systems; however, linking education and workforce data is only in its beginning stages. Few states are able to link data across the P-20/Workforce spectrum. Our results last year show that:
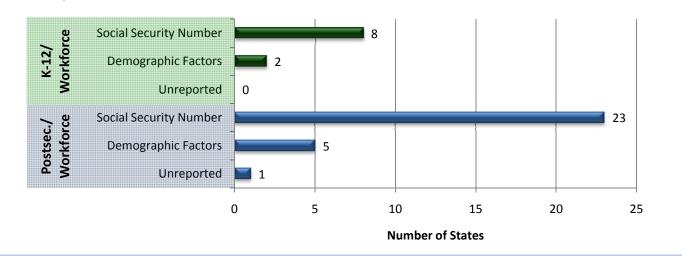
- Only eight states are able to link data across the P-20/Workforce spectrum;
- Only 10 states are able to link K-12/Workforce data; and
- Only 29 states are able to link Postsecondary /Workforce data.

States that have established these connections have done so primarily through the use of social security numbers, but some have also used demographic factors (see below).

About the DQC Survey

The DQC distributes an annual survey to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to assess state progress toward the 10 Essential Elements of a longitudinal data system and the 10 State Actions for effective data use. State education agencies self report on the capabilities of their data systems, and the DQC analyzes state answers to determine if the state meets the requirements for having an Essential Element or State Action.

Ways States Link Education and Workforce Data

K-12/ Workforce	Social Security Number	8
	Demographic Factors	2
	Unreported	0
Postsec./ Workforce	Social Security Number	23
	Demographic Factors	5
	Unreported	1

Number of States

States Status with Regard to Connecting Education and Workforce Data
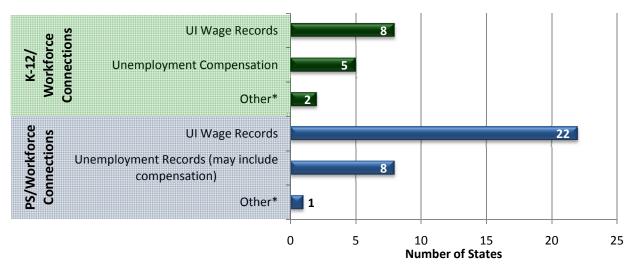### 2009-10

K-12/ Workforce Connections
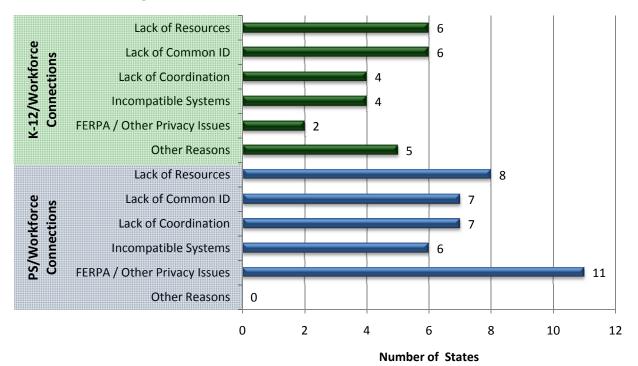

Postsecondary/ Workforce Connections

These connections, however, are not as robust as they could be as most states have only begun to link education data with unemployment insurance wage records or compensation data. For example, no state reports linking education data to Workforce Investment Act training programs on a regular basis (see below).
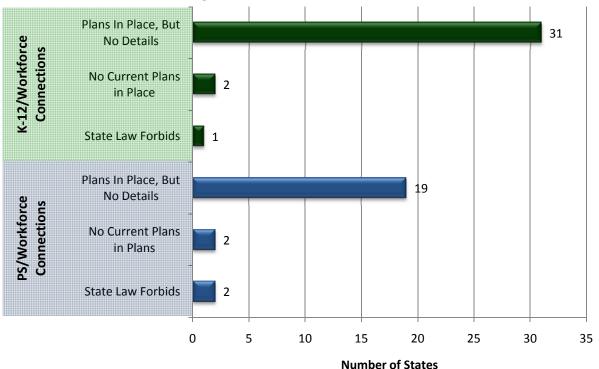
Types of Linked Workforce Data

States have identified several barriers to linking education and workforce data, ranging from legal prohibitions to resource constraints. More detailed information concerning these barriers is displayed in the chart below:

Barriers to Linking Education and Workforce Data

Despite the barriers, most states are moving toward the connection of education and workforce data.

States Plans for Connecting Education and Workforce Data

Chart: States Plans for Connecting Education and Workforce Data

K-12/Workforce Connections
- Plans In Place, But No Details: 31
- No Current Plans in Place: 2
- State Law Forbids: 1

PS/Workforce Connections
- Plans In Place, But No Details: 19
- No Current Plans in Plans: 2
- State Law Forbids: 2

X-axis: Number of States (0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35)

Next Steps

States are currently working to connect education and workforce data, however, states are far from reaching the goal of having data systems that can link across the P-20/Workforce spectrum. To connect these education and workforce databases, states should engage a broad range of stakeholders to:

1. Prioritize, through broad-based stakeholder input, the critical policy questions to drive the development and use of longitudinal data systems.

2. Ensure data systems are interoperable within and across agencies and states by adopting or developing common data standards, definitions and language.

3. Protect personally identifiable information through governance policies and practices that promote the security of the information while allowing appropriate data access and sharing.

For additional information, visit us at www.DataQualityCampaign.org or contact Bi Vuong at Bi@DataQualityCampaign.org.