CALIFORNIA'S CRADLE-TO-CAREER DATA SYSTEM: THE POWER OF DATA TO INFORM POLICY

In 2019, the California State Legislature passed the California Cradle-to-Career Data System Act, setting in motion a process to create a statewide data system containing educational, workforce, financial aid, and social service information designed to address disparities in opportunities and improve outcomes for all students. The proposed data system will be a neutral source of high-quality information, paired with tools to help a range of stakeholders to utilize the information.

Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) are important tools for a variety of stakeholders. When the data system is established, California will be able to:

» Provide public tools enabling students and adult learners to navigate transitions from K-12 to higher education, as well as the education-to-employment pipeline;
» Identify the types of support services that help more students learn, stay in school, prepare for college, graduate, and secure a job;
» Assess data from K-12 and all higher education segments;
» Help agencies plan for and improve educational, workforce, and health and human services programs; and,
» Support research on improving public policies that shape students from early education into their careers.

Given the disproportionate impacts associated with the COVID-19 crisis, the data system will be critical in identifying and targeting resources where they are most needed to close equity gaps.

Many other states have already established longitudinal data systems, and have been able to utilize them to design programs and policies to better serve students, including:

» **Minnesota:** Minnesota has developed the Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS) and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) matching student data from pre-kindergarten through completion of postsecondary education and into the workforce. By bridging existing data with other incoming data, a range of education, programmatic, and delivery questions can be answered to gauge the effectiveness of current programs and design targeted improvement strategies to help students. SLEDS brings together data from education and workforce to:

  » Identify the most viable pathways for individuals in achieving successful outcomes in early care, education, and work;
  » Inform decisions to support and improve early care, education, and workforce policy and practice; and
  » Assist in creating a more seamless early care, education, and workforce system for all Minnesotans.

» **Iowa:** The Iowa Statewide Longitudinal Data System was first established in 2012 as part of a U.S. Department of Education SLDS grant. This federated data system links partners from K-12, community colleges, public universities, Iowa College Aid Commission, and Iowa Workforce Development to better understand and support student success in Iowa. The system, while still new, has already allowed the state to answer a number of longstanding questions related to students' progress (or lack thereof) through the education system and into the workforce.

» **Illinois:** The state of Illinois maintains a federated longitudinal data system with a central entity responsible for identity resolution across the participating state agencies and a governing board that is provided with staffing support through one of the Illinois public universities. Nearly all degree-granting higher education institutions operating within Illinois are included and viewed as partners. There is an amendment currently pending to the facilitating legislation which will allow the Illinois Board of Higher Education to include the remaining degree-granting institutions, private business, and vocational schools. Identity resolution helps to minimize risk associated with sharing unit-level records across participating agencies and/or schools/colleges falling under the purview of the agencies. The system has been used to address policy issues specific to higher education, but more importantly, at key points of transition and overlap across the P-20 to workforce spectrum.

The California Cradle-to-Career Data System will not only assist in identifying student needs and inequitable disparities, it will contribute immensely to our state's economic recovery in the years to come.