Recommendations for Incorporating Postsecondary and Workforce Data into Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems

March 2010

"I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma." -Remarks of President Obama: Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009

Introduction

So ***every American*** can acquire a postsecondary credential leading to a career that provides prosperity for each family and value to America's employers, we must reform and strengthen state and local educational and skills-development systems. And to guide and ensure the effectiveness of these reforms, we must be able to measure and assess student progress and success as well as the outcomes of publicly funded educational and skills-development programs intended to prepare Americans for the labor market.

In recent years, state governments, with assistance from the U.S. Department of Education, have been working to improve state and local data systems that can document and measure student progress and program outcomes. One effort, the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program, has made significant progress in strengthening data systems for K-12. This sets a strong foundation for instituting educational improvements that can prompt higher graduation rates and greater numbers of high school students transitioning to and succeeding in postsecondary education.

However, efforts to improve student success in K-12 alone will not meet the skill needs of America's employers. Already, two-thirds of those who will be working in 2020 are beyond elementary and secondary school age. Of these adult workers, 88 million lack the postsecondary experience and the basic skills to enroll in traditional college courses.[i] To remain economically competitive, the U.S. needs to make sure these workers acquire post-secondary education and skill credentials valued by the labor market. Addressing their needs will require reforming and strengthening state and local educational and skills-development systems. This too can be accomplished only if data measuring participant progress and success is available to inform and guide programs improvements.

Congress and the Administration have recognized the importance of having data to assess performance of postsecondary and adult skills-development programs by expanding the SLDS Grant Program to include these systems. This decision supports the need of policy-makers to answer questions such as:

- To what extent do high school dropouts who earn a GED go on to obtain a postsecondary credential?
- What are the educational and labor market outcomes for unemployed workers who use federal and state resources to obtain training at community colleges?
- What value do noncredit community college certificates have in the workplace?

As most state postsecondary and workforce data systems cannot measure participant progress across educational and skills development systems nor document labor market outcomes, these and similar questions are difficult to answer. This is particularly true for the many students who pursue paths other than the traditional P-20 education system. In fact, a recent Data Quality Campaign survey shows, only eight states have the ability to collect and analyze student-level data across the postsecondary and workforce spectrum.[ii] A recent National Governor's Association report found that uneven data quality and imprecise performance measures have stalled state efforts to improve postsecondary education.[iii] Moreover, nearly all states have difficulty linking data on adult students in non-degree training settings with postsecondary and workforce data – a step needed to achieve more effective human capital development programs.

The recommendations below are intended to inform governors, state legislators, state agencies, leaders in the postsecondary and public workforce systems, and other key stakeholders of the actions needed to build statewide longitudinal data systems that measure the educational transitions, completions, and labor market outcomes of adult students and workers. These actions are essential for improving educational and skills development practices, policies, programs, and strategies that serve the largest portion of our future workforce – adults who are in the workforce today.

Recommendations

Statewide data systems should have the capacity to:

1) Follow the educational progress and labor market outcomes of <u>all adult students and workers</u>:

- Within **Postsecondary** institutions, this means non-traditional students such as those attending part-time, taking non-credit occupational courses, and assigned to development education. This also should include any students who have dropped out.

- Within **Adult Education** programs, this means all participants enrolled in adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English language programs across the state.

- Within **Skill Development** programs, at a minimum this means all participants enrolled in Workforce Investment Act Title 1 (which includes youth, adult, and dislocated workers), Trade Adjustment Assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families training, and Correctional Education.[iv]

2) *Track and measure the <u>educational and skills development progress, completions, and outcomes</u> of all participants:*

- Measure and report student/participant progress within programs and institutions such as the progression of postsecondary students from course to course, year to year, non-credit to credit programs, and remedial education to credit courses.

- Measure and report on student/participants' transitions across programs and institutions, such as adult basic education or Title I participants moving into postsecondary remedial

education, or non-credit and credit courses/programs as well as transfers from program-to-program.

- Measure and report student/participant completions and outcomes for programs and institutions, including the achievement of various credentials (degrees, diplomas, and credit and non-credit certificates of value in the labor market).

3) Track and measure the labor market outcomes of all participants:

Measure and report employment status, earnings, and career advancement for all students/participants who have participated in a program or institution and entered the state's labor market.

4) Respond to additional challenges such as:

- Capture, measure, and report on student/participant education and skill development progression and labor market outcomes across states.

- Capture, measure, and report on the achievement of accredited industry certifications generated via state-approved educational and skills development programs.

Authors:

Evelyn Ganzglass, Center for Law and Social Policy

Andrew Reamer, Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution

Brandon Roberts, Working Poor Families Project

Whitney Smith, Joyce Foundation

Rachel Unruh, National Skills Coalition

For further information, please contact: Brandon Roberts, Working Poor Families Project, Robert3@starpower.net or 301-657-1480.

---

[i] Report of the National Commission on Adult Literacy, *Reach Higher America: Overcoming the Crises in the U.S. Workforce*, June 2008, p. v. See: http://www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org/ReachHigherAmerica/ReachHigher.pdf

[ii] Data Quality Campaign, *DQC 2009-2010 Survey Results Compendium – 10 Actions*, January 2010. See: http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Actions_Compendium.pdf

[iii] NGA Center for Best Practice, *Measuring Student Achievement at Postsecondary Institutions*, National Governors' Association, November 2009. See: http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0911MEASURINGACHIEVEMENT.PDF

[iv] For Adult Basic Education and Skill Development programs, this does not require tracking participants in the state longitudinal data system, but should include linking relevant data systems to assess progress and outcomes.