



**For Education and Workforce Data Systems that
Meet the Demands of a 21st Century Economy**

To ensure our nation is on a path toward economic growth and shared prosperity, we need education and training policies that collectively prepare *all* Americans for participation in a skilled workforce that will help U.S. industries compete in a changing 21st century economy.

The **Workforce Data Quality Campaign (WDQC)** contends that we cannot determine if our human capital policies are up to that challenge without **inclusive, aligned and market-relevant education and workforce data systems** that are supported by state and federal policies. That is, we need publicly sponsored data systems that will provide useful information to the public, to the private-sector, and to policymakers about the skills, employment and earning outcomes of our students and workers, and about the ability of U.S. businesses to fill skilled positions with our education and training programs' graduates.

While we have some notable models for such data systems, they are the exception more than the rule. As a result, in too many circumstances, we have:

- **Policymakers** who cannot assess if our collective human capital investments—PreK-12 schooling, career and technical education, job training and adult education programs, colleges and universities—are preparing young people or adults for skilled jobs or new careers.
- **Students and Workers** who cannot figure out which colleges and training programs are most adept at helping people land a job, continue their studies, or advance in the labor market.
- **Business leaders** who cannot provide feedback on whether the range of degrees and credentials awarded by education and training programs align with their companies' skill needs or the larger skill gaps facing their respective industries.
- **Educators** at colleges, job training programs, adult literacy organizations, or career and technical education programs who cannot analyze the long-term education and labor market outcomes of their graduates, so they might adjust and improve their curricula.

We applaud the work already underway by a range of national organizations, federal agencies and leading states to address these data quality issues, particularly within the context of our nation's early childhood and K-12 education systems. *But we must do more.* This is particularly true regarding the relative lack of federal attention paid to outcome assessment for the larger number of adult Americans who are receiving education or training services in a variety of contexts *after high school*. And it is similarly true in terms of the kinds of data that we should be accessing *outside education institutions*—including labor market data and industry certifications—that we feel need to be brought into education data quality discussions.

The WDQC Agenda

To that end, the WDQC is calling for policymakers in Washington, DC and in our state capitals to take a more inclusive approach to education data quality efforts, so they include the *diversity of students and workers* and the *range of education and labor market outcomes* that comprise our nation's human capital strategy. In particular, we feel our workforce and education data systems need to do a more effective job of:

- I. Including All Students and Pathways:** Beyond tracking student progress in K-12 settings, data systems should include outcome and progress indicators for out-of-school youth, adult workers, and other individuals enrolled in job training, adult basic education and career and technical education programs supported by a range of public policies (e.g., WIA, Perkins Act, Higher Education Act, TANF, Trade Adjustment Assistance, SNAPET).
- II. Counting Industry-Recognized Credentials as well as Degrees:** In addition to documenting traditional high school and college degrees, data systems should capture individual achievement of the wide range of industry-recognized credentials (including certificates, certifications, licenses, et.al.) and related competencies, including those awarded outside educational institutions by private industry.
- III. Assessing Employment Outcomes for all Participants:** Data systems should be able to match student records to employment and wage records for enrollees across all of our education and workforce programs, including various postsecondary settings (e.g., non-profit, for-profit, credit, non-credit). Data systems should also be able to assess what combination of education and training interventions over an individual's lifetime have impacted his/her long-term employment and career.
- IV. Expanding Use of Labor Market Information:** Data on individual participant outcomes will have limited value if not brought together with the best information available about the changing structure of the labor market, including real-time openings as well as future projections. Labor market data must be current, available in a variety of settings, and made understandable to students, workers and employers. LMI should also be used by policymakers to assess the market relevance of education and training policies.
- V. Ensuring Appropriate Data Access and Use:** Aggregated, privacy-protected data on student outcomes can and should be made available to education and training institutions so they can assess their graduates' outcomes and guide program improvements; to students and workers who want to choose the best programs for their respective career goals; and to policymakers who want to know more about the effectiveness of public education and training policies.

Policy Options for Improvement

There are a number of options available to state and federal policymakers to drive these improvements in our education and workforce data systems. In some cases we already have good working models for how to achieve some of these goals, and the WDQC intends to highlight those models to promote their replication. In other cases, however, we need action from state and federal policymakers to facilitate these reforms.

While participants in our Campaign have different ideas about the specific means to achieve these goals, we all agree that some action needs to be taken in the following areas.

FEDERAL POLICY

The Obama Administration, its Education and Labor Departments, and Members of Congress should begin working together to:

- **Make data expectations clear and consistent across pending reauthorizations** of such policies as the *Workforce Investment Act (WIA)*, the *Perkins Career and Technical Education Act*, the *Higher Education Act (HEA)* and the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*. This could include establishing common data standards and credential definitions, making it easier for states to use aligned data systems to measure student progress across programs, and consistently measuring employment outcomes (short- and long-term) for all students and workers served by these programs.
- **Restructure federal funding for states' development of aligned education and workforce data systems**, possibly by combining federal agency investments in the development of aligned longitudinal data systems, providing technical assistance to states with a cross-agency team approach, or rewarding states that use such systems across programs.
- **Encourage state participation in cross-state sharing of employment data** by rewarding states that enter into sharing agreements, or by enlisting state leaders in the development of cross-state platforms that will in turn encourage other states' participation. At the same time, assess if there is an appropriate role for national platforms to facilitate data analysis across states and institutions.

STATE POLICY

Governors, state education and labor agencies, and state legislators are encouraged to work together to create and use inclusive, aligned and market-relevant workforce and education data systems. The following is a blueprint that states can follow toward the development of such data systems. We have states that have already built out much of this blueprint, and others that are working toward the implementation of different elements.

WDQC State Blueprint
For Inclusive, Aligned, and Market-Relevant Education & Workforce Data Systems

Including all Students and Pathways

- **Inclusive Cross-Agency Council:** Establish a cross-agency council that includes labor, PreK-12, CTE, higher education, social services, et al. (P-20/W) to oversee statewide data collection and reporting.
- **Count More Students:** Increase the percentage of students across all education and workforce programs included in state longitudinal data systems.
- **Metrics for Career Pathways:** Create consistent metrics across education and workforce programs to facilitate program alignment and integration into state data systems.

Counting Industry-Recognized Credentials

- **Capture Diverse Credentials:** Increase the range of credentials (certificates, certifications, licenses) being counted in addition to degrees—including those awarded by industry third-parties—within SLDS-monitored outcome data.
- **Industry Validation:** Develop a process for industry validation of awarded credentials across education and workforce programs.

Assessing Employment Outcomes

- **Know if Graduates Get Jobs:** Determine employment and earnings outcomes for graduates of an increasing number of workforce and education programs, including higher education.
- **Cross-State Sharing of Employment Data:** Participate in WRIS2 (or another appropriate platform) to enable the cross-state sharing of employment data.

Expanding Use of Labor Market Information

- **LMI Capacity and Use:** Improve LMI data collection and analysis capacity, and ensure such data is made accessible to a variety of audiences.
- **Industry Skills Gaps:** Initiate skills gap analyses, using expanded student reporting, labor market information and industry feedback to assess alignments between education and workforce programs and labor market demand.

Ensuring Data Access and Appropriate Use

- **Scorecards for Students and Workers:** Report de-identified, aggregate program- and institution-level data so that people can compare programs and make career decisions.
- **Feedback Reports to Programs and Institutions:** Establish the means for all education and workforce programs to access de-identified, aggregate data about graduates' long-term employment and education outcomes.
- **Dashboards for Policymakers:** Regularize reporting to the Governor and state legislature on education and employment outcomes across all education and workforce programs, for comparison with current and projected data on job openings and future industry demand.
- **State Funding:** Commit state resources, in addition to whatever federal support is available, to develop and maintain these data reporting systems for ongoing use by individuals, educators and policymakers in the state.