

Research Agenda Subcommittee Meeting Summary

February 13, 2020

This document provides a summary of the key points that emerged from substantive discussion over the course the day. More information about the meeting, including the background paper and the PowerPoint, are available at <https://cadatasystem.wested.org/meeting-information/research-agenda-sub-committee>. The website also provides information on the overall [process](#) for how the data system will be designed.

The Research Agenda Subcommittee will identify parameters for research on six priority areas spelled out in the legislation. The February 2020 meeting had the following goals:

- Ground the work of this committee by outlining the recommended scope for phase one of the California data system
- Clarify why a research agenda is an important part of data system development
- Understand the types of research other states have conducted on time-to-degree using their longitudinal data systems
- Understand other questions that can be answered using linked data sets, including questions identified by the advisory groups
- Determine priority research questions related to post-transfer outcomes
- Identify required data elements and how information could be integrated into products like dashboards and query tools

The following representatives attended the meeting:

Tom Vu, Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities; Alma Mededovic, Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education; Mary Sandy, California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; John Hetts, California Community College Chancellor's Office; Jonathan Isler, California Department of Education; Natasha Nicolai, California Department of Social Services; Ben Word, California Department of Technology; Sherrie Reed, California Education Policy Lab; Jennifer Schwartz, California Health and Human Services Agency; Martha Friedrich, California School Information Services; Sara Pietrowski, California State Board of Education; Nathan Evans, California State University Chancellor's Office; Jessica Moldoff, California Student Aid Commission; Dan Rounds, California Workforce Development Board; Laura Coleman, Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research; Tameka McGlawn, College and Career Academy Support Network; Muhammad Akhtar, Employment Development Department; Alyssa Nguyen, RP Group; Tongshan Chan, University of California Office of the President; Michal Kurlaender, University of California, Davis; Russ Rumberger, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Introductions and Level Setting

The meeting opened with the facilitator provided a description of the benefits of a longitudinal data system, an overview of the California Cradle-to-Career Data System Act, and a description of the process that will be used to craft recommendations for the Governor's Office. Subcommittee participants were encouraged to work closely with their peers on other subcommittees to ensure that workgroup members are able to provide recommendations on behalf of their agencies at monthly meetings on these types of issues. The work of the subcommittees, advisory groups, and workgroup is iterative.

The facilitator summarized the initial recommendations of the Cradle-to-Career Workgroup regarding the focus of the first phase of data system development, including creating a P20W data set that includes early care, K-12, postsecondary, financial aid, and employment data; making information available via dashboards and query tools; and creating a request process that would allow additional data to be linked for specific purposes. The workgroup will be identifying additional phase one tools for practitioners, students, and families at the February meeting.

Next, the facilitator reviewed the six policy questions spelled out in the legislation that will guide this subcommittee's work: long-term outcomes of early childhood services, long-term outcomes of primary school interventions, college readiness for high school students, timeframes for community college students to transfer to four-year colleges and earn a baccalaureate degree, impact of financial aid on educational and career outcomes, and employment outcomes after students exit education. This meeting focused on timeframes for community college students to transfer to four-year colleges and earn a baccalaureate degree.

The subcommittee discussed the dangers of only looking at outcomes in the context of each discrete step along the education pipeline and the importance of looking holistically to understand the factors that could influence stronger outcomes. This includes the need to look at factors before students enter education systems, non-academic factors, and the structure of education systems.

Finally, participants introduced themselves and listed their highest priority question regarding post-transfer outcomes for community college students. Themes included:

- Identifying the impact of early care and learning programs (possibilities include California State Preschool, General Child Care, and/or CalWORKs Stages 1, 2, and 3 Programs) and K-12 interventions on third grade literacy and math assessment scores and college outcomes
- Examining how health and social service experiences shape and could improve education outcomes
- Clarifying how institutional structures impact outcomes
- Providing information about students' community college experiences that affect post-transfer outcomes, such as their major, whether they were in remedial education, or earned an associate degree for transfer
- Offering insights into how many students in community college are in the transfer pipeline
- Documenting equity gaps in who applies for transfer and ultimately attains bachelor's degrees
- Specifying the impact of education attainment on employment and earnings

Role of the Research Agenda

The facilitator explained the role research agendas play in the development of state data systems, including formalizing policy questions and priorities, engaging stakeholders, ensuring clarity about how linked data will be used, and creating a blueprint for which data elements are important to share.

One participant noted that it will be important to focus on research agenda questions that address intersegmental inquiries, as opposed to research that could be conducted within individual data sets. Several subcommittee participants noted that the research agenda should not preclude other areas of inquiry or narrow the field of allowable questions. One participant suggested it would be helpful to have an inventory of studies that had been approved using intersegmental data and what they found. Finally,

the subcommittee expressed enthusiasm about creating a repository of business rules related to metric and methodology definitions, so that researchers can build off of each other’s work.

Research Priorities for Post-Transfer Outcomes

After a presentation showing that there is little publicly-available data from other state data systems on how long it takes community college students to earn bachelor’s degrees and outlining some of the other questions that researchers have investigated related to post-transfer outcomes using other data sources, the subcommittee brainstormed topics that would be most valuable to explore in California.

Topics fell into four general categories: course-taking, economics and financial aid, student context, and institutional context. Participants self-selected into one of these groups and dug into the initial list of topics to prioritize five questions, specify who would benefit from answers to each question, and how they would use this information. Both are summarized below.

Course-taking

Initial list of topics:

- Impact of early college credit
- Impact of taking remedial courses in college
- Impact of online courses
- Impact of credit for prior learning
- Impact of major
- Impact of enrolling full time or part time and number of units taken by term
- Number of units accrued at the point of transfer, in total after transfer, and in comparison to students who went directly to a four-year institution
- Why students go back to community college after finishing a bachelor’s degree

Priority questions	Who could act on this information?	How would they use it?
What effect does pre-college credit (advanced placement, international baccalaureate, dual enrollment) have on degree completion and time to degree?	Institutions, parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution and statewide policy development • College and career planning and guidance
Does the timing of declaration of major impact degree completion and time to degree? Does persistence in the major (or educational goal) impact degree completion?	Institutions, students, families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution and statewide policy development • Resource/budget allocation • College and career planning and guidance
What is the nature and structure of developmental education and the differential impacts on degree completion and time-to-degree?	Institutions, researchers, and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution and statewide policy development • Student course planning

What role does consistency (including unit load) and recency have on degree completion?	Institutions and policy makers (i.e., financial aid policy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution and statewide policy development • College and career planning and guidance
How does online course-taking (college prep and at college level) affect time-to-degree and how? Are there differential outcomes by rural/remote institutions?	Institutions and educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institution and statewide policy development • Instructional strategies • College and career planning and guidance

Economics & Financial Aid

Initial list of topics:

- Types of financial aid students receive
- Whether students were working during college
- How the job market influences transfer and bachelor's degree attainment
- How many students left because they had already met their goals
- Time to employment after graduation
- Employment and earnings, by major
- Debt ratio by degree

Priority questions	Who could act on this information?	How would they use it?
What is the relationship of post-transfer access and outcomes to factors such as race, family structure, and geography?	Practitioners, students	Identify ways to better balance school and work demands
What is the impact of specific educational pathways on labor market outcomes after college?	Practitioners, students	Determine which pathways to offer, determine which pathway to enroll in
What is the impact of broader economic conditions on transfer outcomes?	Practitioners	Adjustments to program offerings, enrollment management
What are the employment and earnings outcomes for students after college?	Policymakers, practitioners	Advocate for expanding information available from the base wage file to include occupations and hours worked
What are the employment patterns of students during college and how does this influence transfer access and outcomes?	Policymakers, practitioners	Adjust offerings and supports to better address the needs of working students

Student Context

Initial list of topics:

- Early care and K-12 educational experiences that were critical to success
- Social support programs that were critical to success, including health, food, housing
- Whether results vary by student characteristics including race, ethnicity, age, gender, language, socio-economic status, veteran status, disabled status
- Whether students were eligible for health, food, and housing support, and if they accessed these services
- How familial context influences outcomes such as comparing outcomes among siblings and the impact of being first generation
- How many students want a bachelor's degree
- How many students who are eligible for transfer apply, how quickly they apply, whether they accepted, and if they accepted to an institution located near them
- Whether completion of a community college credential is a variable in transfer outcomes
- Whether re-entry students are likely to transfer
- Which students have left the system that are eligible for transfer and how could they be reengaged?

Priority questions	Who could act on this information?	How would they use it?
How do transfer and bachelor's degree attainment outcomes vary by student demographics?	Students, parents, schools, social support agencies, community-based organizations, legislature	To inform decision making, address issues around social determinants, and increase equity
Which social support programs did students participate in and which are critical for transfer and bachelor's degree attainment?	Social support agencies, students and parents, institutions, schools, community-based organizations, researchers, alumni	Quality improvement, close gaps, provide mentoring, move resources to address needs
What factors in early care and K-12 are critical for transfer and bachelor's degree attainment?	Social support agencies, students and parents, institutions, schools, community-based organizations, researchers, alumni	Quality improvement, close gaps, provide mentoring, move resources to address needs
How does early care affect student progress toward a degree?	Social support agencies, community-based organizations, researchers, students and parents	Quality improvement, develop and target programs, assess outreach activities
Are there any demographic trends or common patterns of behavior for students who do not transfer?	Institutions, schools, parents, students, researchers, social support agencies and community-based organizations	Quality improvement, develop and target programs, assess outreach activities

Institution Context

Initial list of topics:

- How results vary by institution
- How results vary by type of institution
- Characteristics of effective institutions
- How colleges reduce friction at the point of transition between institutions
- The percentage of course that transfer within a pathway and how this impacts time to degree

Priority questions	Who could act on this information?	How would they use it?
How do students transfer outcomes vary by institution?	Decision-makers at institutions, counselors/advisors, students/parents, state policy makers, federal Department of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecasting and planning • Enrollment management • Change management strategies • Student support strategies • Deciding which institution to attend • Accountability • Identify and describe bright spots • Identify institutions that need support and target resources to provide support
How can colleges reduce friction at the point of transition between institutions?	Decision-makers at institutions, counselors/advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change application processes • Improve communications
How many courses are accepted for transfer within a specific pathway? How does this rate affect time to degree?	Decision-makers at institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust offerings • Change articulation agreements

After hearing the report-outs from each group, participants engaged in a prioritization exercise about the four topic areas, which revealed a strong interest in institutional and economic contexts.

Data Elements and Dashboards

To link priority research questions to underlying data elements and potential visualizations, the group discussed how to appropriately examine student context.

First, the group brainstormed a list of possible data points that would be valuable to include in the state data system. These included:

Demographics	Characteristics	Economic Context	Familial Context	Education Context
Race/ethnicity	Geographic location	Economic status	Education level of parents	Early care participation
Sex/gender	Disability	Employment status	First-generation college student	K-12 attendance patterns

Age	Foster youth	Financial aid status	Parental status	High school AP/IB status
LGBTQ	Veteran	Homeless status	Outcomes of siblings	Earned early college credit
	Language(s) spoken	Health insurance status		Took remedial coursework in college
	Immigration/residency status	Barriers to employment status		Transfer ready/transfer prepared status
				IGETC/CSU Breadth status
				College award status
				Type of college attended

Then, the subcommittee discussed the importance of ensuring that analyses and data displays do not create a paradigm where students are viewed as the problem or where outcomes are framed solely in terms of demographic characteristics. Participants emphasized that the state data system should prioritize analyses that focus on factors that are actionable for students, parents, practitioners, and policy makers. For example, rather than focusing solely on race, information should point toward supportive services, course-taking patterns, or attendance thresholds that are highly predictive of success. When disaggregated information is displayed or analyzed, it is more helpful to focus on access, the proportion of participants who attain desired outcomes, or institutions that are more successful at closing equity gaps.

For dashboards, some participants suggested that the state data system could provide a suite of visualizations that focus on common questions that various stakeholder groups ask and use an equity framework when providing answers. Other participants cautioned that dashboards—particularly ones that focus on student demographics—can create a false transparency that over-simplifies complex issues. They can obscure critical institutional variables, such as course offerings, the level of training for staff, and the demographics of the people who work at the institution.

[Next Steps](#)

Research agenda questions were not finalized. Information from this meeting will be integrated into a research agenda in the summer, after all six areas have been explored.

Before the March meeting, subcommittee participants were asked to provide the following:

- general studies and resources that could support the planning process
- studies that are specific to the six research questions outlined in the legislation