

# Research Agenda Subcommittee Meeting Summary

May 12, 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, use cases, comprehensive research agenda, PowerPoint, and a recording of the meeting are available at <https://cadatasystem.wested.org/meeting-information/research-agenda-sub-committee>.

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

- Provide an update on the recommended scope for phase one of the California data system
- Review a draft comprehensive research agenda and develop a process for editing it
- Identify goals for sharing college readiness information with specific populations
- List priority information for public dashboards, query builders, and research studies

The following representatives attended the meeting:

Tom Vu, Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities; Tine Sloan, California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; John Hetts & Valerie Lundy-Wagner, California Community College Chancellor's Office; Ben Allen & Jonathan Isler, California Department of Education; Janet Buehler, California Department of Technology; Jennifer Schwartz, California Health and Human Services Agency; Amy Fong, California School Information Services; Jessica Moldoff, California Student Aid Commission; Dan Rounds, California Workforce Development Board; Muhammad Akhtar, Employment Development Department; Abraham Cicchetti, Gurnick Academy of Medical Arts; Alyssa Nguyen, RP Group; Steve Watkins, UnitekLearning.com; Tongshan Chan, University of California Office of the President; Aparna Ramesh, University of California, Berkeley; Michal Kurlaender, University of California, Davis; Russ Rumberger, University of California, Santa Barbara.

## Workgroup Update

The meeting opened with the facilitator providing an update on the decisions made by the California Cradle-to-Career Workgroup at their April 29 meeting and answering clarifying questions from the group.

## Draft Research Agenda

The facilitator described how the draft comprehensive research agenda was developed and answered clarifying questions from the group. While most participants had only had a chance to do a high-level review of the document, several noted that the document provided a solid framework and one person noted that it contained more than expected.

The group reflected on the fact that the research agenda focuses on points of transition between segments. This could lead to the perception of holes in the data. For example, there might be experiences that a student has in middle, high school, and the first years of college that erodes the impact of an intervention in primary school on college completion. Or, in trying to understand post-transfer outcomes, the system does not account for experiences in community college that might mean a student never makes it to the third term, let alone transfer. Several participants felt that it would be

important to display momentum points related to individual partner entities, in addition to information related to transitions between entities. One noted that different types of information could be displayed in different contexts. For example, the dashboard and query tools might only show intersegmental questions based on the priority policy topics, whereas research requests could include information that is both within and between segments. However, another cautioned that research requests should be evaluated to make sure they don't duplicate existing work.

Participants broke into two small groups to examine the proposed research agenda topics for the two policy issues that the group had already discussed: the long term impact of primary school interventions and post-transfer outcomes.

The report outs focused on the need for more time to thoroughly review each topic. For example, the primary school intervention small group spent the full time focusing on the goals for various audiences and did not review possible edits to the scope of the information that would be included in dashboards, query tools, or prioritized research questions. However, they did focus on a case where it would be valuable to include an intrasegmental data point: looking at the impact of chronic absenteeism in primary school on high school graduation in addition to college-related outcomes. Similarly, the post-transfer outcomes small group urged that their topic be renamed to "Transfer" so that a broader range of community college-specific data points could be explored.

Jonathan Isler from the California Department of Education noted that his agency posts information on the School Dashboard related to milestones and experiences that are predictive of high school graduation, post-secondary success, and employment. Information presented by the state data system should be coordinated with these existing resources. Another participant suggested that individual segments could be given control of how intrasegmental data are calculated, allow the state data system to display metrics that individual partner entities construct, or provide links to other dashboards. A third suggested that the research library could be used to provide easy access to information that is within a single segment, but has a significant effect on intersegmental outcomes.

As in prior meetings, the group struggled with the concept of dividing research questions into the six buckets listed in the legislation, because student outcomes are based on cumulative experiences more than on the moments of transition between segments. One participant found it helpful to remember that the data system would allow researchers to examine a continuum of intra- and inter-segmental data points.

The comments also pointed toward a desire to have the public-facing tools address operational concerns, such as providing information on individual students to educators or allowing a student to view information on which courses at their college count toward transfer, how requirements vary by transfer destination, and plot a course schedule that would enable them to attain their transfer goals.

The subcommittee agreed that three smaller groups would meet over the next month to further refine specific sections of the comprehensive research agenda:

### **Primary School**

- Ben Allen
- Amy Fong
- Jennifer Schwartz

- Tine Sloan

### **College Readiness**

- Abraham Cicchetti
- John Hetts
- Michal Kurlaender
- Russ Rumberger

### **Post-Transfer Outcomes**

- Tongshan Chan
- Laura Coleman
- Valerie Lundy-Wagner
- Alyssa Nguyen
- Tom Vu
- Alma Mededovic

## **College and Career Readiness**

After a presentation on the literature related to college and career readiness, a review of information posted by other state data systems, and college and career information posted by the partner entities, the group identified key concepts to consider on this topic. One participant expressed concern that information may be posted that is not actually predictive of college access and success, and noted the importance of empirical research to identify those factors. Another concurred and suggested that the information displayed in the dashboards should reflect new insights gleaned through research over time.

One subcommittee participant noted that there is deep interest in tracking college-going rates by individual high school, while another noted this information is required for federal reporting. A third thought it might be helpful for the state data system to repost information already found on individual partner entity sites, to make it easier to find. This led another participant to highlight the importance developing operational definitions for each data point displayed or importing metrics directly rather than calculating them in the state data system.

### **Goals**

Next the group reviewed the goals for four user types related to sharing college and career readiness data. This led to several refinements, such as noting that students and families would want to be able to compare their schools to other nearby schools and to characteristics of effective schools. Some felt that students and families should be able to see high school graduation rates in addition to college-going rates. However, this would require that the metric be based on calculations made by CDE, which must follow strict federal rules for calculating graduation rates. Another participant suggested that students and families, as well as teachers and counselors, would want to see information on curriculum, such as whether learning outcomes align between high school and college or if the high school offers the courses necessary to meet college-going requirements (such as the appropriate constellation of a-g courses). However, another questioned whether the state data system should focus on issues of instructional content. After brief discussion on this topic, the group determined that it would be helpful

to create a rubric that could support subcommittee members in determining what should be included in the research agenda.

The subcommittee broke into three small groups to discuss the draft research agenda items related to dashboards, query builders, and research questions.

### **Dashboards**

The dashboard group focused their discussion on whether the proposed elements would be useful to teachers. They felt that the highlighted elements were more relevant for advising, as opposed to instruction, and that teachers would be more drawn to information made available at the individual student level. The group felt that they did not have a strong enough understanding of the information available in the California Colleges Guidance Initiative and whether this would help to balance out the resources available from the state data system. The group also noted that in order to develop the School Dashboard, CDE spent considerable time in user testing. This will be important for the state data system.

The dashboard group also made some adjustment to the content of the research agenda, including switching from displaying on-time graduation rates to showing time to graduation. They also suggested showing part-time enrollment rates. In discussion, another participant suggested showing the number of units earned instead, which can help to address variable definitions for full-time enrollment. The group recommended that the dashboard also include information on career and technical education (CTE) course taking, including information on whether the school offers CTE courses. Finally, they recommended including a disaggregation on whether students are multi-lingual.

### **Query Builder Tools**

The query builder group focused on the concept of how questions should be formulated, given that the information produced will be descriptive statistics. Therefore, the group restructured the questions into building blocks. Beginning with the postsecondary milestones of access, progress, and success, the group identified markers, such as enrolling, persisting for three terms, or completing a specific type of credential (such as certificate or degree). Then, the user could select an educational attribute from K-12 for students who attained the postsecondary milestone, such as a-g completion, GPA, or 9<sup>th</sup> grade math course type. The user could also further disaggregate the results by student characteristic (for example, race or foster status), with the goal of educational experiences being displayed as the primary mediating factor in the outcome, while still highlighting equity gaps.

The small group recommended that work done before the next meeting flesh out what the other building blocks should be. The content should also be aligned to what is available in the dashboard. This curated list should ensure that sensitive topics such as disciplinary data, or information that implies causality, are removed. The query builder should also include guidance to help the public use the tool appropriately.

### **Research Studies**

The research studies group felt that the stated topics provided a good guide for priority questions, and noted that equity questions should be given top priority. Another participant suggested that the analyses attend to district and regional-level variations. After a discussion with the full group, the following questions were added:

- Evaluate the impact of the pandemic on college going and success.
- Examine who is eligible for each type of postsecondary institution and why, where they initially enroll, and the types of postsecondary institutions they enroll in over time.
- Explore the relationship between the geographic distance from the college to home to college enrollment and success outcomes, as a way to understand inequities in access and complete a bachelor's degree.

The group was especially intrigued by the idea of exploring the relationship between attending school near home or further away, which could provide insights into whether students are tapping into community-based supports, juggling familial responsibilities, having to move in order to attend school due to impactation at local colleges, whether institutions in rural regions need additional resources to enable students to study closer to home, and whether having to move impacts access to and completion of bachelor's degrees, among other topics.

### **Additional Topics**

The group recommended that close attention be paid to concept of eligibility, which can be calculated at the level of having completed the appropriate sequence of courses or a much more nuanced measure. There needs to be clear labeling so the user will understand what aspect of eligibility is being displayed. Another participant suggested that the label itself be reviewed, and that a more descriptive phrase be used.

One participant asked about the inclusion of GPA. This is another element that can be calculated differently in various contexts (for example, only on a-g courses or a weighted GPA). Jonathan Isler from CDE clarified that the agency does not compute GPA from CALPADS data due to concerns about accuracy. Another noted that changes in grading practices during the pandemic will also complicate how GPAs are calculated. This led to an observation that partner entities should carefully vet the proposed content of the research agenda to ensure that information available through the state data system complements information available on the segments' websites and is based on data that are of high quality.

The group also flagged several topics that will be discussed in future meetings, including examining financial aid, exploring the impact of working while in college, and expanding available employment data captured by the Employment Development Department.