

Policy & Analytics Advisory Group Meeting Summary

January 16, 2020

The Policy & Analytics Advisory Group includes a broad range of perspectives and provides a means for the public to offer recommendations to the Workgroup about how to ensure the California Cradle-to-Career Data System supports research, evaluation, accountability, and optimization of publicly funded services at the state level.

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

The following advisory group representatives attended the meeting:

Liza Chu, Asian Americans Advancing Justice; Heather Hough, Policy Analysis for California Education; Orville Jackson, Greatschools.org; Jacob Jackson, Public Policy Institute of California; Su Jin Jez, California Competes; Carlise King, Child Trends; James Lanich, Educational Results Partnership; Rigel Massaro, Public Advocates; Efrain Mercado, California Teachers Association; Angela Perry, The Institute for College Access and Success; Emily Putnam-Hornstein, Children's Data Network; Brian Rivas, The Education Trust-West; Kristin Schumacher, California Budget & Policy Center; Samantha Tran, Children Now; Andrea Venezia, Education Insights Center; and Evan White, California Policy Lab.

Introductions and Level Setting

The meeting opened with 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. Advisory group participants were encouraged to watch the listserv for alerts about the release of background papers and meeting notes, which will be posted on the project website: cadatasystem.wested.org.

The advisory group members each introduced themselves and identified an early win or "low hanging fruit" for the first phase of work on the data system. Some of the common ideas that were shared include:

- establishing linkages between existing K-12 and postsecondary data, with several participants also prioritizing inclusion of early care, financial aid, and employment data
- providing information that compares results based on student characteristics, particularly race and ethnicity
- understanding the points at which students leave the education system and the factors that contribute to their departure
- creating a strong governance process that opens up access to data and ensures practitioners, students, and families benefit as well as policymakers and researchers

Identifying a possible scope for the first phase of development

The facilitation team introduced five “use cases” — examples of information that the partner entities hoped the data system might produce. Focusing on use cases is part of a user-centered design process that places emphasis on tangible products that a data system could produce, rather than beginning with policies used to construct the data system. Advisory group members were asked to rank the five options in order of priority and to suggest alternative use cases.

Advisory group members noted that many of the use cases were not mutually exclusive and could be constructed from the same underlying data set. They inquired about ways to distinguish the options and requested that the use cases be systematically categorized to facilitate comparisons. The facilitation team suggested that the members focus on the following factors:

- how many data points get exchanged
- the political and legal complexity of the data exchange
- the partner entities that need to provide data
- who benefits from the information produced

After a preliminary discussion of the five use cases, advisory group members indicated that they would prefer to combine elements from the use cases and craft a more nuanced recommendation for the Workgroup.

When advisory group members completed the ranking exercise, it demonstrated an underlying consensus about which elements were most important. They prioritized using information to better understand student progression from early care to postsecondary education and into the workforce, with a focus on identifying factors that contribute to or inhibit that progress. The data system should include information on student enrollment, attendance, individual courses taken and grades in each course, programs participated in, financial aid, supports/services received, completion, employment, and earnings. Information should be available on specific groups of students, such as by location (institution, district, region, statewide) or characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status). Finally, the data system should foster continuous improvement and provide information that is of value to practitioners, decisionmakers, and the public, rather than focus exclusively on accountability questions.

Key considerations for the first phase of development

The group discussed the importance of making data available to parties beyond the partner entities and policymakers. For example:

- access must be guaranteed for institutional researchers, research organizations, and policymakers to ensure that more people understand student pathways and outcomes
- dashboard data and reports should be provided to the public in a manner that makes information easy to understand and support should be offered to help members of the public identify actions they can take with the information provided
- technical assistance is needed to help educators become better users of data, including working with intermediaries who can support data use

In discussing data access, the group noted that various levels should be provided to meet the needs of different users, such as:

- user-friendly dashboards that help the general public understand critical issues about students' progress through education to the workforce
- a data mart that allows users to run reports that answer common questions and download aggregate results (with a requirement that data are only shared for groups large enough to ensure that individuals cannot be identified within the results)
- a data request process that allows research inquiries to be evaluated and de-identified individual records to be provided to authorized users under clearly articulated conditions
- research partnerships that enable approved institutions to conduct deeper analyses of data sets under strict privacy protocols
- over time, develop tools that can support local interventions, such as ways to identify whether students are on track for college based on indicators that cross K-12 and postsecondary data sets

When examining the specific information that would be included in a state data system, group members recommended that:

- early care data sets should be evaluated to determine which information is most feasible to include, with an initial focus on identifying readily available data and specifying the types of information that would be most valuable for subsequent data products (ideally in partnership with efforts already underway to develop an early childhood integrated data system)
- employment and financial aid information should be included as part of the first phase of development
- attention needs to be paid to strengthening the quality of the source information to ensure that conclusions are not drawn on flawed data
- a review should be conducted regarding whether specific data elements should be excluded from the data set or have greater restrictions because they might be used inappropriately, such as K-12 disciplinary data
- further discussion is needed on how to construct metrics being used for analyses, such as when metrics should be pre-determined (such as in dashboards and data marts) and when they need to be generated in a tailored fashion from source data elements (such as for research purposes)

When the group considered how the data might be structured, some members suggested that information should be available in a centralized system that would ensure information could be easily provided as research questions are identified.

Finally, members of the group flagged the importance of developing governance policies, including:

- ensuring that information is provided within the context of continuous improvement, rather than using narrow or punitive accountability frameworks
- spelling out policy priorities to ensure that decisions related to early use cases don't preclude other valuable purposes the data system could serve over time
- establishing goals for the data system with specific measures that can be used to determine whether the data system is meeting those goals
- considering guardrails for data use, such as guaranteeing that it will not be used to evaluate teachers
- establishing rules for how public requests for information will be handled

Research Agenda Questions

In addition to the issues discussed in the meeting, advisory group members had the opportunity to contribute priority questions for the six policy topics articulated in the California Cradle-to-Career Data System Act. The advisory group submitted the following items through a survey, following the meeting.

Note: Across all policy areas, advisory group members focused on the importance of providing information on different types of students, particularly by race/ethnicity, family income, and first-generation status. In addition, analyses should be provided by education institution and by region. Finally, equity analyses should examine both access and success.

Impact of early care

- Which students have access to early education opportunities and what types of programs do they participate in?
- How do characteristics of early care impact children's academic outcomes, such as the quality of the program and the qualifications of early care staff?
- How does early education relate to later outcomes such as kindergarten readiness and literacy and numeracy in grade 3?
- Are children in early care also participating in social and health services and what impact does this have on kindergarten entry and later academic outcomes?
- Do early education assessments and services make a difference in English language learner reclassification rates?
- How do student groups that participated in early education transition within and across systems, such as patterns in course-taking, program of study, college completion, and employment?

Impact of primary school interventions

- Do students who benefited from specific investments—such as access to STEM or arts curriculum, participation in afterschool programs, or learning about college while in primary school—have similar college preparation, college enrollment and success, and employment outcomes?
- How have large reform efforts, such as changes in funding and admissions policies, impacted college preparation, college enrollment and success, and employment outcomes?
- How does teacher preparation affect college and employment outcomes?

College readiness

- What types of academic and student support programs do students participate in?
- To what extent are students meeting academic requirements needed for admission at CSU and UC institutions, such as completing a-g requirements and attaining required grade point averages?
- How many students are eligible for CSU and UC but do not apply?
- What factors are most predictive of being prepared for college, particularly related to course-taking patterns and grades? Are current college and career readiness indicators predictive?

- Which institutions are most effective at preparing students for college, as demonstrated by attainment of postsecondary persistence and completion milestones?

Post-transfer outcomes

- How long were students enrolled in two-year colleges before they transferred? How long were they enrolled in a four-year institution before earning a bachelor's degree?
- How does total time to a bachelor's degree compare between students who enrolled directly into a four-year institution versus those who transferred from a two-year institution?
- What types of financial aid did transfer students apply for and receive after they transferred?
- What types of classes do students take after they transfer and do they succeed in these classes?
- What is the most effective way to reduce time to degree and rate of completion for the largest number of students?
- What impact have associate degrees for transfer had on bachelor's degree attainment and what factors contribute to stronger outcomes?
- Have intersegmental efforts to boost transfer and completion been successful?

Impact of financial aid

- What is the total cost of college, including non-tuition costs, by institution and program?
- What types of aid are students eligible for and do they both apply for and receive it?
- If students are denied aid, do they still go to college?
- What types of colleges do aid recipients attend, do they attain postsecondary milestones, and do they complete a degree? How does this compare to students who did not receive financial aid?
- To what extent does financial aid impact post-college earnings at specific ages?
- How does education attainment (including alternative credentials like apprenticeship) affect earnings?
- Do student who received different types of financial assistance have different outcomes?
- What would the total cost be to fund all unmet financial need and what return on investment would this provide for California?

Employment outcomes

- How many students are employed after they graduate and how much money do they earn at various intervals after they complete college?
- Are students employed in their field of study?
- How do employment and earnings outcomes vary by types of support received, completion status, major, and level of education attainment?
- How much debt do students accrue and how does this compare to earnings?