

Community Engagement Subcommittee Meeting Summary

February 11, 2021

This document provides a summary of key points that emerged over the course of the meeting. More information about the meeting, including materials, the PowerPoint, and a meeting recording are available at <https://cadatasystem.wested.org/meeting-information/community-engagement-subcommittee>.

The February 2021 meeting had the following goals:

- Share effective practices for communicating about data systems to a wide range of stakeholders
- Determine how to reach specific personas, key messages for these populations, and ideal messengers
- Identify priority communications during the planning period and once the data system is launched

The following representatives attended the meeting:

California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), Steven Sterling Mitchell
California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI), Maya Ramos Clayton
California EDGE Coalition, Anna Alvarado
California School Information Services, Amy Fong
California State Board of Education, Zaid Fattah, (Monte Vista High School)
California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Lea Darrah
Californians Together, Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez and Manuel Buenrostro
Concordia University Irvine, Lizz Mishreki
Del Norte County Office of Education, Jeff Harris
Fresno Unified School District, Heather Allen, Executive Director
High Tech High Graduate School of Education, Ben Daley
Jobs for the Future, Mara Lockowandt
Moreno Valley Unified School District, Esperanza Arce
NAACP Pomona Valley Branch, Jeanette Ellis Royston
North Orange County Chamber of Commerce, Theresa Harvey
Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), Patricia E. Chavez and Lucero Chavez
San Bernardino City Unified School District, Rose Gonzalez
San Diego State University, Center for Equity and Postsecondary Attainment, Lauren Owen
Student Senate for California Community Colleges, Gerardo Chavez
University of California Office of the President, Jenna Allen
Vista Murrieta High School, Eric Peterson
Washington Unified School District Board of Trustees, Jackie Wong

Effective Practices for Communications

Liv Jacobson from Collaborative Communications provided an overview of effective communications practices, including key communications elements, the purpose of messages, and strategies for getting messages out (note: this presentation is available with the meeting materials).

The group discussed the need to reach populations who do not have easy access to the internet and the value of connecting with the communication departments within K-12 school districts.

Maura Keane of Collaborative Communications shared findings from an effort to test effective messaging about longitudinal data systems (note: this report is included with the meeting materials).

Several members of the subcommittee emphasized that in addition to clarifying the value of the data system for various audiences, it will be important to work with communities to understand and use the information provided.

Another noted that it will be important to manage expectations. It is valuable to explain, clearly and simply, which features will be available and how they can be used in a practical manner to do one's job or attain a specific goal. For these communications, pay attention to how new tools relate to common tasks and to data tools that each type of user is currently using. When gathering information about desired features, it is important not to leave intended users with the impression that new aspects will become available immediately.

The group discussed how the personas being developed by subcommittee members, which describe various types of users, can be helpful in thinking through use cases. One participant suggested tapping into what we know about people who use existing data systems, like the California Department of Education's Dataquest.

Rigel Massaro of the State Board of Education and formerly with Public Advocates, shared her experiences communicating the types of information that will be available in the Cradle-to-Career Data System to a wide range of communities. She stressed the importance of presenting information in a simple and clear manner and helping to contextualize it, such as through comparison data and by disaggregating outcomes for various types of students. She also noted the value of using social media, short videos, and spokespeople; translating materials into multiple languages; and providing assistance in multiple formats when explaining how to use data.

The group reflected on the difference between interesting data and information that is truly actionable for the user. This requires that attention be focused on what types of information could be actionable for each intended user group.

[Issues to Address in Cradle-to-Career Data System Communications](#)

Kathy Booth of WestEd shared some of the concerns that were raised during a community outreach campaign about the Cradle-to-Career Data System, including:

- People won't know the data system exists
- Information will be too old to be useful
- Quality of the data will be problematic
- There will not be sufficient data privacy and security, particularly for vulnerable populations
- Data will be used to blame some populations for their outcomes
- The data request process will be too difficult to navigate

The group discussed these concerns and developed several recommendations.

Communication messages

- Provide information on what the data system is, why this is useful for an immediate need, and where to get information to support that action
- Tailor information to actions that each user type would take
- Provide visual examples of the available information and its potential use
- Utilize testimonials with real-life examples of how people are using the information provided by the data tools
- Use language that is simple enough that a middle school student should be able to understand what they could learn and what they should do
- Avoid using the term “data” when dealing with families, as it can seem overwhelming or confusing, particularly given that there are other data systems
- Use terms like “guidance” and “customizable”
- Only alert people about the data tools that are useful for them, rather than telling everyone about the entire system
- In cases where a constituency might use multiple data tools, clarify when to use each one (particularly given that terms like “analytical” and “operational” are confusing)
- Craft communications for cases where the Cradle-to-Career Data System will overlap with existing tools
- Conduct frequent outreach that reminds people of the value of coming back to the data tools
- Use focus groups to refine ideas generated in this subcommittee

Communication vehicles and messengers

- Leverage existing information outlets like ethnic media
- Recruit families to share information with each other
- Ensure school districts know about the tools

Fostering data use

- Create short, guided hands-on-tutorials
- Put together trainings on how to pair information from CaliforniaColleges.edu with dashboard information found on resources like Dataquest
- Ensure the data tools are available in Spanish
- Make information available through mobile-friendly apps

Privacy and security

- Let people know that they can opt out of having their information included in the Cradle-to-Career Data System (although this does not allow individuals to opt out of the underlying agency data set)
- Clarify that this information is already held by state agencies
- Showing users how the information is displayed, explain where the information goes, and clarify how this exchange of information helps them reach their personal goals such as applying for college and financial aid

Data quality

- Stress the integrity and neutrality of the data system

Key Messages for Specific Audiences

Subcommittee members worked in small groups to identify key messages, communication strategies, and messengers for specific persona types.

Analyzers

For policy makers, it will be important to keep messages simple and short. They will need to understand what the analytical tools do and do not include, and what to expect when they access these tools. It will be important to alert them that the tools will allow them to compare outcomes and identify opportunities for innovation. Email is an effective outreach mechanism, particularly from trusted messengers within government such as the Governor's Office and the Legislative Analyst's Office. They will also look to think tanks and research organizations and online news sources.

Advocacy organizations are more likely to focus on disaggregation capabilities and the ability to see results for specific regions and populations. They will need to know how they can link data points to individual stories and work with other organizations to form a coherent narrative about their community. Messaging should clarify how the data tools will support work to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes. They will be receptive to information from other advocacy organizations.

Researchers will also be focused on comparisons and prefer access to the query builder or individual-level information rather than the dashboards. They will need to know what steps they need to take to quickly access the information they need, where to find information about others doing similar research, and details on how other analyses have been constructed.

Organizations/Institutions

Institutional leadership will need to understand the credibility and validity of the information in the data system. They will benefit from information on the source of the data, as well as how this data system relates to other data systems, with an emphasis on creating a one-stop shop for longer-term information. Providing teasers of available information that is not available elsewhere will help to make this case.

Institutional leadership will need to be given a clear value proposition for using the data system, such as helping clarify solutions to complex problems and identifying bright spots. This information will be more valuable if it is paired with tools that help institutional leadership grapple with issues and opportunities that are newly clarified by linked data or contradict information they have worked with in the past.

The data system should include a library of templates for how to present information in specific contexts—such clarifying items to feature at school board meetings, leveraging data for funding proposals, using information to strengthen college and career readiness efforts, and documenting the return on investment in education.

Institutional leadership are most likely to trust their peers, such as professional associations and people from similar entities, as well as the partners that they frequently collaborate with, such as community organizations and employers. Institutional researchers will be key allies in helping to interpret information found in the data system.

Effective communication methods include providing information at network meetings, through funders, via social media, and ensuring examples are cited in newsletters, journals, and Governor's Office press releases.

The group recommended adding a persona for a school board member to clarify this important leadership position.

Practitioners

This group will be most likely to use the operational tools and would benefit from information compiled by others that digests relevant data points found in the analytical tools. But communications should take into account that sometimes counselors and teachers are expected to play the role of institutional researchers and so they might want to know about the analytical tools as well.

For counselors, emphasis should be placed on the specific features of CaliforniaColleges.edu and eTranscript California and how these tools can reduce paperwork and free up time to provide customized support to students.

For counselors and teachers, guidance should be provided on how to use the information from the operational tools when communicating with students and their families. Specific examples should be given about how to use the information in parent groups, financial aid workshops, and to advocate for more resources.

Counselors and teachers will also need to understand how information that is gleaned from the linked data set may impact expectations for their work or shape new accountability frameworks.

The best messengers for counselors and teachers will be leadership at the district and school level, in the context of how they are concretely supposed to use the new information. These ideas can be reinforced through communication from industry associations and postsecondary partners. Information on how to use Cradle-to-Career data tools should also be integrated into teacher preparation programs.

Individuals

For individuals making decisions about college and career—and the family members who support them—it will be important to reach out repeatedly over time and indicate specific actions that they need to take.

Communications should clarify that they will be able to access guidance about their options and to get plain-language explanations of categories that may be unfamiliar, such as the differences between two-year and four-year colleges or between public and private institutions.

Messages should note that accessing the tools can help evaluate the return on investment for specific options, such as the amount of debt they may incur relative to the earnings they can expect to make.

It would be useful to leverage testimonials and provide information on the experiences and outcomes of people similar to the intended audiences. Short videos and real-time support would help to address the likelihood that individuals will access data tools on their own.

Communication Timeframes

The subcommittee discussed information that should be shared with the field over the spring, versus in the first year of the data system.

Near Term Communications

- Make sure that school districts know about the plan to make CaliforniaColleges.edu available across the state as they weigh how to allocate resources and respond to vendor information

- K-12 superintendents and school leaders are effective messengers for education institutions and practitioners, and networks like professional associations and county offices would help to reach these individuals
- Parents are attuned to questions of the long-term impact of the pandemic and so will be more likely to be interested in the data system—therefore messages should go out to them in near term while engagement is high
- To reach families and build support, leverage school e-blasts, community based organizations, and social media

Communications in the Next Fiscal Year

- Focus on the entities that are providing data and emphasize the value of their participation in the data system to constituencies within those systems
- Identify specific calls to action, such as participating in the user-centered design process for the dashboards and query builder tool
- Leverage the energy of the back-to-school timeframe to alert people about information from the data system and how parents can use this information to stay connected with their kids and understand future opportunities
- Create one-minute, focused videos for that explain how to use the data tools and highlight bright spots made visible through the tools
- Clarify how information from the data system could inform local control action planning
- Spell out how information from the data tool can inform economic recovery efforts, such as clarifying that adults can use [CaliforniaColleges.edu](https://www.californiaColleges.edu), in addition to teenagers