

Texas Data Advisory Group

Making P20W Data Work for Texas Learners

September 1, 2020

The Honorable Chris Turner, Chairman
House Higher Education Committee

Via Email: julie.young_HC@house.texas.gov

Dear Chairman Turner:

Thank you for the invitation to provide information responsive to Interim Charge 3. By way of introduction, our Advisory Group is composed of P20W practitioners and community-based allies who share an interest in improving the timeliness, accuracy, and utility of linked P20W data.

The information below specifically addresses Question Nos. 6 and 8:

Question No. 6: What is needed in order to identify and address gaps in existing data collection methods?

Question No. 8: What changes, if any, are needed to align data collection between the THECB, TWC and TEA in order to collect consistent metrics?

We appreciate the committee's focus on gaps in data and the need to improve alignment across the P20W continuum. It will be very difficult to achieve our state's 60x30 goals unless education and workforce agencies have the information needed to continually improve pathways and students have the information they need to make timely and well-informed decisions.

We have identified three categories of opportunities to improve current collections and use: (1) governance structures and practices; (2) state and local staff capacity; and (3) secure access to timely and complete information needed for smart decision making.

We lead with observations and suggestions related to data governance, followed by those focused on staff capacity, because we think that getting the right structures, policies, practices, and people in place will lay the groundwork for access to the complete and timely information decision makers need.

I. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES

The term data “governance” describes a systematic approach to data collection and use that is informed by a comprehensive group of stakeholders and designed to provide clear standards and processes, consistent metrics, minimize redundancy, and maximize the accuracy and value of each submission. Our experiences with state data collection and management processes are summarized below and suggest that greater attention to both *intra* and *inter*-agency data governance structures, policies, and practices is warranted.

A. Increase Stakeholder Input into Data Collection Policies and Practices

Challenge: Field-based users (e.g., school district, college, and local workforce agency staff) are not always sufficiently engaged in development of state data policies and practices. This challenge is particularly acute with respect to data users outside a given sector, e.g., higher education users of workforce data.

Consequence: This disconnect undermines the efficiency of data collections and the utility of data collected.

B. Improve Clarity and Standardization of Data Definitions

Challenge: Definitions of data elements are in some instances too vague or inconsistent across TEA, THECB, and TWC.

Consequence: Lack of standardization impedes local information-sharing needed to effectively support progress of students and adult learners.

C. Encourage Common Frameworks for Confidentiality, Security, and Privacy

Challenge: Interpretations and applications of FERPA vary widely across state and local agencies.

Consequence: Inconsistent interpretations of requirements can make even the most straightforward sharing of information time-consuming and expensive.

II. STATE AND LOCAL DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYTIC CAPACITY

State and local staff capacity has historically been stretched thin, hampering proactive data analysis and use.

A. Invest in state and local staff capacity for strategic data analysis and use.

Challenge: State and local agency data management and analytic staff capacity are typically consumed by compliance-related activities.

Consequence: Data are not converted to actionable insights that can improve system performance and thereby improve student and adult learner success.

B. Support talent solutions that address needs of small and rural institutions, perhaps through collaborations that enable economies of scale.

Challenge: Small and rural institutions find it very difficult to attract and afford analytic talent.

Consequence: Students attending small and rural institutions don't get the same benefits from data-informed pathways and supports as students attending larger, better-resourced institutions.

C. Support training in data governance, management and use across P20W sectors.

Challenge: Many staff serving in data-related roles, especially in smaller institutions, are "utility players" who do not have specialized knowledge in recording, managing and supporting use of data.

Consequence: Lack of training contributes to inaccurate or missing data, inefficiencies, and under-utilization of data that could improve system performance.

III. ACCESS TO COMPLETE AND TIMELY INFORMATION

A. Access: Design state data resources from users' perspective.

Challenge: Public state data resources are too often fragmented or buried (e.g., slices of data across myriad websites or buried within a website).

Consequence: The public does not have visibility into the universe of data available to inform pathway decisions.

B. Access: Create more avenues for analysts to securely access linked P20W information.

Challenge: Anonymized, linked P20W data are only available – at significant expense-- for use in narrowly defined research projects through one of the three education research centers with very limited staff capacity. Publicly available, linked data published through TPEIR are only available in a few canned reports and are not disaggregated by student group.

Consequence: It is very difficult for local institutions to access even anonymized, disaggregated information about the postsecondary or workforce progress of students and adult learners after they graduate or leave for other reasons. Therefore, this information is not often used as part of a feedback loop to improve system performance.

C. Completeness: Make critical data elements currently collected more readily and securely accessible to researchers and decision makers.

Challenge: The following data points are collected by state P20W agencies or otherwise available to those agencies through data-sharing agreements with other entities, yet remain very difficult for researchers and stakeholders to access in appropriate anonymized or aggregate forms: SAT and ACT scores, Advanced Placement Course enrollment and scores, grade point averages, military enlistment, household data.

Consequence: Researchers and decision makers do not have the full sets of information needed to accurately evaluate and improve programs and practices

D. Completeness: Consider options for collecting certain new workforce data elements.

Challenge: Neither occupation code (only industry codes are collected) nor number of hours worked in relation to salary is currently collected by state P20W agencies.

Consequence: K-12 and higher education institutions are unable to accurately determine the impact of the preparation they provide and improve as needed. Although a college may know, for instance, that a graduate with an accounting degree is employed in the healthcare industry, it is unable to determine whether the graduate is in an accounting role or some other unrelated role. As another example, a school district may access information showing the wages of a graduate, but not whether the wage was earned over 20 or 40 hours.

E. Timeliness: Consider options for supporting secure, compliant, near-real-time local data sharing arrangements.

Challenge: Much of the cross-sector information needed for timely local decision making is not collected by the state because it is not used for state funding,

performance accountability, or compliance monitoring purposes. Therefore, because of the difficulty to establish data sharing agreements and other complications, the data often remain in local silos.

Consequence: Critical Information that could support the success of students and adult learners is not put to use.

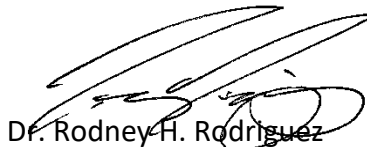
Thank you again for the opportunity to share the information above. We would be happy to answer any questions or provide any additional information that would be helpful to the committee's work.

Sincerely,



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