VALUABLE INSIGHTS ON HOW TENNESSEE AND KENTUCKY CONNECT EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DATA

Based on the State Higher Education Executives Officers Association (SHEEO's) Strong Foundations survey in 2020[17]:

» **43 states** currently linked or planned to link postsecondary data to workforce data
» **34 states** were able to access both K-12 and Workforce data elements

The collection and use of robust longitudinal education and workforce data can help agencies address the disparities in opportunities that influence educational and economic outcomes for students. High-quality information can help policymakers and other stakeholders more effectively direct resources and improve public policies to increase educational attainment, and close equity gaps by race and by income.

Since 2005, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded grants through the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program to help states collect and analyze P-20 and workforce data.[1] Since its inception, 49 states have received at least one SLDS grant.[2] However, not all states link their P-12, postsecondary, and workforce data sets. Further, the types of data collected and the linkages between data differ by state, limiting the utility and effectiveness of these systems in driving decisions and change as the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and the twin economic and health crises it created.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the labor market across the country, triggering a significant rise in unemployment and bringing inequities in the labor market into sharper focus.[3] While many office workers were able to transition to remote work, those who held jobs that could not be performed remotely or were not financially sustainable without customers or other key inputs experienced high levels of unemployment. Young Black and Latino workers ages 18 to 24, particularly, experienced high rates of unemployment throughout the pandemic.[4]

Additionally, individuals with a high school diploma but no college degrees decreased participation in the labor force over the course of the pandemic.[5]

In higher education, enrollment levels dropped 20 percent and remained significantly below pre-pandemic levels for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students (BIPOC) and students from low-income backgrounds.[6] Given the underlying racial and social inequities already embedded in our labor market, the disparate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic could pose a long-term challenge for efforts to reduce poverty and close employment outcome gaps by race and income.

As labor force recoveries vary across the country, states continue to track workforce and employment outcomes as critical measures of well-being. Robust labor market data that is connected to educational data can provide policymakers with rich information that can be used to understand and improve the impacts of educational programs, systems, and institutions that prepare citizens for entering the workforce.

IN HIGHER EDUCATION, ENROLLMENT LEVELS DROPPED 20 PERCENT AND REMAINED SIGNIFICANTLY BELOW PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR STUDENTS (BIPOC) AND STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS.

STATE EXAMPLES

Two states that stand out for utilizing their data systems to help design effective programs and policies to better serve their students and support employment growth are Kentucky and Tennessee. These states offer key lessons in how to bring together data from education and the workforce to inform decisions to support and improve educational and workforce programs and services. To learn more about how they developed their data systems to improve educational system outcomes to benefit workers and employers, TICAS spoke with experts from each state about their use of data systems to keep programs and institutions and other state entities accountable for reaching their goals and ensure college graduates have pathways to in-demand industries upon graduating.

KENTUCKY

The Kentucky Longitudinal Data System (KLDS) facilitates the integration of data to inform decision-making at their state and local policymaking levels.[7] KLDS links education and employment records to ensure colleges are meeting the needs of Kentucky's labor force and students are entering the workforce earning a reasonable wage. KLDS data also allows policymakers to understand how and what benefits transpire from their education and training programs when looking at employment outcomes.
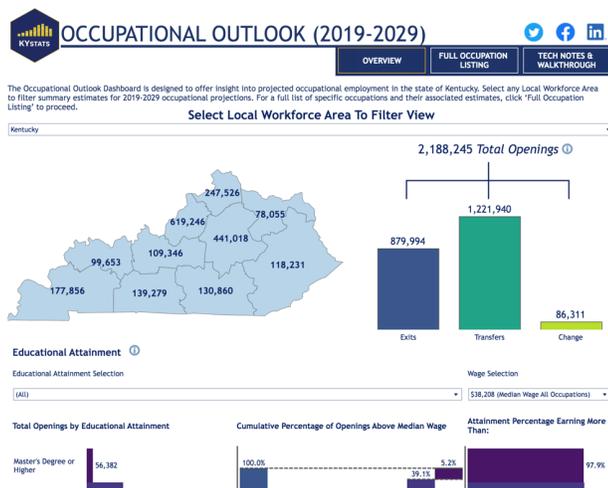
Source: https://kystats.ky.gov/Reports/Tableau/2022_OCC

KEY PRACTICES

» In 2012, the Kentucky Center for Statistics (also known as KYSTATS) was created through executive order and ratified into law in 2013, with the objective to expand upon the work of the Kentucky P-20 Data Collaborative which was originally developed in 2009. Per legislation, KYSTATS is responsible for maintaining the KLDS and developing reports and research to better inform the Commonwealth. Five different agencies[8] are required to annually submit data on K-12 education, postsecondary education, financial aid, and workforce.[9]

   ○ The Bureau of Labor Statistics is housed within KYSTATS and while not directly connected to individual level records, it supplements important data presented alongside different KYSTATS reports.[10]

» As a research facility, KYSTATS is intentional about collecting the data needed to find the answers to specific research questions from its partnering agencies to inform policy. To answer some of those questions, KYSTATS is honing in on very specific and critical transition points for students – e.g., when they are coming in and out of education and the workforce-- and contextualizing this data with key geographic, demographic, and income information.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Understand the Stakeholders' Needs – It is important for KYSTATS to provide value back to the agencies that are providing the data as well as incorporate the feedback of end-users to ensure KYSTATS' researchers are answering key questions and producing resources with the purpose of informing recommendations and solutions. Conversations with agency staff should address what questions they most would like to answer, which data elements are most important, and what supports are needed to build capacity for accessing and analyzing collected data. Additionally, using data-visualization software such as Tableau to ensure data is presented in a user-friendly way can maximize impact.

TENNESSEE

The State of Tennessee developed the P20 Connect TN Data system that connects data to provide a 360-degree view of development from K-12 education, higher education, and workforce development.[11] Currently, the P20 Connect TN data system is transitioning to Data Analytics for Transparency and Accountability, or 'TN DATA'. The new system will modernize the technical infrastructure and expand the use of evidence across state government by focusing on cross-agency priority areas such as workforce development, criminal justice, and substance abuse and overdose.[12]

A useful and interactive tool for stakeholders is Tennesse's program inventory tool which compiles rigorous evidence of services and state-funded programs' outcomes:

Source: https://www.tn.gov/finance/oei/program-inventory.html
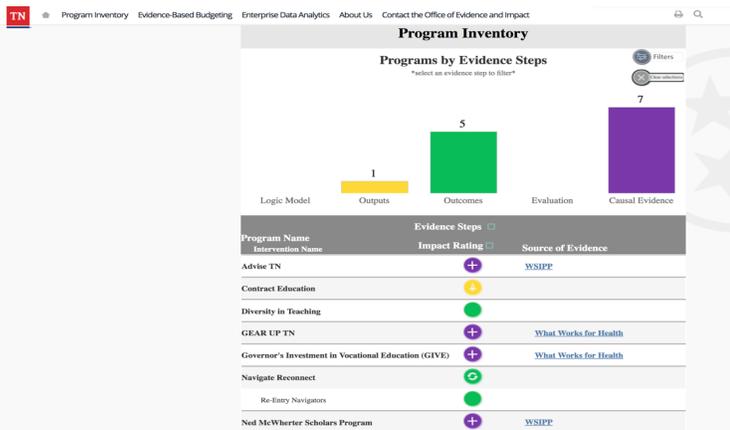
KEY PRACTICES

» A major strength of Tennessee's data system is the variety of contributing partners[13], resulting in a great amount of buy-in from agencies through partnerships that have been fostered through engagement initiatives and codified through various Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). Agencies leverage Tennessee's integrated data in different reports, such as the Supply and Demand Report, which highlights how Tennessee's K-12 and higher education system is preparing students for in-demand occupations.[14]

» Tennessee has a strong integrated centralized data system available for researchers that can be accessed through a well thought out research and governance strategy process to answer questions that improve state policies and program and contribute to the broader literature.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Data Accessibility – Since inheriting Tennessee's data system from the Boyd Center at the University of Tennessee, researchers learned that the metadata was not accessible for everyone. Their current plans are to leverage cloud capabilities to democratize the access to evidence by pursuing high-priority use cases that inform state program leaders, while continuing its long tradition of accessible data for researchers in a secure environment. This will also require the intentional development of high-quality, well-documented datasets, dashboards, and reports that are tailored for different consumer groups seeking access to improve the lives of Tennesseans.

CONCLUSION:

It is critical that all states continue to build out data systems that effectively integrate workforce data to provide policymakers and other stakeholders with reliable information to explore student outcomes and address students' needs to successfully navigate education and workforce systems. According to a State Higher Education Executives Officers Association (SHEEO)'s Strong Foundations survey from 2020, only 43 states linked or planned to link postsecondary data to workforce data and 34 states were able to access both K-12 and Workforce data elements.[15] The federal government and state leaders must prioritize and continue to provide funding for stronger incentives and requirements for SDLS. Adequate funding for states to conduct equity-centered data collection and analysis is fundamental in any future federal-state partnership to fund public colleges.[16]

ENDNOTES

1. National Center for Education Statistics. 2022. "Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program." https://bit.ly/3XNp4MQ

2. The average FY 2019 award amount is $3.3 million; National Center for Education Statistics. 2022. "Information Related to FY19 Grants." https://bit.ly/3Up2ozt

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7. Kentucky Center for Statistics. 2022. "KYSTATS History." https://bit.ly/3AXre2A

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9. "KYSTATS History." https://bit.ly/3AXre2A

10. Kentucky Center for Statistics. 2022. "KYSTATS Labor Market Information." https://bit.ly/3VK4hl2

11. Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA). 2022. "Data Collection." https://bit.ly/3FhJKVP

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14. Tennessee Higher Education Commission. (2022). "Supply and Demand Report." https://bit.ly/3UhNmM0

15. SHEEO. (2022). "Strong Foundations Survey." https://bit.ly/3VySPPA

16. TICAS. (2021). "Data for Equity: Closing Racial and Economic Gaps through a Federal-State Partnership." https://bit.ly/3FisaRP

17. SHEEO. (2022). "Strong Foundations Survey." https://bit.ly/3VySPPA