Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee, Subcommittee 1 on Education

Richard Roth, Chair

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Statewide Longitudinal Data System
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Good morning, Chair Roth, Senator Leyva, and Senator Morrell. Thank you very much for having me. My name is Valerie Lundy-Wagner and I am the Senior Research Analyst for California Competes: Higher Education for a Strong Economy. California Competes was established in 2010 recognizing that higher education serves as both an antidote and vaccine to income inequality. We are an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit project that focuses on making the economic and equity-driven case for increasing degree attainment here in California.

To significantly increase the number of Californians with a postsecondary degree or certificate, our state needs a stronger grasp of not only students' experiences in higher education, but also their experiences with early education, K-12, and the workforce. We're excited for California to catch up with the progress other states have made by more systematically integrating data to better serve policy-makers, the public, and students—both youth and adults.

I'll start by sharing what an education and workforce, or P-Workforce, data system should do in California and then why one is needed. I'll also share our most recent policy recommendations for developing such a system. Finally, I'll close by describing what we believe are critical near-term implementation steps that can set the state on a path for effectiveness, cost savings, and ultimately, more individual and shared prosperity.

A P-Workforce data system for California should:

1. **Drive and support** state-level education and economic goals.
2. **Connect** education and workforce data systems at the individual-level.
3. **Serve** as the primary repository for up-to-date and historical education and workforce data.
4. **Overcome** historical independence challenges that limit the state's ability to use existing data.

There are a few widely agreed upon considerations that emphasize why the state's current data collection and reporting methods are inadequate.

First, the lack of coordination across the current data landscape is a key issue for our state. As detailed in your agenda for this hearing, California's public education entities—K-12, the California Community Colleges (CCC), California State University (CSU), and the University of California (UC)—maintain their own data systems. Private schools and colleges maintain their data separately, as does the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) which houses its data on financial aid. In addition, the Employment Development Department houses data on employment and wages. While each entity independently holds rich data, this segmented approach limits understanding of how the education and workforce systems complement one another, reducing policy-makers' ability to make fact-based decisions, and preventing students from being informed consumers.

Second, the capacity and costs required to connect these siloed data are Herculean. The state spends tens of millions each year directly and indirectly supporting myriad data systems, dashboards, and portals – only some of which are presented in today's agenda.

My third point centers on equity. It's a fact that California has vulnerable populations and less vulnerable populations. The state needs data on where students and workers are excelling, and which investments can alleviate struggles and maximize success. The absence of an independent data system prevents comprehensive understanding of opportunity, progress monitoring, and informed decision-making.

In fact, the state's major investments in cross-sector or cross-segment collaboration are hampered by the lack of a P-Workforce data system. In a previous role, I led research to understand implementation of the Department of Education's Career Pathways Trust and the Community College Chancellor's Strong Workforce Program. Each region considered developing

its own data system, and all had common struggles, such as which data systems were the best for understanding regional pathways?, who had access to those data?, and of those with access, who also had capacity to interpret the data? Their progress varied based on resources, and that alone should not determine how leaders or individuals are able to use information. A P-Workforce data system could help democratize how data are accessed and used by various stakeholders, including students.

So, given this information, where does the state go from here? First and foremost, the state must decide on the fundamentals.

- What will this P-Workforce data system be used for?
- How will the state look different as a result of getting this system?
- Which sectors should be involved?
- Who would be consumers of the data system?

The next step is to research data policies and practices outside of California. The state has an opportunity to assess how policy has been used to frame, plan, and implement P-Workforce data systems across the nation. I've provided you with a handout,[1] Attachment 1, that summarizes this in three other states. Understanding the work of other states and importantly, how that work can or cannot be applied to our policy context is critical.

This brings us to the next recommendation: the state should plan to develop a single, central repository for data. The various data systems, portals, and dashboards available to students, workers, researchers, and leaders throughout the state are mind-boggling. A centralized repository for data would more equitably provide stakeholders with access to consistent and comprehensive information. It would also help level the playing field and reduce the adverse effects of "zip code destiny" for Californians.

Finally, the question of where a centralized P-Workforce data system should be housed is closely linked to the issue of coordination. To gain the trust and buy-in of all participants, the state must store the data in a way that is politically neutral, secure, and assures a balance of power in alignment with state goals. We are glad other policy conversations are underway to establish an independent agency that could oversee data as its main charge.

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[1] Attachment 1 contains a table summarizing how Maryland, Kentucky and Washington state have implemented P-Workforce data systems.

In closing, I'd like to suggest what we believe are critical near-term implementation steps.

- The state should map existing data infrastructure: identifying which systems are in use, where there are gaps, and what scaling up statewide means. Mapping can clarify needs and help ensure that the data system goals are met.
- The state should identify the data and metrics needed to meet system goals.
- The state must also determine who will comprise the committee charged with planning and launching the data system. Several entities want to and probably should have a voice, yet independence is key to ensuring a student-centered approach.
- Finally, the state should consider more than one prototype of a P-Workforce system. They should address how data would flow from the local to state-level and back, identify infrastructure to connect to other state agency data, and delineate costs.

It is an exciting time to consider the potential for a P-Workforce data system. We are eager to support your efforts to develop such a system, and we offer our expertise as you refine a strategy that more equitably expands opportunities for California residents as well as for our state's broader economy.