Strengthening North Carolina's Longitudinal Data System (NCLDS)
Progress Update
The Vision and Recommendations from the Education Cabinet LDS Work Group

Overview

The North Carolina Longitudinal Data System (NCLDS) is authorized under Chapter 116E of the NC General Statutes. By statute, the NCLDS is to contain individual-level student data and workforce data from all levels of education and the State's workforce system. The NCLDS must have the capability to do the following:

- Facilitate and enable the exchange of student data among agencies and institutions;
- Generate timely and accurate information about student performance that can be used to improve the State's education systems and guide decisions makers at all levels;
- Facilitate and enable linkage of student data and workforce data;
- Serve as a data broker for education and workforce data maintained by:
    - Department of Public Instruction (DPI)
    - Local boards of education, local school administrative units, and charter schools
    - University of North Carolina System (UNCS)
    - North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS)
    - North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), Inc. and private colleges and universities
    - Department of Commerce (DOC), Division of Employment Security (DES)
    - Department of Revenue (DOR)
    - Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
    - Department of Labor (DOL)

The statute states that the NCLDS shall be located administratively within the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), and that the NC Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC) is also charged with specific responsibilities including:

- facilitating the drafting and adoption of rules;
- providing general oversight and direction to the system;
- approving the annual budget; and
- establishing an advisory committee on data quality as well as a phased plan that outlines the establishment and operation of the system.

Under the parameters set out in statute and based on input from the education and workforce data partners, the Education Cabinet NCLDS Work Group (Work Group) in April 2019 recommended that the NCLDS be defined and set up as a "system of systems." The three existing longitudinal data efforts described below provide valuable data for the agency or agencies with which they work. The NCLDS will provide a framework for how those data systems can be more effectively connected and leveraged to generate longitudinal data sets or reports for analyzing student and system outcomes across the education and workforce continuum. The Work Group also recommended that the work on the required administrative rules and the NCLDS Contributor Data Sharing Agreement move forward.

Contributors to the NCLDS

Currently, three longitudinal efforts focused on segments of the education-workforce continuum exist. They are collaborative efforts among many of the same agencies listed in the legislation (including GDAC) and are hosted and supported by the GDAC.

- **Early Childhood Integrated Data System** – ECIDS is designed to provide integrated early childhood education, health and social service data from participating agencies. This system is administered by North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).
- **North Carolina School Works** – NCSW is a federated system that links data from early learning to workforce. This system is administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).
- **Common Follow-Up System** – CFS is a repository of workforce and education data. This system is administered by Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD).

Key Principles

Below are key principles identified by the Work Group in April 2019 that will guide development and operation of this "system of systems":

- Each data contributor to the NCLDS will maintain authority over their agencies' data and data systems.
- Each data contributor to the NCLDS will be able to request data from other data contributors through the system.
- Data contributed to the NCLDS will remain in secure environments but will be identifiable to other data contributors to the system. Data shared with outside entities must remain confidential, be de-identified and in some cases aggregated.
- Data contributors have the right to deny a data request and not share data.

Progress

Since the Education Cabinet's endorsement of this vision and the Work Group's recommendations in April 2019, the Work Group has made progress on several efforts related to moving the NCLDS forward.

- Rules were developed based on input and feedback from the contributing education and workforce partners and were approved by the Office of Administrative Hearings, Rules Review Commission. The rules define and outline the:

    o NCLDS and its components (i.e. "system of systems");
    o contributors to the system, requestors of the system, and a request;
    o data request process; and
    o minimum contents necessary in a contributor data sharing agreement.

    The rules were approved on Dec 17, 2020.

- GDAC, in collaboration with the NCLDS contributors, developed a Contributor Data Sharing Agreement that builds the foundation for the NCLDS by enabling the existing longitudinal systems to exchange data. The Agreement has been signed and executed by current data contributors to the system, which includes most of the organizations identified in Chapter 116E. The Agreement outlines:

  o disclosure of data to the NCLDS by agencies;
  o process for data exchange among the agencies; and
  o process for disclosure of reports (data) to requestors that are not contributors to the NCLDS.

- Based on the Work Group's recommendation and the Education Cabinet's endorsement, GDAC engaged the Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) team at UNC as the independent consultants to assist with developing a strategic modernization and interoperability plan for the NCLDS. Funded by GDAC and directed by a steering committee from the Work Group, the EPIC team gathered input and direction from key NCLDS stakeholders, agency leaders, and data users. The deliverables for this effort included:

  o a current state assessment and the State's progress to date;
  o a collaborative vision and objectives for a modernized NCLDS;
  o business and organizational requirements for the modernized NCLDS;
  o recommendations on NCLDS system and data governance; and
  o a collaborative sustainability plan for the NCLDS.

  Work on this effort began in August 2019 and was completed July 2020.

Next Steps

The Work Group has proposed that a summary of the NCLDS study findings and the eight recommendations be presented to the Education Cabinet at the next meeting.

In addition, the Work Group has recommended that the Education Cabinet endorse the following immediate next steps based on the study recommendations:

- Establish an NCLDS governance committee
- Hire NCLDS executive director (within GDAC)
- Direct the governance committee to craft a strategic plan for further strengthening the NCLDS
- Direct the governance committee to review and adopt proposed research agenda from IDMC