Longitudinal Data Systems in Michigan:

SLDS Analysis, Stakeholder Input and Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

Michigan's economic future will be determined by the skills and education of its workforce. Competing in the 21st century talent landscape demands education and workforce systems that are designed for a global, knowledge-based economy.

To be effective, these systems must be built on a foundation of high-quality data that measures the effectiveness of our education and workforce programs in delivering results for Michigan's citizens, employers, and communities.

That transformation already is under way, and national studies predict it to accelerate, driven by the growing roles of automation and artificial intelligence. To compete in this environment, employers increasingly demand worker qualities – a combination of soft skills and technical expertise – that can be difficult to quantify with existing data systems.

Meanwhile, Michigan's lagging levels of education and training, a declining birthrate and tight labor market have only added to employer need for more sophisticated and detailed education and workforce data. To provide that information and to guide improvements, Michigan needs a best-in-class state longitudinal data system to quantify educational and training outcomes for youth and adults.

Examining the System

Michigan, along with other states, began developing state longitudinal data systems (SLDS) in the early 2000s to track student progress through the public education system. The purpose was to assist local educators with programming and to allow policymakers to assess and make decisions regarding the education system.

As these systems developed across the country, best practices emerged. Many states began linking education data with additional state systems, including workforce and unemployment wage data. These linkages offered a more holistic approach to measuring and supporting program challenges and success. In Michigan, this resulted in a system that was trifurcated, with one agency responsible for education data, one responsible for workforce data, and another responsible for wage data. The system also is federated, where each department or administrative entity compiles, manages, and determines how and when its data will be shared.

Our research of the Michigan SLDS found what appears to be one major drawback: A lack of access to longitudinal connections across K-12, post-secondary and workforce data in a way that allows for research, innovation and evaluation of institutions and individual programs.

Why Improvements are Needed

Michigan has struggled to retain, grow and attract employers that rely on an educated and skilled workforce. The demographic challenges we face, along with our comparatively lower levels of education, need to be addressed in a rational and measurable way. High-quality data is essential to this discussion.

As of December 2019, over $20 million in federal funding has been invested in Michigan's SLDS. Along with employer demand for more sophisticated data, expectations for more capabilities have been rising for years among school administrators, community colleges, university researchers, the workforce system, and nonprofit workforce intermediaries. These expectations range from on-demand systems level data, to granular program level data, which could result in answers to a wide range of questions about education and workforce investments.

Talent 2025 commissioned this report thanks to funding from the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation to shed light on Michigan's SLDS, so stakeholders can have a well-sourced document with insights about the use of the current SLDS and to guide improvements toward a best-in-class system.

In addition to a national literature review, stakeholders were convened to better understand expectations, frustrations, and recommendations from diverse perspectives. The past and current state of Michigan's SLDS was documented and compared to best-in-class systems around the country.

Building a Best-in-Class System for Michigan

Based on our review of literature, stakeholder input and examination of high-functioning systems across the country, the characteristics of a best-in-class SLDS include:

- Widespread Policymaker Support
- Meaningful Agency Collaboration
- High Quality Governance Structure
- Robust Privacy and Security Protocols
- Standardization of Data
- Adequate Technical Infrastructure
- Dedicated Human Capital
- Sustainable Internal Leadership

Recommendations

To achieve these characteristics in Michigan's SLDS, this report makes seven recommendations. Below is a summary of those recommendations, which are explored in detail starting on page 50 of the full report.

1. Grow a culture of data literacy and transparency.
2. Design and publish clear rules for engagement for access to SLDS data. Make the "front door" obvious across websites and dashboards for all data owners.
3. Add vital reporting metrics to employer unemployment wage reporting including: ONET occupation code, job title, hours worked, and primary job site.
4. Add missing data from existing state systems.
5. Implement a system of assigning unique identifier codes (UIC) at birth, or at first engagement with state services. Integrate a common system of UIC assignment across all state agencies, agents of the state, and subcontractors.
6. Appropriate a "data innovation and quality fund."
7. Revisit succession plans among key state agencies to identify and verify critical systems and employees.

If considered and implemented well, these improvements will catapult Michigan into the top tier of best-in-class systems, providing a wide range of research opportunities. They also would provide (arguably for the first time) comprehensive efficacy measures to accompany billions of dollars in education and workforce investments. This is how we improve the quality of education and workforce systems for individuals, employers, and communities.

How Recommendations Align with Best-in-Class SLDS Characteristics

Recommendations	Best-in-Class SLDS Characteristics							
	Widespread Policymaker Support	Meaningful Agency Collaboration	High Quality Governance Structure	Robust Privacy and Security Protocols	Standardization of Data	Adequate Technical Infrastructure	Dedicated Human Capital	Sustainable Internal Leadership
1 Expand data literacy & transparency.	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
2 Publish rules for data access.	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔
3 Add vital metrics to wage reporting.	✔		✔		✔	✔		
4 Add missing data from existing systems.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
5 Assign unique identifier codes.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		
6 Establish a data innovation & quality fund.	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
7 Verify critical data systems & employees.	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔