Testimony to Select Committee on Student Success

August 7, 2018

Good afternoon, and thank you Chair Glazer and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Colleen Moore and I'm the assistant director of the Education Insights Center at Sacramento State. I was asked to make comments today about the need for longitudinal data systems in California, which I'll do based on some research I've done over the past two years examining California's approach to tracking student progress across institutions and systems. In doing this research, we interviewed over 70 people involved in collecting, analyzing, or using student data or information generated from those data, in California and several other states.

California does not have a statewide longitudinal student data system, meaning it is nearly impossible for the state to assess how well its students are progressing from high school, to and through college, and into the workforce. Although there is no central system, the four public education systems in California have longitudinal data systems that are quite good, and contain information valuable to understanding student progress and outcomes within each system. But the data are disconnected, which has led to a kind of "maze" of data reporting and data-sharing efforts. The handout you have includes a graphic on the inside left page that depicts the complexity and duplication of effort in our current approach.

This decentralized approach to student data has a number of disadvantages—it reinforces the state's very siloed approach to education planning, leads to fragmentation in the metrics that are used, and creates confusion among stakeholders. Worst of all, it leaves California unable to answer important questions that cross sectors, or to develop evidence-based policies and practices that serve students as they move through multiple education systems. In my interviews, state education policy experts often acknowledged the limitations of the current approach, but expressed skepticism about whether the potential benefits to be gained from developing a more comprehensive data

system would be enough to justify its implementation costs. Some suggested that data-sharing efforts across institutions at the regional level represent a promising alternative.

However, local education leaders I talked to pointed to the significant challenges they face in establishing and sustaining such efforts. They often expressed frustration with the current pressures they feel from the state to provide more data, often on topics they have no ability to track as students move across institutions and regions. Considering the large number of school districts and colleges in California, a region-by-region approach is simply *not* an efficient or effective solution for tracking the progress and outcomes of the state's mobile student population.

Fortunately, California has a range of options for developing a statewide longitudinal data system; examples in other states illustrate the variety of structures and processes used to accomplish this. Most other states have or are in the process of developing such data systems. National experts indicate that there is no single best model; rather a state should design an approach that best fits its history, culture, and capacity.

Two key factors to consider are the *structure* of the data system, which essentially involves whether or not to create a centralized data warehouse, and the *governance* of the data system. In the final report of my research, I outlined a set of values or policy criteria to consider in making these choices. Primary among those values should be a focus on the public good – that is, on facilitating the use of cross-sector data to understand and improve student outcomes through better-informed education policy and practice. Other criteria include data quality and security, technical and political feasibility, and sustainability.

Analyzing these criteria against several options for the structure and governance of a statewide data system suggests that California faces more significant *political* than *technical* challenges to developing one. We determined that California might best be served by establishing a state education data agency, or a dedicated data office within an existing state agency, with the specific mission of developing a centralized education data warehouse, producing standard reports and data tools for various audiences, and managing access to the data for research. The inside right page of your handout shows a graphic depicting this option, which would be more efficient than the system in place today, and could improve access to and use of the data. Both state-level policymakers and local educators need adequate information in order to fulfill their roles in improving equitable

student learning, progression, and success. It's time for California to help by developing a vital tool to support their work. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.