

Education Snapshot

State Still Missing Piece in Data Puzzle

By Charlee Beasor

Data isn't a sexy subject. But it sure is an important one. Numbers point to trends and reveal weak points. They highlight positives and negatives in mostly black and white, without flash or panache. The analysis and interpretation of data, however, can lead to major policy decisions and improvements across any industry.

For instance, manufacturing companies utilize data to identify processes or systems that aren't working efficiently – or fix a problem if one arises. The same holds true for nearly all businesses and organizations.

What if Indiana's education and workforce development systems used data in a similar way? Patterns would emerge. Policy decisions could be formed around tangible results if student data was able to be tracked from kindergarten through five or 10 years into the workforce.

"Everyone is paying attention to data, except perhaps education in America," offers Derek Redelman, vice president of education and workforce development at the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. "We need to build a culture around data and drive this cultural shift of collecting and analyzing education data to find and plug those holes in our education system that are failing our children. In addition, we need to advance what's working well by utilizing the best available data."

The data does exist in Indiana. State agencies are able to follow students at various points from early education through high school, postsecondary education and into the workforce (referred to as P-20/Workforce). Putting the data together and making it accessible, called a longitudinal data system (LDS), is the challenge.

The goal is for policymakers, researchers, administrators, teachers, parents and the business community to access the data and determine the best way to educate the children who will become the next generation of the workforce.

"We need to reach a point where folks want to be focused on data to help them improve and help them do a better job. There are aspects of the business world where they measure just about everything to find out what works and what doesn't. But that mindset hasn't permeated the education ranks," Redelman adds.

An intelligent system

There are some big roadblocks ahead for Indiana's economic future if more Hoosiers aren't adequately prepared for the workforce.

One glaring example is a 2008 report by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), which documented 931,366 working-age Hoosiers that need adult education and training.

And future projections by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

indicate that Indiana's need for educated and trained workers is just going to continue to grow. Between now and 2018, Indiana will create 930,000 vacancies from new positions and job openings due to retirement. By 2018, 55% of jobs in Indiana will require some form of postsecondary education.

Fully aware of the situation facing Indiana, four state agencies came together to build a unique database that would include student level facts (aggregate data, no personal

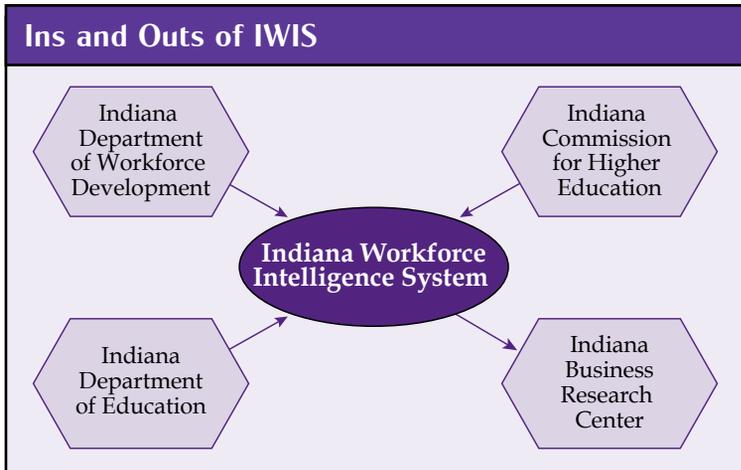
information included) that is needed to follow young people from one education level to the next.

The Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (CHE) created the Indiana Workforce Intelligence System (IWIS) in 2007. The



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Indiana Department of Education (DOE) now also sends data to IWIS.

The Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC) came on board to provide funding, staffing and expertise to house the information. It mines the data and creates research reports.

"This was the brainchild of the governor (Mitch Daniels) back in 2005. Nothing like this even existed before that period of time. He saw the future so clearly; he knew that to make progress in education that we'd need to have a better sense of the student's history in education, where the system was falling down on the job or where the system was having good outcomes," declares Gina DeSanto, CHE senior associate commissioner and previously the senior deputy commissioner for the DWD.

Access is needed

Building such a system takes time and cooperation among several entities. Challenges include how to govern the system, finding state funding, determining how to protect the future of the project, dealing with political issues and discovering the best way to allow stakeholder access. In Indiana, full utilization is the missing piece.

The IBRC is the only organization that can pull data from all facets of IWIS. But a publicly-searchable interface would open it up to more usage possibilities – including influencing public policy at the K-12, higher education and workforce levels.

"In terms of future action, that could be the biggest opportunity for IWIS going forward – to put that public interface on it so researchers, chambers of commerce and their outreach efforts can identify appropriate legislative remedies," DeSanto notes. "Once IWIS can get to that point, its value to the state of Indiana will become even more obvious."

She also wants to hear from the business community about what type of information would be most useful to them.

"I think I am not overstating the matter by saying the business community has been the No. 1 champion in educational improvement and reform in Indiana. When they encourage us

to be at our best, that's when we're at our best. That's when we do the kinds of things that are going to lead to a high quality workforce in Indiana," DeSanto contends.

National effort

This change of culture toward data isn't just happening in Indiana.

Data Quality Campaign (DQC) is a non-partisan national advocacy organization that encourages state policymakers to build P-20/Workforce data systems.

"Once you get 20 years of data, you can start to look at how Head Start is impacting college readiness, who's graduating college with a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) degree. There is almost no end to the types of policy questions you can answer," states Paige

Kowalski, DQC director of state policy initiatives. "Building a system is a means, not an end. The end is to use it. The system is a piece of it."

DQC collects information from each state on the progress of these systems and points to something Indiana can do to enhance its system.

"One key piece (Indiana) is missing is state funding. They haven't committed that to this yet – for sustainability," she explains. "You're not going to hear your Indiana state Legislature pull funding for basic Internet lines; that's foundational now. Data use needs to get to something that if it was pulled and went away, we couldn't live without it."

Making it stick

Codification of the data system into Indiana law would be a step in the right direction, according to DeSanto. She points to Maryland, which codified its system in 2010, as an example.

Maryland passed into law a bill with specifics toward building the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center (slated to open in February 2014), allocating funding for the center and establishing a governing board to run the system.

Chandra Haislet, P20/Workforce Interagency Coordinator at the Maryland State Department of Education, explains that getting all stakeholders together in one room with a specific purpose in mind was the key to getting the system in place.

An important piece of the legislation, Haislet notes, is the governing board.

"The individuals that sit on the governing board were very

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purposeful. We have a highly engaged governing board – executives that actively are guiding the process and making the decisions that need to be made and that's listed out in the bill," she surmises.

That issue could be solved here by having the Indiana Education Roundtable as the oversight body, DelSanto points out. The Roundtable is co-chaired by the Governor and state superintendent of public instruction and is composed of education, business, community and government leaders.

And state funding would be helpful, she affirms. Money is

available (such as the \$4 million Statewide Longitudinal Data System grant the DOE received in July), but allocating state funds would allow for a small IWIS staff.

Collaboration will make the difference

Education institutions across the state also collect data for various purposes. The connection and addition of those other data sets into IWIS would continue to enhance the state's educational picture.

Gretchen Gutman, associate vice president of government relations for Ball State University, explains that the institution's new strategic plan highlights continued data collection.

"I think to the extent that there's an opportunity to collaborate and develop research and trends, help our students make better choices and also create an environment where there's more efficiency of employer matching of graduate skills to employment needs, we certainly would participate in that 100%," she indicates.

With a new Governor at the Statehouse (Republican Mike Pence), along with a new superintendent of public instruction (Democrat Glenda Ritz) and a large number of first-time state legislators, bipartisan cooperation will be crucial.

"Education reform is probably the only major issue where our governor and the presidential administration agreed," Redelman suggests, "and data was a core strategy for both."

A common goal will hopefully be enough, DelSanto summarizes.

"We are all after the same thing, which is improved educational outcomes," she concludes.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Derek Redelman, Indiana Chamber of Commerce, at www.indianachamber.com

Gina DelSanto, Indiana Commission for Higher Education, at www.che.in.gov

Paige Kowalski, Data Quality Campaign, at www.dataqualitycampaign.org

Chandra Haislet, Maryland State Department of Education, at www.marylandpublicschools.org/msde

Gretchen Gutman, Ball State University, at www.bsu.edu

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