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Integrating California's Education Data

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California needs an integrated data system that connects pieces of the education pipeline that are currently maintained separately. An integrated system could perform a variety of critical functions and reach a diverse audience of stakeholders. For example, it could provide feedback to educational institutions on student outcomes, even after students graduate. It could also encourage better planning and coordination between educational sectors, increase the state's ability to evaluate educational programs and policies, and provide students and families with better information about successful educational and workforce pathways.

The state has recently invested \$10 million toward planning for this type of system, establishing the California Cradle to Career Data Systems Working Group to “recommend data system structural components, processes, and options” and to “advise ongoing efforts to develop, administer, and enhance the data system” (per Senate Bill 75).

The Public Policy Institute of California has also been focused on this issue, facilitating a group of research and policy organizations interested in the establishment of an integrated student data system in the state. Known as the California Education Data Collaborative, this group has met regularly throughout this year to discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with advancing education through connected data. The collaborative's activities are designed to build knowledge and skills among diverse stakeholders involved in improving access, equity, and success across California's educational systems. As a collaborative, we have engaged with national experts, leaders in successful data systems from other states, policymakers from California, and those with experience in working for an integrated data system in California.

As the state's California Cradle to Career Data Systems Working Group takes shape, the collaborative is working to:

- Engage with stakeholders—including students, parents, educators, and institutions—about how to implement a data system that best serves them.
- Connect with policymakers to ensure that the data system answers critical questions about policies and programs to foster student success.
- Provide research and advice on how to construct a system that will improve California's education systems.
- Examine issues of privacy and security to ensure confidentiality of student records.

PPIC's California Education Data Collaborative

Establishing an integrated, longitudinal student data system will take a multifaceted, sustained approach. In the long run, the value of this system will lie in the policy questions that can be asked—and answered with confidence—and the ability of practitioners, students, and families to access information that helps them make informed choices. To assess reforms accurately and comprehensively will require strong partnerships, clear long-term planning, identified goals—and good data.