THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS: HOW SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY CAN FOSTER IMPROVED SECONDARY-POSTSECONDARY COLLABORATION

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Introduction: Accountability is an essential factor to the success of career technical education (CTE) in the 21st century. Nearly every elected official, as well as other constituent groups like parents and employers, demand more information about the effectiveness of public investments, and the demands on the accountability data are many and varied. Data is expected to determine a system or program's effectiveness, while at the same time providing practitioners with meaningful and useful information used to guide student success and program improvement.

Rather than ensuring that indeed no child is left behind, some fear the data being collected is a sorting mechanism whereby schools, programs and systems will be forced to become competitors rather than partners. Is it possible to create a meaningful accountability system where programs and systems can work collaboratively to ensure student success? Common measures and their contribution to accountability systems and collaboration is the focus of this research brief.

A Balancing Act: Developing meaningful and reliable accountability systems is a challenge facing every state. Not only is the development of these systems costly both in human capital and fiscal resources, there are many considerations and competing priorities to be balanced. For CTE, we must balance the demands for more rigor through academic standards, while remaining committed to the development of a highly skilled, technical workforce.

While finding the right balance is difficult, improved CTE accountability data is absolutely essential. The demand for improved performance data is coming from friends and foes alike. During a February 2005 Perkins reauthorization hearing, Congress asked for our help in providing with them 'proof' that what we do works. And those who challenge the very existence of CTE by calling into question the system's value and role rely on the lack of comparable and quality accountability data to underwrite their beliefs.

As the demand for more and better accountability data escalates, CTE must take a hard look at the data it collects and determine if it is measuring the right things, and how the quality and reliability of the data, as well as the data comparability among programs and states, can be improved. One option to consider is the development of an integrated performance information system where a plethora of workforce-related programs share a set of common measures.

History of Common Measures: The most recent era of cross-program accountability began in 1993 with the passage of the Government Performance and Results Act, which called for common definitions and performance measures across a variety of federal programs.[i] In the Fall of 2002, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)[ii] announced its set of common performance measures for education and workforce programs. Their rationale was that measures standardized across programs are required for: (1) treating workforce development programs as a connected system of workforce preparation, and (2) for ensuring that all parts of the system are aligning to and progressing toward the same goals, with performance being measured in the same way across funding streams associated with the different programs.

OMB Common Job Training Performance Measures

Adult measures
- Entered employment
- Retention
- Earnings Increase
- Efficiency

Youth and Lifelong Learning Programs
- Placement in Employment or Education
- Attainment of a Degree of Certificate
- Literacy and Numeracy Gains
- Efficiency

OMB has long held that Perkins is a workforce, as opposed to an education, program and as such should easily be able to align to a set of performance measures designed around workforce programs and outcomes. When the OMB measures were introduced, they received much criticism from the CTE community. Not only were the measures developed with little or no input from the field, but the timing of their introduction occurred while states were in the early stages of implementing a new Perkins accountability system that state directors developed in partnership with the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). The Perkins measures, in most instances, do not easily align with those developed by OMB. Noting that much of the data the OMB measures required was currently not collected through Perkins, some felt these measures set an unattainable goal and supported a political agenda to eliminate Perkins. Looking at the substance of the measures, many felt the OMB measures did not hold programs accountable for the right things and expressed great concern as to whether a cost efficiency measure was good public policy.

Despite concerns raised, the OMB measures are still in place today. OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) relies, in part, on data collected around these measures to determine program effectiveness; these measures inform the Administration's budget proposals as well. [iii] The PART review of Perkins, which found the program ineffective, was used as justification by the Administration to eliminate Perkins in its FY06 budget proposal. [iv] The PART analysis faulted Perkins for the lack of comparable and consistent accountability data.

Why Common Measures? While the OMB measures did little to build partnerships and shared responsibility among systems and programs, it did get folks thinking about the advantages of a meaningful common performance information system. The first benefit is obvious - efficiency. However, another powerful motivator is that a set of common performance measures might address one of the most common challenges of collecting longitudinal student data, namely following a program participate as s/he enters into and out of multiple programs and systems (K – 12, post secondary, workforce programs, and labor market, etc.). Using a common set of performance measures means that multiple systems will be sharing data common to a student, as well as collecting similar data. The data will be easily shared across systems, thus promoting shared responsibility for student success. Finally, we see benefits from this shared responsibility model as a means of promoting improved transitions and partnerships among secondary and postsecondary education. Is there a set of common measures that are meaningful, reasonable and attainable? The answer is yes!

Common Measures – Yes, They Can Be Your Reality: The state of Washington, working collaboratively with representatives from a cross-section of workforce development programs in five states (Florida, Michigan, Montana, Oregon, and Texas), as well as partners from the Washington Workforce Board, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas and The Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois University, recently developed a set of common workforce performance measures. The team shared experiences, reviewed technical papers and asked questions such as – "(w)hat do policymakers want to know about performance?" and "(w)hat makes for a good performance measure?" before arriving at consensus on key aspects of integrated performance information. Not only did they consider what programs need to be accountable for, but they developed solutions that would be acceptable to all. This effort resulted in the creation of *The Integrated Performance Information (IPI) Blueprint.*[v]

The Blueprint discusses each of the steps involved in the process of developing integrated performance information and the practices necessary to support collaboration of results. Steps include: (1) establishing authority, (2) building a culture of shared accountability and trust, (3) generating capacity, (4) crafting performance measures, (5) setting and using targets, and (5) creating and maintaining a shared information system.

In this instance, the phrase 'workforce development' includes programs that prepare individuals for employment and career advancement throughout their lives. IPI recommends their performance measures can apply, but not be limited to, programs such as: secondary and postsecondary CTE (Perkins); the Employment Service, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title III; the Workforce Investment Act Title I-B; the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act; Adult Education and Family Literacy, WIA Title II; Vocational Rehabilitation, WIA Title IV; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Work Program (TANF); and Apprenticeship.

From this discussion, eight common performance measures were developed; the measures provide information policy leaders want to know about the performance of the workforce development system. The eight IPI performance measures are separated into those measures that are useful as accountability measures for which there could be targets and consequences, and those measures that, while indicators of performance, do not sufficiently satisfy the criteria for good accountability measures. The IPI measures also do not attempt to measure everything important to each program, but concentrate on outcomes important across workforce development programs and leave room for additional measures to be added as required.

IPI Performance Measures

Accountability measures

- Short-term Employment Rate
- Long-term Employment Rate
- Earnings Level
- Credential Completion Rate
- Repeat Employer Customers

Performance Indicators

- Employer Market Penetration
- Taxpayer Return on Investment
- Participant Return on Investment

How Common Measures Can Foster Improved Secondary and Postsecondary Collaboration: Almost every piece of federal and state workforce or education legislation includes some sort of accountability requirement. However, these accountability requirements are often developed in a vacuum, without care or knowledge of other programs' requirements. The genius of these common measures is that they will stand the test of time as they get to the heart of the questions most frequently asked by policymakers. When programs or systems adopt common measures, they become a team working together to respond to questions of impact and effectiveness. Success of individual programs and systems becomes intertwined with others. As such, they become collaborators rather than competitors focused on student success.

Because a student's success is the result of many interventions through myriad programs and systems, common measures can help all earn 'credit' for their contributions, as well as end duplication of efforts. The IPI Blueprint stated it well: "*(t)he same individual may attend secondary and postsecondary career and technical education, use labor market information at a One-Stop, and find a job through the Employment Service. The results are the shared effect of the services of all these programs. The results will be better and most efficient when states plan the services of multiple programs strategically in an integrated fashion. Having consistent performance measures across programs, and shared information to support them, greatly facilitates such planning*." In addition, "*(i)ntegrated performance information can improve coordination, enabling programs to act more as a system even though they may remain administered by separate agencies with different sources of funds and different governing authority*."[vi]

Our labor market demands that most individuals will need some postsecondary education to maintain a marketable skill set. Under this framework of common measures, secondary and postsecondary education share responsibility for student success; their respective systems are impacted and reliant on one another to succeed. For example, secondary schools are held accountable for preparing students for transition to postsecondary education or the workforce. Most secondary school report cards highlight where and how many students go to college. The secondary transition goal is important not only for our economy and labor market, but the qualifications of secondary school graduates impacts the success of postsecondary education. With more students graduating from high school prepared for postsecondary education or the workforce, the pool of qualified students who can enter postsecondary education without the need for remediation increases. Better prepared secondary students are also more likely to persist and complete postsecondary studies, which is especially important as pressure mounts to increase postsecondary completion rates. Common measures are a win-win for all!

"A Washington Case Study: Advantages of Consistent Measures for Secondary and Postsecondary CTE A Case Study From Washington" – *by Bryan Wilson, Ph.D., Associate Director for Policy and Research, Washington State's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board*

Washington State has applied the same state core performance indicators for secondary and postsecondary CTE for nearly a decade. Washington measures employment rates, earning levels, student satisfaction, and employer satisfaction (with students they have hired) in the same manner for secondary and postsecondary CTE.

Washington also measures the net impact of program participation on student employment and earnings, and resulting tax revenue, in a consistent manner for secondary and postsecondary CTE.

There are a number of advantages that result from this consistency. At the policy level, we are able to present performance results in a fairly simple, straightforward manner to policymakers who are lay people when it comes to performance evaluation. We do not confuse policymakers by "employment" meaning one thing for secondary CTE students and a different thing for postsecondary CTE students.

Another advantage is that we can easily demonstrate to secondary CTE students, their parents, and others the gains to be had by students continuing in postsecondary CTE. Since the results are measured in a consistent manner we can say, for example, that while students who go to work after completing secondary CTE earn $8.19 per hour (median hourly wage), students who go to work after completing postsecondary CTE earn $12.81 per hour, without comparing apples and oranges. This enables us to talk to kids and their parents about the monetary benefits of CTE, without fearing that we are encouraging them to work instead of continuing their education and training. We can show them how much it pays to continue on to postsecondary CTE.

A more complete integrated performance information system, such as Florida's, can go even further. Florida's system has more comprehensive data, such as course completions, and is linked with data from a wide variety of social programs and all of higher education. For example, Florida's system can indicate the prevalence of TANF receipt among CTE completers of a particular career cluster compared to the prevalence of TANF receipt among high school graduates of a "general track" curriculum. Florida can examine whether postsecondary CTE students have better results if they first complete CTE in high school. These are just a couple of examples.

The advantages of an integrated performance information system are wide-ranging. Such a system can provide extensive opportunities to researchers and program administrators to find and implement better ways of preparing students for work and continuing education.

Conclusion: The case for common measures is a compelling one: increased efficiency, improved collaboration, shared responsibility, and meaningful measures, let alone the likely derivative effect of improved and coordinated services for students. Common measures hold the potential to both answer the questions policymakers want answers to and provide useful information for program administrators. Even Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings called for common measures in her March 2005 letter to Congress where she asked for the "*authority to establish common measures, to assess program performance, and to ensure that data provided by the states are valid and reliable*."

As you begin to think about how to improve secondary-postsecondary collaboration in your state, we hope you will consider how common measures might play a role in overcoming this challenge. With a core of relatively simple and common performance measures, you will be able to show elected officials and the public that your programs are focused on student success and are accountable for results.

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[i] King, C., O'Shea, D., Tang, Y. Performance Measurement and Management for Next-Generation Workforce Systems. Dallas, Texas: Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin. November 2002.

[ii] The Office of Management and Budget. *Job Training and Employment Comparison Measure*, *OMB Addendum,* n.d., http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/memoranda/m02-06_addendum.html#h2 July 24, 2004.

[iii] The Office of Management and Budget. *Program Assessment Rating Tool*. Washington, D.C., 2004. http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2004/pma/vocationaleducation.pdf

[iv] The Office of Management and Budget. *FY2006 Administration Budget Proposal*. Washington, D.C., 2005. http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/pdf/Education-06.pdf

[v] Wilson, Bryan (2005). *Integrated Performance Information (IPI) for Workforce Development – A Blueprint for States,* Olympia, WA: Workforce Education and Training Coordinating Board, Draft, February 2005.

[vi] Ibid, page 2.