

State Workforce and Education Alignment Project (SWEAP)

Overview

June 2015

Governors and state legislators wonder why employers continue to tell them that they cannot find skilled workers for open positions. These state elected officials (SEOs) want to know why the state's schools, colleges, and training programs are not collectively solving industry skill gap challenges. But the reality is that most SEOs typically have information about only a portion of their state's workforce education and training programs, and lack the data necessary to tell how programs are or are not aligning with each other, or aligning collectively with labor market demand.

Advocates for low-income students and workers would also like to see more state residents prepared for these open positions, many of which are middle-skill jobs that require some form of postsecondary training but not a bachelor's degree. But it is typically difficult to assess how many people have effectively moved through high school or adult basic skills instruction and onto postsecondary education and training programs, and to figure out why some people persist and succeed and others "leak out."

Each state has multiple programs that can help a diversity of students and workers prepare for middle-skill jobs. Most of these programs operate outside of the "traditional" K-12-to-university pipeline:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Program for Adults
- WIOA Title I Program for Dislocated Workers
- WIOA Title I Program for Youth
- Adult Basic Education (WIOA Title II)
- Employment Service (WIOA Title III)
- Vocational Rehabilitation (WIOA Title IV)

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Employment and Training
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training
- Secondary Career and Technical Education
- Community and Technical College Workforce Education and Training (Postsecondary Career and Technical Education)
- Apprenticeship
- Corrections Employment and Training
- Customize Training for Employers

Even though many of these programs work together to serve the same individuals and employers, information about these programs tends to be only program-specific. It is usually impossible, or at least very difficult to compile or compare information across programs.

The State Workforce and Education Alignment Project (SWEAP), an initiative of the National Skills Coalition, is demonstrating how state policy leaders can use system-wide information about workforce education and training programs to better align programs with each other and with employers' skill needs. The goal is to create better cross-program information that allows state policy leaders to see how these programs can work together in their state, and how individuals can advance through these programs over time in the pursuit of post-secondary credentials and higher-paying employment.

What Data Tools Provide System-Wide Information?

SWEAP is helping states develop three types of data tools that can offer high level, system-wide information useful for state policymakers. These tools are dashboards, pathway evaluators, and supply and demand reports. Separately and more so together, these tools can inform policymakers about how their state's education and training programs are working together to close the skill gap.

- **Dashboards** display a small number of common metrics to report education and employment outcomes across workforce development programs. They answer policymaker questions: Do program participants earn credentials? Do they get jobs? How much do those jobs pay? State policymakers can use dashboards to identify programs that have strong outcomes and warrant expansion. They can also see which programs have weak outcomes and need improvement.

- **Pathway Evaluators** show how people use a range of education and training programs to earn credentials and move into jobs. They answer policymaker questions: Do people with different needs have access to the right programs? Are programs creating career pathways to middle-skill jobs? Which pathways work best for which people? With this information in hand, state policymakers can create career pathways that achieve the best employment and earnings outcomes for people with different skill needs.
- **Supply and Demand Reports** show how the supply of newly credentialed workers compares to the number of workers that employers demand. They answer policymaker questions: What occupations have skill gaps? Are workers being trained with the right skills for those jobs? How many more skilled workers do we need? State policymakers can use supply and demand reports to invest in training programs that will prepare more skilled workers for occupations that have a skill gap.

In addition to helping states develop these tools, SWEAP is also demonstrating how state policymakers can use the data tools to develop policies that better align workforce development. SWEAP is not about data for data's sake, but about using data to improve state workforce development policies, and ultimately educational and labor market outcomes for program participants.

SWEAP highlights ways policy leaders can actually use system-wide information about workforce development. For example, policymakers can use dashboard information to drive state investments to programs that have strong labor market results, while modifying policies for weak programs that need improvement. Policymakers can adopt policies integrating the services of multiple programs, building career pathways along the patterns of participation that pathway evaluators reveal to be successful. Policymakers can also establish sector partnerships and invest in training to close skill gaps in the fields in which supply and demand reports discover mismatches.

SWEAP is occurring at the same time that states are turning their attention to the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), effective July 1, 2015. Data and measurement reforms in WIOA can facilitate the development of SWEAP's suite of data tools, and the data tools can inform the development of WIOA state plans and the implementation of key WIOA strategies. WIOA data reforms include common performance metrics and easier cross-program data linking – both of which are key to creating SWEAP's data



tools. WIOA requires states to use valuable skills strategies such as sector partnerships, career pathways, and job-driven investments, and SWEAP's data tools provide critical information that can be used to develop these strategies. WIOA also requires states to create new strategic plans, which can encompass the broad array of programs that prepare people for middle-skill jobs. SWEAP's suite of data tools can inform states' planning efforts by providing information on how programs across the system are working together to close the skill gap.

Project Steps

SWEAP is a two-phase project:

- During Phase One (January 2014 – April 2015), SWEAP established its suite of data tools and identified states with interest and capacity for developing and using those tools to guide policymaking.
- During Phase Two (May 2015 through December 2016), SWEAP will work with four states to develop and use its data tools.

Phase One:

During its first phase, SWEAP published papers on dashboards, pathway evaluators, and supply and demand reports describing the tools and providing examples of how states have used the tools to develop workforce policies. SWEAP also developed fact sheets on each tool. In addition, SWEAP created a short animated film to explain in simple, compelling terms why policymakers should take part in the project. Each of these products may be found at Nationalskillscoalition.org/sweap.

Phase One also brought together teams of policymakers from seven states to inform them about SWEAP and to set the stage for Phase Two. The first SWEAP State Leadership Forum in December 2014, was attended by policymakers from California, Indiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, Oregon, and Rhode Island, as well as representatives of philanthropic organizations. The seven states attending the Forum were selected based on geographic and political diversity, the capabilities of their data systems, and evidence of political interest in advancing public policy in this area. The state teams included governors' advisors, workforce agency leaders, higher education policymakers, and state legislators. This broad cross-section represents the key state leaders that are needed to successfully formulate, adopt, and implement state workforce and education policies.



Phase Two:

During the Second Phase of SWEAP, SWEAP staff are working with four states—California, Mississippi, Ohio, and Rhode Island – to provide technical assistance and re-grants to the states of up to \$180,000. SWEAP staff are providing guidance on:

- The development and/or improvement of state dashboards, pathway evaluators, and supply-demand tools;
- Facilitation of and participation in policy conversations with both administration and legislative leaders, as well as with other workforce and education stakeholders in the state; and
- Assistance in developing legislation and other policy documents that use the information generated by these tools to inform state decision-making and reforms.

For each state, SWEAP is hoping to show progress on some or all of the following outcomes over the nearly two-year process:

- Development of the three types of SWEAP data tools and the production of relevant information.
- Internal interim reports to state teams (e.g., recommendations for work plans, analysis of what their data tools tell us, potential policy recommendations to draw from this data), as well as final public reports developed in collaboration with each state team.
- Increased ability of state elected officials and their staff to use and interpret the information produced by these tools.
- Increased attention to workforce development by a broader set of state elected officials.
- Introduction of legislation or executive actions toward new or modified policies informed by the data from SWEAP tools, such as re-targeting state or federal workforce/education resources to better meet industry skill gaps, developing sector partnership policies and career pathways, or more informed assessments of both program and system-wide performance.

SWEAP will also be sharing lessons learned with other states through publications, webinars, forums, and other means.

By taking these steps, SWEAP expects to show that providing SEOs and other policy leaders with meaningful information about the workforce development system will increase their



awareness and interest in the system. Improved information will also enable leaders to find ways to make the system operate more effectively. In the end, increased attention and better information for system improvement will materially benefit participants in the system, improving their education and labor market outcomes.

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