

MOVING FROM DATA TO ACTION

Recommendations from Teach Plus Mississippi Policy Fellows



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As Teach Plus Mississippi Policy Fellows and highly effective teachers who work in diverse classrooms across the state, we are focused on leveraging authentic teacher leadership to transform student outcomes. Our commitment to our students doesn't end when they leave our classrooms. We envision an education system in our state that prepares all students for a bright future after students earn their high school diploma. Whether a student's desired career pathway requires job training, a college degree, or an industry certificate, we want to ensure that each student in the Magnolia State graduates with the knowledge, skills, and preparation necessary to fulfill their aspirations. This vision requires educators, administrators, and policymakers to ensure that all Mississippi students have exposure to various career pathways that align with their skills and interests, as well as the academic and career-technical programs necessary for long-term success.

Our vision is closely aligned with our [state's goal of having 55 percent](#) of working-age Mississippians hold a high-value certificate, college degree, or industry-recognized credential by 2030.¹ As of January 2025, Mississippi's postsecondary attainment rate was 48.7 percent, significantly lower than the national average of 54.9 percent. State leaders recognize that raising this rate is key to strengthening the "quality and quantity of Mississippi's workforce," as well as improving the lives of individual Mississippians.² In a local example, [Mississippi's University for Women](#) reported that on average, bachelor's degree holders earn \$17,400 more per year compared to those with only a high school diploma.³ In addition, according to a 2023 [Labor Force Participation Survey Report by the Mississippi Department of Employment Security](#), workers without college degrees make up more than 80 percent of Mississippi's unemployed population.⁴ Meeting this important goal will require more of our young adults continuing their education after high school. It will also require schools, colleges, and employers to have data to track progress and make informed decisions about resources allocation, staffing, and student support services, just to name a few. **The time is now to revamp our existing Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) so that it provides robust, actionable, interactive data that is essential to measuring progress at the local and state levels.**

Our Vision for an Actionable SLDS

Mississippi needs an SLDS that is not only accessible, but serves as an essential resource for a wide range of education stakeholders seeking to make informed, data-driven decisions in real time. For example:

- + **State-level policymakers** need to understand workforce development trends to measure progress toward statewide initiatives like the [Ascent to 55%](#). This data can also be used by policymakers to allocate resources and make policy decisions based on anticipated shifts in the state's workforce.⁵
- + **Educators and administrators** across early childhood, K-12, and higher education systems need this data to drive decisions about curriculum, instruction, and interventions. Schools can also ensure that their college and career readiness (CCR) efforts are aligned with student goals and workforce needs.
- + **State and community organizations**, such as research groups, nonprofits, and education service providers, need access to publicly available data to understand the impact and efficacy of policies and systems, help students explore and navigate opportunities, and hold administrators and policy makers accountable to effect change through advocacy.
- + **Most importantly, students and their families** need access to data to explore various career pathways, access support services, and develop plans to smoothly transition from the classroom to the workforce.

To be actionable, an SLDS needs to be accessible to a broad audience, as well as connected across multiple agencies and data sets. We believe in democratizing access to data so that Mississippians—from state lawmakers to high school students—can use the system to make informed decisions about the future. The data system should also be connected, meaning that it links valuable data from early childhood education all the way to the workforce. For instance, state agencies like the Mississippi Department of Education already publish some CCR indicators on the [Mississippi Succeeds Report Card](#) (such as the percentage of high school students who meet performance benchmarks on ACT assessments).⁶ But because this data system is disconnected from our higher education system, it limits our ability to provide actionable information about postsecondary outcomes. Lastly, a practical SLDS should be able to answer questions that can help educators and institutions make informed decisions, including, but not limited to:

- + Which career pathways in Mississippi are scholars pursuing, and how do these align with workforce needs?
- + How well are K-12 schools preparing students for postsecondary enrollment and completion?
- + How well do existing CCR indicators (such as performance on the ACT or the ACT WorkKeys) predict postsecondary success?
- + Which career pathways in Mississippi provide the best opportunities for students to fulfill their aspirations while also earning a living wage?
- + What are the most effective pipelines of talent to high-need occupations in Mississippi, like nursing and teaching?

By providing comprehensive, longitudinal insights that span early education through career outcomes, a robust SLDS can guide smarter investments and better prepare Mississippi students for lifelong success.

Current State of Mississippi's SLDS

Mississippi's [SLDS](#) was designed to be an instrumental tool to collect and organize data across educational and workforce sectors. SLDS is led by a 10-member governing board consisting of leaders from multiple state level boards and agencies covering education, health, economic development, and law enforcement. In keeping with state guidelines, the SLDS Governing Board has contracted with the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) to manage and maintain the SLDS.⁷ We analyzed the current longitudinal data and found the following:

1. Mississippi's SLDS has the infrastructure and contributors required for an actionable data system.

The legislation that established the governance structure of the SLDS already requires participation from numerous agencies, all of which provide data for the system.⁸ This includes education agencies representing early childhood education, the K-12 public education system, and state-funded higher education institutions. The governing board also includes agencies that focus on workforce development, public health, and law enforcement. The inclusion of a broad range of agencies, and the data they bring to the system, gives Mississippi the foundation for what could be a robust longitudinal data system.

2. The current data system has fragmented data across the early childhood, K-12, higher education, and workforce systems.

While the SLDS houses a wide range of data from K-12 schools, higher education, and the workforce, there is little information at the intersections of these systems. Specifically, the static formats in which data is presented significantly limit its usefulness. Furthermore, the existing information is often published in PDF reports, which can be cumbersome to read and difficult to navigate, thereby preventing users from interacting with the data or conducting in-depth analysis.

3. The current data system lacks user-friendly tools for exploring outcomes and conducting research.

While a few interactive dashboards are available through the report dashboard, limitations to how the data is presented restrict both the timeliness and scope of insights that can be drawn. An example of this is the [4-Year Institution by Major](#) report, which provides annual statewide numbers of graduates by major, as well as employment rates and median annual earnings. However, data cannot be broken down by each higher education institution, the sending school district, student demographic group, or region of the state.⁹ The limited accessibility of our current system not only affects its utility, but also curtails the awareness of the SLDS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To fulfill its potential, the SLDS must be transformed into an actionable and fully interactive system that drives Mississippi's educational and economic progress. A more dynamic and updated SLDS would empower stakeholders to make informed decisions, modify educational programs to meet labor market demands, and equip students with the skills necessary for both current and future job markets. By promoting economic growth, in addition to individual accomplishment, the SLDS could be utilized to keep talent in the state.

Bridging the Gap: From Current Limitations to Future Capabilities

Key Question the SLDS Should Answer	Current Limitation	Recommended Change
Which career pathways are students pursuing, and how do these align with work-force needs?	Data fragmented across K-12, higher ed, and work-force systems	Strengthen data-sharing agreements
How well are K-12 schools preparing students for post-secondary enrollment and completion?	No regular feedback loop from postsecondary to K-12; fragmented data	Fund and maintain SLDS with reporting requirements
What are the most effective talent pipelines for high-need occupations in Mississippi, like nursing or teaching? Which career pathways in Mississippi provide the best opportunities for students to fulfill their aspirations while also earning a living wage?	No user-friendly tools to explore outcomes by occupation/credential	Improve accessibility with dashboards and tools like Kentucky's KY Stats.
How well do existing indicators of College and Career Readiness (such as performance on the ACT or the ACT WorkKeys) accurately predict postsecondary success?	No research capability or longitudinal tracking available; fragmented data	Sustain funding to support research functionality

1. Establish a consistent state funding stream for maintaining an updated SLDS.

An actionable SLDS needs reliable and ongoing funding to operate and support continuous improvements, including the ability to analyze longitudinal data and generate reports that answer key questions about CCR indicators and postsecondary outcomes. In previous years, the SLDS has received some state funding, in addition to grants and federal funding. However, to support an SLDS that Mississippians can rely on to make informed decisions about the future and ensure their economic prosperity, state lawmakers should enact an annual funding stream and require a yearly report to the legislature that demonstrates how money was spent and what information was generated.

Case Example: The Colorado General Assembly passed legislation in 2024 that created a new cross-agency governance structure for its SLDS. The [legislation](#) also provides \$5 million in annual state funding to maintain the system.¹⁰

+ **Learn More:** [Government Data Advisory Board \(GDAB\)](#)

2. Strengthen data-sharing agreements across agencies from early childhood to the workforce.

An actionable SLDS is greater than the sum of its parts. Synthesizing data from across agencies like the Mississippi Department of Education and the state's institutions of higher learning maximizes the utility of otherwise siloed information to inform policy and practice and allow the SLDS to answer questions about student pathways from early education through employment. Stakeholders will be able to analyze which high school pathways lead to successful careers or how postsecondary preparation aligns with workforce needs, as examples. Mississippi's SLDS Governing Board should operate under clear data-sharing agreements that facilitate cross-agency collaboration, protect data privacy (e.g., provide universal identifying numbers to ensure that individuals are not identifiable), and embed safeguards to preserve agency autonomy.

Case Example: The [Kentucky Center for Statistics \(KY Stats\)](#) directly informs policy and practice through real-time, accessible data dashboards that support decision-making at every level—from classrooms to state leadership. Five different agencies are required to annually submit data on K-12 education, postsecondary education, financial aid, and the workforce. A key focus area of Kentucky's SLDS reports is on transition points from K-12 to higher education to the workforce. It emphasizes cross-agency collaboration and continuous improvement, ensuring data leads to targeted interventions and measurable outcomes.¹¹

+ **Learn More:** KY STATS [High School Feedback Report](#) and [Postsecondary Feedback Report](#)

*"This is one of the first state-driven reports to promote cross-state collaboration and provide out-of-state workforce outcomes for postsecondary graduates. Institutions can now have a better understanding of their graduates' employment and wages by credential level, major, and the state these graduates originated from, all while ensuring data privacy and security."*¹²

—**Dr. Jessica Cuninghame**, Executive Director of the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KY Stats) in an article published by the [KY Council on Postsecondary Education](#)

3. Collect input from a broad range of education stakeholders to improve the accessibility and usability of the SLDS.

The insights and reports coming out of the SLDS should be accessible to the general public, not just to researchers and data experts. To ensure that this powerful tool benefits all Mississippians, the system must be designed to be both accessible and easy to use. An important first step for the SLDS Governing Board would be to look beyond state agencies, seeking input from diverse audiences within the state, including educators, employers, and other members of the general public.

Secondly, the SLDS Governing Board should prioritize the development of intuitive dashboards that provide clear, actionable insights tailored to the needs of different user groups—policymakers, educators, students, and their parents, as well as community members. These dashboards should be interactive, allowing users to easily:

- + Disaggregate data by student subgroup (e.g., race/ethnicity, income level, geography);
- + Explore trends over time across different school types or career pathways;
- + Compare outcomes across regions, programs, or institutions; and
- + Visualize key metrics, such as certificate or credential attainment, or job placement rates.

Lastly, Mississippi should promote meaningful engagement with the SLDS. This includes offering training for local leaders and practitioners, incorporating data literacy into educator professional development, and encouraging policymakers to utilize SLDS data in program and funding decisions.

Case Example: The Colorado SLDS Governing Board consists of the commissioner of education and the heads of designees of the state departments of higher education, early education, and labor and employment. The Board also consists of three members from the public appointed by the governor. Currently, those spots are filled by a former K-12 administrator, college professor, and state policy expert.¹³

- + **Learn More:** [Statewide Longitudinal Data System \(SLDS\) | Office of Information Technology](#)

CONCLUSION

With access to a wide range of data from our public schools, higher education institutions, and the workforce, Mississippi's SLDS has the potential to inform state policy and empower individuals to make informed decisions about their future and the future of Mississippi. Such a tool is essential to achieving our state's postsecondary education attainment goals.

We encourage policymakers to view this memo as the beginning of a broad effort among multiple stakeholders to envision an actionable data system and take the steps necessary to make it a reality. By improving accessibility, utility, training, and knowledge of the SLDS, we can turn data into action and ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

ABOUT TEACH PLUS

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning for students.



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ENDNOTES

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