

Assessing and Improving State Data Systems (PSURS)

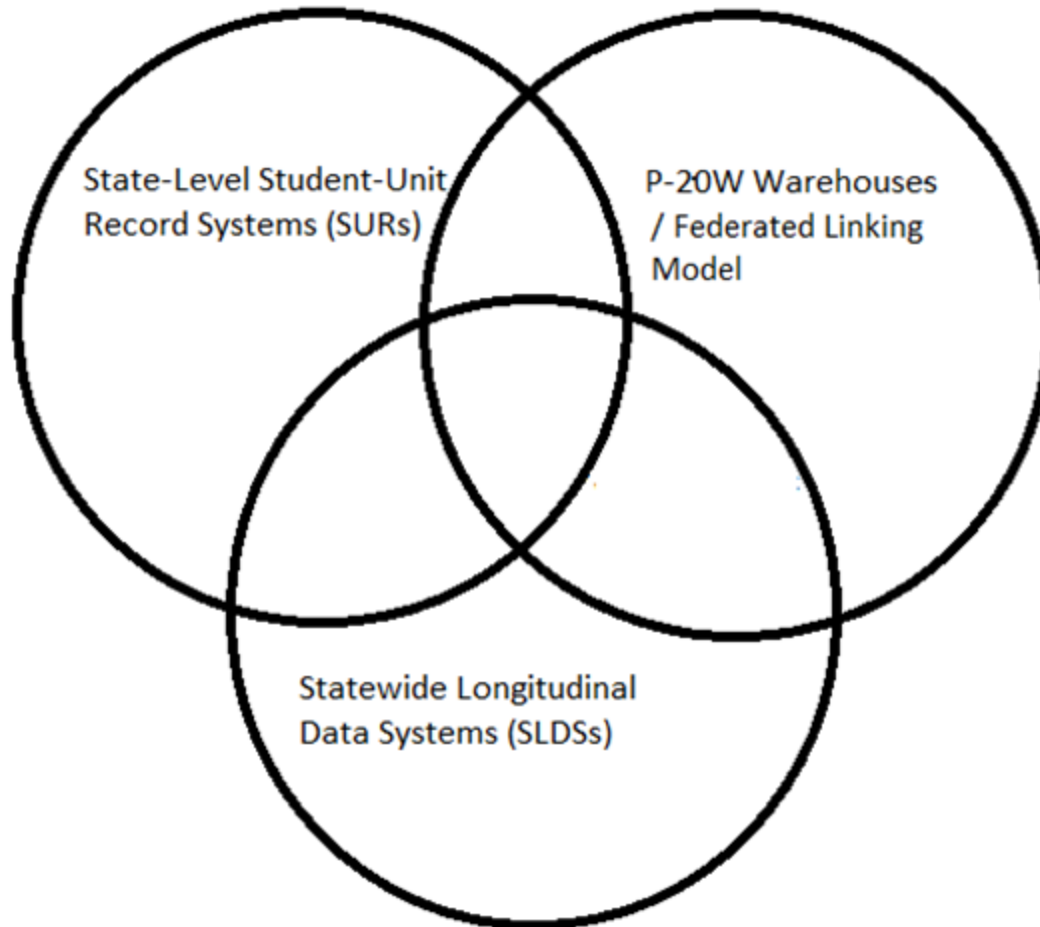
John Armstrong, Katie Zaback



Created by Ilya Gerner
 ilyagerner.tumblr.com
 Blank Map Courtesy of:
 Produced by the Cartographic Research Lab
 University of Alabama

Key Points in Paper

- Postsecondary Student Unit Record Systems (PSURS) are the best tools to deliver reporting for state policymakers
- The breadth of data housed in PSURS has grown and PSURS often collect data elements that are absent in national-level datasets
- The use of PSURS has evolved from primarily counting enrollment to linking across sectors, analyzing complex topics and driving policy.
- Linking between postsecondary agencies and K-12 / Workforce datasets has grown significantly in recent years
NOT ALL OF THESE LINKAGES ARE THROUGH WAREHOUSES



Role of PSURS in Data Policy Discussions

- While the scope of data elements collected varies across the country, state agencies have access to unit record information as well as data elements not present in IPEDS:
 - Examples Include – Course-level information
 - Remedial / Developmental Enrollment and Completions
 - Transcript level data
 - State and institutional aid and debt levels
 - Workforce outcomes (through linking arrangements)
- Many institutions collect a broader scope of data elements than PSURS, but each state focuses on key metrics and collects those metrics to present to policymakers in a state context

Major Issues

- Resources to support and use these systems are a significant barrier for states. Specific resource challenges include:
 - Attracting and keeping high quality skilled staff
 - Maintaining and improving technology infrastructure
 - Funding constraints & sustainability
- A lack of a common identifier and concerns about privacy have Linkages can be stymied or incomplete due to a lack of common identifiers.
- Data quality & coverage limitations
- Need for good communication and usage

Technical Enhancements Needed to Improve PSURS

- Improve the quality of labor force outcomes by allowing state agencies access to IRS or SSA wage records (which are more complete than Unemployment Insurance Records)
- Closing gaps in data collection through:
 - National Initiatives (CCA, VFA, SREB)
 - Tying SURS data collections to state and agency strategic planning
 - Engaging stakeholders, including non-policymakers
- Address privacy directly through best practices and utilizing national resources (DQC, PTAC)
- Better recognition that technology and FERPA are more perceived barriers than actual barriers

Resources Needed to Improve PSURS

- Sustained funding and investment from states
- Training and assistance for state agency staff
- Presentation of national data in state contexts
- Political will to utilize and improve these data collections (Data Champions)

Action Items for Improving PSURS

- Involve agency leadership in PSURS collection and priorities
- Shift the focus of federal grants to outcomes of systems, rather than outputs or infrastructure
- Communicate the best practices of PSURS that are impacting policy
- Continue to build on past improvements and expand the use of these data systems

Concluding Thoughts

- State agencies have been collecting unit record data on postsecondary students for as long as forty years.
- More demands are being made on data and reporting
- PSURS are adaptive to state policy needs and fulfill a critical role in crafting higher education policy.