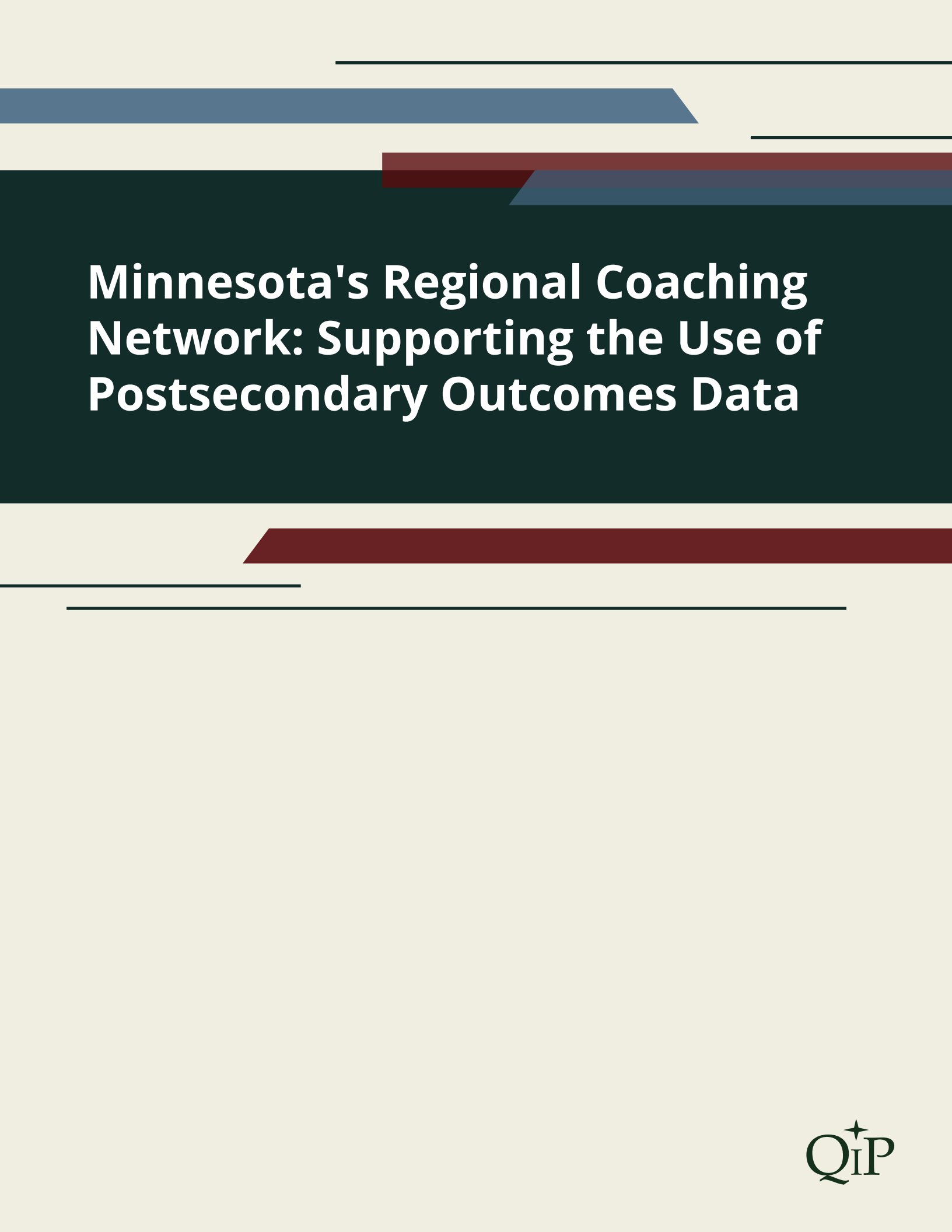




Minnesota's Regional Coaching Network: Supporting the Use of Postsecondary Outcomes Data

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INTRODUCTION

About This Document

This case study is one in a set that examines states' practices and policies for providing postsecondary outcomes data to the public and practitioners. This resource provides guidance for state agencies who use and support the use of postsecondary outcomes data. It is designed to help states implement strategies around their use of postsecondary outcomes data and support their stakeholders' use, including K-12 districts and schools, parents/guardians, students, and policymakers.

This case study focuses on Minnesota's Regional Coaching Network and how the data coaches help educators access, interpret, and use data to improve postsecondary and workforce outcomes for their students. It highlights program objectives and examples of how data coaches support effective use of postsecondary outcomes data in Minnesota.

Minnesota's Regional Coaching Network

To ensure that local education stakeholders are well versed in the effective use of education data, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) developed a statewide coaching network in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). Under Minnesota's Regional Coaching Network, data coaches work across Minnesota's nine regional service cooperatives to help high school and postsecondary educators access data within the state's Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS)¹ and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS). These data coaches are instrumental in helping high school and postsecondary staff navigate, interpret, and effectively use complex datasets from SLEDS to improve postsecondary and workforce outcomes for students.

The Regional Coaching Network ensures that educators use data to

- foster equitable access to quality education;
- evaluate the success of academic programs in preparing students for higher education; and
- inform students graduating from high school on their postsecondary education and career options.

Data coaches teach educators and staff how to use data to gain insights on successfully preparing students for postsecondary pathways. Data coaches help educators develop questions and identify available postsecondary outcomes data to answer their questions. They help staff analyze and use the data to inform actions to improve student outcomes. For example, school counselors can use postsecondary outcomes data to help students make informed decisions about actions they can take in high school to improve their chances of success in postsecondary education.

Minnesota's Regional Coaching Network is an exemplary model for other states seeking to increase data-informed decision-making among prekindergarten through workforce (P-20W) educators, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to improve postsecondary outcomes for students.

HOW DATA COACHING SUPPORTS THE USE OF POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES DATA

Each data coach's ability to provide tailored support to their region's education stakeholders is key to the program. Stakeholders can include

- district data analysts who require access to timely and accurate data with minimal coaching;
- researchers seeking answers to targeted questions around postsecondary outcomes who need to know how to find data and what practices to follow to ensure data privacy; and
- district or school data users trying to understand which postsecondary outcomes data can help them evaluate and refine their programs to best serve students.

Minnesota distributes resources to districts, government agencies, and non-profits based on nine geographic regions, or service cooperatives (co-ops), known collectively as the Minnesota Service Cooperatives (MSC).² The Regional Coaching Network employs 11 data coaches who assist the nine regional service co-ops and three at-large coaches from the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI)³ and Century College.⁴ Each region is assigned one to two data coaches. At-large coaches serve all 87 counties in Minnesota in coordination with the assigned regional data coach(es) for each region.

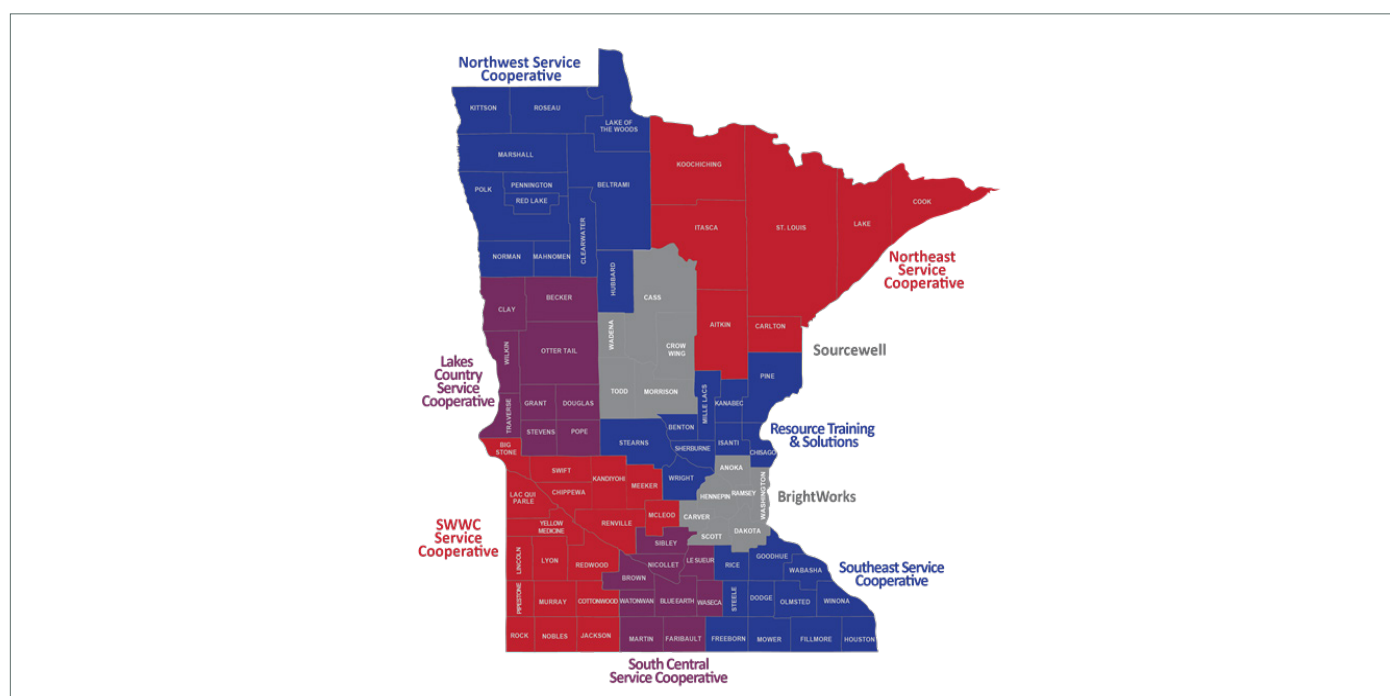


Figure 1. The Regional Coaching Network employs 11 data coaches who are assigned to specific regional co-ops and three at-large coaches who serve the entire state. Source: "Map of Minnesota Service Cooperatives," The Minnesota Service Cooperatives. Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://www.mnservcoop.org>.

Leverage Existing Relationships

In addition to their work within the Regional Coaching Network, data coaches already occupy full-time data expert roles at Minnesota districts or other institutions. Their role as a data coach is an add-on to their preexisting duties.

Find people at local levels who want to use data to change what they do. They will be the best data coaches.

—Director of Research,
Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Each data coach has existing relationships and ties to the education community in the region they serve. These relationships give data coaches a unique understanding of the region, which helps them provide a more tailored approach to schools and districts based on local efforts.

Maintaining Relationships Beyond the Education Sector

Minnesota's data coaches use their knowledge and leverage relationships in both the education and workforce sectors. For example, data coaches participated in a statewide awards event honoring businesses that had established partnerships with local schools. These partnerships included industry-specific job shadowing and apprenticeship opportunities for high school students. During the event, data coaches in attendance demonstrated their familiarity with local business leaders, including knowing each by name, understanding the specific schools these business leaders were engaged with, and the activities they were involved in. This close connection underscores how deeply integrated coaches are in their respective communities and how vital their role is in facilitating and strengthening crucial relationships.

Data Coach Roles: Trainer, Analyst, and Communicator

Effective data coaches must occupy several roles for their stakeholders. As trainers, data coaches meet with district and school staff to teach them about the data available in SLEDs and help develop questions that can be answered with postsecondary outcomes data. Data coaches point district and school staff toward data that can illustrate the challenges and successes of student pathways that might have otherwise been overlooked. Data coaches also help educators understand the kinds of questions the data can answer to improve postsecondary outcomes for students. They help staff read data and interpret data; data coaches educate stakeholders on how specific data elements are defined in SLEDs to ensure staff are using the right postsecondary outcomes data to answer their targeted questions.

I've met with directors of career services to teach them about what data is available, what it means, and how you can use the public website. [Training the career services directors how to access publicly available data] is then informing their conversations with students when they're talking about potential career paths and what are the wages that you could expect to receive in that career.

—At-large Data Coach,
Century College

As data analysts, data coaches can provide guidance and assistance when data is inaccessible or protected from public view. Data coaches have access to postsecondary student data that school staff do not, and they can pull data into secure reports that inform solutions without compromising the privacy of student data. For example, data coaches might be asked to assist a researcher with questions regarding students in the correctional systems. A researcher might want to know

- how many students continue academic work and pursue degrees while incarcerated;
- how many students complete degrees while incarcerated; and
- how many students wait until after their release to resume academic work.

Queries about incarcerated students would include data from the Minnesota Department of Corrections, which is likely to be beyond the purview of school-level or district-level education researchers. Data coaches, in collaboration with the state, coupled with permissions to view and report sensitive student data (after proper redaction, exclusion, and protection of personally identifiable information), can analyze and anonymize the relevant data for secure release and provide it to the researcher in a format that protects student privacy.

As communicators, data coaches serve as an important bridge between the state and district. When new opportunities and resources become available through state offices, data coaches communicate these opportunities to the appropriate stakeholders in their region. OHE also relies on data coaches to communicate the postsecondary data needs of districts to the state (for example, data coaches can suggest the state produce certain reports and metrics that will best inform a specific district's work).

We use our coaches as more than just data coaching now, we use them as a dissemination network. Any time I have a program that may impact a local area, I ask them where to send them an email ... And then we connect them to the colleges ... the data coach now knows who the contact at the college is for research and data, who knows who the contact at the high school is for research and data ... And given that most high school graduates go to the closest college near them, that relationship is critical.

**— Director of Research,
Minnesota Office of Higher Education**

Keeping Data Coaches Prepared

Minnesota regional data coaches receive regular training to enhance their skills and stay updated on best practices in data analysis and coaching. The Regional Coaching Network meets monthly to provide updates on data projects, share best practices and tips, and ask questions to increase their knowledge. The frequency of training sessions can vary depending on the specific needs and priorities of the coaching network. Typically, data coaches participate in professional development opportunities throughout the year, which may include workshops, seminars, conferences, webinars, or online courses. These training sessions are designed to provide coaches with the latest research, tools, and strategies in data analysis and coaching. Extra training ensures that data coaches have the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively support educators and schools in using data for instructional improvement.

Introducing data analysis into decision-making can be challenging for some organizations. The Minnesota P-20W has created an extended Regional Coaching Network to provide personal assistance to stakeholders. The network works closely with ECLDS and SLEDs users to address the technical issues some may have when applying data towards education, regional analysis, and career planning information.



EXPERTISE ACTIVITIES



- Training state, local, and partnering agency staff
- Coordinating data analysis activities in partnership with the state, school districts, and communities
- Assisting with data-based planning and program evaluation



- Developing products and services to improve user experience, as guided by ECLDS and SLEDs coordinators
- Facilitating projects with external partners
- Incorporating feedback to improve products and services



- Overseeing special regional studies about education, college, and career planning
- Coordinating and conducting original education data analysis
- Serving as an expert resource to education stakeholders and partner agencies



- Assessing education research and information resource needs
- Responding to requests for information and analysis
- Representing ECLDS and SLEDs at regional meetings

Figure 2. Minnesota's Regional Coaching Network data coaches must serve a variety of roles to be effective.

Source: "Regional Coaching Network Informational PDF," Minnesota SLEDs/ECLDS.

Retrieved April 1, 2024, from https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE033100&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary.

DATA COACHING IN ACTION

The Regional Coaching Network helps educators and staff effectively use postsecondary outcomes data to understand the paths students take after high school and how to help them achieve success in their postsecondary education.

Understanding Student Trajectories: South Central Service Cooperative

The South Central Service Cooperative (SCSC), one of the nine education cooperatives of Minnesota, serves a largely rural area of the state. This region's data coach works with SCSC educators to use postsecondary outcomes data to research questions on how students transition into the Minnesota workforce. Specifically, the region's questions include

- What kinds of careers are our students moving into?
- How much are they paid?
- Are they working locally or moving away to work?
- Are our secondary and postsecondary institutions giving our students what they need to succeed?

The sea is wide and deep with data—each district will have different questions and different things they are focusing on and how best to support them.

**—Director of Research,
Minnesota Office of Higher Education**

Connecting Career and Technical Education to Concurrent Enrollment

The SCSC data coach also works with district staff in Mankato Area Public Schools (Mankato) to use postsecondary outcomes data to examine how career and technical education (CTE) programs align with current and future labor market demands. Minnesota has multiple programs⁵ for high school students to engage with postsecondary opportunities:

- Concurrent enrollment opportunities allow students to begin college courses while still in high school.⁶
- The Transfer Pathways program allows students to earn an associate's degree and transfer to a Minnesota State University (MSU) to earn a bachelor's degree. Students can begin taking these courses in high school.⁷

School counselors support high school students in earning transferable college credits by helping students select concurrent enrollment options with credits that can be easily transferred to MSU. Mankato district leaders use postsecondary outcomes data to track students who took CTE courses in high school before attending MSU Mankato to determine whether these students continued to follow their high school CTE pathway in their postsecondary education. Additionally, Mankato data leaders are investigating if CTE teachers, who may act as career coaches in their role as educators, influence postsecondary pathway choices. These data will help the district make informed decisions that will refine and potentially expand the connection of CTE courses to the Transfer Pathways program and better define the role CTE teachers have in helping CTE students succeed.

Expanding concurrent enrollment options

In smaller or rural districts without local colleges, high school counselors may need to encourage their students to explore concurrent enrollment opportunities that are farther from home. The SCSC data coach helps counselors in these regions use postsecondary outcomes data to understand where students in their communities are receiving postsecondary education. This information allows counselors to connect students

with similar opportunities in neighboring communities or regions. In addition, the SCSC data coach facilitates partnerships with concurrent enrollment programs across the region that match student interests and align with current and future labor market demands.

Enhancing Meaningful Data Use: Century College

Century College* offers a wide range of CTE programs as well as concurrent enrollment programs.^{8,9} The at-large data coach at Century College is a research analyst who fills a pivotal role in helping researchers and educators across the state make sense of postsecondary and workforce outcomes data from SLEDS.

The data coach supports the meaningful use of postsecondary outcomes data by

- addressing queries about how and where to locate specific data;
- raising awareness about how data can be used to support students; and
- combining datasets across data sources to show important data patterns and trends.

The Century College data coach created an internal data dashboard to showcase employment and wage insights for college graduates. The dashboard showed the wages of college graduates from various Minnesota colleges and universities, making it easier for districts to analyze their high school graduates' employment trends through a readily usable and accessible format. The report also connected OHE data about Minnesota college graduates to data from DEED, giving colleges and universities long-term wage insights about their graduates.

The data coach at Century College also created a comprehensive institutional report that connects employment data from SLEDS to the college's degree programs. Programs in Century College use this report to assess the employment status and wage earnings of their graduates. For example, this report has been used to determine the median wage of nursing graduates in Minnesota.

We have a report that we put out that different programs on campus use for program review ... I worked to incorporate SLEDS employment data into that report, so that if, for example, the nursing program wants to see, 'Are our nursing graduates finding jobs? and what are the wages they are earning at those jobs?' That's something that I was able to use SLEDS data to do for Century programs.

**— At-large Data Coach,
Century College**

* Century College is a 2-year comprehensive community and technical college in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, offering 156 degrees, diplomas, and certificates in transfer and career programs. It is the largest 2-year comprehensive college in Minnesota, serving more than 15,500 credit and non-credit students annually. Fifty percent of students are first generation and 41 percent receive Pell grants.

Finally, the Century College data coach developed an aggregate report to provide insights into developmental education rates, graduation rates, and transfer rates based on whether students had an individualized education plan (IEP) in high school. The report leverages SLEDs data, which includes a disability indicator and IEP status at the last enrollment in K-12. This information could shed light on the outcomes of students with different needs and abilities, fostering awareness of potential impacts on their experience at the college. The report also allows users to disaggregate the data into other various student groups, such as by race/ethnicity. Presenting information in this format could help stakeholders identify trends without compromising individual privacy. Reports such as these are critical in making this population visible to enhance support and resources based on actual data trends.

CONCLUSION

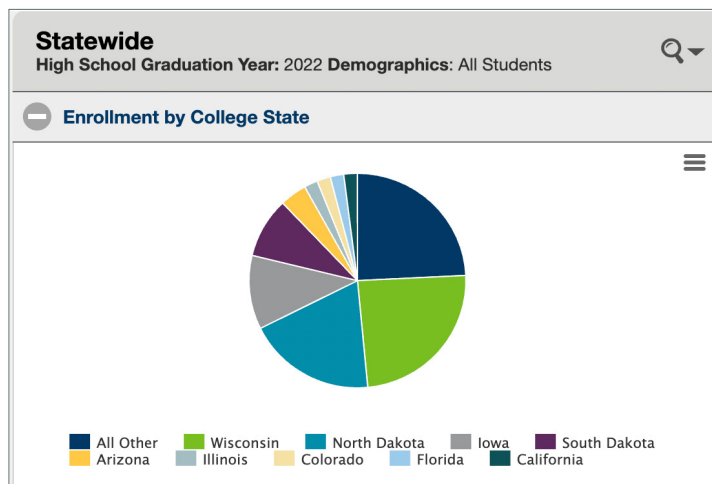
Minnesota's data coaches play a pivotal role in training educators and counselors, helping them understand data and how to use it for decision-making. Their expertise and on-the-ground involvement ensure that data-driven decisions are not only made at the state level but also filter down to local education settings, ultimately benefiting students. By leveraging existing relationships, the Regional Coaching Network offers tailored support for regional educators, promoting data literacy and equitable access to quality education. The Regional Coaching Network helps various stakeholders address disparities and understand student trajectories.

APPENDIX A: POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES DATA USE AT THE STATE LEVEL

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) relies on its Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDs) and its networks to create a statewide culture of data maximization—encouraging stakeholders to think about strategic practices in data use. OHE uses SLEDs to assess trends in postsecondary outcomes data, revealing which regions across the state have disparities in performance for certain groups of students and whether strategies and programs are effective. It also relies on the Regional Coaching Network at the regional and local levels to help education practitioners make an impact on their students using statewide data. OHE’s efforts support a longitudinal and cooperative approach to improving postsecondary outcomes through supporting data-driven improvements to programs and practices earlier in the education pipeline.

Leveraging National Student Clearinghouse Data Sources

Connecting data from Minnesota institutions of high education (IHEs) and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) gives OHE a comprehensive view of student progress, allowing for the identification of trends, including potential misalignments between high school curricula and college academic expectations. To get a more comprehensive picture of their students, OHE uses NSC data in SLEDs to report on students who go out of state for postsecondary pathways and to see transfer data and completion rates.



The National Student Clearinghouse sometimes fills a hole [in the data]. Sometimes you’ll find a student that’s in one dataset and not the other, and we’ll ask why. It’s a data quality check, we use it to validate our data. They do a lot of reporting on national trends and national patterns that we don’t necessarily pick up on right away. So we kind of use them as a sounding board in terms of research and analysis, too.

— Director of Research,
Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Figure 3. This pie chart shows out of state enrollment data for 2022 Minnesota high school graduates using data from the NSC. Source: “Enrollment by College State.” Minnesota Office of Higher Education. Retrieved April 1, 2024, from <https://sleds.mn.gov/#outStateCollegeStudentEnrollment>.

Connecting to Workforce

OHE works with regional service providers across the state to introduce certificate programs in high-demand, high-growth fields to students in high school. For example, through collaborations with industry partners in healthcare, high school students can take courses toward obtaining a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certificate by high school graduation.¹⁰ OHE is also pursuing a partnership that would enable students to obtain a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) certificate within 6 months of high school graduation.

OHE fosters strong partnerships with local community colleges, technical colleges, and other education stakeholders, with grant funds from the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act of 2018 (Perkins V) serving as a pivotal enabler. Minnesota is currently in the process of piloting a partnership that would directly integrate data from SLEDs with student information from participating community colleges and state universities. This endeavor would enable Minnesota IHEs to use postsecondary and workforce outcomes data from SLEDs to track the employment and earnings outcomes of their graduates. An IHE could use this postsecondary and workforce outcomes data to determine

- the wages of students who graduate with a health care degree at 1, 2, or 5 years after graduation;
- the industry or career fields they enter; and
- whether graduates are staying in the local area or moving away.

This data could indicate if local investments in education are yielding local dividends. OHE is looking at postsecondary outcomes data in the healthcare, manufacturing, and service industries to determine if enough individuals trained in these fields remain in the local community to meet workforce demands. OHE is also using postsecondary and workforce outcomes data to see the extent to which learners remain in their chosen industry or opt for a career change, which is useful for shaping education and training programs.

Connecting to Research

OHE's commitment to supporting SLEDs data use at the local level goes beyond data collection mandates. OHE focuses on fostering connections and partnerships with various agencies that support use of data that has already been collected. OHE connects external researchers to SLEDs data, ranging from doctoral candidates conducting dissertation research to larger institutions.

Researchers also collaborate with OHE to collect data from multiple states to examine the impact of high school graduation requirements on postsecondary success. After completing their studies, these researchers provide presentations or reports back to OHE. OHE then shares the findings with local stakeholders, often through the Regional Coaching Network. As a result, OHE delivers the latest research insights, derived from Minnesota data, to empower local educators and administrators in making informed decisions. This approach ensures that SLEDs data is used actively at the local level, contributing to evidence-based decision-making.

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