



Measuring early career outcomes in D.C.

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D.C. POLICY CENTER

Education Policy Initiative

D.C.'s public and public charter schools serving students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 strive to prepare students to succeed as young adults through college and in the workplace. While the city monitors key outcomes such as high school graduation rates and enrollment in postsecondary degree programs, we know very little about the early career outcomes for D.C.'s public school alumni. Tracking early career outcomes of D.C.'s former public school students is difficult, especially given D.C.'s small geographic area, dispersed alumni population, and small public postsecondary system compared to other states—but understanding more about District graduates' experiences in early career could inform practices and investments to support current students and future graduates on a path to success.

Measuring early career outcomes in D.C. presents a blueprint of how the District can collect the critical information needed to determine the early career outcomes of former public school students, and the ways that others undertake this difficult task.

Read the full report: dcpolicycenter.org/publications/measuring-outcomes

What are early career outcomes?

Early career outcomes refer to the employment, income, and educational attainment (including degrees, certificates, and credentials) of D.C.'s former public and public charter school students and graduates during their twenties and thirties.

Today, the best proxy for early career outcomes for D.C.'s alumni is information about young adults (ages 18 to 34) who were born and live in D.C.:

- 1 in 4 young adults born and living in D.C. has completed a postsecondary degree (which is required by 58% of jobs).
- Their average annual income is \$31,658, half that of their peers who are living in D.C. but were born elsewhere.

While improving data on early career outcomes would require commitment and resources, it is important because it can:

- ✓ Pinpoint what types of opportunities students have after K-12 and postsecondary education and workforce training.
- ✓ Expose the barriers that exist in the labor market, postsecondary attainment, or other training completion for former public school students to achieve successful early career outcomes.
- ✓ Change practices across public schools, postsecondary, and workforce development programs to maximize future success for D.C.'s youth.

What are other jurisdictions doing to collect early career outcomes information?



Creating strong linkages to local data

Statewide longitudinal data systems link high school student and alumni information from education agencies with outcomes data from in-state postsecondary networks and workforce agencies, including wage data reported for unemployment insurance administration.



Using surveys to ask alumni about outcomes

Schools or national organizations reach out to alumni via phone or email surveys for information on income, educational attainment, and qualitative information about their career and school experiences.



Connecting to national and interstate data sources

Researchers link to external data to find out what happens to alumni after they leave a school system, usually using National Student Clearinghouse, unemployment insurance data exchanges, and federal data sources, among others.

What is D.C. doing now to collect information on early career outcomes?

- **D.C. has a lot of citywide data on the PK-12 experience.** D.C.'s statewide longitudinal database system (SLDS) has a strong base of information on student characteristics, the school experience, and college and career readiness.
- **High schools have some information on postsecondary outcomes for their alumni, mostly from the National Student Clearinghouse.** DCPS Persists and KIPP Forward are examples of schools that follow and support alumni using data from the National Student Clearinghouse and administering their own surveys.
- **Workforce data is challenging for high schools and postsecondary institutions to find and track.** While some high schools survey alumni about their employment and income, unemployment insurance wage data in D.C. and elsewhere would provide more accurate and comprehensive information.

Considerations for D.C. to build out its early career outcomes tracking system

1. **Establish guiding principles for tracking early career outcomes in D.C.:** Identify desired outcomes and engage with stakeholders to evaluate the need for this information.
2. **Make stronger connections between local and national data sources:** Link data between D.C. agencies, and then connect to national data sources (such as National Student Clearinghouse or national unemployment insurance data exchanges).
3. **Determine ownership and governance for an education workforce data system:** Consider creating a separate entity to track data with data sharing agreements.
4. **Build capacity among practitioners in K-12, postsecondary, and workforce programs to use data:** Hold trainings for educators and administrators on how to use data and conduct citywide analyses.
5. **Plan for continuous improvements:** Connect to regional partners such as Maryland or Virginia, or conduct an alumni survey to learn qualitative information on former students' experiences.

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