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VLDS E-Newsletter - May 2014

IN THIS ISSUE

[Q&A with Virginia's Secretary of Technology Karen Jackson](#)

[Insights Explained – Pioneering Workforce ROI Research Released](#)

[VLDS INSIGHTS Conference](#)

[Longitudinal Data Systems in the News](#)

Q&A with Virginia's Secretary of Technology Karen Jackson

We spoke with Karen Jackson, Virginia's Secretary of Technology, about VLDS, big data and the role data can play in education, government and the workforce.

VLDS: Can you share some of the administration's initiatives that you might highlight in your Insights Conference address? How does VLDS fit with those initiatives?

Sec. Jackson: It just so happens that Governor McAuliffe recently announced a big data initiative known as Data.Virginia.Gov. We're very excited about it! As described on the website, Data.virginia.gov provides easy access to information on Virginia's big data initiatives as well as centralized access to open data from Virginia and a variety of other sources. Our intent is to leverage Data.Virginia.Gov to increase transparency, encourage innovation, and ultimately enhance state operations. VLDS is highlighted as one of the big data case studies. We feel that the creation of VLDS is an important step and its mission – to improve student outcomes – is a case study for other agencies to learn about what big data is and how it can be used to improve stakeholder outcomes.



VLDS: What role do you think the careful use of data plays in education, government or the workforce in Virginia? How do you think it is evolving?

Sec. Jackson: Data is an untapped resource that is ever-evolving. Government is full of data, and we're just beginning to identify the many problems and opportunities where data can help. Effectively leveraging data is important to drive outcomes, improve transparency and to help us identify and create efficiencies. Right now, we're identifying data resources throughout the Commonwealth and bringing them together under one umbrella. We're not only making data more available to the public on the open data side, but we're also seeking to build "big data" awareness within our own agencies so all of us can reap the benefits of identifiable trends, increased efficiencies, and improved citizen experiences.

VLDS: How do you view the value of the insights powered by VLDS in your role as Virginia's Secretary of Technology?

Sec. Jackson: Most importantly, VLDS, through its partnerships, is helping to shape the workforce of the future. From what we've learned already, we need to make sure that the education system is aligned with the needs of the future workforce. And, we've seen that VLDS can help us answer questions like how best to assess teacher preparation programs or what high school achievement factors are associated with enrollment, persistence, and graduation from college. VLDS does provide a process to help "Bridge the Data Divide."

The technology community is strong in Virginia. We're breaking new ground in modeling and simulation, cyber security, data analytics and in the bio industry. Only fifteen years ago, we spent a lot of effort teaching people how to get their businesses on the internet. But our children will live in a vastly different world. If we are to remain academically and economically competitive (because our competitors now are not just other states, but we're also competing globally), we'll need to be smarter in how we learn, plan, and work, and there will be an even greater need for collaboration. The VLDS partner agencies have proven that it can be done and it can work well. Virginia has a rich past. We want to make sure that our future is even brighter!

You can hear Secretary Jackson's keynote address at the [VLDS Insights Conference on June 24](#).

Insights Explained – Pioneering Workforce ROI Research Released

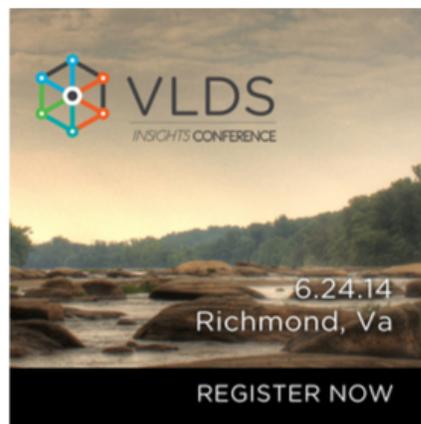
To determine whether Virginia might improve the performance of its public workforce system, Virginia Community College System (VCCS) and the Virginia Employment Commission, founding agencies of VLDS (Virginia Longitudinal Data System), sponsored research to evaluate the return on investment for three programs: Workforce Investment Act (WIA); Wagner Peyser (WP); and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA). The results of the study, part of the inaugural class of VLDS research insights, were delivered last month by researchers from Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Virginia in a report entitled "Return on Investment for Virginia's Workforce Programs."

The study examined how ROI differs across demographic groups, economic factors, services levels, and the types of services utilized (i.e. training, certifications) and regional differences. In addition, researchers compared and contrasted study outcomes across the three workforce programs and a control group. The report highlights key findings for policy makers to consider as they formulate workforce policy in the Commonwealth.

In addition to the findings, however, some of the most important insights of this research may stem from the process itself. The study reveals needed improvements that will help Virginia meet its accountability mandates for measuring workforce programs and emphasizes the importance of context in evaluating program ROI. Researchers suggest that ROI be but one of many measurement tools for that analysis.

VLDS INSIGHTS Conference

The second annual INSIGHTS Conference is quickly approaching. Here's a preview of what you can expect during the breakout sessions. Want to know more? You can see the full agenda [here](#).



Privacy Best Practices

Presented by: Michael Hawes

This session will provide a brief overview of federal requirements for protecting student privacy in longitudinal data systems under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The presentation also will discuss a number of privacy best practices related to data governance, data management, data release and transparency, and how to follow these best practices in the context of VLDS.

Statistical Peer Groups Project: Creating Demographically Similar Peer Groups of Schools for School Improvement

Presented by: Dennis Kramer, Ryoko Yamaguchi

This session will focus on using school-level data as a roadmap for school improvement by creating four types of comparisons:

1. State
2. Division

3. Statistical Peers

4. School

The presentation will describe methodological approaches to creating statistical peer groups using school data and how state, division and school leadership can use this information for school improvement.

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Longitudinal Data Systems in the News

- "With the help of researchers, we can provide real numbers to teachers, parents, and students that will help students make important decisions in middle and high school. Similarly, on the other end of the spectrum, researchers can help us evaluate early learning programs..." [Read more](#) of the Data Quality Campaign guest blog post from, Bethann Canada, Director of Educational Information Management with the Virginia Department of Education and VLDS Project Director.
- Schools have always kept records, and in 2005 the federal government began awarding grants for the creation of state longitudinal data systems. This allowed states to store and process information on remote servers. Read more in this All Things Considered piece, [What parents need to know about big data and student privacy](#).
- Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe announced a state data site known as Data.Virginia.Gov that can help Virginians make informed decisions. Read the announcement [here](#).



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For more information on VLDS, visit
<http://vlds.virginia.gov>

VLDS PRIVACY PROMISE: We, the members of VLDS, promise to protect the privacy and confidentiality of data entrusted to us. The VLDS system is designed to meet or exceed all state and federal privacy laws and requirements.

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