West Virginia has just launched a web site, ZoomWV, intended to make it easier to use its massive longitudinal student database, but a recent U.S. Government Accountability Office report suggests it and other states could have difficulty making the bridge between K-12 experiences and long-term student outcomes.

The Charleston Daily Mail reported that West Virginia's $1.54 million data site will allow parents, researchers, and the public to see "where the state and each county and school stands in terms of enrollment, assessment results, and graduation and attendance rates" both overall and disaggregated by student groups in K-12.

But West Virginia, like many other states, has difficulty matching individual education records to students' later results in the workforce, according to a GAO report.

The GAO found that most of the 48 states that received some of the more than $640 million in federal grants since 2013 through the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) or Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) programs could match at least some individual students from early childhood all the way through K-12, higher education, and into the workforce. Yet, the report noted, "as the match rate—that is, the percent of unique student records reliably connected between databases—increases, the number of grantees able to match data between sectors decreases."

![Figure 1: Number of SLDS or WDQI Grantees with the Ability to Match Data from Early Education to Workforce, 2013](chart.png)

Source: GAO analysis of 2013 Data Quality Campaign (DQC) survey data. [GAO-15-27]

Notes: We analyzed data on the 48 states that received a State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant, a Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant, or both and responded to the 2013 DQC survey. Matching is defined as reliably connecting the same individual record in two or more databases. The match rate is the percent of unique individual records that are matched. We considered a grantee as matching data between sectors if a grantee matched data from at least one program between sectors.
Workforce data seemed to be a big sticking point, the GAO found, because several states had laws limiting whether, say, a student's Social Security number could be used to identify him or her for such purposes. The few states that could match students' educational and workforce data holistically, such as Washington and Pennsylvania, reported concerns that there is not enough federal funding to sustain the continued data collection needed to keep the systems running properly.

The long-term health of the student-data systems is important, the GAO found, because states overwhelmingly are using the systems to conduct research and inform policy in several ways, including:

- Forty-five grantee states provided feedback to high schools on how their students fared after graduation;
- 27 analyzed the college and career readiness of their emerging workforce;
- 29 could flag individual students who showed early signs of disengagement or risk of dropping out of school; and
- 39 created research agendas based on current problems in educational policy and practice that could be studied using the data systems.

"As grantees continue to refine their systems," concluded report author Jacqueline M. Nowicki, the director of GAO's education, workforce, and income-security issues, "maximizing the potential of these systems will rest, in part, with the ability to more fully match information on specific programs and characteristics of individuals that could help in further analyzing education and workforce outcomes."

*Chart source: Government Accountability Office.*