MLDS CENTER
Maryland Longitudinal Data System

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MEMORANDUM

TO: MLDS Governing Board

FROM: Molly B. Abend, Data Management Coordinator

DATE: June 9, 2026

SUBJECT: MLDS 2026 Proposed Legislation

The MLDS Center proposes amending or repealing the statutory requirement that limits how long student data may be linked to workforce data within the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS).

Overview

Longitudinal data systems depend on many years of continuous data in order to generate and provide meaningful insights. Maryland law currently requires the MLDS Center to unlink an individual's workforce record 20 years after that individual's last education record. No other state with a State Longitudinal Data System imposes a limit of this kind. Amending or repealing this restriction is critical to support long-term policy relevant research and reporting on education and workforce outcomes in Maryland.

Background

Education Article § 24-702(c) states that "linkage of student data and workforce data for the purposes of the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) shall be limited to no longer than 20 years from the date of latest attendance in any educational institution in the State". The original MLDS statute limited the linkage of education and workforce records to only 5 years. In 2017, state law was amended (Chapter 791) to extend from 5 to 20, the number of years that records can be linked.

The MLDS contains education records beginning with the 2007-2008 cohort. Under the current statute, individuals with no new education record after 2007-2008 must be delinked from wages records beginning in 2028. This results in an inconsistent analytic window for students from the same cohort and lowers the ability to compare outcomes for those who continue their education and those who do not.

Effects on Research and Reporting Outputs

At the December 2025 MLDS Governing Board Meeting, members recommended that the MLDS Center undertake a review on the impact of the delinking requirement on MLDS Center research and reporting. The quantitative analysis (Appendix A) projected a substantial amount of delinking that would be required if the 20 year limitation remains in place. The qualitative analysis (Appendix B), which included a survey of data users (Appendix C), provided feedback and insights regarding the significant negative impacts of delinking.

Proposed Legislation

Below are three legislative options for addressing this issue:

1. Amend to Grant Governing Board Authority
   Remove the 20 year requirement and revise the language to grant the MLDS Governing Board authority to determine the appropriate length of time for maintaining student data and workforce data linkages. This would include developing regulations on how to implement the statute.
2. Repeal the Restriction
   Eliminate the current restriction entirely, allowing student and workforce data linkages to remain indefinitely within the MLDS.
3. Amend to Extend Timeframe
   Change the 20 year requirement to a significantly longer retention period to align with recommendations for maintaining data in a longitudinal data system.

Action

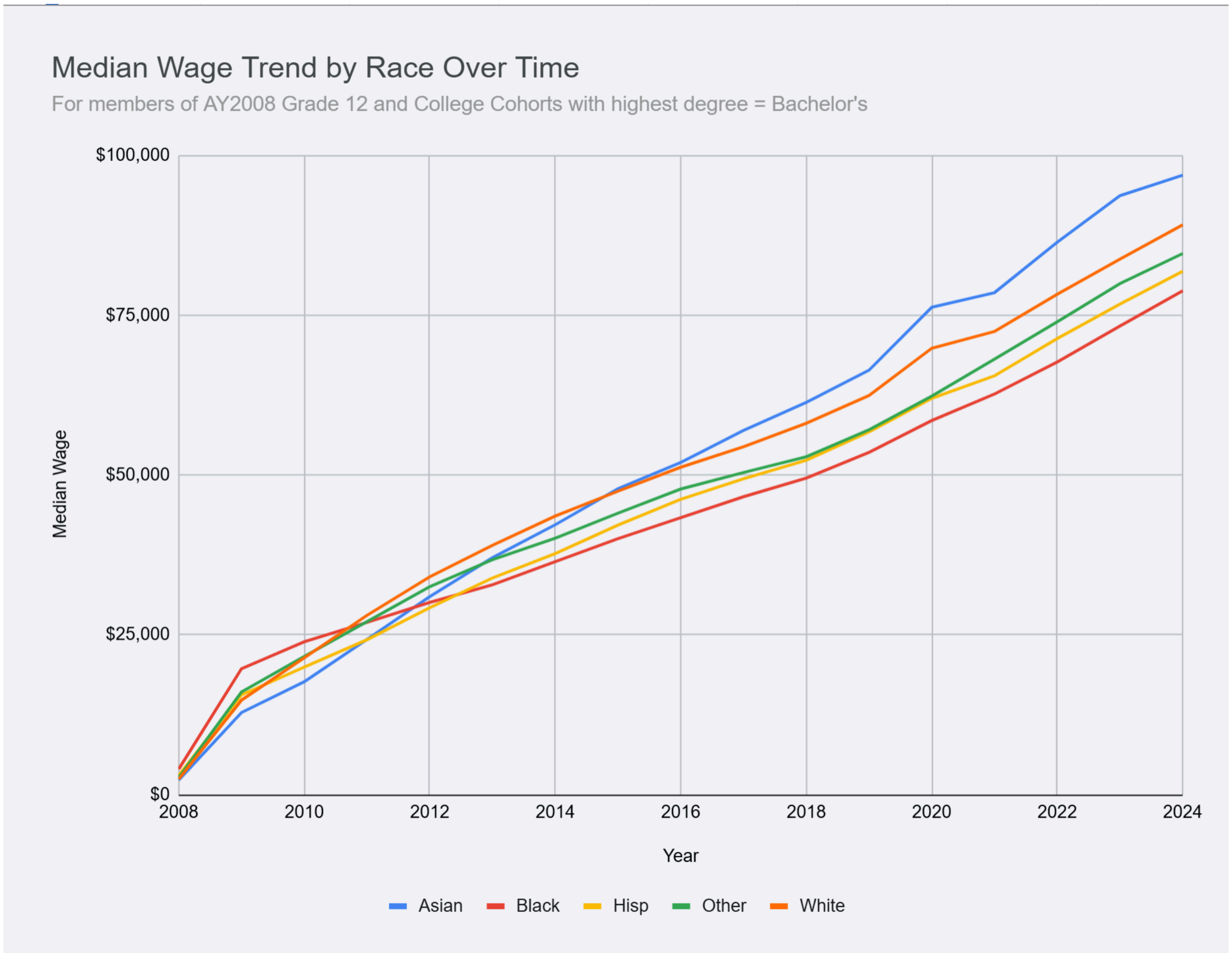
Determine which legislative option the MLDS Center should pursue regarding the delinking requirement.

Appendix A: Quantitative Analysis

MLDS Staff conducted an analysis to assess the magnitude and impact of the delinking requirement using current data in the MLDS. The analysis projected the percentage of individuals whose wage records would be delinked under a 20 year limitation, assuming no additional college attendance occurs between 2026 and 2030. Please note, approximately 5 percent of Maryland public high school graduates from the 2008 cohort did not have a postsecondary attendance record in Maryland until more than 10 years after high school. This pattern is not captured in the projection assumptions and suggests that the projected delinking percentages are likely overstated by a few percentage points. Below is a summary of the findings.

1. In 2028, an estimated **46.7%** of Maryland State Department of Education high school records and **50.3%** of Maryland Higher Education Commission postsecondary records would require delinking because no new education record occurred after students' 2008 high school graduation.
2. The chart below displays wage outcomes for Grade 12 Maryland public high school graduates in the 2007-2008 academic year who went on to earn a Bachelor's degree. The chart includes 16 years of wage data and demonstrates steady wage growth over time. However, the chart does not capture the complete wage-growth trajectory. Access to wage information beyond the 20 year limit is necessary to fully assess long-term wage trends, particularly for individuals whose wages continue to increase well into their career.
3. Findings from the MLDS Center's annual Career Preparation Expansion Act report further underscores the need to amend or appeal the current 20 year limit. The report illustrates that wage trajectories continue to increase well beyond the early career period. The report demonstrates the need and importance of longitudinal wage data when examining long-term earnings.

Chart 1: Median Wage Trends by Race for AY2008 Grade 12 and College Cohorts with Highest Degree of Bachelor's



Appendix B: Qualitative Analysis

The Research Branch compiled information from 17 researchers to understand the negative impacts of the proposed 20-year limit on linking educational and workforce data in the Maryland Longitudinal Data System (MLDS) on high-quality, policy-relevant research. The consensus among the researchers was that a 20-year limit prevents the study of long-term effects of education policies and interventions, comprehensive cost-benefit analyses, and life-course perspectives—especially since peak earning potential may not be reached until 35 years after high school. Researchers emphasize that this limit would introduce bias by disproportionately removing wage data for individuals who follow non-traditional or delayed educational pathways. State Longitudinal Data Systems in other states and national longitudinal studies link data from individuals for far longer periods to provide valid research to improve the understanding of long-term educational and workforce opportunities.

In summary, researchers would like to see the legislative restriction removed, for two main reasons.

1. **The restriction prevents the study of long-term effects of education policies and interventions, comprehensive cost-benefit analyses, and life-course perspectives.**
   For people whose last educational record was in 2007-08, we currently (2026) see up to 18 years of wages. The restriction limits research in several ways:
   - Researchers can only observe ***short term effects*** of educational programs on wages. This means that we are unable to see if programs have longer term effects on wages.
   - Researchers currently only observe ***early career wages***. This essentially limits outcome measurement timing to young adulthood. Researchers are unable to see what happens to people's wages as they progress through mid- and late-career.

The restriction limits researchers' ability to provide research to inform policy implications about educational effects into peak earning potential, which may not be reached until 35 years after high school.

2. **The restriction introduces bias by disproportionately removing wage data for individuals who follow non-traditional or delayed educational pathways.**
   Policymakers would benefit from the ability to be informed by consistent long-term comparisons across groups. For instance, consider following the 2008 high school graduating cohort of students into college and the workforce to assess how college enrollment and degree attainment influence wages. This would involve comparing those who go on to college with those who do not and instead enter the labor market with only a high school diploma.

   However, the structure of the data with the current legislative restriction complicates such comparisons. For individuals who enroll in college, the observation window effectively resets, allowing their wage outcomes to be tracked for an additional 20 years after college. In contrast, for those who do not enroll in college, wage data are only available for 20 years following high school graduation. As a result, while we can observe wages in 2032 for students who graduate from college in 2012, we cannot observe wages in 2032 for those who did not attend college—their data end in 2028.

This misalignment creates a critical limitation: **without comparable long-term wage data for the students who did not attend college, it becomes difficult to estimate the impact of college degree attainment on wages 20 years after college.**

	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
HS ONLY	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
COLL	✓	ENROLLED IN COLLEGE				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓ = MLDS is permitted to retain wage records

Appendix C: Feedback on Proposed Data Linking Limit Survey

Linking Limit

To MLDS Center Research PIs,

Maryland Education Article § 24-702(c) states: "The linkage of student data and workforce data for the purposes of the Maryland Longitudinal Data System shall be limited to no longer than 20 years from the date of latest attendance in any educational institution in the State."

The purpose of this survey is to compile justification and evidence from MLDS researchers to support the MLDS Center in advocating for legislation to remove this de-linking requirement. We are hoping to collect specific examples that demonstrate the limitations and drawbacks that this requirement imposes.

For example, high school graduates in 2008 with no subsequent education record in Maryland can currently be linked to quarterly wage data through 2027 but starting in 2028 no further workforce records could be linked to them because of the 20-year limit. It is possible that further education records after that 20-year span would not be allowed to be linked either.

MLDS Center staff have compiled some data to describe the extent of this issue. There are 359,329 individuals with an education record in the 2007-2008 academic year (from both MSDE and MHEC). Of them, 178,314 (49.6%) have no further education record and would need to be de-linked under current law.

We are requesting that you complete this survey so that we can document the challenges posed by the current delinking requirement. We appreciate your participation. **Please complete the survey by Monday, March 23, 2026**.

If you have any questions, please contact Angie at angela.henneberger@maryland.gov.

1. Name

____

2. E-mail address

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how problematic is the 20-year limit on linkage of educational and workforce data as described above?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely problematic

4. How would a 20-year limit on data linkage harm your research with MLDS data?

5. How would your MLDS research benefit from the use of data linkage beyond 20 years? This could include work you have already completed, are in the process of completing, or plan to propose.

6. Please share some of your experiences with other state longitudinal data systems or other longitudinal data that provide data linked across more than 20 years. What benefits have they provided for research or other purposes?

7. Please tell us about some examples of other research that supports the need for linking records beyond a 20-year time span. (Full detailed citations are encouraged.)

8. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the 20-year linking limit?

9. Can Angie reach out to you with additional questions if necessary?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No