

TIME TO ACT

Making Data Work for Students



APRIL 2016



The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to bring every part of the education community together to empower educators, families, and policymakers with quality information to make decisions that ensure that students excel. For more information, go to www.dataqualitycampaign.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter (@EdDataCampaign).

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FOREWORD



I have never been more excited and optimistic about the power and potential of data to change students' lives than I am now. Thanks to strategic investments in infrastructure and smart policies over the past decade, every state now has the ability to produce a richer and more useful picture of student learning.

It is no longer merely a campaign tag line that data should be used to improve student achievement. Every day, parents, teachers, policymakers, community leaders, and students themselves are using information in new ways that have shown promising results. We are on the cusp of a new era of data in education—one in which information is used to empower decisionmaking at every level, from kitchen tables to school boards to state houses. When people have the right data in the right format at the right time, it changes conversations, decisions, actions, and ultimately results.

Early warning systems in a growing number of states help identify potential dropouts so teachers can work to get these students back on the path to the graduation stage and to successful careers. High school feedback reports are helping our policymakers and practitioners better align PK–12 and postsecondary systems to create stronger pathways to college and career. These examples show that this transformation is more than talk; they show how states already are using data to support student learning.

As far as we have come, even harder work is ahead. While we have begun to tap into the power of data to change outcomes, we have only scratched the surface. Up to now, data has been used more often as a hammer—the tool of compliance and accountability. While accountability is important, if we do not expand our use of data as a flashlight—to shine a light on what is working, to empower decisionmakers, and to illuminate the path to success—we are not leveraging the full power of the data now in hand. When we focus on the illuminating aspects of data, we will fuel continuous improvement to get the results our children deserve and our nation requires.

The new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides a timely opportunity for states to change the culture around data use. ESSA pairs robust data provisions with increased flexibility that opens the door for states to empower families, educators, and citizens with meaningful information and change the focus of data use from one of compliance to one of continuous improvement.

The Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students presented in this paper provide a set of recommendations for policymakers to take advantage of the opportunities presented by ESSA to ensure that data serves their citizens and supports student learning. As this report highlights, data by itself does not change anything; we need to prioritize meeting the information needs of the people working to support students and their academic success. Everyone who has a stake in education needs timely, tailored access to information to serve our students. When those closest to students have the right data in the right format at the right time, with the training and context to use it well, our students excel.

We cannot afford to let a single student fall off the path to success, and now we have the information to support our shared goal of having every student graduate from high school college and career ready. As the Data Quality Campaign and our partners have documented over the past decade of work, we now have more quality information available than ever before. It is time to act and make data work for all of our students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aimee R Guidera".

Aimee Rogstad Guidera
President and CEO, Data Quality Campaign

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All students deserve a great education, one that affords every opportunity for them to grow into knowledgeable and successful adults. The well-being of communities, states, and the nation depends on that. Yet students are not widgets. Every student has a unique background, unique strengths, and a unique path to college and a career.

To date, efforts to improve education have operated on a model of mass production, assuming—wrongly—that what works for some students must work for all. To change that model, students and their parents, teachers, and mentors need different information to collaborate, improve, and innovate. Now that every state in the nation has a robust longitudinal data system, it is possible for every student in this country to benefit from personalized learning that meets his or her needs.

The Big Idea: When students, parents, educators, and partners have the right information to make decisions, students excel.

When information about students is provided in a timely, useful manner, every adult working with a child is able to support that student's learning more effectively.

This vision can become a reality for every student in the next five years, and states have a unique and critical role to play in bringing it to life. Although education happens in classrooms every day, states are best positioned to enact policies and practices to ensure that parents, educators, partners, and students themselves have access to the information they need. States can also maximize investments in data infrastructure, ensure efficiency in data collection and costs, and reduce the burden on districts by providing data training or tools. States can gather knowledge and lessons learned from high-capacity districts—successes that can be scaled across the state to ensure that data is being used to support student learning no matter where students live.

In partnership with leaders from across the education field, the Data Quality Campaign has developed a set of recommendations to help states enact policies that are critical to ensuring that data is used to support student learning. The **Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students** presented in this paper are the following:

- **Measure What Matters:** Be clear about what students must achieve and have the data to ensure that all students are on track to succeed.
- **Make Data Use Possible:** Provide teachers and leaders the flexibility, training, and support they need to answer their questions and take action.
- **Be Transparent and Earn Trust:** Ensure that every community understands how its schools and students are doing, why data is valuable, and how it is protected and used.
- **Guarantee Access and Protect Privacy:** Provide teachers and parents timely information on their students and make sure it is kept safe.

Data has the potential to transform education from a model of mass production to a personalized experience that meets the needs of individuals and ensures that no student is lost along the way. But for this transformation to happen, the focus needs to pivot from collecting data to prioritizing the effective use of data at all levels, from kitchen tables to school boards to state houses.

Leading states and districts are already making data work *for* students to some degree—and they are beginning to see results in student outcomes. The country has made great progress building systems, improving data quality, and encouraging data use. But without a focus on the needs of the people who are going to use the information, the impact on student achievement will be minimal. It is time to make data work for students.



THE BIG IDEA

All students deserve a great education, one that affords every opportunity for them to grow into knowledgeable and successful adults. The well-being of communities, states, and the nation depends on that. Yet students are not widgets. Every student has a unique background, unique strengths, and a unique path to college and a career.

To date, efforts to improve education have operated on a model of mass production, assuming—wrongly—that what works for some students must work for all. To change that model, students and their parents, teachers, and mentors need different information to collaborate, improve, and innovate. Now that every state in the nation has a robust longitudinal data system, every student in this country can benefit from personalized learning that meets his or her needs.

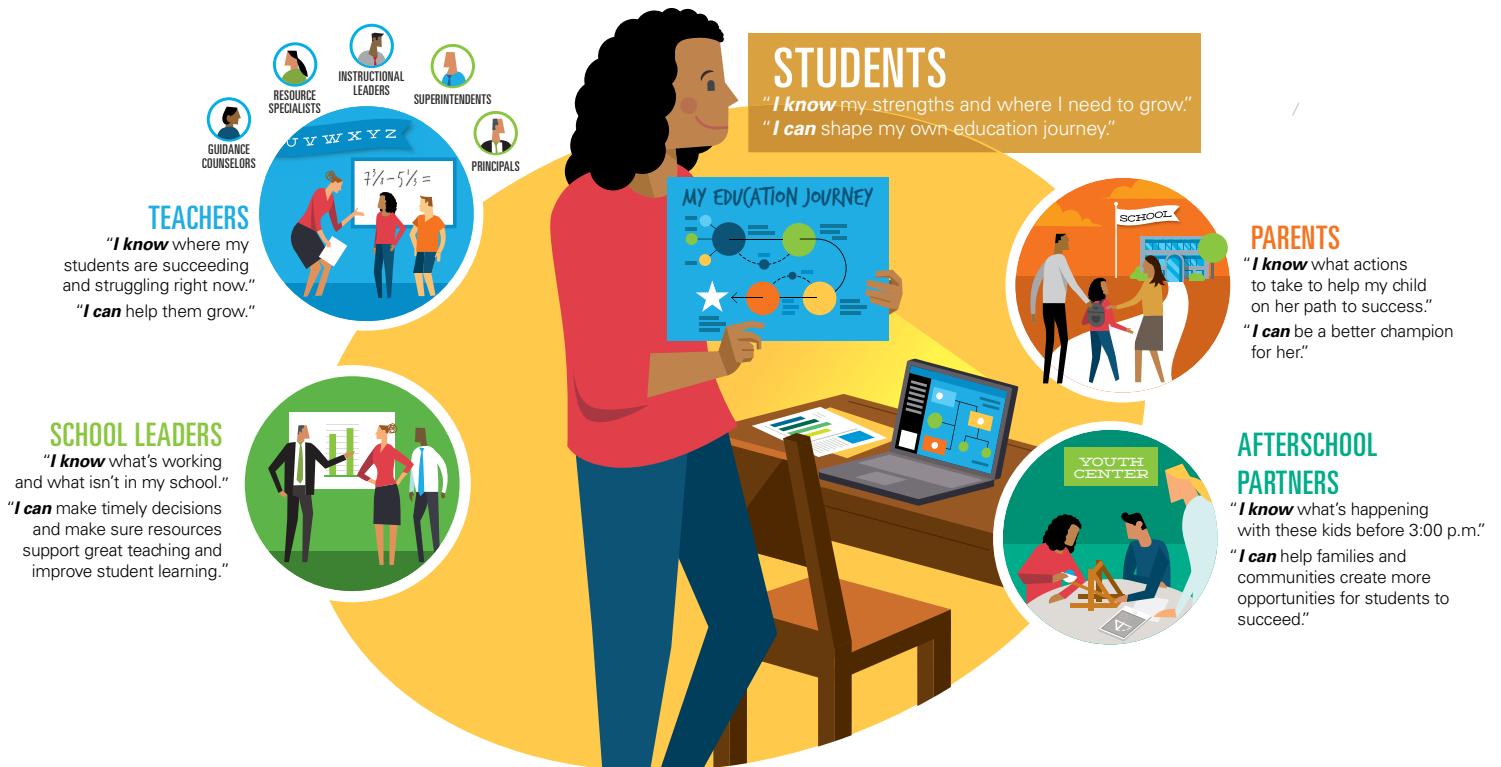
The Big Idea: When students, parents, educators, and partners have the right information to make decisions, students excel.

When information about students is provided in a timely, useful manner, every adult working with a child is able to support that student's learning more effectively. Put simply, this is what it looks like when data is working for students:

- **Students** can be confident that they are on track for success in college and the workplace—or know what they need to do to get back on track.

- **Parents** can ensure that schools are responsive to their child's needs and take advantage of additional learning and enrichment opportunities for their child.
- **Teachers** have a more complete picture of their students' progress plus tools to augment and support their expertise in tailoring lessons to the learning styles and interests of each student.
- School and system **leaders** can direct coaching and resources where they are most urgently needed to support student learning and have confidence that they are investing in approaches that have been proven to work in their school and community.
- Key **partners**, like afterschool programs, can better bridge the gap between learning in and out of school when they can identify opportunities for students that address their individual needs.

This vision can become a reality for every student in the next five years. The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) knows empowering those closest to students with quality data is possible because leading states and districts are already making data work *for* students to some degree—and they are beginning to see results in student outcomes. The country has made great progress building systems, improving data quality, and encouraging data use. But without a focus on the needs of the people who are going to use the information, the impact on student achievement will be minimal. It is time to make data work for students.



STATES MUST LEAD THE WAY

Ensuring that students, parents, educators, and partners have the right information to make decisions to help students excel is a big idea that can galvanize the field—from early childhood to K–12, postsecondary, and the workforce—to action. While making this vision a reality will require commitment and work at all levels, states have a unique and critical role to play in bringing it to life.

Although education happens in classrooms every day, states are best positioned to enact policies and practices to ensure that parents,

educators, partners, and students themselves have access to the information they need. States can also maximize investments in data infrastructure, ensure efficiency in data collection and costs, and reduce the burden on districts by providing data training or tools. States can gather knowledge and lessons learned from high-capacity districts—successes that can be scaled across the state to ensure that data is being used to support student learning no matter where students live.

New Policy Recommendations to Make Data Work for Students

In partnership with leaders from across the education field, DQC has developed a set of recommendations to help states enact policies that are critical to ensuring that data is used to support student learning. The Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students presented in this paper build upon the foundation of DQC’s previous state policy recommendations. The [10 Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems](#) (2005) helped states build their critical data infrastructure. The [10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use](#) (2009) provided guidance for states to leverage investments in data systems and promote effective data use. State leadership in building longitudinal data systems and promoting the use of the information produced by them now makes it possible to turn attention to the next vital phase of this work. In a word, the new policy recommendations are about *people*—parents, teachers, school leaders, and partners—who are critical to making data work for all students.

Using data to support student learning requires states, districts, and schools to embrace new technologies, tools, personalized learning strategies, and other developments that were not possible as recently as five years ago. This is not just about changing policy and practice; this transformation of education into a student-focused enterprise

requires a culture change. This type of change is difficult in a field often associated with terms like *compliance*, *proficiency*, and *systems*. But what if education in the United States could be described with words like *support*, *mastery*, and *people*?

“What we’ve been trying to do is take the data that the system’s generating—because we’re generating a whole lot of data—and turn it into information that can inform action.”

—MITCHELL CHESTER, COMMISSIONER OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, MASSACHUSETTS

Every state has the technical capacity to empower people with information. The rest of this paper lays out Four Policy Priorities to ensure that data is useful, usable, and used to support student learning because if data is not working for students, then data is not working. Building great data systems does not change anything for students by itself; prioritizing the state actions in the following pages will ensure not just that students are counted but that each student *counts*.



FOUR POLICY PRIORITIES to Make Data Work for Students

The Four Policy Priorities are a set of recommendations for policymakers who want to transform data from a tool of compliance to one that fuels continuous improvement and achievement of results. This culture change rests on several guiding principles:

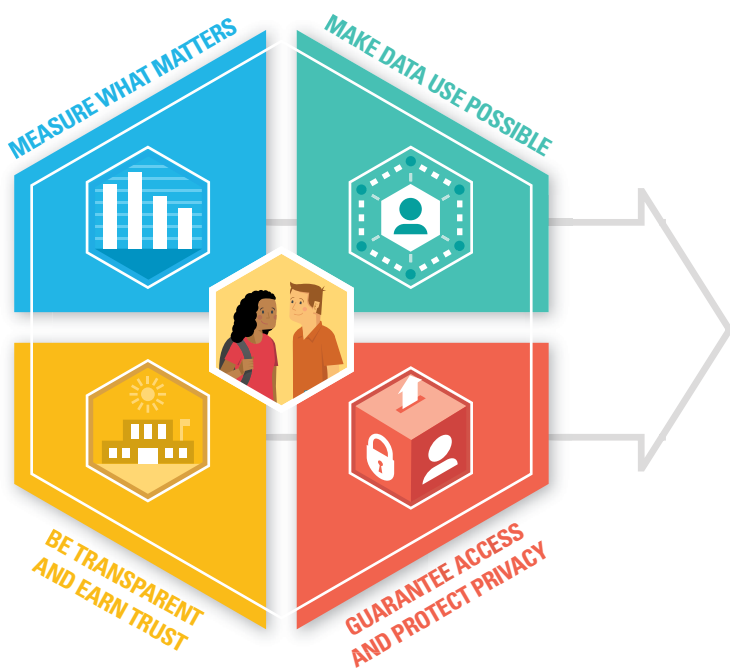
- **Students are central.** Data must be used to support student learning and to ensure that each student's individual needs are met.
- **Data systems are not enough.** States must shift their focus from building systems to empowering people and from using data only for compliance to using it to foster improvement and results.
- **Data needs to be tailored to the user.** All stakeholders in education require quality information, but the type and grain size of the data they need depend on the needs of the individual. While a governor or legislator needs annual state- or district-level data to make critical decisions about allocating resources to support schools and districts, teachers need real-time, student-level data about the progress of their students to adjust and tailor instruction for each student.

- **Data is used for different purposes,** including transparency, continuous improvement, and accountability. Not all data collected needs to be used for all three of these purposes. For example, some data may be useful for improving a curriculum but not meaningful as a measure of school performance. Data used for inappropriate purposes can damage trust and stunt a culture of continuous improvement.

"I think the biggest thing is knowing what you are going to do with [the data]. If I am going to collect it, am I just collecting it to say I collected it and sit on this paper, or am I going to collect it and do something with it?"

—TEACHER, OMAHA, NE

- **Stakeholder engagement is critical.** People who need the data—including teachers, principals, and parents—must be involved in the creation of policies for access and use. Data is more likely to be useful and used if those who need it have a say in the information-delivery process.



State Policy Priorities

When states enact the Four Policy Priorities, teachers, parents, school and system leaders, partners, and students themselves will be able to make timely, data-informed decisions to help students excel. It is time to act to ensure that data works for students.



MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Be clear about what students must achieve and have the data to ensure that all students are on track to succeed.

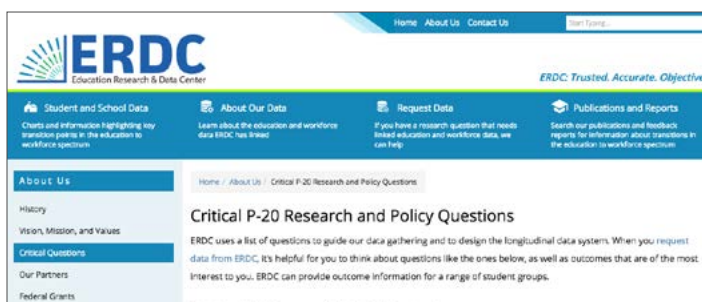
What State Policymakers Should Do

- Develop a set of policy and practice questions that will set the priorities for state action and determine the information needed to answer those questions.
- Link and govern data across all agencies critical to student success, from early childhood and K-12 to postsecondary and the workforce, including other state agencies that support students (e.g., child welfare).
- Develop, calculate, and share indicators based on longitudinal data, in addition to measures based on annual statewide assessments, that demonstrate progress toward stated goals.

What Is Different When States Measure What Matters?

Currently data has a bad reputation and often is not useful to educators and families. It is seen as synonymous with test scores, and it has primarily been used to punish educators rather than support student learning. But data use is about much more than accountability and compliance to a government agency. It is about meeting people's needs. Aligning data systems and indicators to critical policy and practice questions makes data relevant and valuable to everyone with a stake in education. States that do this alignment are viewed as service providers supporting continuous improvement, not mere compliance bodies. After states take these steps, they will see more demand for useful data from stakeholders such as parents and state policymakers.

What Does Good Look Like?



Washington's Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) collaborated with parents, researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders across the state to identify **critical** research and policy questions and prioritized them based on criteria that include expressed interest by stakeholders and data availability. The ERDC **publishes** studies and reports that answer the questions and use a variety of indicators.



MAKE DATA USE POSSIBLE

Provide teachers and leaders the flexibility, training, and support they need to answer their questions and take action.

What State Policymakers Should Do

- Use the bully pulpit and allocate resources (people, time, money, and technology) to prioritize using data to inform decisionmaking at the state level.
- Ensure that leaders responsible for student outcomes have the feedback data they need from other systems to effectively serve students.
- Support local education agencies (based on their unique capacity and needs) by providing the flexibility to use people, time, money, and technology to prioritize data use to inform action and improve outcomes.
- Enact the necessary policies, practices, and conditions to ensure that every educator can use data effectively.

What Is Different When States Make Data Use Possible?

Few teachers support the current uses of data because they are rarely given the tools and training to make data work for them and their students. Instead, data use is seen as a mandate from administrators and policymakers, who themselves are not supported in turning data into useful information to make decisions. Everyone needs training, time, and tools to access and use data effectively. When state policy focuses on creating a culture that supports people using data for improvement—and builds the conditions and capacity to sustain this culture—students will benefit.

What Does Good Look Like?

Delaware has **invested resources** in having the capacity at the state level to analyze data about education outcomes—data that in turn informs policy decisions. Its research on teacher quality in the state led the administration to propose Senate Bill 51, which required teacher preparation programs to raise admissions



standards and focus on high-quality student teaching experiences. In addition to focusing on data use at the state level, Delaware requires every school in the state to have 90 minutes of weekly collaborative planning time so that teachers can work together in professional learning communities and use data to improve outcomes for students.



BE TRANSPARENT AND EARN TRUST

Ensure that every community understands how its schools and students are doing, why data is valuable, and how it is protected and used.

What State Policymakers Should Do

- Provide the public timely, high-quality, relevant, and easy-to-find data.
- Communicate the value of data to support student learning.
- Communicate the types of data the state collects and how the data is protected.

“When we started using data back in the early ’90s, there was a lot of fear from teachers, administrators, parents. And once people saw how we were going to use data, and the data collaborations, and the data talks, and really the transparency of using data—data is not seen as a bad thing here, it’s actually seen as your friend.”

—CHRISTOPHER STEINHAUSER, SUPERINTENDENT, LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, CA

What Is Different When States Are Transparent and Earn Trust?

The existing culture of compliance in education has stifled data use for transparency, support, and empowerment. No one will use data if they do not trust it and find it useful. Citizens must be empowered with quality information to act in their communities and ensure all students’ needs are met—and to hold policymakers and public agencies accountable for results. The public also deserves to know what data is collected, how it is used to support students, and how it is protected. Clear, steady communication about data will foster public understanding and trust in the state as a good steward of student information.

What Does Good Look Like?



Ohio provides an online platform where the public can delve into information on districts and schools, including postsecondary achievement and financial data. Its school report cards are easy to navigate, provide clear ratings for various indicators, and include many easy-to-understand graphs. Users can also generate their own reports or download de-identified data for further analysis.



GUARANTEE ACCESS AND PROTECT PRIVACY

Provide teachers and parents timely information on their students and make sure it is kept safe.

What State Policymakers Should Do

- Ensure that those closest to students have access to student-level data that is tailored to their needs and presented in context.
- Intentionally design and implement policies and practices to protect the privacy and confidentiality of student and teacher data and ensure that systems are secure.

What Is Different When States Guarantee Access and Protect Privacy?

Currently those closest to students—especially parents—are not getting enough value from the student data that is collected. Students will not be successful unless the individuals closest to them have timely, tailored access to information that answers their questions. When that information is timely and useful, everyone can better support student learning. States must ensure that people who need access to data have it—and that those with no business seeing confidential personal information are kept away from it. (Policies must evolve as technology evolves to ensure this privacy.)

“I want my class to be student driven. Hard data, hard facts—things that tell me what my kids don’t understand, what they’re missing, and what I’m not doing well—have helped me shape my classroom into a community-oriented classroom where my kids are in charge.”

—ASHLEIGH FERGUSON, MATH TEACHER, ROBERT A. MILLIKAN HIGH SCHOOL, LONG BEACH, CA

What Does Good Look Like?

Indiana’s Learning Connection provides teachers secure access to achievement data for their students and a common platform for collaborating with other teachers across the state. It also enables parents and students to access their own student data.



Putting the Four Policy Priorities to Work for All Students: Georgia and Kentucky

No state has fully realized the vision of effective data use to support student learning. But there are bright spots. Efforts in Georgia and Kentucky best exemplify what it looks like when state leaders, guided by principles of quality, focus on the Four Policy Priorities to put students at the center. The states adopted different strategies to do this work, but none of the progress would have been possible without visionary leaders who believed these outcomes were possible and created the political will and collaborative efforts to make it a reality. While they are not done yet, these states show that empowering educators, parents, and leaders with data to help every student excel is possible.



GEORGIA

Georgia has seen improvements in its academic performance, including a 7 percentage point increase in its graduation rate since 2012. While many factors contribute to this positive trend, access to data is certainly an important part of this growth. Georgia's commitment to data use was solidified when it passed legislation that many see as the most constructive state laws on data use and protection.

Georgia made this progress by

- **strengthening collaboration among the state's education leaders, businesses, and nonprofit partners.** Data is more valuable when diverse stakeholders are brought to the table to use that information to set priorities and measure progress. Georgia **measures what matters** through the creation of a strong coalition of state leaders, known as the Georgia Alliance of Education Agency Heads, which drives the state's education priorities and establishes goals for the system from early childhood to workforce.
- **giving teachers training and resources on how to use data to inform teaching and learning.** Data is most valuable when it is used to inform and continuously improve practice. Georgia **makes**

data use possible by providing resources that support teachers' capacity to effectively individualize instruction. Training on how to use data to inform teaching and learning supports teachers in areas like lesson planning, student advising, and parent-teacher conferences.

- **engaging stakeholders and proactively seeking feedback throughout the development of the state's data system.** Data and those who have it are most trusted when stakeholders understand what information is collected, how it is protected, and why it is valuable. Georgia **is transparent and earns trust** by seeking input and using stakeholder feedback to inform system design and contents. The state's data collection and privacy practices are also publicly available information that is accessible within two clicks on the state department of education's website. By shifting its focus from systems to people and committing to strong stakeholder communication and engagement, Georgia has built a system that truly serves the information needs of its teachers and families.
- **ensuring that those closest to students have appropriate access to their students' data.** Data is a valuable tool for teachers and parents only when they are given secure and contextualized access to information. Georgia **guarantees access and protects privacy** through the design of its state data system, which gives teachers, parents, and students secure access to the data they want and need. State lawmakers confirmed their support for data access and protection by working closely with the education community to pass legislation that protects student data privacy without compromising appropriate and secure access to this critical information. By securely sharing relevant and timely data with those closest to students, Georgia transformed data use from a compliance exercise to a critical strategy enabling educators to tailor learning based on the unique needs of the student.





KENTUCKY

Between 2012 and 2014, Kentucky saw a 15 percentage point increase in its college and career readiness rates. Kentucky's coordinated statewide efforts and intentional focus on using data to support students has been a key factor in the state's improved performance.

Kentucky made this progress by

- **linking data to answer crucial questions about Kentucky's outcomes.** Data is more valuable when systems are linked, giving policymakers a holistic view of state performance. Kentucky *measures what matters* by investing in a cross-sector data system, called the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics (KCEWS), which collects and links key data from early childhood to workforce. Having access to this information allows policymakers to answer important questions such as which teacher preparation programs produce effective teachers or how well Kentucky's colleges meet the needs of local industry. KCEWS is mandated by the state legislature and financially supported by the state's budget, giving the group significant authority to drive education work throughout the state.
- **embracing performance management strategies that put data at the center of all decisionmaking.** Leaders must model effective data use to help shift state culture away from compliance and toward continuous improvement. Kentucky *makes data use possible* by using data to set state education goals, monitor progress toward those goals, and change course when needed with input from those closest to students. During its strategic planning process, Kentucky identified its most important student outcome goals, developed metrics and targets to measure progress against those goals, and assigned a specific leader for each goal to make sure that the work continued to be high quality.

- **making data publicly available to demonstrate how the state's education and workforce programs affect residents' long-term outcomes.** Publicly available information adds an important layer of transparency that gives stakeholders the information needed to ensure equity and accountability. Kentucky *is transparent and earns trust* through KCEWS' work collecting outcomes data from early childhood to workforce and providing publicly available evaluations of state systems. The KCEWS website also outlines the kinds of data the state collects, which when paired with the evaluations makes clear to the public the value of having that data. The state is so committed to transparency that it even posts the current and archived contracts and evaluations of its education commissioners on its website.
- **providing teachers secure access to aggregate and student-level information.** Access is at the heart of data use. If teachers cannot get the information they want and need to tailor instruction, data will remain a compliance exercise. Kentucky *guarantees access and protects privacy* by giving teachers secure access to quality information that demonstrates how students are progressing against state standards and providing teachers instructional resources to facilitate data-driven instruction. Having this information on hand means that teachers can more strategically reflect on their instructional practices and make real-time course corrections as necessary to ensure that all students excel.

These are not the only success stories showing how states are making data work for students, but they serve as inspiration for making the vision of using data to support student learning a reality in every classroom, district, and state. (See Appendix A for more examples of how states are beginning to enact the Four Policy Priorities.) Building on the past 10 years of progress in using data, states are in a position to prioritize measuring what matters, making data use possible, being transparent and earning trust, and guaranteeing access and protecting privacy.



ALIGNING POLICY AT ALL LEVELS to Make Data Work for Students

While state policy is critical to making the vision a reality, local and federal policymakers also play an important role in ensuring that those closest to students have access to data. In fact, when policies from these three levels of government are not coordinated, informed by each other, and aligned to the same vision, educators, families, and decisionmakers grow frustrated and perceive data efforts as a waste of time and energy. To ensure that local and federal actions support this vision, DQC will release policy recommendations aligned to the Four Policy Priorities for federal and district leaders.

The Four Policy Priorities: District View

Much of education data's power to support student growth and learning depends on how effectively it is used by those closest to students in schools and communities across the country. When local leaders focus on the Four Policy Priorities, they can help ensure that data is used effectively and responsibly to inform educators and families and to support student learning. Leading districts across the nation have begun to embrace these Four Policy Priorities.

- **Metro Nashville Public Schools educators involve parents in their student's learning by engaging them with their child's data.** The district produces clear, simple data reports that outline individual students' academic progress. Parents, students, and teachers then sit down together to set goals, discuss student progress, and determine specific ways parents can be partners in student learning, using the district-provided reports.
- **Chicago Public Schools teachers are empowered to keep students on track academically with access to timely, actionable data.** The district provides the data, and each school pursues solutions to support students who are at risk. Through a combination of in-school interventions and community partnerships, fewer students across the district are dropping out. Between 2007 and 2013, the rate of students on track to graduate in Chicago rose from 57 to 82 percent. That represents 6,900 additional students on track to graduate each year.

The Four Policy Priorities: Federal View

As states and local education agencies work to create and implement data practices that support student success, the federal government is uniquely positioned to support and incentivize them with the conditions, guidance, and resources they need to be successful. And with the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) giving states unprecedented flexibility and responsibility in using data for continuous improvement and accountability, these federal supports have never been more important. ESSA preserves the most positive legacy of the No Child Left Behind era—more accurate and transparent data about the performance of all students—and requires states to reorient their accountability systems and ensure that their schools are

HOW DQC WILL SUPPORT MAKING THIS VISION A REALITY

DQC is committed to supporting policymakers, educators, and families by doing our part to make this vision of using data for student success a reality. We will take the following steps:

- **Sound the call to action.** This vision and set of policy recommendations is our clarion call to state, local, and national leaders that more *must* be done to ensure that those closest to students have the data they need.
- **Be the flashlight.** DQC will measure how well states are implementing this ambitious and critical agenda across the Four Policy Priorities. We will use a variety of methods to understand state activities, including document and website review, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. This approach will improve the depth and quality of information available to the field by providing more detailed accounts of best practices. DQC will shine a light on valuable lessons from states, and the guiding principles (p. 6) will determine how we measure evidence of quality implementation in the field.
- **Gather and disseminate proof points.** To help policymakers understand the art of the possible, DQC will tell stories of success so that other states can adapt their policies and approaches to meet their own stakeholder needs. DQC will lead efforts to build consensus and collaboration for the effective use of data to improve education outcomes.
- **Develop and share resources.** To support states in meeting these goals, DQC will build knowledge and create evidence-based recommendations and resources for the field.
- **Advocate for policy changes.** DQC will advocate for and support changes in policy and practice to ensure that data effectively and securely follows and serves the individual.

accountable to families and taxpayers, not only the federal government. As states work to produce the richer information that ESSA requires and build on their own education data efforts, federal cross-agency collaboration, expertise, and policies and grants can reduce state and local data burden, promote cross-sector and cross-state data linkages, and shine a light on promising practices and important skills like high-quality public reports and educator data literacy.

By developing an aligned approach to effective education data use based on the Four Policy Priorities, policymakers at all levels can help create a culture that values and uses data for continuous improvement and that empowers families, educators, and education leaders with the high-quality data they need and deserve to make great decisions for students. Implementing ESSA provides an opportunity for leaders at all levels to make data work for students.

IT'S TIME TO ACT

When students, parents, educators, and partners have the right data in the right format at the right time, students excel. This big idea can become a reality within five years if policymakers prioritize the policy recommendations outlined in this report.

Data has the potential to transform education from a model of mass production to a personalized enterprise that meets the needs of individuals and ensures that no student is lost along the way. But for this transformation to happen, the focus needs to pivot from collecting data to prioritizing the effective use of data at all levels, from kitchen tables to school boards to state houses. As DQC and its partners have documented over the past decade of work, American educators have more and better information available to them than ever before. The Four Policy Priorities focus on people—meeting their information needs, providing them the conditions to use data, providing them greater transparency, and guaranteeing that they will have access to data that is also kept safe. Without these pieces in place, the power of data to support the learning and success of every student will never be realized. Now is the time to make data work for all students.



APPENDIX A: Getting Started

States must take action to implement the Four Policy Priorities. Below are the Four Policy Priorities, recommendations for states, state examples, and DQC resources to help states get started in making data work for students. The state examples provided show how some states are starting to meet each Priority, but the examples may not represent all of the recommendations or best practices.



MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Be clear about what students must achieve and have the data to ensure that all students are on track to succeed.

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- Develop a set of policy and practice questions that will set the priorities for state action and determine the information needed to answer those questions.
 - Link and govern data across all agencies critical to student success, from early childhood and K–12 to postsecondary and the workforce, including other state agencies that support students (e.g., child welfare).
 - Develop, calculate, and share indicators based on longitudinal data, in addition to measures based on annual statewide assessments, that demonstrate progress toward stated goals.

STATE EXAMPLE **Rhode Island's** Department of Education conducts surveys of students, parents, teachers/staff, and administrators as part of a coordinated effort to improve schools. These surveys ask questions to collect data related to five key topic areas: student achievement, teaching, families and communities, safe and supportive schools, and funding and resources. Survey results are centrally located on the state's [RIDE InfoWorks](#) website.

- DQC RESOURCES
- [What Is Student Data?](#)
 - [Roadmap for Early Childhood and K–12 Data Linkages](#)
 - [Roadmap for K–12 and Postsecondary Data Linkages](#)
 - [Roadmap for a Teacher-Student Data Link](#)
 - [Supporting Students in Foster Care: Collaboration Between Education and Child Welfare Agencies Is Key](#)
 - [Pivotal Role of Policymakers as Leaders of P–20/ Workforce Data Governance](#)
 - [Using Financial Data to Support Student Success](#)
 - [Sealing the Cracks: Using graduation data, policy, and practice to keep all kids on track](#)



MAKE DATA USE POSSIBLE

Provide teachers and leaders the flexibility, training, and support they need to answer their questions and take action.

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- Use the bully pulpit and allocate resources (people, time, money, and technology) to prioritize using data to inform decisionmaking at the state level.
 - Ensure that leaders responsible for student outcomes have the feedback data they need from other systems to effectively serve students.
 - Support local education agencies (based on their unique capacity and needs) by providing the flexibility to use people, time, money, and technology to prioritize data use to inform action and improve outcomes.
 - Enact the necessary policies, practices, and conditions to ensure that every educator can use data effectively.

STATE EXAMPLE The teacher preparation program at Lipscomb University uses **Tennessee's** annual [Report Card on the Effectiveness of Teacher Training Programs](#) to inform improvements to its program. For example, this state source of data reinforced what the university was learning from internal sources such as survey data and anecdotal information—that the pedagogy training for social studies teachers needed improvement. Data helped start a conversation with the provost leading to changes such as filling a position to strengthen the pedagogy training, shoring up the social studies methods courses, and changing the selection process for the program.

- DQC RESOURCES
- [Providing High School Feedback: Using Data to Improve Students' College and Career Readiness](#)
 - [Roadmap for High School Feedback Reports](#)
 - [Understanding Teacher Effectiveness: Providing Feedback to Teacher Preparation Programs](#)
 - [From Compliance to Service: Evolving the State Role to Support District Data Efforts to Improve Student Achievement](#)
 - [Teacher Data Literacy: It's About Time](#)



BE TRANSPARENT AND EARN TRUST

Ensure that every community understands how its schools and students are doing, why data is valuable, and how it is protected and used.

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- Provide the public timely, high-quality, relevant, and easy-to-find data.
 - Communicate the value of data to support student learning.
 - Communicate the types of data the state collects and how the data is protected.

STATE EXAMPLE Spurred by legislation to redesign the annual school report card to better meet the needs of parents and communities, **Illinois** was purposeful in the design, communication, and engagement of its new [report card website](#). The state established concrete goals for the new report card including that families, educators, and the public have a shared understanding of school performance enabled by an easily accessible report card that includes multiple dimensions of school performance and environment. In addition to focus groups on the report card's content and design, user testing ensured that the report card website was intuitive and easy to navigate. A strategic communications plan ensured that stakeholders across the state were familiar with the new report card and the value it offered.

- DQC RESOURCES
- [Empowering Parents and Communities through Quality Public Reporting](#)
 - [Student Data Principles](#)
 - [Roadmap to Safeguarding Student Data](#)



GUARANTEE ACCESS AND PROTECT PRIVACY

Provide teachers and parents timely information on their students and make sure it is kept safe.

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- Ensure that those closest to students have individual access to student-level data that is tailored to their needs and presented in context.
 - Intentionally design and implement policies and practices to protect the privacy and confidentiality of student and teacher data and ensure that systems are secure.

STATE EXAMPLE In 2014, **Idaho** passed the [Student Data Accessibility, Transparency and Accountability Act](#) to establish critical student data privacy safeguards. The law calls for the development of comprehensive data privacy, access, and collection procedures as well as provisions governing data management and analysis contracts. These policies help make sure that students' data privacy is protected, whether data is managed and analyzed directly by the state or through a contracted service provider.

- DQC RESOURCES
- [Roadmap for Teacher Access to Student-Level Longitudinal Data](#)
 - [Key Elements for Strengthening State Laws and Policies Pertaining to Student Data Use, Privacy, and Security: Guidance for State Policymakers](#)
 - [A Stoplight for Student Data Use](#)
 - [Student Data Privacy Legislation: What Happened in 2015, and What Is Next?](#)

APPENDIX B: 10 Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems and 10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use

The Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students build on the foundation of DQC's 10 Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems and 10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use.

In 2005, DQC identified the **10 Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems**. The 10 Essential Elements, listed below, provided a roadmap for states as they built statewide longitudinal data systems to collect, store, and use longitudinal data to improve student achievement.

1. A unique student identifier
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information
3. The ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth
4. Information on untested students and the reasons why they were not tested
5. A teacher identifier system with the ability to **match teachers to students**
6. Student-level transcript data, including information on courses completed and grades earned
7. Student-level college readiness test scores
8. Student-level graduation and dropout data
9. The ability to match student records between the P-12 and postsecondary systems
10. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability

In 2009, DQC released its **10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use**. The 10 Actions called for states to move from collecting data only for compliance and accountability purposes to using data to answer critical policy questions, inform continuous improvement, and ultimately support students on their paths to success.

1. Link state K-12 data systems with **early learning, postsecondary, workforce,** and **other** critical state agency data systems
2. Create stable, **sustained support** for longitudinal data systems
3. Develop **governance** structures to guide data collection and use
4. Build state data repositories
5. Provide timely, **role-based access** to data
6. Create progress **reports** with student-level data for educators, students, and parents
7. Create **reports** with longitudinal statistics to guide system-level change
8. Develop a purposeful research agenda
9. Implement **policies** and promote **practices** to build educators' capacity to use data
10. Promote strategies to raise awareness of available data

APPENDIX C: Acknowledgments

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