TALK LIKE YOUR AUDIENCE
Parents

Parents deserve the best information possible to make education decisions for their children, but we often talk about data systems and policies in ways that don't answer parents' questions and address their concerns. Earn parents' trust by being honest and transparent about what data is collected and how it is used and protected to help their child succeed.

Keep in mind:

- Parents already use data to support their child's academic success. In national polls, the vast majority of parents say they rely on data to understand how their child is progressing in school and to make education decisions.

- Parents trust educators to use their child's data appropriately. But they become more skeptical of data use as it moves further away from the classroom to the district, state, and national levels. Be transparent about what information is collected, who has access to it, and how it is used and protected.

- Parents need to see how data affects their child. Conversations about systems and policies will not resonate unless there is a clear link to how those things actually affect students.

GET TALKING

Use plain, straightforward language.

- Avoid jargon and terms that have little meaning outside of government offices. Acronyms are not your friend.

- Help people make meaning of the numbers by connecting them back to students and their progress in meeting achievement goals. (See "You Don't Have to Go It Alone in Communicating about Data" in this toolkit.)

Spell out what *education data* means every time you use it, and provide examples.

- Parents don't necessarily know what you mean when you say *data*—they may have their own definition. Be specific about the kind of information you mean and how it supports students.

- The term *data* itself can seem vague, technical, and impersonal. Show how data is simply information that helps people make decisions. Consider including an example of data use in a classroom in your state or district.

Talk about data in the context of a broader set of tools and practices to promote student success.

- Emphasize that data is a tool that can enable parents and educators to make better decisions to help students learn; it is not a panacea or replacement for teaching.

- Show how data use contributes to larger goals, such as measuring which programs are most effective and making sure that all students get what they need to succeed.

Think about *how* parents get their information.

- Identify the best messenger for parents and what vehicles parents use to get information. (See the "Equip Your Messengers" section of this toolkit.)

- The best way to reach parents may be to equip educators and school leaders with effective, factual ways to talk about the value of data. (See "Why Data Matters" in this toolkit.)

MORE →

FIND THE RIGHT VEHICLE

When engaging parents, dissemination is not enough. Parents are critical partners, and your communication must be designed to meet them where they are, not the other way around.

Think about using new channels of communication that parents may prefer, like social media platforms.

Leverage communication avenues already being used by districts as well as less official networks used by parents, like community email lists.

Talk about data use at events, such as a back-to-school meeting, and solicit parents' feedback.

Create an online FAQ to answer difficult data questions with parent-friendly language.

Open a space for dialogue for parents to share their questions and concerns about data use.