



Be proactive

Find Opportunities to Communicate

Don't wait for a crisis to start talking to people about data use and why it matters to student learning. Communicate proactively—and make sure that communication is a two-way street—to foster trust and value in your communications. Look for opportunities in the calendar and as you listen to the public conversation to communicate about your priorities.

Get Started





- Think about the best ways to communicate with your audience. Avoid jargon and meet people where they are, such as on social media. Be sure to open channels of communication that audiences like parents and teachers can use to share their values and concerns with you. (For more tips on language and communications vehicles, see the “Talk Like Your Audience” section of this toolkit.)
- Make sure your communications lead is involved in external communications about data to maintain consistency of messages, alignment to the priorities of the agency, and alignment with the overall communications calendar.
- Use stories in the news as opportunities to highlight what's working in your schools and create urgency around issues you care about. When topics in the public conversation relate to your priorities, tee up your leaders and spokespeople to comment. (See “You Don't Have to Go It Alone in Communicating about Data” in this toolkit for more.)

Plan Your Communications Calendar

The school year provides plenty of opportunities to communicate with your education community and the public. Following is just the start of a list of events that you can consider as part of your proactive communications planning:






Late Summer: Back-to-school season

-  Remind parents, students, and educators about changes in standards, curriculum, and other policies and whether their students' or school's performance data may look different this year.
-  Spotlight the importance of school attendance to students' success. Discuss chronic absence and how it hurts student learning.
-  Raise awareness about promising initiatives, like parent and teacher dashboards, that will provide better information to support student learning.
-  Promote newly released information about school and district progress on state report cards, and explain to parents and the public what that data says about student learning.



Fall: Parent-teacher conferences

-  Highlight the value of regular conversations among parents, teachers, and students and how important student data is to those conversations.
-  Discuss how access to student data through state and local dashboards provides teachers a more robust understanding of their students' progress than snapshots like grades or a single test alone.
-  Spotlight the types of data your state makes available to parents to help inform their decisions about their children's education.

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Winter: Beginning of the new semester

- Use the time after winter break to remind parents, teachers, and students about changes to standards or curriculum that will be assessed in the spring and what that means for their students' performance data.
- Begin discussing graduation rate successes and challenges.



Spring: Assessment season

- Highlight the importance of your state's assessments (like the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium exams or end-of-course exams) and college readiness assessments (like the SAT and ACT), and discuss your state or district's progress on those assessments.
- Discuss how your state or district is using student test results to improve how it prepares students for college and careers.



Highlight information, such as the information reported on state report cards, that provides a picture of student postsecondary success, and discuss how your state or district plans to use that data to improve learning.



Start reminding parents and the public about the state report card, what types of information they will be able to find there, and why it's important.



Discuss how data helps teachers better understand and improve their own performance. If your state report card includes a teacher quality metric, talk about what that metric means.



Early Summer: Graduation season

- Celebrate graduation successes, and discuss the graduation rate and what your state or district is doing to improve it.
- Talk about the value of summer professional development for teachers.
- Discuss the role of data, like assessment results and grades, in helping identify the right summer learning opportunities for students.

SPECIAL DATES

Look out for special recognition times to highlight specific issues and celebrate educators and schools (check exact dates each year):

- October: National Principals Month
- January 28: Data Privacy Day
- February: Digital Learning Day
- May: Teacher Appreciation Week

Days throughout the year (varying by state and district):

- important assessment windows
- school and academic program choice windows
- release of assessment results
- notable awards or achievements
- parent-teacher meetings
- professional development (especially dedicated days)

See also the "Tell Stories about Students" piece of this toolkit, which includes a sample letter to parents. The letter seizes an opportunity to communicate—the inclusion of a new metric on the state report card—and uses it to talk about how the district is using data to better serve students.