Promoting Transparency and Maintaining Public Trust

Report Cards and the COVID-19 Crisis

DQC
DATA QUALITY CAMPAIGN

Recovering from the COVID-19 crisis will take coordinated action across multiple critical issue areas from policymakers, elected officials, researchers, advocates, and other education leaders. To support these efforts, the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) has compiled a series of resources on key issue areas states must address as they map their paths forward. Leaders can refer to these resources to learn why these issues matter to their education goals, how to prioritize actions now and down the line, and where to find additional guidance.

Why Do Report Cards Matter Right Now?

Recent school closures and the transition to distance learning have underscored the need for clear and transparent data about how schools are serving all students' needs. The most direct and transparent way for state leaders to communicate this information is through their report cards. These valuable tools help ensure that decisionmakers and communities are equipped with the data they need to answer their most pressing questions about the unique challenges schools and communities will face as they move into recovery. Examples of these questions include the following:

- What percentage of students in my school or district were chronically absent last year and might need additional supports as school reopens?

- Does my school have enough teachers certified in their content area to provide high-quality instruction for all students when they return?

- Were Advanced Placement course completion rates affected by COVID-19 school closures?

Although accountability and testing waivers mean that report cards will not include all the data they have in years past, many indicators can and should still be reported. State leaders must fulfill their responsibility to the public and demonstrate their commitment to transparency by sharing this information in clear, actionable report cards.

What Actions Do States Need to Take to Support Student Learning and Recovery Efforts?

State leaders must release updated report cards this year to inform local decisionmaking and recovery efforts. Leaders should also consider how they can use their state's report card to share updates on recovery efforts and ensure transparency moving forward.

Near-Term Priorities

- **Release this year's report card as planned.** In these uncertain times, transparency is of the utmost importance. System leaders and community members alike need accurate information on their students and schools to see what is working and what is not. By sharing updated information on this year's report card, state education leaders can demonstrate their commitment to

transparency and ensure that all people have the information they need to make informed decisions about student learning. Despite not having 2020 assessment data, states are still able to report many of the indicators normally included on report cards. The table on the following page highlights some of the data elements that state leaders can and should include on this report and disaggregate where appropriate.

Indicator	Can states include this data on this year's report cards?
Per-pupil expenditures	**YES.** These indicators are based on data from previous years that state leaders already have and can easily include on this year's report card.
Postsecondary outcomes for 2019 graduates (including college enrollment, retention, and remediation; military enlistment; workforce entry)	
Course and/or program enrollment (e.g., number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement history)	**YES.** These indicators are based on data from the start of the 2019 academic year. This data should not have been affected by current school closures and should still be reported as planned.
Educator information (including experience, credentials, demographics)	
Student enrollment (including grade, demographics)	
Chronic absenteeism	**YES, with adjustments.** School closures have certainly affected the ways in which these indicators are collected and/or defined. However, state leaders can still report these indicators by adjusting the reporting window (e.g., number or percentage of students chronically absent on March 1) or explaining any changes in how the data element is defined (e.g., any adjustments made to high school graduation requirements).
Discipline and safety incidents (including in- and out-of-school suspensions; expulsions; incidents of violence, restraint, and seclusion; referrals to law enforcement)	
High school graduation	
Student course and/or program completion	

- **Prioritize the following** in planning the release of this year's report cards:

  - *Providing context:* State leaders should go the extra mile in helping people understand and interpret this year's data by including clear explanations of any adjustments made to indicators and why the data matters.

  - *Proactively communicating:* Local leaders may have concerns about report card data being misinterpreted or used punitively; state leaders should address these worries head-on by clearly communicating how report card data will and will not be used and how this data can support local leaders' decisionmaking.

  - *Engaging with partners:* State leaders do not have to do this work alone. They should engage with local and community partners to help spread the message about the value of the information states include on their report cards and how these resources can help inform recovery efforts.

Long-Term Considerations

- **Ensure that report cards continue to meet evolving needs.** Above all else, report cards are an essential communications tool for state leaders. In the wake of COVID-19, families and communities will have new questions, such as the following:

  - What are my district's policies on school closures and distance learning?

  - What is my school doing to ensure that students remain on track for learning goals?

  - How will my students' teachers handle the transition to remote instruction in case of future closures?

  State leaders should focus on making sure that report cards have the information that families and communities need to answer these and other questions, as well as direct them to other helpful information about resources and supports (health information, support services, local resources, etc.).

- **Keep moving forward.** State leaders have already made significant investments in their report cards and should not walk away from that work, especially right now. The goals that state leaders were working toward before COVID-19 are still important now—perhaps even more so. State leaders should maintain focus on the following:

  - *improving report card functionality,* such as adding the ability to compare data across schools and districts or allowing local leaders to add context to their school or district report card

  - *providing a comprehensive picture of student progress and opportunities* by continuing to prioritize valued indicators, such as postsecondary enrollment, access to and completion of advanced coursework, and student growth (all disaggregated where possible)

  - *ensuring that report card data is meaningful and actionable* for everyone by translating all materials and making sure that all text is written at or below an eighth-grade reading level
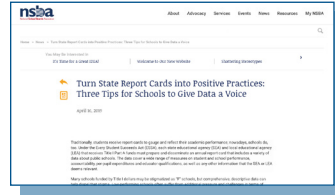
Resources

States can refer to the resources below for clear, actionable information related to report cards.
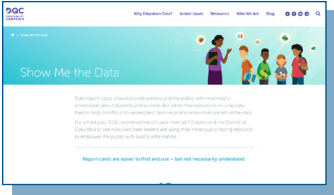
Show Me the Data 2019

highlights the findings from DQC's 2019 review of school report cards from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It showcases state examples and best practices related to report card design, functionality, and usability.

"Turn State Report Cards into Positive Practices: Three Tips for Schools to Give Data a Voice,"

released by the National School Boards Association, details best practices for how states can engage parents and use report cards to facilitate meaningful conversations.
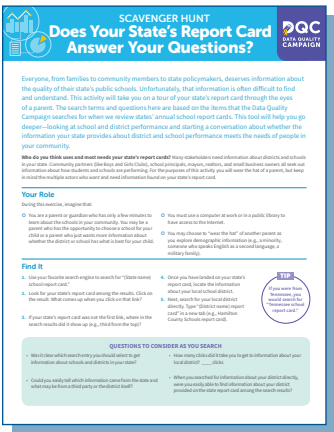
Does Your State's Report Card Answer Your Questions?

is a DQC resource that guides readers on a scavenger hunt of their own state's report cards through the eyes of a parent, highlighting what information is included and what questions parents still have.

What Makes a Good ESSA Report Card?,

a presentation from the National PTA and Learning Heroes, details how states can engage with stakeholders and make report cards accessible and actionable for parents.
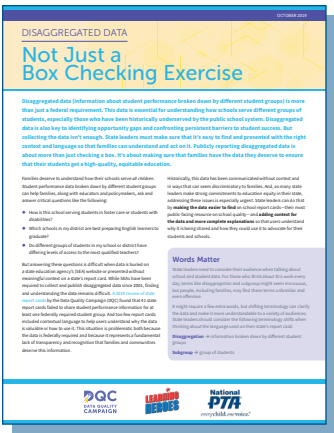
Disaggregated Data: Not Just a Box Checking Exercise,

created by DQC, the National PTA, and Learning Heroes, explains the purpose of disaggregated data and outlines why parents and families need access to this information to serve as effective advocates for their students.

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).