Using Data to Understand What Works

Research and the COVID-19 Crisis



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 Does Research Matter Right Now?

State and district leaders face many challenges heading into the next school year, leaving them to make tough decisions about what to prioritize and where to invest resources. Adapting the state's existing research agenda or investing in new research solutions can provide states with critical information that will enable them to spend responsibly and identify best practices in

the current education landscape. Building an effective research infrastructure can be a long-term, multistep process, and states should begin the work to set that process in motion. Getting started now will ensure that state and district leaders take actions such as the following:

- developing research models to estimate the impacts of school closures on student learning to identify where resources will be needed the most
- building evidence about which intervention strategies are and are not working to make effective administrative and programmatic decisions for the school year ahead
- designing studies to understand how this crisis is affecting student pathways through education and into the workforce and what those findings mean for economic recovery

State and district budgets will be spread thin as a result of the pandemic, and actionable research provides state and district leaders with insights into the policies and programs that best serve their communities. As states and districts prepare for the year ahead, they must use the evidence available to them to continuously improve policies and programs so that they meet the needs of all students.



Spotlight: Texas

The Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC) is a partnership of Rice University and 11 Houston-area school districts serving more than 700,000

students combined. This partnership is putting research into action by supplying survey data to assist local government and nonprofits in identifying needs in communities and allocating resources appropriately. HERC has been able to document the impact of COVID-19 on employment, education (e.g., the digital divide), and physical and mental health for historically marginalized communities in real time. Initiatives like HERC can serve as models for states to use as they create or support similar programs in other districts or even build a statewide version of a research partnership.

Visit HERC's Gulf Coast Coronavirus (COVID-19) Community Impact Survey Data Dashboard to learn more.



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

Building and maintaining a robust data infrastructure is the foundation for conducting useful research. In the short term, state leaders must prioritize investing in their data systems, quickly gathering information from the communities they serve, and mobilizing research partnerships to answer more complex questions. These priorities may mean that states need to consider new

or temporary data collections that help answer questions about the results of the pandemic. Longer term, they should use their data governance body to manage their research agenda and modernize their cross-sector longitudinal data systems (e.g., P–20W, integrated data systems, data trusts) so they are equipped to build evidence and identify solutions that address present and future challenges.

Near-Term Priorities

- Use recently allocated funding to make needed investments in data systems and rapid research. When state budgets are tight, state leaders should maximize their use of federal supplemental investments to address their data priorities. Examples include the following:
 - States can use federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to improve data connections across sectors, build evidence related to interventions, and move forward with addressing questions that can be answered now. Funding from the CARES Act—allocated to K–12 and higher education as well as directly to governors—is flexible and can be used for data and research.
 - States that recently received a new round of state longitudinal data system (SLDS) grants should stay the course on projects they committed to in their applications that will improve data systems and increase their research capacity.
- Take the necessary steps to mobilize research partnerships.
 As states begin to deploy strategies to address the impacts of COVID-19, research partnerships can provide much-needed capacity to analyze what is and is not working. States should act now to get the most out of these partnerships. Examples include the following:
 - Ensure that memoranda of understanding or other datasharing agreements necessary to engage with researchers and practitioners are in place and up to date.
 - Consult with research partners about planned interventions so they are designed in a way that enables state leaders to measure whether or not they are effective.
 - Work with researchers to survey parents, students, and educators from all backgrounds to identify pressing questions and challenges created by COVID-19, and use this information to guide additional research that informs policy and practice.

Long-Term Considerations

- Strengthen data governance. Data governance bodies are the best way to ensure that everyone involved with state data systems can come to the table to set priorities and identify who is responsible for implementing those priorities. States should use these bodies to design a research agenda that addresses the state's most important questions, to make recommendations for directing resources toward research, and to manage relationships with research partners who can analyze the data. Now is a good time to examine who has a seat—and a voice—in these decisionmaking bodies to ensure that they are representative of stakeholders who need data to answer questions and take action.
- Modernize data systems. States must continue the hard work of integrating data systems to enable states and their research partners to answer increasingly complex questions. In particular, connecting K–12 data systems with early childhood, postsecondary, and workforce data is critical for addressing long-term challenges related to education and economic recovery. States should keep an eye out for new sources of funding, including those that may not be explicitly for data. Pulling together small amounts of funding from multiple sources can be an effective way to maintain momentum on data system enhancements.



Resources

States can refer to the resources below for clear, actionable information related to building and using evidence.



Using the CARES Act to Strengthen Education Data Collection and Use is a

DQC fact sheet that details how states can and should consider using some of this federal funding to increase the capacity of their data infrastructure.



Roadmap for Effective
Data Use and Research
Partnerships between
State Education Agencies
and Education Researchers

is a resource from DQC that lays out eight focus areas for education leaders looking to build meaningful collaborations with research partners.



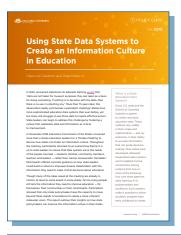
Research Partnerships Are Key to Improving Practice is a DQC
brief that lays out how research
partnerships can benefit states
and districts along with the core
characteristics and drivers of
research partnerships.



"An Evidence-Based Response to COVID-19: What We're Learning," posted by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, shares rapid-response research on distance learning from the What Works Clearinghouse.



When Researchers Have Access to Data, Students Succeed, an infographic from DQC, provides an illustration of how research can affect students in the classroom.



Using Data Systems to
Create Information Culture
in Education, a policy
guide from the Education
Commission of the States,
documents how leaders
can leverage existing data
systems to create stronger
infrastructure to meet policy
and research demands.



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).