

2020

Show Me the DATA



DQC
DATA QUALITY
CAMPAIGN

There Is No Finish Line for Report Cards

Every year, the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) reviews each state's report card to capture states' efforts to make their report cards easy to find, use, and understand. In January 2020, we conducted our review as usual and set out to write our report. But then "business as usual" was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools shut down for the remainder of the year, and state leaders had to focus their efforts on ensuring that students had basic necessities like food, not to mention the technology needed to learn from home. DQC made the decision to postpone the release of *Show Me the Data 2020* as leaders nationwide were rightfully focused elsewhere.

As states grapple with an ever-changing "normal," the importance of transparent and useful data cannot get lost. Updated and easy-to-understand report cards will help ensure that decisionmakers and communities are equipped with the data they need to answer their most pressing questions about how their schools responded to the crisis, what worked, and how to move forward.

This report looks at information on student progress and school quality provided in states' 2018–19 report cards. As always, DQC looked for whether states were communicating the information that parents need and deserve, including the necessary context and other indicators that add value beyond test scores alone. We found that states took the following two overarching approaches to their report cards:



Making required data available.

States that have taken this approach include required compliance and accountability information but have not gone further to provide valuable context to help people make meaning of and use the data.



Providing meaningful transparency that informs families and communities.

States that have taken this approach use report cards as more than accountability tools. States that are committed to using data to answer questions and inform action in communities are focused on providing context for information and continuously improving their report cards.



State report cards are worth the investment and must be driven by a clear theory of change.

Increased transparency happens only when state leaders prioritize spending time, resources, and political will on improving report cards. These investments are essential because families, leaders, and communities need and deserve data about how schools are serving students in times of disruption and regular operation alike. Meeting even the minimum data reporting requirements is an important service that states must provide.

Despite increased attention on the quality of state report cards, there are still disparities in how easy

state report cards are to find, use, and understand. States must consider their theory of change as they invest time and resources in report cards. States that decide that **making required data available** is their priority must focus on how complete the data is, whether it is high quality, and how easy it is to locate. For those states that want to demonstrate leadership in **providing meaningful transparency that informs families and communities**, there is still work to be done to ensure that report cards continuously improve to supply this needed service.



Making Required Data Available

Investing in meeting data reporting requirements is important. DQC does not review report cards strictly for *compliance* with the Every Student Succeeds Act, but too many report cards still lack pieces of information that are not only required by law but also provide important information about school quality and student progress. This data will be essential in helping families understand how students' needs are being met during disrupted school years and online learning, and state leaders should prioritize the continued publication of this data.



ABOUT HALF OF STATES (26) are still missing at least one required **student group** in their displays of disaggregated student achievement data. While the decrease in this number is a significant improvement from previous years, state leaders must make providing the full picture of student performance a priority.



While every state includes graduation rate data, **25 STATES do not include that information broken out by all of the federally required groups of students.** This outcome data is a missing piece in helping communities understand which students may not have the supports they need to complete high school.



25 STATES do not include all the required information about teacher experiences, such as information about whether teachers are inexperienced or don't have required credentials. Schools that serve low-income students are more likely to have higher concentrations of these teachers.



While most states publish [per-pupil expenditure data](#), the **MAJORITY OF STATES are still working to fulfill the new requirement in ways that are meaningful and actionable to communities.** State and local decisionmakers need a picture of how dollars are being spent in service of student learning.



43 STATES reported student growth data on their report cards this year. Growth data measures student test scores over time and offers a much richer understanding of student performance, especially when considered side by side with proficiency scores. While not required by law, growth data is part of most states' accountability systems and is an essential piece of information that all families should have access to.



When **Delaware's** leaders published new per-pupil expenditure data on the state's report card, they focused on balancing federal reporting requirements with the information needs of families, local leaders, and community members. For the first year, state leaders focused on creating simple data visualizations that allow users to see school-level data and put it in context through district and state comparisons. The report card also includes helpful questions that families can use to better understand the data.

But state leaders didn't stop when they'd checked the box of the federal requirements. Instead, they kept thinking about how to add more value to the data. The state's finance team began meeting with business managers in each school to create more uniform business rules for data collection and reporting to provide users with more nuanced financial data in the future. Additional context will be added through the inclusion of a snapshot story, a short analytical narrative that will communicate the high-level takeaway(s) of the data being displayed. By focusing on user needs, leaders in Delaware built on the federal requirement to make the per-pupil expenditure data more useable for families and communities.



Providing Meaningful Transparency That Informs Families and Communities

Report cards can and should be more than accountability tools. States that are committed to using data to answer questions and inform action in communities must focus on **providing context** for information and **continuously improving** their report cards. States that are committed to meaningful transparency and continuous improvement will be well positioned to meet the current moment. Next year, state leaders will need to build off this foundation and be thoughtful about how to release data that **may look different** than in years past.

Words make a difference.

States must ensure that the language on their report cards is easy to understand.



Just 25 STATES provide the option to **translate their report card** into a language other than English. Translating report cards into the languages spoken in a state ensures that all families can understand school quality and student progress. While Google Translate can serve as a place to start, it alone does not meet translation needs.



Information that is overly complicated or filled with education jargon doesn't help anyone understand school quality and student progress. Complicated language is also harder to translate into other languages. DQC has reviewed the reading level of states' report cards using hemingwayapp.com, a free online tool, for four years. Despite easy access to this resource, and the fact that many states are focused on creating a parent-friendly tool, **the text on report cards remains overly complex.**



Minnesota's report card provides easy-to-find translation options that reflect the unique demographics of the state. The entire report card, not just explainer text, is translated so users can dig into all of the available data.



Washington's report card provides a simple explanation of student achievement data that reads at a sixth-grade level. With a clear explanation of the different score levels, users are better able to understand what the student assessment data is communicating about student learning in that school.

Context makes data more meaningful.

The most useful report cards provide helpful context for the data being presented so that families and communities understand the value and meaning of the information.



Idaho organizes its report card by questions and groups data together in a way that helps audiences make sense of the data.



Oklahoma provides an “About School Report Cards” section on its report card homepage that describes what report cards are, why they are valuable to families, and where to go for answers to further questions.

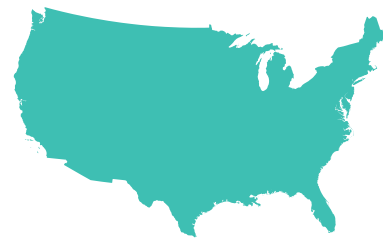


Illinois’s report card goes beyond compliance to give users additional details about the data. An explanation tab describes the data visualization, and a context tab helps connect the dots between the measure and what it could mean more broadly for students and schools.

Rounding Out the Picture of School Quality

Some state leaders have prioritized including information above and beyond what’s required by law to give families a fuller picture of school quality. Providing even more meaningful context will take political will from state leaders to marshal support and resources for sharing expanded data.

- **35 STATES** include **postsecondary enrollment data**, up from 24 the previous year. This data adds context to high school graduation rates and helps users understand whether schools are helping their students get to the next step.
- **25 STATES** include **career and technical education (CTE) enrollment or completion data**, up from 16 the previous year. Information on CTE paints a fuller picture of the options that are available to students.
- **13 STATES** include **teacher demographic data**, up from 11 the previous year. Access to a diverse and representative teacher workforce is key to meeting the educational and social-emotional learning needs of all students.





There is no finish line for report cards.

Report cards are not a one-time effort. State leaders must continuously evaluate whether the tool they have created is meeting the needs of their audiences and providing clear, understandable information about school quality and student progress. Right now states are facing unprecedented challenges in their efforts to collect and report data—they may need to think of new ways to provide report cards to communities while students are learning online.

Help people use the data.

Every state, regardless of which approach it has taken, should consider its role in making sure that report cards are useful and used. Now that states have invested in resources to increase and improve transparency, they have an opportunity to be creative in the ways they can help families and communities not only find but also use report cards. States should consider helping people use data on report cards in the following ways:



Empower and train principals to use the data presented on report cards and be spokespeople for the data with both their school staff and the school community.



Build on the stakeholder engagement efforts used to inform the development of the report card to ask how people are using it and what changes they would like to see.



Find critical friends, like civil rights groups, advocates, businesses, and faith-based organizations, that have direct lines to communities and can be spokespeople for the report card.



Help legislators and state board members dig into the data for their districts.



This year's pause on accountability and assessment data reporting has given state leaders unexpected time to prioritize report card improvements they might not have otherwise been able to address this year. In **Rhode Island**, state leaders are using this time to upgrade the report card so that everything on the site is mobile friendly. In the past, the report card's data displays did not translate effectively to mobile devices, which limited their usefulness to families that rely on those devices for internet connectivity. By creating charts and graphs specifically designed for mobile use, Rhode Island's leaders are helping ensure equitable access to the critical information families and communities need to understand how their children are being served.



Where do we go from here?

Students, families, and educators experienced unprecedented disruption in the 2019–20 school year and are likely to see more disruptions in the 2020–21 school year. State leaders have a lot to focus on, and transparency must remain a priority. Depending on which theory of action they choose, states will be set up to tackle this unprecedented challenge differently.

Families and communities have *always* had questions about whether schools are meeting student needs. Those questions may change as families and leaders alike grapple with providing education during an unprecedented global crisis, but transparency is just as important as ever. States will need support from advocates and local community partners to truly make data work for students. Even before education across the country was disrupted in 2020, state leaders were asking for additional support to make education data meaningful, useful, and used. **Federal leaders should use financial resources and guidance to help states grapple with needed improvements to report cards.** Meaningful translation, for example, requires both time and financial resources for states.

Despite the challenges, states must release 2019–20 school year report cards to provide student data to those that need it. States may need to consider new ways to collect and report data given the additional constraints that come with online learning. And even if the data they collect looks different than in previous years, states must prioritize sharing information. DQC is eager to see how states tackle this unique challenge in the coming year.



Ohio remains committed to transparency during the COVID-19 pandemic. State legislation requires that data related to school and district performance be reported publicly, even though accountability ratings will not be calculated for the year. In doing so, state leaders have committed to the importance of data for planning and best serving Ohio students during the upcoming school year.