

The Next President Must Make Data Work for Students

Recommendations for the New Administration from the Data Quality Campaign

INTRODUCTION

Quality education data is key to our nation's education and economic goals

All students deserve a great education, one that affords them every opportunity to grow into knowledgeable and successful adults. To make this vision a reality, students, parents, educators, taxpayers, and policymakers must have access to the right information to make decisions that support student learning. The next president can change the role of data in education from a tool of compliance to an instrument that informs families' education decisions and choices, empowers teachers to personalize learning, increases transparency, enriches public accountability, promotes equity, and fuels schools' efforts to continuously improve.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states have more responsibility for closing achievement gaps and improving overall student achievement. Effective data use will be critical to states' ultimate success in improving outcomes for every child. Even as states develop their ESSA plans and move toward implementation, the federal government will continue to play a vital role in supporting effective data use—including ensuring that families, educators, and education leaders have the high-quality information they need and deserve to support student learning.

Recommendations to empower families and the public with data

The next president can make data work for every student by focusing on these five critical actions:

- 1. Ensure that all families have access to their own child's data** so they can be effective partners in, and advocates for, their child's learning.
- 2. Increase transparency and public accountability** around schools' progress and outcomes.
- 3. Provide teachers with the knowledge, access, and tools they need** to use education data in service of student learning and help parents understand the value of student information.

- 4. Reduce unnecessary data collection burden and duplication** and build trust around the effective, ethical use and protection of data.
- 5. Support the development of the necessary infrastructure** to provide timely, actionable information to families, teachers, and the public.

Following are details on how the next administration can bring each of these recommendations to life.

1. Ensure that all families have access to their own child’s data so they can be effective partners in, and advocates for, their child’s learning

When families have timely and secure access to their own student’s data along with aggregate data about their community’s schools and outcomes, they are empowered to advocate for and support their student’s learning, hold their schools accountable, and make informed decisions to chart their own path to success toward and beyond high school graduation. But providing families with the information they need and deserve takes much more than our current reliance on paper report cards and the occasional parent–teacher conference. Families need timely information on their child’s grades, test scores, growth, courses, attendance, and more. The next administration can ensure that all families have this richer, actionable, and private information they need to partner in their child’s success.

The next presidential administration should take the following actions:

- **Prioritize parental access to their own child’s data** and make parent empowerment a national goal. Use the bully pulpit of the White House and hold national events emphasizing the importance of improved data use,

including building on the ongoing work of the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking.

- **Celebrate states that are increasing transparency** and giving every family high-quality information on their own child with a new annual “state of empowerment” report, which can provide a leadership model for other jurisdictions.
- **Provide grants** through existing authorized programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) or directly through new opportunities created by the appropriations process for states and districts **to develop portals, data backpacks, or dashboards** to provide families access to their child’s own data in a secure and private manner.
- **Include** in ESEA Title I’s Parent and Family Engagement programs **a core focus on promoting data collaboration** between families and schools to support communications with students and families about data.

For more information about how data empowers parents, see the [“How Data Empowers Parents”](#) video and infographic.

2. Increase transparency and public accountability around schools’ progress and outcomes

Families, as well as educators, policymakers, business leaders, and advocates, need access to high-quality aggregate information on K–12 school performance and outcomes to inform decisions at every level and provide measurable accountability for tax dollars invested in education. The robust data systems in place in every state now make it possible to provide a richer picture of student outcomes than just the number of students who graduate and their aggregate test scores and grade point averages. It is now possible to provide real indicators that signal successful preparation of graduates who are ready for postsecondary education and work; these indicators include postsecondary program enrollment, remediation, persistence, transfer, completion, and student debt figures.

When applied to both K–12 and postsecondary education, this feedback information provides clarity around how well K–12 schools prepare students for college and career, whether postsecondary institutions and programs provide value, and how well they prepare their students for success in the workforce. To provide this richer picture, the next administration should ensure that the education data the federal government maintains on postsecondary aid and outcomes and on educational equity and civil rights is accessible, trustworthy, and useful to families and the public.

The next presidential administration should take the following actions:

- **Make more useful information about postsecondary outcomes available** to all communities by amending ESEA to require states to include in their school report cards not only postsecondary enrollment but also remediation and completion.
- **Create a pilot program** in the next ESEA or in the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization **to further increase the quality of postsecondary outcome data** available to the public. This pilot will develop and incentivize secure data linkages and processes that allow states to report outcomes for all of their high school graduates.
- **Maintain and improve the College Scorecard** to provide the information families need and deserve.
 - Publicize the College Scorecard with a communications campaign about how education data informs families’ choices and helps ensure that families get value from their postsecondary investments.
 - Explore ways to improve the College Scorecard and make sure it represents all of our students and their pathways by

including program-level outcomes data and completion rates for all students, regardless of the type of institution they attend or whether they remain in the state.

- **Help the public understand how student loan debt is related to successful postsecondary and workforce outcomes.** Amend HEA’s Title IV, which governs the administration of federal student aid programs, to require

that aggregate, deidentified federal financial aid data be reported back to state K–12 systems and included in public reports.

For more about what high-quality public reporting looks like, see [Empowering Parents and Communities through Quality Public Reporting](#) and the corresponding [Federal Policy Guide](#).

3. Provide teachers with the knowledge, access, and tools they need to use education data in service of student learning and help parents understand the value of student information

As parents gain access to more information about their children’s education, many will seek guidance from their most trusted point of contact—teachers. Parents will not be able to use data to champion their children’s learning unless teachers are able to help them make sense of the information and explain its value. The next administration has a responsibility to equip new and in-service educators with the training and tools to use student data effectively and the language to communicate with parents about how this information can be used to achieve their child’s educational goals.

The next presidential administration should take the following actions:

- **Amend Title II of HEA to ensure that states establish feedback loops with teacher preparation programs (TPPs)** that provide timely information about TPP graduates for the purposes of continuous improvement, including ensuring that they are equipping new teachers to be data literate and to be able to communicate effectively with parents.

- Reporting TPP graduate metrics on annual report cards for accountability purposes does not enable real-time TPP program improvement.

- **Encourage states and districts to foster teacher data literacy**, which includes the skills to communicate the value of data to parents and the knowledge to use data to meet the learning needs of each student, using ESEA Title II professional development funding and ESSA Title IV block grant funding for effective technology use.
- **Provide guidance on how states can use new ESSA assessment audit funding** to explore ways interim assessments can provide teachers real-time feedback that can be used to personalize learning throughout the school year.

For more information about how teacher data literacy empowers parents, see the [“Ms. Bullen’s Data-Rich Year”](#) infographic and the [Teacher Data Literacy: It’s About Time](#) brief.

4. Reduce unnecessary data collection burden and duplication and build trust around the effective, ethical use and protection of data

The existing culture of compliance in education has stifled the use of data for transparency, empowerment, and continuous improvement. Families and communities will not use data if they do not trust it and find it useful. Districts and states will not invest in their own innovative data uses if they are overburdened with compliance reporting that does not provide value to them. The next administration can take steps to build trust in education data by promoting its value and use while also taking steps to safeguard students’ privacy.

The next presidential administration should take the following actions:

- **Amend and update federal privacy laws and guidance** using a strategy that supports and encourages appropriate data use, while also protecting student privacy.

- **Build state and local capacity to implement robust privacy policies and practices** with responsive resources and guidance provided through federal leadership such as the Privacy Technical Assistance Center at the US Department of Education, additional funding, and incentives to increase data literacy around the ethical use and protection of data.
- **Support the work of the bipartisan, congressionally created Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking.** The commission provides an unparalleled opportunity to examine the role of data in creating an information-driven education sector. The next administration should support the commission’s work and use the commission’s recommendations to inform important education data use and privacy decisions.

- **Require the US Department of Education to publish annually an inventory of data collections** and the educational rationale for each collection. Institute a routine review of federal data collections and sunset all unnecessary or duplicative collections.

For more information on how the federal government can support data privacy, see [The Federal Role in Safeguarding Student Data](#).

5. Support the development of the necessary infrastructure to provide timely, actionable information to families, teachers, and the public

For states to get meaningful information to families and report on a rich set of education indicators, linking and sharing limited data across systems and sectors must be possible. For the federal government to provide value for families and the public, federal data systems must also be aligned and strengthened. The next administration should support the development of robust and useful state data systems and improve federal data infrastructure.

The next presidential administration should take the following actions:

- **Support the development and use of limited and purposeful data linkages** across systems, sectors, and states to support high-quality public reporting on K–12, postsecondary, and workforce outcomes.
- **Require or encourage the Departments of Education and Labor to produce more aligned, streamlined data collections.** Ensure that the secretaries of labor and education discuss data collection and reporting alignment among ESEA, HEA, and The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) so that these three laws produce comparable data that creates a clear and more complete picture of education and workforce outcomes.

- **Amend HEA, WIOA, ESEA, Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and ESRA to require and support state efforts to share the limited information** from early education, K–12, postsecondary, workforce, and other data systems that is needed to provide a clearer picture of outcomes. For example, work within WIOA to require data comparability and linkages between the workforce and postsecondary systems and across state lines to provide a clear picture of student outcomes, even as students move out of state.

- **Overtake the federal student unit record system ban.** While eliminating the ban alone does not solve current postsecondary infrastructure challenges, the field must be allowed to consider all options for governing the postsecondary data that is critical to supporting student success. (See the Institute for Higher Education Policy’s [Weighing the Options for Improving the National Postsecondary Data Infrastructure](#) for more information on reforming the postsecondary data infrastructure.)

For more information on state capacity to securely link data systems, see [Preparing Students for Jobs: Ensuring Student Success in the Workforce](#) and [Supporting Students in Foster Care: Collaboration Between Education and Child Welfare Agencies Is Key](#).

Next steps

Every state has built a longitudinal education data system, but federal action must now help ensure that this infrastructure leads to real action and improvement for children. The next administration has a timely opportunity to ensure that all families, teachers, and communities have access to the education data they need to support students.

For additional information on all of these recommendations, see the Data Quality Campaign’s [Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students](#) and corresponding [Federal Actions to Make Data Work for Students](#).

Data Quality Campaign staff welcome the opportunity to further discuss these recommendations, and we are optimistic about the opportunities for the new administration to ensure that data works for students and helps meet our nation’s education goals.



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).