



TIME TO ACT 2017

**Put Data in
the Hands
of People**



The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) 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 \(@EdDataCampaign\)](#).

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INTRODUCTION

More must be done to put data in the hands of people. States have made significant investments in data infrastructure, but data will never be used as a tool to inform continuous improvement and support student success unless parents, educators, policymakers, and students themselves have access to timely, useful information.

In 2016 the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) released *Time to Act: Making Data Work for Students* to support efforts to strengthen the culture of data use in education. The report lays out a set of recommendations for state policies and practices to ensure that data is used to support student learning. The [Four Policy Priorities to Make Data Work for Students](#) build on DQC's earlier policy roadmaps, the 10 Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems and 10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use, and were developed with a broad coalition of partners representing state policymakers, educators, parents, school and district leaders, and advocates. DQC's roadmaps have provided clear guidance to states, and states have invested in systems and begun to create the conditions for effective data use in classrooms. But more must be done to **ensure that people have the information they need to answer questions and take action.** As states build on past progress and turn to new opportunities provided for in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it is important that data serve as a tool to meet ambitious goals.

Getting people the data they need is essential because when students, parents, educators, and partners have the right information to make decisions, students excel. The hard work of education is happening in classrooms every day, and states have the critical role of establishing policies and practices that ensure that those closest to students, like teachers and parents, can put data to work to support student success. While the vision of using data as a tool to improve outcomes for all students is a big one, the priorities are simple. States must



Measure What Matters. *Be clear about what students must achieve and have the data to ensure that all students are on track to succeed.*



Be Transparent and Earn Trust. *Ensure that every community understands how its schools and students are doing, why data is valuable, and how it is protected and used.*



Make Data Use Possible. *Provide teachers and leaders the flexibility, training, and support they need to answer their questions and take action.*



Guarantee Access and Protect Privacy. *Provide teachers and parents timely information on their students and make sure it is kept safe.*

These Four Policy Priorities are a set of recommendations for policymakers to transform the nature of data in education from being used solely as a hammer—a tool to punish and shame—into a flashlight—a tool to shine a light on what’s working and where to improve. This culture change cannot happen unless states move beyond compliance and ground their efforts in these guiding principles:

- Foremost, **students must be central**. Data must be used to support student learning and ensure that *each* student’s individual needs are met.
- **Data systems are not enough**. States must shift their focus from building systems to empowering people.
- **Data needs to be tailored to the user**. Everyone needs data, but the type and grain size of the necessary data depend on the needs of the individual—parents, teachers, policymakers, and other stakeholders all have different needs for data.
- **Data is used for different purposes**, including transparency and continuous improvement, along with—but not only for—accountability.
- And to bookend these guiding principles, **stakeholder engagement is critical**. People who need data, including teachers, principals, and parents, must be involved in the creation of policies for data access and use.

As demonstrated by state efforts to realize the 10 Elements and 10 Actions, responsibility for policy and implementation does not rest with one state leader. Leadership must come from education agencies, along with state boards, legislatures, and governors. Without leadership at the highest levels prioritizing effective data use, those closest to students will never fully have the resources, time, and skills they need to put data to work. States have made significant progress over the past decade, but there is more to be done—strong leadership is necessary to act on the Four Policy Priorities and change the culture of data use in education. Without it, states will fall short in their efforts to meet education goals and improve outcomes for students. While making all of this possible takes many leaders, the recommended actions included in each section of this report can be taken by a single person, right now, to start the conversation about state action.

About This Report

This paper provides a landscape of state efforts on the Four Policy Priorities as well as a clear set of actions that must be taken to fully realize the power of data to support students. Specifically, this paper

- summarizes what we know about states’ efforts to act on the Four Policy Priorities;
- provides evidence of state efforts based on DQC’s research and research by others where relevant;
- builds on DQC’s 50-state survey, last administered in 2014, to paint a richer picture of state efforts by using multiple research methods including opinion research, website and policy reviews, and legislative analysis;
- describes state progress beyond a simple yes or no response and takes into account the guiding principles that foster quality over compliance; and
- provides specific recommendations along with examples and resources for individuals looking to move their state forward.

The work that DQC and its partners outlined in the Four Policy Priorities is comprehensive, challenging, resource intensive, and difficult to measure. While states have more work to do, the sector as a whole also has more work to do to better understand how data is being used, how states are supporting districts’ efforts to use data, and whether teachers and parents have the information what they need to support student success.

All research conducted by DQC except where otherwise noted. For more information on research and methodology, see www.dataqualitycampaign.org/timetoact17.



MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

States have shown leadership in collecting meaningful data that provides a picture of student and school success over time. Looking forward, there is more work to be done to ensure that state data efforts reflect state goals to serve all students regardless of their zip code.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

Data is no longer *only* a hammer.

State data efforts reflect the need to do more than hold schools accountable—data is also a flashlight, illuminating what works and supporting continuous improvement. But students will not fully benefit from the power of data as long as silos persist among prekindergarten, K–12, postsecondary, and the workforce.

Demonstrating that data use has moved beyond only accountability, DQC found the following:

- When asked about their perceptions of data, only 18 percent of teachers say that they believe that data is used to punish teachers and schools.
- 29 states differentiate data access for multiple stakeholders, ranging from researchers to parents and even courts. (Farley-Ripple, 2016)
- 29 states paint a picture of education access and equity on their report cards by publishing measures including attendance, discipline rates, school safety, climate, and access to advanced coursework.

But more must be done to further break down silos:

- 37 states and the District of Columbia link at least two data systems, but only 17 states and the District have built a full P–20/workforce system linking early childhood, K–12, and postsecondary education data and workforce data. (Education Commission of the States, 2016)
- Only four states—Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin—include information on their report cards about the number of students entering the workforce after high school.

Data has become a state priority; now it's time to put it to work for all students.

State leaders have demonstrated commitment, through policy and practice, that data should answer questions and inform actions that support student success. However, states and communities will never be able to take advantage of data to support *all* students without stakeholders who represent the multiple needs and perspectives within the state being at the table where decisions are made.

Demonstrating that states are committed to using data to answer questions and meet education goals, DQC found the following:

- 41 states publish the guiding questions that reflect the strategic thinking of the state and drive data collection and use.
- 31 states include questions about student success beyond K–12.

More focus must be placed on including multiple stakeholders in decisions that guide state data efforts:

- While DQC was able to find evidence of a cross-agency data governance body in 33 states, only seven states include members who represent a diversity of perspectives and needs, such as English language learners, students with disabilities, rural students, gifted and talented students, or low-income students.

As a result, data does not always reflect the needs of all children. For example:

- Only one state—Alaska—includes information about the performance of military-connected students on its report card.
- Only one state—Washington—includes information about the performance of students in foster care on its report card.
- Only six states—Arizona, Idaho, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, and Virginia—includes information about students who are homeless on their report cards.

BRIGHT SPOTS



Washington **MEASURES WHAT MATTERS** by connecting data across sectors to provide a fuller picture of the quality of its education system. Washington created the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC), an education data warehouse that links data from the state's early learning, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce sectors. At the heart of ERDC is a strong data governance body, codified in law, which includes agency leaders, district representatives, and data users. Together, this cross-sector group helps determine what data to collect, what research to conduct, and how to keep the information secure. ERDC enables research that helps state and local leaders better understand what's working and what needs to change to best support all students. For example, recent research has focused on the educational and employment experiences of young adults in the justice system.

TAKE ACTION

- ✓ **Take stock of voices that are included—and not included—on your state's P–20/workforce data governing body.**
- ✓ **Make sure your state is producing robust indicators by linking K–12 and postsecondary data with workforce data.**

LEARN MORE

- [Pivotal Role of Policymakers as Leaders of P–20/Workforce Data Governance](#)
- [Mapping Postsecondary and Workforce Information Gaps in State Data Systems](#)



MAKE DATA USE POSSIBLE

Educators and leaders at all levels have embraced the power of data to improve student achievement, but policymakers must do more to ensure that those closest to students can use data effectively.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

Data use is an integral part of good teaching—but isn't always possible.

Teachers want to use data as a tool to inform instruction but often lack the time and support needed to put data to work. State leaders must do more to ensure that teachers have the time and hands-on training to make data use a seamless part of the day, not a cumbersome one-off.

Demonstrating that teachers want to use data as a tool to inform instruction, DQC found the following:

- On average, teachers view data as “worth it” and frequently use data to
 - guide or drive instruction;
 - gather insight about student learning and provide a roadmap for instruction; and
 - help with differentiation or individualized instruction.
- 72 percent of teachers use data to collaborate with other teachers to support student learning.
- 65 percent use data to communicate with parents about their child’s progress in school.
- 57 percent use data to communicate with each student about his or her strengths and learning needs.

More must be done to ensure that data use is not a cumbersome one-off:

- 52 percent of teachers say they have no time during the school day to review data.
- 21 percent of teachers say they lack needed training on how to use data to support teaching and learning.
- 62 percent of district administrators identify “understanding how to use data to improve teaching practices and student learning experiences” as a priority within their district for in-service or external teaching training.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

States are starting to step up to support district data use.

Anecdotal evidence shows that states are supporting districts through tools and resources that help them use data to foster student success. Some districts, like smaller or rural districts, may need more supports than others. Until states provide every district the necessary supports to use data in service of student learning, states have not fully enabled effective data use at the local level.

Demonstrating that states are beginning to support district data use, DQC found the following:

- Tennessee's *District Empowerment* strategy focuses on providing districts the tools and autonomy they need, including empowering leaders and educators with access to accurate and timely data linked to clear action steps.
- Virginia provides schools and districts with an early warning system that helps schools identify ninth-grade students who are at risk of not graduating from high school.
- Massachusetts has an early warning system for all districts that is used as a tool to better target interventions at the individual, small-group, and whole-school levels.

BRIGHT SPOTS



Delaware **[MAKES DATA USE POSSIBLE](#)** by putting actionable data about whether students are on track for college in the hands of teachers and school leaders. Administrators and teachers can access real-time data that shows which students are on track for college as well as indicators of their progress in applying to school, including student completion rates for college applications and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Teachers and counselors have the data they need to work with individual students and ensure that students have the resources they need to be college ready. Using actionable data to work with students across Delaware has resulted for three consecutive years in every graduating senior who is highly qualified for college applying to at least one postsecondary institution.

TAKE ACTION

- ☑ **Review your state's teacher licensure policy to uncover opportunities to strengthen the language that requires new teachers and leaders to have data literacy skills.**
- ☑ **Conduct a needs assessment of your state's local education agencies to determine the unique data needs of each, and advocate for tools and resources to meet those needs.**

LEARN MORE

- [Teacher Data Literacy: It's About Time](#)
- [District Actions to Make Data Work for Students](#)



BE TRANSPARENT AND EARN TRUST

States have a responsibility and an obligation to communicate meaningful information to the public. What states do share is often outdated, difficult to find, and full of jargon, leaving the public frustrated and wondering what information to trust.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

People can't use data if they can't find it.

Right now, finding the information they need is hard for families and communities. States have more work to do to ensure that people can answer questions and take action without cobbling together multiple difficult-to-find sources.

Demonstrating that state report cards are not yet meeting the needs of families and communities, DQC found the following:

- Only 24 percent of parents nationally say they have used a state education agency website to find out how well their local high schools prepare students for college or the workforce.
- In 2016, 10 states' most recent state assessment data was outdated, showing results from the 2012–13 or 2013–14 school year.
- While 45 states publish postsecondary enrollment data, only 17 include that information on school-level report cards, where other school performance information can be found.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

Todos necesitan información en un lenguaje que entiendan.

For many reading this report, that phrase is at best prompting memories of high school Spanish and at worst incomprehensible. Similarly, states are missing an important opportunity to communicate with *all* stakeholders because information is not available in their language or is buried in technical terms.

Demonstrating that states have not made the language on report cards accessible to parents and the public, DQC found the following:

- 45 states produce report cards in English only (and provide no resources to have them translated into other languages).
- With few exceptions, state report cards include acronyms, terms of art, or technical terms that are not easy to understand for a wide audience.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

People won't use what they do not trust, value, or understand.

State leaders across roles have not done enough to communicate proactively about how data is collected, calculated, and used. As a result, they are not meeting people's needs or making the value of that information clear.

Demonstrating that states must go further to communicate about the value, collection, and use of data, DQC found the following:

- While 42 states are transparent about how data is kept secure, only 15 states are transparent about n-size used on their state report cards, limiting stakeholders' understanding of the decisions that went into the outcome data they use to monitor school and student progress.
- As of summer 2016, 30 states had communicated about stakeholder engagement efforts called for in ESSA, which in part was an opportunity for states to engage communities about what data is most useful to inform their decisionmaking.

BRIGHT SPOTS



West Virginia is **TRANSPARENT AND EARNS TRUST** by proactively and clearly communicating its data privacy practices to the public. Understanding how essential public trust in data is, West Virginia included a diverse group of stakeholders in the development of its [privacy policies](#). Then state leaders created a strategic communications plan to show how the state collects and protects student data, including the creation of an engaging comic book-themed [newsletter](#) and informational meetings with the media. By proactively engaging with the public and clearly explaining how and why data is collected, West Virginia built an important foundation of trust and support for its work statewide.

TAKE ACTION

- ☑ Use DQC's [scavenger hunt tool](#) to review your state's report card for ease of use.
- ☑ Review feedback from ESSA stakeholder engagement sessions for insight into the data most in demand by the public. Determine whether and how your state can include that information on its report card.

LEARN MORE

- [Show Me the Data: State Report Cards Must Answer Questions and Inform Action](#)
- [A State Guide to Building Online School Report Cards](#)



GUARANTEE ACCESS AND PROTECT PRIVACY

Accessible, useful, and secure data is critical to supporting student success. States have exercised leadership in creating policy guardrails to keep student data safe, but too few educators, parents, and students have access to the information they need to support student learning.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

When it comes to privacy, leaders have stepped up—but the work is never done.

State leaders, including legislators, governors, chiefs, and state boards, have all demonstrated commitment and taken action to protect students' data. However, states must go further to make sure that educators and districts have the training and legal and technical support they need.

Demonstrating that states have focused on safeguarding data, DQC found the following:

- Since 2014, 49 states and the District of Columbia have introduced legislation intended to safeguard student data.
- Since 2014, 38 states and the District of Columbia have passed 85 laws to better safeguard student data privacy.
- As of publication, during the 2017 legislative sessions policymakers have introduced 80 bills related to student data privacy, nine of which have been signed into law.

States must also go further to provide training on safeguarding data:

- Since 2013, only five states have passed privacy legislation that includes language that requires either the state or a local body to provide training on safeguarding students' information to those closest to students.

WHERE STATES ARE TODAY

Those closest to students don't have the data they need.

Parents and educators want and need their students' data. States have gained ground in providing information to teachers beyond test scores, like early warning data. Though parents have access to their student's school report cards, and some have a district portal, too few states are ensuring that parents have all the information they need, like students' progress over time, side by side with other information. There is much work left to provide every parent, teacher, and student with a complete picture of student learning.

Demonstrating that states must do more to get data into the hands of those closest to students, DQC found the following:

- 67 percent of teachers are not fully satisfied with the effectiveness of the data and tools they have access to on a regular basis. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015)
- Only 36 percent of public school parents strongly agree that they have easy access to all the information they need to make sure their child gets a great education.

States can learn from field leaders:

- As of 2013 five states—Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, and Ohio—provided teachers best practice-based access to their students' longitudinal data.

BRIGHT SPOTS



Georgia is committed to giving those closest to students access to the data they need and protecting student privacy. Georgia created a Statewide Longitudinal Data System that provides district administrators, principals, teachers, and parents secure, role-based access to state and district education data in the same place. Local education agency officials can view and compare state and local performance over time to identify best practices; teachers and parents can view their own students' progress in different subjects over time. In 2015, state lawmakers confirmed their support for data access and protection by passing one of the nation's most robust [data privacy laws](#), which safeguards students' data without limiting the usefulness of information to improve student achievement.

TAKE ACTION

- Learn from leading states that are making data available to teachers and parents; some states offer their code and additional resources for other states to use and adapt.**
- Review your state's privacy law for opportunities to include training and technical support for districts.**

LEARN MORE

- [How Data Empowers Parents](#)
- [Ms. Bullen's Data-Rich Year](#)
- [Roadmap for Teacher Access to Student-Level Longitudinal Data](#)



WHAT'S NEXT?

The work required to ensure that data is used to support student success is not done.

This report demonstrates that the investments states have made in data have begun to change perceptions, policy, and practice. But our findings also show that policymakers must prioritize getting teachers, parents, and students themselves the data they need to answer questions; take action; and make change on the ground, where it matters. Without intentional focus, states will not fully maximize the value of investments in education data.

DQC's ongoing research is intended to inform state leaders, including state education agency leaders, governors, legislators, and state board members, about the state of the field and action steps they can take to make sure data is used to support student success. To capture state progress, DQC will continue to use multiple methods to measure the availability of, access to, use of, and perceptions about data. DQC will work with states to identify bright spots and highlight promising practices—and to identify remaining challenges and barriers to effective data use.

Together we go further, faster. This report is DQC's best understanding of the landscape of the field to date. But more must be done, not only by DQC but also by friends and partners to understand the landscape and quality of state data efforts. Because data is central to meeting education goals nationwide, DQC invites others to join in determining whether states' efforts are making data work for students.



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