



Show Me the DATA

States Have Seized the Opportunity to Build Better Report Cards, but the Work Is Not Done

State report cards should provide parents and the public with information about the outcomes of students and schools in their state. But if information that helps paint the full picture of student success and school quality is missing, hard to find, or impossible to understand, families are left in the dark.

This is the third year the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) has looked at report cards for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This is also the first year that states should be reporting out the information required by the Every Student Succeeds Act. Prompted by policy change and national attention, states have invested in updating their report cards, and as a result many states have made progress. But even with investments in better report cards, **every state must improve.**

✓ Report cards are easier to find and use.

To date, report cards have been hard to find, use, and understand. Now they are starting to reflect a consideration that report cards need to be useful to an audience of real people. As states improve the look and use of report cards, they come closer to empowering the public with the information stakeholders need to answer questions and take action.

Report cards are easier to find.



42 STATES have state report cards that can be found within the top three results of a simple internet search.

Report cards are easier to use.



31 STATES have mobile-friendly report cards; mobile devices are how most families access information.



30 STATES offer a PDF version of their report card, which makes printing and sharing copies easier for schools and families.



36 STATES offer downloadable data, making it possible to dig deeper into the numbers.

But states must do more to make report cards easier to understand.



Only **15 STATES** translate information on report cards into a language other than English. When it is translated, states can make information about school quality understandable for more families.



Text on **MOST REPORT CARDS** is written on a **postsecondary reading level** (grade 14 as measured by hemingwayapp.com). Making language easy to read is still a significant challenge.



TOO FEW STATES provide tools to help make meaning of the information, such as providing a “contact us” button for each indicator that directly connects users with the appropriate department.

But report cards still leave parents and communities in the dark.

States’ report cards still lack data that shines a light on the performance of all students. Information that provides context about student learning—and helps parents understand whether or not schools are serving students of different races, backgrounds, and abilities—is essential.

Report cards lack important information about student performance.



41 STATES do not include **disaggregated achievement data** for at least one federally required subgroup. Alarming, 21 states still do not disaggregate achievement data by gender, which has been a requirement for almost 20 years. Failing to disaggregate data provides families and communities with an incomplete picture of student outcomes and experiences in school and beyond.



12 STATES do not include **student growth data**, which enables communities to better understand how schools are helping students progress toward and beyond proficiency. Of these 12, 10 states are holding schools accountable for **student growth** but are not communicating this information to the public.



27 STATES do not include **postsecondary enrollment**. Most states already publicly report this data elsewhere. States can and should include it on their most public resource. Postsecondary data side by side with graduation rates helps communities better understand how schools are preparing students for life after the classroom.



26 STATES do not include **discipline data** such as suspensions and expulsions. Without this information parents lack context on how these school practices may affect student learning.

Report cards lack important information about teachers.



25 STATES do not include required data on the number of inexperienced teachers, teachers with emergency or provisional credentials, or out-of-field teachers in a school. Low-performing schools are more likely to have higher concentrations of these teachers, keeping their students at a disadvantage.



46 STATES do not include information about teacher effectiveness. Without this information families have no context about the most important classroom factor—teachers.



40 STATES do not share data on teacher demographics. Communities need this data to inform conversations about diversifying the teacher workforce.



Report cards are not created equal.

If parents and the public can't navigate report cards to find what they are looking for, taking action is impossible. With many ways of displaying this information, some report cards are more successful than others at prioritizing data to help users make meaning of the information.

States' approaches to report card design vary.



One-Stop Shop: Report card data is organized in a single, cohesive resource.

- At its best, this format simplifies the user experience by limiting the places parents need to look for data.
- At its worst, this format can result in a bulky resource consisting of numerous web or PDF pages.



Parent-Facing Front Door: A landing page for parents connects to a separate, more comprehensive data site.

- At its best, this format gives users a quick overview of school performance and allows them to easily pick and choose the level of data they are seeking.
- At its worst, information is oversimplified, and figuring out where to find more is overly complicated.



Data Hub: Often provided in a dashboard style, this format allows users to explore data from different angles.

- At its best, this format communicates a greater variety of data points and allows users to dig in and answer questions beyond accountability.
- At its worst, this format can end up feeling like a frustrating scavenger hunt if not clearly organized.

For more information and examples, see DQC's analysis of school report card design models.

✓ Progress is possible.

States have made real changes in the past year—demonstrating that this sort of change is possible and that it does not always take a huge investment of time and money. States that made the biggest gains prioritized different opportunities for improvement.

Better design.



Many states improved the visual quality of their report card this year. For some states that meant a wholesale redesign; for others it was about reorganizing an existing tool to better meet consumers' needs.

More and better data.



With the inclusion of new information states are providing new context for student success, including five states already reporting per-pupil spending by school.

Different approaches.



Some states partnered with external vendors to jumpstart these efforts; many others sought internal solutions, proving that even with varied capacity, states can improve right now.

For more information about leading exemplars in school report cards, see DQC's [Show Me the Data 2019: State Bright Spots](#).

States have started the hard work, but there's more to do.

While this progress toward more meaningful communication is crucial, *what* states communicate matters just as much. Too many school report cards still lack the data that matters most to parents and communities, and these report cards fail to paint a full picture of how schools are serving the needs of every child. Evidence shows that states are investing in and thinking about report cards as more than a federal compliance activity. But **this work is not done**. State report cards that can serve as a catalyst for conversation and action that lead to improved schools are not a one-time project. Moving forward, state leaders at every level must reflect and reinvest to identify what's working, to uncover what's not, and to prioritize continuous improvement.

This report was updated on April 4, 2019, to reflect feedback the Data Quality Campaign received from states.