



# Show Me the DATA

## The Most Useful Report Cards Prioritize Design and Language

### DESIGN

States have made progress in the design of their school report cards. More states are centralizing report card data in one location and are creating parent-focused websites that are easier to navigate and use. But **all report cards are not created equally**. The way a report card is designed and organized reflects a state's priorities about what data it is sharing, how the data is shared, and why the data is shared. This year, most states took three basic approaches to their report card design:

#### ONE-STOP SHOP

Report card data is organized in a single, cohesive resource.



Simplifies the user experience by limiting the places parents need to look for data.



To be most effective, the design must scaffold the information in ways that allow users to get high-level data easily along with the ability to dig more deeply into the data as needed.

#### STATE EXAMPLE



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.



Gives users a quick overview of school performance and allows them to easily pick and choose the level of data they are seeking.



To be most effective, the design across the two sites should be as cohesive as possible, and the connecting data site should be intuitively arranged.

#### STATE EXAMPLE



Provides information that is oversimplified and makes figuring out where to find more overly complicated.

#### DATA HUB

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



Communicates a greater variety of data points and allows users to dig in and answer questions beyond those related to accountability.



To be most effective, the design should include an overview or parent-friendly tab that houses especially relevant information and helps clarify where additional data can be found throughout the rest of the tool.

#### STATE EXAMPLE



Can end up feeling like a frustrating scavenger hunt if not clearly organized.

Each format has its tradeoffs, so state leaders should consider the purpose of their report card and ensure that they have answers to questions such as the following:

- What are our goals for our report card? What do we want to convey?
- Who is our audience? Is it parents, superintendents, the media?
- What resources and capacity do we have to devote to this work? What resources and capacity do we need to reallocate to be successful?

## LANGUAGE

While most school report cards now include definitions right next to technical terms or data elements, definitions do not matter if they are confusing to audiences. Good definitions offer a clear and complete explanation of data indicators that include information about why this data matters and the questions it can help answer.

### EXEMPLAR

**“What does this achievement level number mean? Students scoring at Levels 1 and 2 will likely need additional help in the next year to succeed in that subject area. Students scoring at Level 3 are considered proficient for that grade level or course but may still need some targeted help in the next grade or course. Students scoring at Levels 4 and 5 are ready for the next grade or course and are also on a path to be prepared for college or a career by the time they graduate.”**

- Definitions that fall short offer a basic explanation of the data in jargon-free, easy-to-read language but no information about why it matters.
- Definitions in need of the most help fail to offer any real explanation of the data and often include unexplained jargon or acronyms.

---

*For more information on DQC’s report card research, check out [Show Me the Data 2019](#).*