

Don't Make Decisions in the Dark

Local School Board Members Need Quality Public Information That Informs Decisions, Empowers Action



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As a local school board member, you need to be able to access and use high-quality data to make good decisions. Often these data are collected and stored locally, but information that is publicly reported by the state can provide additional value. Only the state can build data systems that allow comparisons across schools and districts, and only the state can develop analytics using student data over multiple years and across sectors.

Every state is required by the federal government to make certain information about public schools and districts available to the public—including student achievement, accountability, and teacher quality.* When this publicly reported information is useful and actionable, you and your community have a clearer picture of successes and challenges in your district, leading to more effective decisionmaking.

The Power of Quality Public Reporting

Although public reporting in a few states is intentionally designed to serve your information needs, most states' efforts are geared toward compliance with state and federal laws. Consequently, most publicly reported information goes unseen, unused, or underused.

However, when publicly reported information is useful, trustworthy, timely, and easy to find, you have the tools required to take the following actions:

Create momentum for desired policies.

When you have access to robust, comparable data, you can use that information to establish support for the difficult decisions you need to make; expose areas of strength, weakness, or inequity in the current system; and increase confidence that you are making the right decisions.

Empower constituents to be informed participants and make informed decisions.

This participation can include parents and other community members providing feedback and ideas to school board members, volunteering at local schools, voting in local elections, or participating in school board meetings, as well as parents choosing academic programs for their children.

Demonstrate the progress of reforms to ensure continued support for ideas that are effective.

Hold schools and districts accountable for performance via comparative results.

Comparable data across the state allow you to identify areas of need as well as pockets of success. You can use that information both to hold actors accountable and to support continuous improvement, providing additional support where needed and promoting and scaling what works.

Provide transparency around how public dollars are spent.

You can use objective, publicly reported data to illustrate successful decisionmaking in your own district and demonstrate how best practices from other districts can be replicated in yours.

Publicly reported information is focused on schools and districts and does not include any personally identifiable information that can be used to identify individual students.

Key Questions You Could Answer with Quality Public Reporting

When states publicly report information in a way that is understandable and useful, you can more easily answer critical questions such as the following:

Are my public schools and district spending money efficiently and effectively to improve student learning?

Are students overall mastering content standards at the rate necessary to prepare them for success? Are results comparable among groups of students?

Is school performance in my district improving, decreasing, or staying the same over time?

"State data helps us to look beyond our district borders and think about what is best for our students in the context of the work they will do when they move beyond high school." —David Evans, School Board Member, Chandler Unified School District, AZ

What You Can Do

If you want better information there are a few ways to galvanize support. While the state education agency is responsible for publicly reporting information about public schools and districts across the state, you also can take actions locally, including the following:

- ✓ **Determine the questions you want answered** by publicly reported information and communicate that information to the state.
- ✓ **Engage constituents to identify the questions they want answered** by publicly reported information and serve as their spokesperson to the state. Ask the following:
 - ⇒ Can parents easily find publicly reported data on state education websites?
 - ⇒ Is the information easy to understand and clearly labeled?
 - ⇒ Does the information help parents make decisions regarding their child's education and encourage parent involvement in their child's school?
- ✓ **Ensure that data** collected at the school or district level **are accurate, trustworthy, and safeguarded.**

When publicly reported information is useful, trustworthy, timely, and easy to find, you will be able to use this information to inform your decisions, engage the community, and take action to improve student learning.

To see the Data Quality Campaign's full suite of public reporting materials, including the full primer, the infographic summary, the federal spotlight, and resources for parents and administrators, go to www.dataqualitycampaign.org/PublicReporting.

*In addition, a state that receives Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility must report college-going and college-credit-accumulation rates. See *State and Local Report Cards Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as Amended* for more information: www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/state_local_report_card_guidance_2-08-2013.pdf.