

AUGUST 2013

What Every Parent Should Be Asking about Education Data

Schools and districts collect a lot of information about students. Empowered parents should demand to get value out of these data. Here are questions you can ask of your school officials to ensure that your child is on track to graduate college and career ready:

1. I already have my child's grades and test scores, so what more do I need?

- You may have some information about your child, but this doesn't tell you how your child is doing over time, how they compare to kids in other schools, and if they're going to be ready for college or a job.
- Your child's teacher uses your child's data to understand your child's learning and teach to their needs and strengths. Your child's school uses data to make sure your child is on track to graduate.
- *Example:* Early warning systems provide information to educators and families about whether students need extra help. Parents and teachers can use this information to help students improve their performance.

Tip: When you meet with your child's teacher for a parent-teacher conference, make sure your child's teacher uses data beyond just test scores to have a productive conversation with you about your child's strengths and weaknesses.

2. Why does the state collect student data? Can't my district just do it?

- States can do things districts can't, like follow children when they move across district lines and connect high school data to college records.
- Also, because states provide services on a larger scale, they can better employ technical expertise and have more purchasing power to adopt better technology and security than most districts.
- *Example:* When a child moves across district lines, the state can electronically transfer transcripts in real time so that the child doesn't lose instructional time repeating lessons or trying to make up missed material.

Tip: Request information about how your school district compares to others in the state and how children in your district fare in college.

3. As we implement state standards aligned to the Common Core, what can I expect to change with regard to data collection or use?

- Common Core is a set of grade-level expectations and doesn't require states or districts to collect any new data.
- With comparable expectations across states, states will be able to better use the data they have to make comparisons to other states and determine what programs, interventions, and pathways lead to success.
- *Example:* With comparable expectations, state data is comparable across state lines. Your state can better understand how well third graders in your state are reading compared to third graders in other states—and what those states might be doing better.

Tip: Ask your school's leaders how they plan to use Common Core assessment data to help students.

What Every Parent Should Be Asking about Data Privacy

Asking the questions on the previous page, families are more ready than ever to use education data to help their kids. However, along with the great benefits of education data come school, district, and state responsibilities to keep your child's data private. Empowered parents can ensure that their child's data are being protected by demanding answers to the following questions:

1. How is my child's privacy being protected?

- There are many federal and state laws that protect the privacy of students.
- Data systems use complex security processes and technology to protect student data.
- *Example:* Oklahoma's HB1989 outlines policies and processes to protect student data.

Tip: Ask for an explanation of your district's privacy and security policies.

2. If my school district or state works with a vendor to keep track of things like attendance, grades, and test scores, will my child's information be secure?

- Districts and states almost always work with a vendor to keep the data they collect safe and make it easy to use.
- Federal and state laws prevent these vendors from using the data in any way the district doesn't want them to.
- These vendors also can't sell the data or let anyone else access it.
- *Example:* A federal law called FERPA specifies that student records cannot be accessed for purposes not related to education or a health or safety emergency.

Tip: Ask your school and district what oversight is in place to ensure that its data security policies are being followed.

3. Who has access to this data?

- Access to student data is role based, which means that only teachers and other designated local personnel have access to student data.
- FERPA was designed to protect student privacy. And most states have their own privacy laws in addition to FERPA.
- The federal government is forbidden by at least four federal laws from collecting student data. And the federal government can't look at the data about individual students that states collect.
- *Example:* Section 9531 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act prohibits the creation of a federal student database.

Tip: Ask for an explanation of your rights as a parent to access your child's data.

What Are Education Data?

Education data means any type of information (like student attendance, demographics, or success in college and the workforce) that helps parents, educators, and policymakers make informed decisions about education.

For more information on how education data can help parents, educators, and education leaders, please go to:
dataqualitycampaign.org