

Data in Schools

Parent & Guardian Informational Guide

Data is:

► **important_**

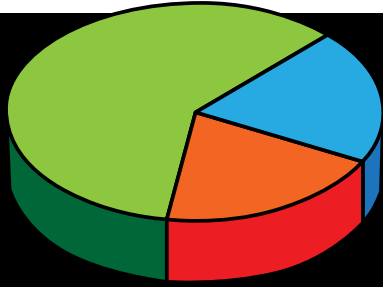
Helping teachers make sure that their students are learning and helping schools make better decisions about the programs they offer. Without data, teachers and schools would have no way of knowing what is effective and whether their students are learning. Recently, there has been increased attention to data that the State Education Department uses in its school governance.

► **information_**

Schools have always collected data about students and their academic progress. Districts are required to report some of their data to the State. The New York State Education Department (SED) maintains a statewide repository of information about NY students in order to meet its federal and state compliance responsibilities and to support the improvement of educational programs. The data maintained by SED are primarily reported to SED by local schools and districts and includes student demographic, enrollment, and state assessment information. Neither districts nor the SED collect or shares students' social security numbers.

► **used for accountability in education_**

Although this practice started before the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), data-based accountability exploded under the 2002 legislation which was proposed by President George W. Bush and adopted with bipartisan support. Since then, more tests were required and school and district results were publicly shared and were used to identify low performing schools or schools in which certain groups of students were performing lower than others. This is from where the ELA and math tests in grades 3-8 and high school came.



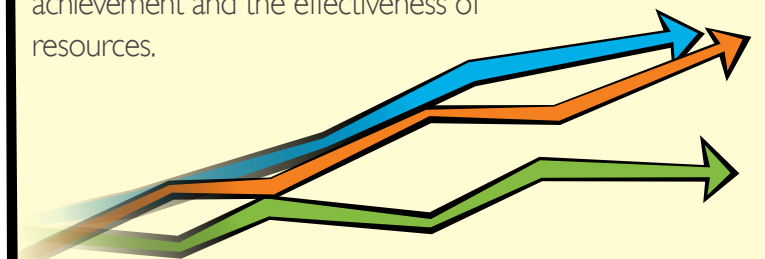
New York State has been administering Regents examinations to its secondary students since 1878. Passage of these exams was meant to be a way to demonstrate that students have mastered certain content in certain subjects. In our state, we've long been accustomed to this use of data. Tests are also used by colleges for admission purposes, by professional bodies (think the bar for lawyers and boards for doctors) for certification, and industries for purposes of accreditation.

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Technology has allowed for electronic collection, storage, and reporting of data. Many districts now have "portals" that allow students and parents to monitor progress. Because of the complexity of the systems, districts buy the technology from vendors and transfer the data into the system. These systems allow students and parents to monitor grades, assessments, attendance, discipline, state assessment scores, and other types of information. This is a common practice among schools and provides families with much more information about their children's progress than ever before. Recently, with part of its Race To The Top funding, New York State has been working with several vendors for the provision of portals statewide.

Virtually all school districts – in New York State and around the country – engage third-party providers or vendors to provide software services necessary for instructional programs and management operations, including products that deliver student information management (e.g., report cards, transcripts), course scheduling, school lunch, school transportation, online course, and local assessment services.

Districts have been sharing district, school, and pupil data for decades. It is the principal mechanism for school accountability. The lists of schools and their student achievement that appear frequently in the newspaper are products of the data collection and accountability requirements. Newspapers and magazines use school and district data to rank districts and make conclusions about achievement and the effectiveness of resources.



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Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA) is the Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR § 99.31):

- School officials with legitimate educational interest;
- Other schools to which a student is transferring;
- Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
- Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
- Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
- Accrediting organizations;
- To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
- Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
- State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

Vendors that are involved in NY's data portal initiative are bound to protect student information. All vendors sign legally binding confidentiality agreements and are obligated to comply with FERPA and all state policies on data security and privacy.

It is a common misconception that the Common Core Learning Standards require different or additional collection and sharing of data about students and student learning. That just isn't true. The Common Core Learning Standards are a description of what students should know and be able to do. The Standards are the goals or objectives toward which teachers and students strive. Schools and classrooms have always had learning goals – the Common Core Learning Standards are simply the most recent version. NY first adopted goals that were called "standards" in 1996 but the state has had common expectations for learning going back to Civil War times. The Standards are intended to ensure that students are ready for college or a career and describe certain reading, writing, speaking, listening, and mathematics expectations. The Standards don't have any requirements about testing or the use of data. They are simply learning goals that were voluntarily adopted by most states.

Good teachers use data every single day to assess their students' progress through the curriculum.

When teachers have knowledge about what their students understand, today, they can make plans for what to teach and practice, tomorrow. Unlike the one room schoolhouse of the past, teachers work collaboratively with other teachers to look at student progress together and to make adjustments to instruction that reflect the collective experience and skills of the teachers. Data are frequently used to provide feedback to students (and their parents) about learning progress.

Good schools, too, use data to guide their decision making. Decisions about programs, curricula, technology, and other aspects of the educational system are all based on data about what is working (or what is not working as well as expected). Schools are committed to continuous improvement and so the use of data is an integral part of the decision-making process. In fact, it is impossible to make good decisions without the effective and systematic use of data.

Schools and districts take learning seriously and they take their responsibilities toward their students seriously. Every effort is made to ensure that all aspects of a child's education, including the use and appropriate sharing of data with authorized parties, are respectful of privacy and all legal obligations.

