



U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Foundation

The State of K-12 Academic Achievement Data

Assessment and Accountability Brief Series

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The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

harnesses the power of business to create solutions for the good of America and the world. We anticipate, develop, and deploy solutions to challenges facing communities—today and tomorrow.

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stronger communities.

As a business leader, you use data to drive your decision making every day. You rely on it to know how your organization is doing, what’s going well, and what problems you need to troubleshoot. Without data, you’re flying blind.

It’s easy to forget that before 2001, the American education system had no reliable source of comparable data for every student in every state. The ability for education leaders or policymakers to access information to make decisions was inconsistent and piecemeal at every level, and disaggregating data for groups of students was often difficult or impossible. This data is meaningful to the business community as a pulse check on the preparedness of the future workforce—for example, [CNBC reported](#) Virginia’s strong education system was a factor in why Amazon chose to locate its HQ2 in Arlington, believing high-performing public school systems and investments in tech talent training programs would create a strong future talent pipeline.

Today, states release data every year that allow policymakers and education leaders at the state and district level to see whether they are making progress on student outcomes, where there isn’t progress, and how to allocate resources. All states publish report cards with transparent data showing student outcomes over time by district, school, grade level, and important groups of students like those from low-income families, students with disabilities, and students who are learning English.

The Data Quality Campaign’s [Show Me the Data](#) report provides an overview of how states share education outcomes with the public.

The continued availability of statewide, comparable education outcomes data depends on sustained policy attention and public use. As more time passes since these data systems were first established, some policymakers and educators have raised questions about the role and value of annual statewide assessments and public reporting. For the business community, these data provide one indicator of how well the education system is preparing the future workforce. Business leaders can help by asking how their states collect, report, and use education outcomes data—and by reinforcing the importance of maintaining consistent, comparable information over time.

Of course, transparency of academic outcomes alone does not improve student achievement at scale. What matters is how the education system uses these data, driving investments in evidence-based strategies targeted at the students who need them most. We will explore the connection between data and school improvement in the third and final issue in this series.

What Education Achievement Data Are Available?

The most comparable education data available comes from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP. This assessment samples students in every state across the country to produce the only nationally comparable education outcome data available. However, apart from a few large school districts, NAEP only produces outcomes at the state level, only for a few grades and subjects, and only once every two years. Still, NAEP has been consistent and unchanged for decades, and provides an valuable measure of education outcomes in the United States over time.

Since the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted in 2002, states have been required to administer a single state-selected assessment in math and reading to every student in grades three through eight and once in high school. States are also required to assess science in grades five, eight, and high school and social studies once in elementary school and once in middle school.

The most current federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, requires that states publish report cards that include these results to give a picture of overall school performance. States must show both proficiency and growth (as the state defines it) on the state’s math and reading assessments. Publishing high school graduation rates is also required. States can incorporate additional data as described in the state’s federal plan: things like absenteeism, participation and/or outcomes from Advanced Placement courses, or outcomes from additional assessments like the SAT, ACT, or ACT WorkKeys.

But all states do these things differently, which means the following:

- The way school progress is indicated on state report cards is not comparable across states.
- The clarity with which information is delivered on state report cards varies tremendously by state.
- The portals through which the public can access education data are equally variable. There is little consistency in the degree to which users are able to download spreadsheets, manipulate the data in the portal, or even access data that are federally required.
- Some states have chosen to combine many data sources into a single measure, making it hard to know why a school’s data might say what it says.
- Some states are much faster at reporting new assessment data than others. An academic year’s outcomes may become public as soon as July, or as late as February of the following year.
- As discussed in [our first brief](#) in this series, states set a wide range of achievement standards for what they call “proficiency.” A student who is proficient in reading or math by one state’s measure may not be proficient by another’s.

Several states provide examples of public education data dashboards that emphasize accessibility, transparency, and breadth of information. For example:

- Indiana: Indiana GPS (Graduates Prepared to Succeed) expanded their dashboard beyond test score reporting to include other factors of student success and workforce readiness. Now, the dashboard includes statistics on attendance, graduation, postsecondary readiness, FAFSA completion rates, credential attainment, and median income five years after graduation. And, they’ve made the site clear to navigate: The outcome is a usable dashboard for policymakers, business leaders, and families alike.
- Massachusetts: DART and RADAR dashboards are case studies in robust public-facing tools. Highlights include the finance outcomes of graduates, cross-district comparisons, and multi-year data available. There are also separate dashboards for different uses and stakeholders, with user guides and clear instructions on how to navigate the tools.

Other states illustrate areas where public data systems may differ in scope, alignment, or ease of use.

- Iowa: Iowa has the highest Honesty Gap when comparing their state academic test versus the national NAEP assessment.
- New York: NYSED data provides several public-facing statistics across enrollment, demographics, assessment results, graduation, attendance and suspension data, fiscal information, and accountability indicators. This data does not, however, include outcomes data for graduates as other states have done in the past few years. While there is much data publicly accessible, and available across several years, the data dashboard can be difficult to navigate to understand a clear story of school performance. To assist users, particularly families, New York launched a Parent Dashboard to aid in schooling choices.

Recent Trends That May Compromise Education Data

There have been recent developments in education policy that could muddy the waters for the transparency of academic outcomes.

First, more states are making changes to their tests and achievement standards (see our brief on the Honesty Gap). States like Illinois have recently lowered proficiency thresholds in math and English, arguing the previous higher bars for achievement were not representative of students’ preparedness for postsecondary education and careers. However, advocates in Illinois argued that lowering achievement standards inflates proficiency rates and misleads parents on their students’ progress. Further, changing how assessment results measure proficiency means that the outcomes are no longer comparable to previous years.

Second, more states are enacting universal private school choice laws that allow more students to enroll in private schools or homeschool using public funds. In most cases, that means that those students no longer need to take the statewide assessment or even if the states require the assessment to be taken, the results don’t have to be reported publicly. We lose transparency into many students’ academic achievement. Notably, Iowa and Indiana buck this trend: students who take advantage of public funds to attend private schools still must take the statewide test, meaning stakeholders will have an accurate picture of how public funds are serving students across the state.

Third, in states like Oregon and New York, many parents opt their students out of the statewide test. Like students enrolling in private schools, this results in lower assessment participation and less information about student outcomes for policymakers and educators to use.

Lastly, there is a great deal of confusion among all education stakeholders as to the purpose and benefits of various assessment tools. While the federal government requires a limited set of tests that measure student performance against their state’s standards, most districts across the country implement other assessments, usually because they produce results quickly and educators find them useful. These tests tend to be “norm referenced”; in other words, they compare the performance of a student to other students rather than to a standard. Both are useful, but multiple tests with multiple purposes tend to cloud understanding about outcomes and create uncertainty about which are necessary. The education system can improve this environment by ensuring each assessment has an express purpose and use case that is communicated proactively to educators, stakeholders, and students.

What Can the Business Community Do?

One critical action that business leaders can take is to signal to state education leaders how important education data is. If stakeholders do not emphasize the importance of these data, statewide, comparable assessment and transparent reporting will be deprioritized at best. Ask questions of leaders in your state and/or districts about how data are collected and used. And find your State Report Card website [here](#).

As a business leader, approach district and state leaders as a supportive partner. You can ask questions about your state’s education data, such as:

- Are summative test results made public July 1 at the latest? How can we speed up the timeline so families and educators have access to actionable information?
- Is our education data easily accessible and digestible to the public? How does our state report card compare with federal reporting requirements and commonly cited transparency practices, such as those identified by the [Data Quality Campaign](#)?
- For how many years have we had consistent outcome data? If the data has changed frequently, how can we ensure that we currently have high standards now, and how can we support continuity?
- What percentage of our state’s 3-8 graders take the statewide assessment? How do we measure outcomes for students outside the traditional public school system?
- How else do we measure progress in our schools?

- How do we measure student achievement in high school specifically? Is this reflective of in-demand skills and local workforce needs?

Other actions to consider include the following:

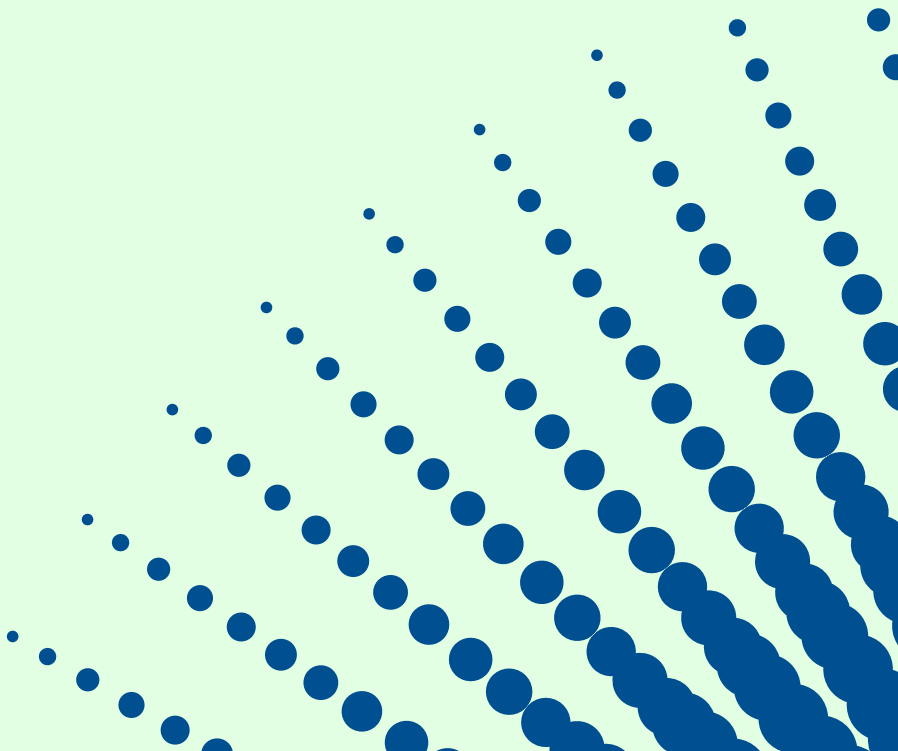
- Celebrate your state if it has a good track record of making timely education data easily accessible.
- Encourage policymakers and the state education agency in your state to commit to providing timely, actionable, and digestible education data. If your state is lagging behind in student achievement, give examples of similar or neighboring states that are making more progress.
- Make the case that academic proficiency matters for the future workforce. Communications like the Florida Chamber Foundation’s [Math Matters](#) report underscore the importance of academic outcomes as an indicator of preparedness for in-demand jobs of the future.

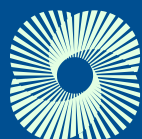
Appendix

Collection of State Report Card Websites

State	Education Report Card Site
Alabama	https://reportcard.alsde.edu
Alaska	https://education.alaska.gov/compass/
Arizona	https://azreportcards.azed.gov
Arkansas	https://myschoolinfo.arkansas.gov
California	https://www.sarconline.org/public/findASarc
Colorado	https://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview
Connecticut	https://edsight.ct.gov
Delaware	https://reportcard.doe.k12.de.us
District of Columbia	https://schoolreportcard.dc.gov/home
Florida	https://edudata.fldoe.org/
Georgia	https://gosa.georgia.gov/dashboards-data-report-card/report-card
Hawaii	https://hawaiipublicschools.org/
Idaho	https://www.idahoreportcard.org/
Illinois	https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/Default.aspx
Indiana	https://indianagps.doe.in.gov
Iowa	https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov
Kansas	https://ksreportcard.ksde.gov/default.aspx
Kentucky	https://reportcard.kyschools.us/
Louisiana	https://doe.louisiana.gov/
Maine	https://www.maine.gov/doe/dashboard
Maryland	https://reportcard.msde.maryland.gov
Massachusetts	https://profiles.doe.mass.edu
Michigan	https://www.mischooldata.org/
Minnesota	https://rc.education.mn.gov
Mississippi	https://msrc.mdek12.org/Index
Missouri	https://mcds.dese.mo.gov
Montana	https://reports.opi.mt.gov
Nebraska	https://nep.education.ne.gov
Nevada	https://nevadareportcard.nv.gov
New Hampshire	https://jwt.nh.gov/?src_route=iReport/FrontPage
New Jersey	https://www.nj.gov/education/spr/

State	Education Report Card Site
New Mexico	https://nmvistas.org/
New York	https://data.nysed.gov
North Carolina	https://www.dpi.nc.gov/data-reports/school-report-cards
North Dakota	https://insights.nd.gov/Education
Ohio	https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov
Oklahoma	https://oklaschools.com/
Oregon	https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data
Pennsylvania	https://futurereadypa.org/#
Rhode Island	https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/
South Carolina	https://screportcards.ed.sc.gov/
South Dakota	https://doe.sd.gov/reportcard
Tennessee	https://www.tn.gov/education/families/report-card.html
Texas	https://tea.texas.gov/data-reports/data-and-reports
Utah	https://reportcard.schools.utah.gov/
Vermont	https://education.vermont.gov/vermont-education-dashboard
Virginia	https://schoolquality.virginia.gov
Washington	https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us
West Virginia	https://wveis.k12.wv.us/essa/dashboard.html
Wisconsin	https://dpi.wi.gov/accountability/report-cards
Wyoming	https://edu.wyoming.gov/data





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