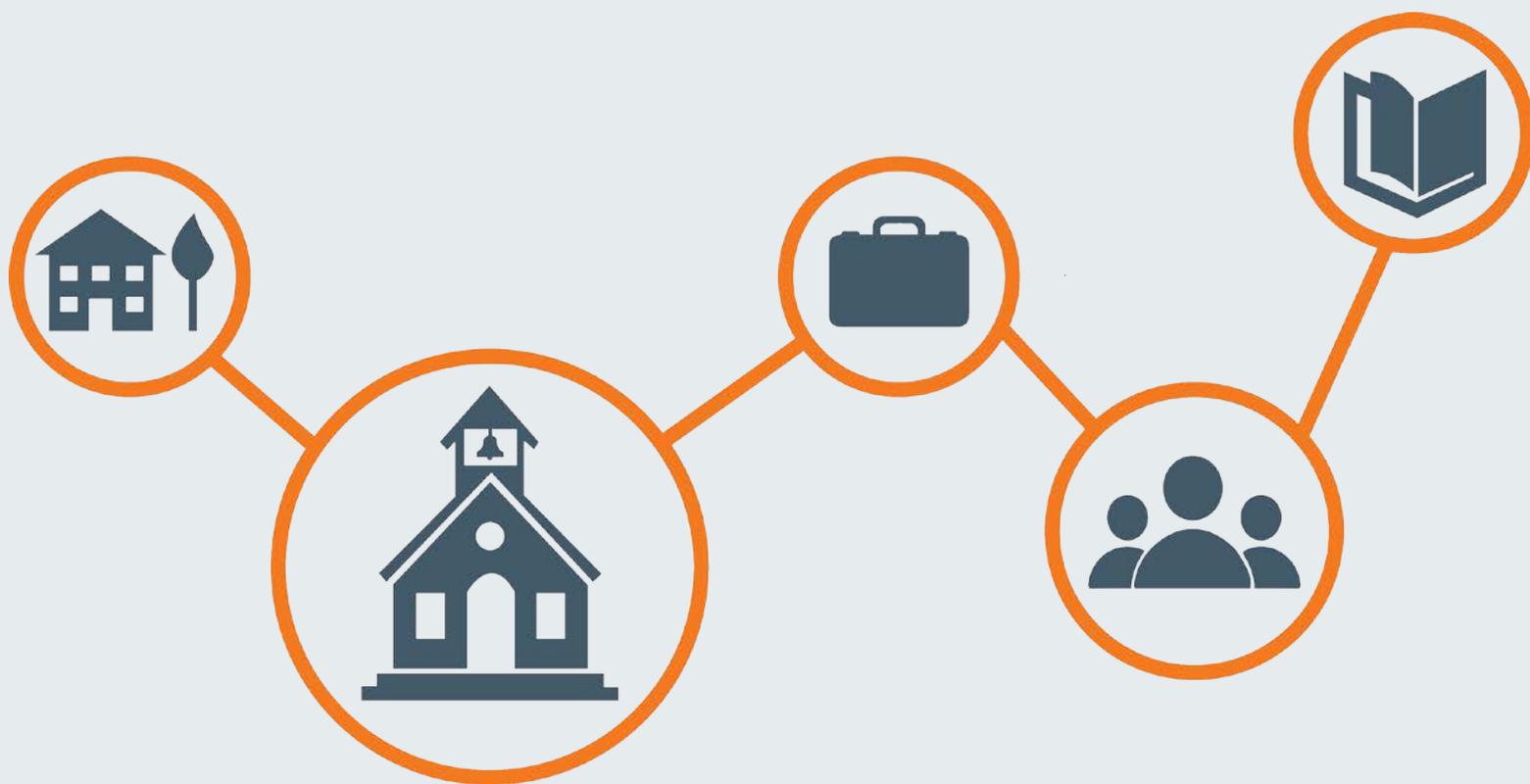


DATA DRIVES SCHOOL-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION:

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE DATA SHARING



StriveTogether
Every child. Cradle to career.

DQC
DATA QUALITY
CAMPAIGN

*Using Data
to Improve
Student
Achievement*

This paper was co-authored by StriveTogether and the Data Quality Campaign as part of a collaborative resource on data use and protection.

"The problems out there are enormous and too large for any one entity to tackle on its own. It does take a collective approach, with the school districts working together with business leaders and community partners, to really address the underlying challenges facing families."

– *David Jansen, Fresno Unified School District*

The element that perhaps most distinguishes collective impact from other modes of cooperation to improve youth achievement is rigor. This rigor, to not only prove, but constantly improve, is founded on the smart use of data, shared within and among schools and community partners and used to identify and spread effective practices across programs and systems. Collective impact is not simply about scaling an individual program or evidence-based practice; it's about using data to improve decision-making at all levels, all the time.

Thomas Edison once said, "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work." The sharing and use of information with schools is one area where most communities understand the need for more work but misunderstand its nature. Crucially, this opportunity has very little to do with technology or technical negotiations over privacy law. It has more to do with the three oft-overlooked "Ts:" trust, turf and time. This paper will provide a more solid foundation for effectively sharing data across necessary organizational boundaries to improve student supports.

Specifically, this paper is written for deputy-level decision-makers who need to oversee the implementation of this kind of complex data partnership without getting buried in the weeds. Its main purpose is to help you think about how to *approach* this challenge. As a more robust 'playbook' is built out, we will add additional case studies, resources and strategies to help you do the work. These principles are rooted in the experiences of communities across the StriveTogether Cradle to Career network as well as the knowledge that the Data Quality Campaign brings through its broad network of local leaders and national experts. But there is virtue in starting small. In the words of Matt Deevers from the Summit Education Initiative, we "prefer a small victory over a large defeat." This guide provides seven key lessons about how to get started on the right foot.



StriveTogether, a subsidiary of KnowledgeWorks, works with communities nationwide to help them create a civic infrastructure that unites stakeholders around shared goals, measures and results in education, supporting the success of every child, cradle to career. Communities implementing the StriveTogether framework have seen dramatic improvements in kindergarten readiness, standardized test results, and college retention. For more information about StriveTogether, visit www.strivetogether.org.



The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) is a national, collaborative initiative to encourage and support state policymakers' efforts to improve the availability and use of high-quality education data to improve student achievement. The campaign will provide tools and resources that will help states implement and use longitudinal data systems, while providing a national forum for reducing duplication of effort and promoting greater coordination and consensus among the organizations focused on improving data quality, access and use. Find out more at www.dataqualitycampaign.org.

7 LESSONS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY DATA SHARING



1. LEADERS AND DECISION MAKERS DRIVE THE WORK.

Decision makers, not data people, get information moving – and they do it when it's in their own best interest.

Successful and sustained information sharing across organizations in a community doesn't bubble up from below. It is not negotiated by junior-level staff, however smart and effective.

Too often, busy C-suite leaders are left out of data-sharing discussions until their budget authority or signature is needed, at which point it is presented as a favor to another department or organizational partner, rather than a strategy that appeals to that leader's immediate self-interest. As Laura Hansen, who has worked on both the community and school side of this issue in Nashville, takes pains to emphasize: it is always a good idea to assume the first question from your superintendent or mayor is going to be, "What's in it for me?"

Involve these system leaders early and focus early uses of data that will directly help them in identifying service gaps, providing evidence for budget and grant requests, and informing continuous improvement initiatives. Bottom line: Data is at the service of community priorities, never ahead of them.



2. KNOW YOUR INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM.

Connect, don't re-create... only build as a last resort.

Nearly every school, nonprofit or public agency you would partner with already has multiple information systems, data collection mandates and reporting requirements. One good rule of thumb? If you can't yet describe this "information ecosystem" in detail, you probably have no business adding something new to it. Most communities need more system integrators instead of more systems.

That's not to say that new technology or capacity isn't crucial. But it's necessary to understand the systems and costs that already exist in order to fully comprehend what is needed and its potential benefits to the community.

Know your information ecosystem. Know the legal and technical constraints of partners' systems. Know the purpose and issues they are addressing. And, above all, remember the first rule of data systems: Never begin by talking about data systems.



3. INFORMATION IS ONLY WORTH GATHERING IF IT LEADS TO ACTION.

One good question is worth a dozen data points.

With more and better data available to us all, it is increasingly important to ask effective questions. There is nothing that more quickly repels interest or ends constructive discussion than a ream of data tables or raft of bar charts that nobody requested.

Every educator and nonprofit administrator reports that they're "drowning in data." How often do they complain that they're "awash in answers? The difference between confusion and enlightenment is whether or not the information helped answer an important question.

And the most important questions are, frankly, the ones we are asking every day– that could lead a nonprofit, teacher or parent involved in a student's life to take smarter action. Working with a community of practitioners to define these questions is often more difficult than collecting the information to answer them. But this step is crucial and the experience of dozens of communities across the country gives us a fairly good sense of where to start.



4. BUILD RESPONSIBLE DATA USE AND PROTECTION INTO YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL DNA.

It's not technology but "Trust, Turf and Time" that bedevil most collaboration between schools and communities.

Schools and community partners need to have their own houses in order to be good partners to one another. Each needs to be able to demonstrate a set of effective practices around the data they maintain. This starts with placing the student at the center - identifying what data is needed, and how to use it in a way that protects and best serves students.

In 2014 alone, 36 states introduced more than 100 bills to strengthen student privacy. Districts and partners need to be acutely aware that they are guardians of the public's trust, and they should be proactive in assuring parents that any use of their children's information is purposeful, protected and approved. They must be aware of and have a plan to address topics such as data security, data governance and policies, FERPA (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and other applicable regulations, privacy protection practices, and engagement of key stakeholders. Addressing these key areas is not a one-time conversation, but an ongoing effort. Data stewardship needs to be part of districts' and partners' organizational DNA.



5. IDENTIFY YOUR TRUSTED LOCAL DATA HUB(S).

Find your “one-stop shop” to connect people to the data they need.

Even communities with a single and well-defined backbone organization that coordinates action often find that the information that *informs* that action is collected and stored in a dozens of different places, each with its own peculiarities and gatekeepers. These communities develop many “data committees” where overlapping sets of stakeholders discuss related issues, such as middle-grade success and youth re-engagement, but often without linking these data, connecting the conversations or pooling resources available for analysis and communication. Whose job does it become, then, to serve as a safe and trusted bank for critical information about the community – a sort of “Data Switzerland?”

Sometimes a well-resourced school district or municipal office can play a leadership role in facilitating school-community data sharing. Many communities, however, have also found that a neutral entity dedicated to managing information can be extremely useful. This organization makes it its business to know as much or more than anybody about what national and local data can be brought to bear on different stakeholders’ questions. They provide context to decision makers and seek to develop trust and capacity (institutionalized through written agreements and professional development). This serves as an unbiased third party for schools and communities to link, share, map and use data to drive action.

Whether housed at a local foundation, United Way or independent nonprofit, examples from the field provide a model for how to build and sustain this important kind of community resource.



6. DON'T BLAME IT ON FERPA.

It's a foundation to protect student privacy, but it doesn't prevent most legitimate data sharing in the service of helping kids.

Like many federal laws, FERPA is not exactly bedside reading. As the foundational federal law on student privacy, it establishes student rights by restricting with whom and under what circumstances schools can share students’ personally identifiable information. Some FERPA provisions are very simple, like its guarantee that parents can review their child’s education record. (And spoiler alert: *No one* is allowed to sell student education record data.) Other parts of the law are more complicated, and education stakeholders need to know FERPA and think carefully. Yet it does allow for reasonable data sharing.

Some schools find FERPA a useful talisman with which to brush off requests for data from organizations they don’t know or trust, to ignore community questions that are incoherent or designed to embarrass, and to triage the battery of informational demands placed on them from youth-serving organizations on the far side of the FERPA-firewall. Schools have an impossible job keeping up with these various requests with limited resources; appealing to FERPA is sometimes a polite brush off. Likewise, FERPA can be a scapegoat for communities that have failed to build a level of trust or partnership with their schools, that either don’t understand or have not invested to fill the gaps in districts’ capacity to meet these kinds of informational demands, or that don’t understand educators’ keen sense of responsibility for protecting student records. Furthermore, FERPA is not the ceiling for protecting data; states can and should take additional actions to safeguard student information while promoting effective data use to improve student achievement.

Evidence from the rich and sophisticated data-sharing initiatives underway in communities across the country is clear: When it is in the students' best interest, very little legitimate data-sharing between schools and communities is prohibited by FERPA or the array of state and federal laws that extend it. FERPA is not the problem. By establishing clear standards for student privacy and blazing specific paths for schools and communities to work together more closely, FERPA is our map for getting to "yes."



7. INVEST IN THE PEOPLE WHO WILL LEAD THE WORK.

You can choose to develop the technology systems, but you HAVE to develop the people.

Data sharing and collaboration across schools and communities works because of a combination of tools, processes and people. Think of it as a three-legged stool. Without focusing on and investing in the people who will make the work happen, the stool tips and the effort collapses.

A data system and procedures to navigate data sharing are important components, but not sufficient. Local leaders should identify and invest in the people who will drive this work forward. Having the right people across multiple stakeholder organizations is critical to success and to accelerating the pace of progress.

Building the broader community's capacity to use and understand data is also important to catalyzing a culture of continuous improvement. Educating local stakeholders in accessing and interpreting data, standards of data sharing and privacy, and continuous improvement principles will go a long way toward widespread adoption and sustainability.

"Data isn't something that happens separate from the work. Data use is the work."

– Kacey Guin, Seeding Success, Memphis, Tennessee.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Learn more about the [StriveTogether](#) approach to [quality collective impact](#) in communities across the country via the StriveTogether [Theory of Action](#).
- Learn more about the [Data Quality Campaign](#) and access [resources](#) from [FERPA guides](#) to [Safeguarding data](#).
- For more resources around data sharing between school and community organizations, please visit: www.strivetogether.org/content/data-drives-school-community-collaboration.