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Leveraging Data for Student Success

EDITOR'S NOTE

Leveraging student data can provide valuable insights to help drive academic success and personalize learning experiences. This Spotlight will help you learn how data can help schools identify where to target resources; examine how to improve the efficacy of "early warning systems"; improve student engagement with data on the usage of educational technology tools; explore how to improve instruction with data; and more.

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There's Little Data on the Pandemic's Effect on Students With Disabilities. That's a Big Problem

By Lauraine Langreo

More than two years since the pandemic disrupted student learning, the extent of the damage on the academic, social-emotional, and post-graduation outcomes of students with disabilities is still unclear, according to a report from the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

"Overall, there remains an urgent need for more research," the report's authors wrote.

Less than a third of most rigorous academic studies in the past year disaggregated outcomes for students with disabilities, according to the CRPE analysis. And when students with disabilities were included in the data, they were often treated as a monolith, which "likely masks critical variation in outcomes depending on students' intensity of special education services, race, socioeconomic status, and English learner status," according to the report.

Most of the data analyzed for the report were also limited to a specific state or locality and grade levels, so the findings are hard to generalize, according to the report.

CRPE, with the help of the nonprofit Center for Learner Equity, reviewed more than 100 research reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, news stories, and summaries of legal cases, along with available federal and state data, to understand how students with disabilities have been impacted by the pandemic.

As K-12 schools shift to recovery mode, experts emphasize, it's critical to have data on how students with disabilities fared during the pandemic.

"If we don't have a baseline understanding, we won't be able to understand recovery efforts, and we won't be able to understand what is effective in supporting students' recovery, and we won't also know where to target the most support," said Laura Stelitano, a research manager for the Center for Learner Equity and lead author of the report, in an interview with Education Week.

"We need nuanced data that tells us who's been impacted the most and in what ways so that we can be accountable for getting the right type of support to the right students," she added.

— Jay Reeves/AP

Timothy Allison, a collaborative special education teacher in Birmingham, Ala., works with a student at Sun Valley Elementary School in September.

Robin Lake, the director of CRPE, agreed: "The data are telling us so little. How can we take lessons from this if we can barely understand how students are faring?"

The report also examined students with disabilities' experiences during the pandemic. Here are some of the report's findings:

- Families of students with medical conditions or more significant support needs grappled with tradeoffs between the benefits of in-person learning and their children's health.

- More students who need special education services may not be getting identified, especially those younger than 2.

- Families are still waiting for compensatory services to make up for what students lost earlier in the pandemic, and many are not aware that they qualify.

- The pandemic disrupted students' transition services and progress toward traditional graduation requirements, and the implications are unknown.

- Reliance on underqualified teachers—particularly for special education positions—may be increasing from pre-pandemic levels.

- Early analyses of how states and districts spent their Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding raises concerns for how well-positioned schools will be to make long-term and systemic improvements to benefit students with disabilities.

What can school districts do immediately?

The first thing to do, Lake said, is to use the federal COVID relief money to address unfinished learning and other student needs.

"It's really important to zero in on the kids who most need intervention and support right now and think of creative ways to make sure they get it," she said.

Schools also need to make sure that students with disabilities who qualify are re-

ceiving compensatory services, Stelitano said. Federal law requires schools to provide those services to make up for interruptions that caused them to fall behind on expected progress.

But with teacher shortages, it'll be important for schools to provide the remaining teachers with sufficient support, which includes "making sure they have sufficient planning time, making sure they have sufficient time to do progress monitoring and the paperwork required for their roles, and [time for] the collaboration that they need with other teachers," Stelitano said.

What else is needed?

To really understand how to help students with disabilities recover from the disrupted learning, there needs to be more complete data, disaggregated based on multiple student identities, Stelitano said.

The report also suggested investing in the capacity of local school districts and their individualized education program (IEP) teams so that they are "equipped to elevate the voices of families and students when making decisions."

And lastly, schools should share what strategies are working for their students with disabilities so that policymakers and school leaders have models to learn from, the report said. ■

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With So Many Kids Struggling in School, Experts Call For Revamping 'Early Warning Systems'

By Sarah D. Sparks

When one student starts to fall behind, act up, and disengage from class, many schools now have early-warning systems in place to signal a problem and intervene. But what happens when half the class—or half the school—throws up similar red flags?

"If you just focus on the students who require intervention, you miss the forest for the trees," said Carla Gay, the executive director for innovation and partnership, for the Gresham-Barlow School District, in Portland, Ore. "If you have a high percentage of students who are showing some sort of need for intervention, it's more of an indicator of the health of the system."

That problem confronts many educators and administrators after years of pandemic schooling disruptions. While school districts have adopted data systems to track and analyze student indicators at unprecedented rates in the past several years, the creators of those systems warn that the indicators and interventions developed before the pandemic may not be enough to get students back on track now.

"The pandemic has created greater needs for more kids, more dynamic and more diverse and more shifting needs," said Robert Balfanz the co-director of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and an early architect of early-warning systems for schools. "Sometimes, we got so enamored by the technology and [it's] all about the best data system with the best bells and whistles … but we also have to make sure we're really focused on those supportive mindsets, the human piece of that."

Balfanz, research scientists from the Center for Social Organization of Schools and the University of Chicago Network for College Success, and six other research and education groups have launched a project to develop "next-generation" early-warning and intervention systems. The aim is to identify a broader set of academic and non-academic indicators for a broader set of students. While the first-generation systems looked at critical indicators for high school graduation, for

—DigitalVision/Vectors/Getty

> **"**The pandemic has created greater needs for more kids, more dynamic and more diverse and more shifting needs."

ROBERT BALFANZ
Co-Director,
Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University

instance, the 2.0 version might include key middle and high school transitions along the way to graduation as well as postsecondary success. The project also aims to guide districts in identifying broader, more systemic interventions when larger groups of students are at risk.

Pandemic pushes red flags beyond the 'ABCs'

Academic early-warning systems evolved in large part from work at Johns Hopkins and the Chicago consortium. Balfanz and his colleagues identified what they termed the "ABCs" of student disengagement:

- Absenteeism, particularly a student who chronically misses school, usually defined as 10 percent or more of the available school days.

- Behavior problems, such as two or more detentions or in- or out-of-school suspensions; and

- Course performance, such as grade failures and lack of credit completion.

More than a decade of research suggested that taken together, spikes in these three areas could identify students who were beginning to disengage from school. While most research focused on the use of early-warning indicators as middle school red flags, at least one statewide study in Maryland found the indicators predicted increased high school dropout risk as early as 1st grade.

For example, Balfanz pointed to a recent study by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The study found that while mental health problems among high school students increased during the pandemic, students who reported having at least one caring adult in school and at least one supportive peer had 50 percent fewer mental health problems than students who did not have those social supports.

"But the hard truth again was [that] only 47 percent of students reported having those connections and only a third of minority students did. So … we know there was a realm of human need and human power that was not necessarily captured by the first set of systems focusing really narrowly on preventing high school dropouts," Balfanz said.

For example, Gay said her Oregon district has been working to add indicators of resilience and strength to its early-warning

system, to help identify which protective supports students have and which students need them. The district has partnered with universities to identify indicators in academic and behavioral areas, but also social-emotional and basic welfare needs that are most predictive of postsecondary success at every grade from kindergarten through 12th.

While these systems have shown promise, they also can be a heavy lift for districts. "Everything from teacher voice and agency, the expectations of students and their feelings of safety, leadership from the administrative level—all those pieces are also important not only to implementing early-warning systems, but seeing outcomes attached to that, too," said Elizabeth Kirby, the superintendent of Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district.

Kirby said it is important for district administrators to bring teachers and administrators from different school levels together to discuss ways to address red flags across transitions, such as middle to high school.

In one Pennsylvania evaluation before the pandemic, early-warning systems significantly reduced both chronic absenteeism and course failures—both priorities for districts trying to help students recover lost academic ground now. But only two of the 37 schools in the study were able to implement the full model, and eight quit within a year. The biggest challenges? Staff turnover and the ongoing need to train teachers in how to understand and act on student data.

Gay said the pandemic has highlighted systemic inequities that can undermine schools' intervention efforts with individual students. The district is working with partners to identify school practices and policies that can help students who struggle to make it to school because of transportation or other challenges. ■

Ainslie Illig, 8, works on her computer at home in Ebensburg, Pa., during school closures last spring. Schools are putting together strategies for improving student and teacher engagement with online learning tools for the 2020-21 academic year.

—Kara Illig via AP

Published July 22, 2020

Knowing How Students and Teachers Use Tech Is Vital

By Mark Lieberman

Finding out how many students and teachers are using tech tools can be informative and interesting. But the numbers can also be overwhelming, and they rarely tell the full story.

Schools face steep challenges this fall: balancing pressure to teach students in person while facing the serious threat of COVID-19 transmission; reaching students who struggled to access learning materials or stay connected this spring; narrowing equity gaps that have only become more pronounced and visible in the last few months.

Data can provide districts with a concrete sense of progress and challenges, and a roadmap to addressing issues. Education Week consulted district technology leaders and software platform providers to get a sense of what technology usage looked like this spring, and to ask a critical question for the fall: How can schools use these findings to improve remote learning and technology-based offerings?

Link Low Login Rates To Internet Needs

Little Rock, Ark., School District

For the Little Rock school district, usage data helped paint a picture of access gaps among groups of students that needed extra help.

District and school leaders are confronting difficult, high-stakes decisions as they plan for how to reopen schools amid a global pandemic. Through eight installments, Education Week journalists explore the big challenges education leaders must address, including running a socially distanced school, rethinking how to get students to and from school, and making up for learning losses. We present a broad spectrum of options endorsed by public health officials, explain strategies that some districts will adopt, and provide estimated costs.

Part 1: The Socially Distanced School Day

Part 2: Scheduling the School Year

Part 3: Tackling the Transportation Problem

Part 4: How to Make Remote Learning Work Full Report: How We Go Back to School

The Finding: Early on in the pandemic, the district's tech team noticed that schools with higher percentages of English-language learners had lower login rates to ClassLink, a single sign-in portal the district used to remotely connect students to learning materials. All district parents had been asked to fill out a survey indicating what they had for at-home internet access. But some nuances of that access might not have been clear, such as whether the internet connection was on a smartphone or a computer.

The Follow-Up: The district then reached out to students in those schools who were lacking internet access, and, in many cases, sent them hotspots and digital devices, said Travis Taylor, an instructional technology specialist for the district.

"You always have to look for the story behind the numbers," Taylor said. "You should look at data and it should make you ask more questions."

Scrap Poorly Used Digital Tools

Roxbury School District, New Jersey

Over the last few years, technology has become a major priority for the Roxbury school district, which has a steadily expanding 1-to-1 computing program and a growing number of technology resources for students and teachers to use.

But the platforms have become increasingly scattered, and it was difficult for the district's tech team to separate programs that generated meaningful engagement from programs with only superficial use. In some cases, getting students and teachers to use technology tools the district had was a big challenge, said Teresa Rehman, the district's director of technology.

The Finding: "For the past few years, we had a subscription to a video streaming service that has a lot of educational videos on it," said Rehman. "We pay a lot for that service on an annual basis for access for all of our students. The usage was extremely low, but the usage of YouTube and finding free educational videos was working for everyone."

The Follow-Up: Next year, the district will abandon the video streaming service. "That frees up money for us to pay for the purchase of a new assessment program.," Rehman said. "It allows us to shift that money around and put it towards tools we really need."

In other cases, technology products that could be useful aren't being used because

teachers don't know about them. Rehman's team saw low usage numbers for the PDF editing tool Kami, so it organized "a couple of mini-sessions" to help explain its value.

Understand When Students Do Their Work

Madrid-Waddington School District, New York

The Madrid-Waddington school district in rural upstate New York paid special attention this spring to the websites students visited—and when they visited them.

Prior to the pandemic, usage of certain websites would spike among groups of students who were doing a project on a particular subject. "After the pandemic hit, the number one site was always Google Classroom because that's where the kids go to get everything," said Michelle Burke, an instructional technology specialist.

The Finding: Some of what happened was predictable: visits to ed-tech programs like Kastle Learning, Edmentum, and Study Islands were up as students looked for resources to replace some of their in-person instruction.

Others were more surprising: "Our 'use of video' statistics has actually gone down. That is not something I thought I would see."

Students often used to watch videos for fun during study hall or periods of down time during the school day. But when they're at home, they're busy on their own devices or doing other things, rather than using the school computer to watch videos, Burke speculates.

The Follow-Up: Taking a more sophisticated look at the usage of technology in the district helped provide a better picture of when students are learning. Approximately 30 percent of students completed much of their work outside of nontraditional school hours, "which really shocked me," Burke said.

Approximately 5 percent did it very early in the morning. It's likely that many of those students live in rural areas and have daytime responsibilities on family farms, Burke said. Indeed, the usage data reflect that many of those students are in high school.
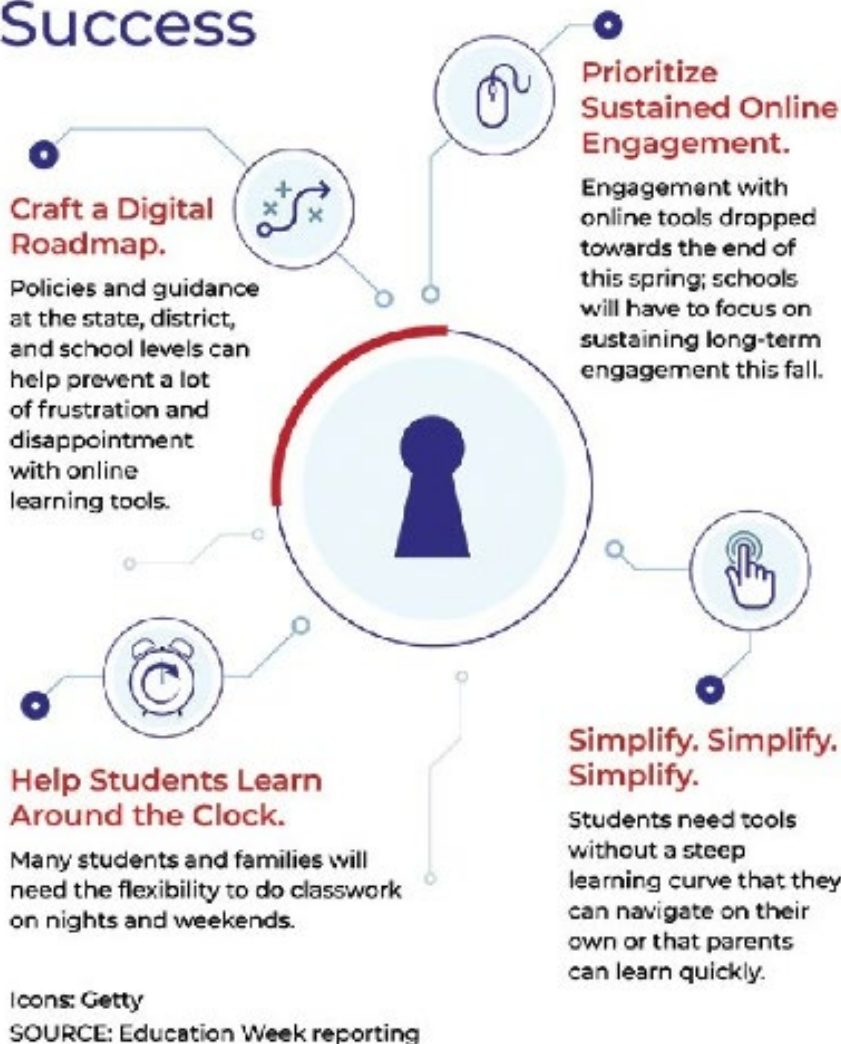
"As long as our kids know we're behind them, we're happy to connect with them [at anytime]."

Produce Resource Guides For Families

Brighton School District, Michigan

Chris Turner, director of technology for the Brighton School district in Michigan, of-

Tips for Remote Learning Success

Craft a Digital Roadmap.

Policies and guidance at the state, district, and school levels can help prevent a lot of frustration and disappointment with online learning tools.

Prioritize Sustained Online Engagement.

Engagement with online tools dropped towards the end of this spring; schools will have to focus on sustaining long-term engagement this fall.

Help Students Learn Around the Clock.

Many students and families will need the flexibility to do classwork on nights and weekends.

Simplify. Simplify. Simplify.

Students need tools without a steep learning curve that they can navigate on their own or that parents can learn quickly.

Icons: Getty
SOURCE: Education Week reporting

ten spends his time troubleshooting Wi-Fi and network issues at school buildings. He had developed a data-driven approach to identifying and resolving those problems that came in handy during the pandemic. "We knew that pivoting to the online environment would reveal how important it was that technology was performing for our teachers and students," he said.

The Finding: The pivot to remote learning this spring for the district led to a massive surge in usage of the Google Meet videoconference tool. On average, during the first half of the school year, the school's platform was used six minutes a day. Once school buildings closed, that number went up to more than 40,000 minutes per day, among both

students and teachers.

The Follow-Up: Turner attributes the rapid growth to his team's decision to designate Google Meet early on during school closures as the platform everyone was expected to use. Turner also collaborated with curriculum and library media specialists to quickly assemble resource guides families could use. Those employees were also on call to answer questions.

Turner recently sent a message to all families in the district outlining the district's usage stats from the spring. This transparency helps parents understand the role that technology is playing in the district, and gives them confidence that the district is working on refining its offerings. ∎

OPINION

Published April 4, 2022

Why It's So Tough to Get the Data Educators Want

By Rick Hess

A decade ago, Harvard's Jon Fullerton and I penned "The Numbers We Need," arguing that educational data systems focus too much on metrics useful to policymakers and too little on the numbers that are useful to educators and families. We observed that the data most useful to policymakers "are often simple, straightforward data on assessment results and graduation rates, whereas the key data for district officials shed light inside the black box of the school and district—illuminating why those results look like they do and what might be done about them."

Those same concerns are still with us today. And the disruptions of the pandemic have only made the need for useful, actionable data even more pressing. Well, in a recent report, "Bridging the Gaps in Education Data," Fullerton, the executive director of Harvard's Center for Education Policy Research, tries to make sense of why dissatisfaction with data remains so high and what we can do about it. Fullerton has worked intimately with state and district data over the years, as part of CEPR's Strategic Data Project, and he's a wealth of wisdom on this topic. (Full disclosure: The analysis was published by AEI Education, which I direct.)

Fullerton argues that we never seem to have enough data for two reasons: technical constraints and normative disagreements about what schools should do and how to measure this effectively. To make sense of all this, he walks through the "data gaps" that bedevil early childhood, school spending, postsecondary outcomes, and tutoring interventions.

For instance, when it comes to determining whether tutoring is effective, he notes that we frequently don't know how much is spent on particular interventions or even which students receive which interventions. Fullerton writes that, so long as this is the case, neither school systems nor evaluators will "be able to determine whether tutoring worked," "the cost of tutoring relative to student growth," or "whether tutoring is more or less cost-effective than other interventions."
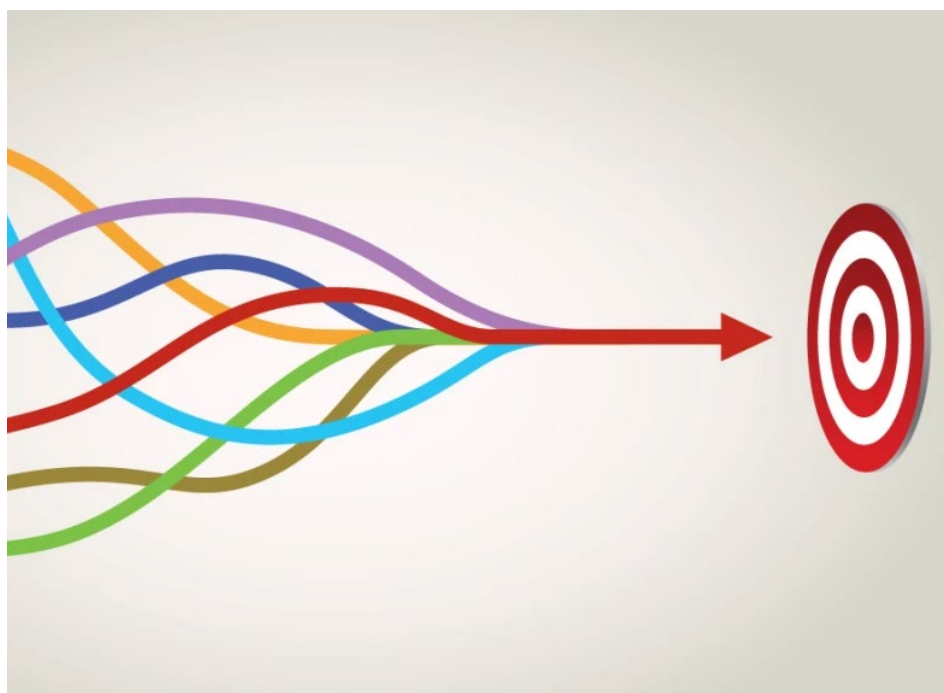
—DigitalVision Vectors/Getty

These kinds of problems can be solved. If we want to understand whether and when tutoring (or any other intervention or program) actually works, Fullerton says schools need to get consistent about how they collect and report the essential data. Districts, he explains, do not currently standardize or even collect basic information: Is a student being tutored in math or history? During or after the school day? Does the student even attend each session? Fullerton suggests that schools track program and intervention participation and integrate that into student-information systems. So, for instance, "A student receiving high-dosage tutoring might get tagged with 'high-dosage tutoring, [provider name], math, two hours per week, in-school, in-person.'"

Even if we get such things right, though, data dissatisfaction will persist because of broader technical shortfalls, especially with how we measure outcomes. For instance, he notes that "grades are not particularly reliable in demonstrating students' actual skills," while standardized tests omit important skills and competencies. As Fullerton puts it, "Measures, particularly of educational outcomes, almost never capture the richness of what we want to measure efficiently and in time to be useful."

And then, of course, Fullerton points to the role of normative disagreement about what data we should be collecting and why. As he writes, technical debates about how and when to collect data often skip past the fact "that we don't agree, at least in any deep way, on the specifics about what education is for and what we are even trying to measure."

In the end, Fullerton wisely cautions, "We must also maintain an appropriate sense of humility and realize that data will not answer all our questions or make our core disagreements go away." We shouldn't ask data to do what they can't. But we should also ensure that we're doing what we can to ensure that the data do what they can to help us understand the impact of our dizzying array of programs, practices, and interventions. ∎

Rick Hess is a resident scholar and the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. He writes the Education Week opinion blog "Rick Hess Straight Up."

Untangling Student Data Integration Platform Implementation

How to choose the right partner

School districts collect data on their students' enrollment, attendance, grades, test scores, discipline referrals, and so much more. There's no shortage of data. Yet districts are often data rich but information poor, meaning that districts have access to more data on their students than ever before but far too often aren't well-positioned to take advantage of this wealth of knowledge.

Data are important and allow districts to make well-informed strategic decisions to benefit their students. Administrators often use data for an overall picture of how their students are progressing and a snapshot of the district's health.

The COVID-19 pandemic made whole-child data even more important, and it's well documented that students are behind in reading and math. It's crucial that districts make the most of their data — from comparing past benchmarks to measuring each student's progress each month. Bringing disparate sources of data into an easy-to-access platform makes it more efficient for educators to tackle challenges.

When student data are hard to access within the district or don't work well with the programs that educators use, the data are almost useless. Administrators and teachers are burdened with moving data back and forth between different programs, such as Google Sheets, or manually pushing Excel files since programs don't always understand each other's data formats and can't share data easily.

A data integration platform helps translate and share data between a student information system — also known as an SIS — and a multitude of programs. A strong data integration platform saves administrators and teachers time while also providing the information teachers need to set their students up for success.

Like many large-scale technology adoptions, data integration platforms are difficult to implement well.

Successful student data integration platform implementation vendors have a few key attributes in common, including:

Data and change management expertise

A focus on partnership and stewardship

Data and change management expertise considerations

1. Look for an implementation partner who provides:

SIS integration and data load services
Does the vendor do all the data moving, or does the organization bear the responsibility? Moving data between systems is time consuming and requires a specific professional background. Some vendors even stipulate a required FTE in order to administer the data portions of a data integration system. There is a better way. Partner with a service-oriented vendor, like Proliftic, who understands SIS integration and data load services are critical for better data integrity.

Data and configuration validation
Does the vendor provide a blank slate as a platform that the customer must configure all of the features and components alone, or is it a shared journey where the vendor works as a partner with the customer? In a shared-journey approach, more can be accomplished and the exchange of ideas creates a sense of partnership.

Data strategy
How does the vendor meet the needs of the organization's data strategy? What is needed for access levels, implementation phases, and creating the customer's better data future?

> Choose a partner who has a deep, practical expertise in education.

2. Consider vendor qualifications & capabilities

When selecting a partner, choose one who can support and coach the organization around the use and interpretation of data.

It's important to identify who is leading the product management and vision. Educators? Technicians? Data scientists? Additionally, understand the role of the district/end users in product design and delivery.

Lastly, consider if the vendor's personnel have backgrounds in roles as educators, administrators, and school psychologists. In other words, does the vendor have deep, practical expertise in education and can serve as a thought partner — providing solutions, or alternate pathways to meet customer needs when there are potential limitations in the software capabilities?

3. Choose a vendor with a proven track record for security and protections against an attack

Cybersecurity is a growing concern in education, with more and more reports of schools and districts, along with education companies, being targeted in phishing and ransomware attacks. Sometimes, we don't realize that almost everything in a school building runs on a network — the HVAC system, security cameras, lights, and more. That means there are more vulnerabilities and avenues for someone to gain access to sensitive information.

Recognizing this, it's a good idea to ensure the vendor that you're considering is a Student Privacy Pledge signatory, which means a public commitment for the responsible collection and use of student data.

With the increasing amount of sensitive information on students, it's crucial that vendors have strong relationships with districts and have the right protections in place in case of an attack. A data integration platform support team should work hand in hand with your district's IT department to ensure students' data are safe and secure, as well as have a plan in place if something goes wrong. Within this process, consider the roles that use data within the district. A vendor with a proven track record and awareness of the ongoing threats to districts cannot be overlooked.

Partnership and stewardship considerations

A. Emphasize strong communication and collaboration

The implementation of a data integration platform should be just the beginning of a partnership with a vendor. It's important that districts work and meet with their vendors on a regular basis. Check-in meetings each month during initial onboarding and ongoing support are critical to success. These meetings are a chance to discuss what's working, not working, and where there are questions. Your vendor should also have a quick response time. Additionally, creating a communication plan is key to successful change management.

B. Share common goals and the same definition of success

What's the ultimate goal when implementing a new data integration platform? Is it to keep administrators more informed about how students are progressing when the district is switching between in-person and remote learning? Is it to help educators make more informed decisions in their classrooms? Is it to see how the district's academic progress compares to previous years?

A data integration platform means nothing if the district and the vendor aren't on the same page. Training and implementation should be tailored to a district's unique needs, including how to use the system and access data. Onboarding is a shared responsibility and should be a true team effort. While the vendor should do the main lift and connect the data, district administrators and educators need to work together with the vendor to provide the feedback and framework for onboarding. Establishing a project sponsor at the district is helpful. After all, an implementation is only as successful as an onboarding.

C. Have a strong implementation and training plan

Long-lasting partnerships are the result of a solid foundation when implementing and training staff. Look for a vendor that will provide MTTS/RTI implementation consultation, change management assessment, a stakeholder communication toolkit, post-implementation evaluation, and ongoing support and training — and meet the needs of your data strategy.

A good vendor partner wants districts to get the most out of their investments while ensuring administrators and educators are comfortable navigating the data integration platform and have a support team that's responsive to challenges, concerns, and issues that might arise. It's a true ongoing partnership.

Conclusion

Not all data integration platforms are created equal, but a good one gives administrators and teachers the power to lead with data and see how their students are performing and why. A complete, detailed picture of performance across the district, down to individual students, aligns everyone so they can work toward a common goal — student success.

The Proliftic team has honed the implementation and support process for its student data integration platform — ensuring there aren't surprises for end users. The Proliftic implementation team tailors training and implementation to the unique needs of the district, including how it plans to use the system and data. This includes identifying district roles and defining a mutually agreed upon definition of success. Additionally, they provide access to support resources including user groups and experts, such as former educators and administrators, and data and MTSS/RTI thought leaders.

—E+/Getty

OPINION

Published September 19, 2022

Standardized Tests Aren't the Only Meaningful Data on Student Achievement

By Shane Safir

Public education needs a new data paradigm. The past 20 years have trapped us in a narrow definition of data that peddles a deficit narrative about Black, Indigenous, Latinx students, students with learning needs, and other historically marginalized groups. This era has stripped educators of agency and made student voice peripheral to our accounting of "school progress," which we largely measure through incremental gains in test scores and other quantitative metrics like attendance and graduation rates.

It's time to reimagine "data" for the next generation of schooling, beginning with street-level qualitative data that is rooted in student experience and invites educators to become ethnographers rather than statisticians in their pursuit of educational equity.

After this month's release of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed significant dips in student math and reading scores, national coverage of the results has told a story of "learning loss" and the need to fill student "gaps." This framing echoes nearly two decades of test-centered solutions that fail to account for the complexity of learning.

Complex times call for complex approaches, including an orientation toward a love of learning rather than the deficit-based loss: How can we help children—and teachers—cultivate joy in the wake of so much personal loss and tragedy? We must embrace an expansive concept of data, one that centers student and family voices as well as students' cultural values, funds of knowledge, identity development, sense of belonging, and mastery of 21st century competencies that extend well beyond test-taking.

1. We need to adjust the role of big, quantitative data in school improvement efforts. The entire premise that we can define "learning loss" as a function of how students should have scored on standardized tests is problematic, dangerous, and dehumanizing. Achievement is about so much more than test scores, and authentic assessments of achievement would incorporate student voice, reflection, and performance on real-world learning tasks, not just tests.

When we only evaluate learning through such analysis as "the average high-poverty school that remained in remote instruction for a majority of 2020-21 lost roughly .44 standard deviations in achievement" (from the recent report out of Harvard University, "The Consequences of Remote and Hybrid Instruction During the Pandemic"), we pursue a path of uncreative solutions that will further deepen opportunity gaps and reproduce status quo approaches.

Author and leadership coach Jamila Dugan calls this overemphasis of large-scale, quantitative data the "boomerang equity trap": investing time and resources to understand your equity challenges but reverting back to previous mental models in ways that lead to unintentionally harmful solutions.

To suggest—as the Harvard University report does—that interventions like high-dosage tutoring or remediation will produce incremental gains (i.e., a .38 standard deviation gain in math) exhibits an incarceration of the imagination that simply doesn't speak to parents and students. Ask any parent of school-age children what matters most to them in the wake of a traumatic global pandemic, and I guarantee they will not clamor for solutions measured by a .38 standard deviation gain in math.

This is not to say that increasing numeracy and literacy doesn't matter; of course, it does. However, this type of myopic analysis of standardized test scores at the expense of other meaningful sources of data treats students like computers that were just "unplugged" for a while and lost valuable "processing" time, the solution to which is to simply run them overtime with high-dosage tutoring to get them where they need to be.

2. We need to shift our focus from so-called "achievement gaps" to opportunity gaps by collecting qualitative information that is close to the learner. This qualitative information is what I call "street data." Instead of fixating on filling purported "gaps" in learning, street data can allow education researchers to start addressing opportunity

gaps, or what Gloria Ladson-Billings refers to as the lingering "education debt" owed to Black, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized groups of students.

This would mean building more robust and holistic data systems that highlight student and community voice—from school planning templates to report cards to district equity audits that don't just include numbers but tell a story of change. Researchers should particularly focus on learning more from school districts that have succeeded in closing gaps and developing innovative approaches to supporting underresourced schools.

In contrast to quantitative data, street data offers a wider lens to start measuring what truly matters: the development of student agency. Through rich, authentic assessments—not just pencil-and-paper tests—we can begin to understand the complexity of learning and human development: how students see themselves in the world (identity), their sense of connection to others (belonging), their ability to construct and defend original ideas (mastery), and their capacity to make a difference around what matters to them (efficacy). This more holistic approach is the compass that will guide us toward a next-generation model of data.

3. We need to start listening to stories at the margins of our schools and districts as the most valuable equity-centered data of all. This requires a mindset shift from data as something we extract from students and then organize into dashboards and reports toward a stance of deep listening and keen observation. We can collect valuable street data from students by conducting empathy interviews, shadowing students, and convening focus groups, student panels, and action research around problems of practice. Now more than ever, we need holistic, inclusive data that can only be gathered by going to the most marginalized families and students, listening deeply, and co-constructing recovery frameworks and priorities.

The solution to generational, systemic inequities will never emerge from a single source. When we continue to frame our analysis and approaches around standardized testing and other big data, we miss an opportunity to reimagine schooling for a post-pandemic world. Recovery isn't just about academic test scores. It's about building a next-generation approach to data and knowledge that tells the whole story—a story of loss, yes, but also of survival, resilience, new forms of learning, and yearning for a reimag-

> ## This type of myopic analysis of standardized test scores at the expense of other meaningful sources of data treats students like computers that were just "unplugged" for a while and lost valuable "processing" time."

STANDARDIZED TESTS AREN'T THE ONLY MEANINGFUL DATA ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
Shane Safir

ined educational system. To dream this approach into existence, we need a data framework rooted in holistic assessment of student learning. In this brave new world, data will be humanizing, liberatory, and healing. ∎

Shane Safir is an equity-centered leadership coach. Previously, she was a high school teacher and then the founding principal of June Jordan School for Equity, an innovative model high school in San Francisco. She is the author of The Listening Leader: Creating the Conditions for Equitable School Transformation *(Jossey-Bass: 2017) and a co-author with Jamila Dugan of* Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation *(Corwin: 2021).*

OPINION

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Improving Instruction With Student Data

By Larry Ferlazzo

What are examples of your collecting and using student "data" in the classroom successfully?

Today, Luiza Mureseanu, Ciera Walker, and Douglas Reeves offer their ideas.

"Assessment for learning"

Luiza Mureseanu is an instructional resource teacher-K-12, for ESL/ELD programs, in Peel District School Board, Ontario, with over 17 years of teaching middle and high school students in Canada and Romania. She believes that all English-learners will be successful in schools that cultivate culturally and linguistically responsive practices:
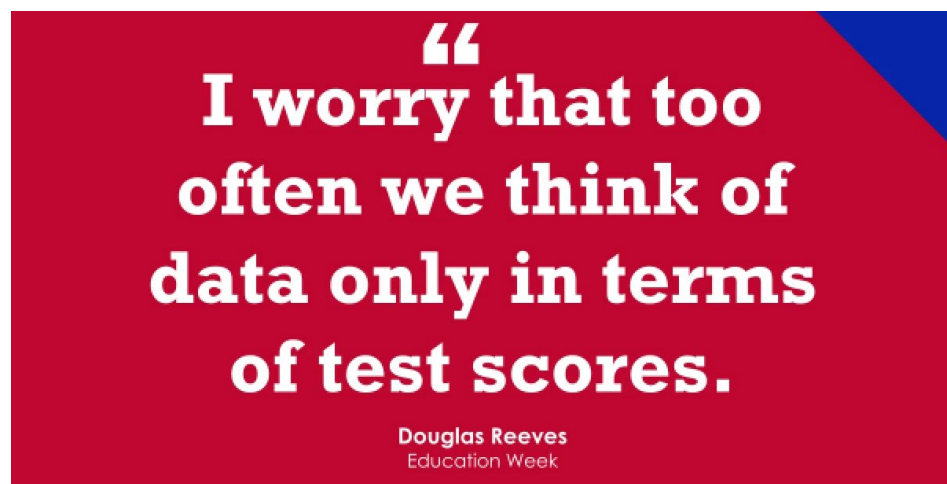
Pedagogical documentation and data collection from students—either qualitative or quantitative—play a significant role in informing our practice.

I often use Google forms, exit tickets, notes, comments, peer assessment, interviews, class surveys to gather information about multiple aspects of teaching and learning. Based on student input, I change and diversify the text selection, types and number of assignments, selection of group work or grouping strategies, assessment narratives.

The learning space is an open and democratic forum where things get to be changed if need be or maintained and improved when necessary. One important piece of evidence collected from students that has a positive impact on student learning is related to their assessment for learning.

When asked about their major projects and final evaluations, students are able to articulate their ideas about changes that will serve their learning better. Some of these changes refer to more time accommodation and timeline flexibility and some are about new tasks for their final evaluations.

For example, students in my class determined a change of the traditional formal class presentations to student-led TED Talks and/or video stories. Student data can be truly beneficial in improving classroom instruc-

"I worry that too often we think of data only in terms of test scores.

Douglas Reeves
Education Week

tion. A simple exit ticket can provide a clear overview about teaching strategies, a lesson, or a whole unit planning.

Using a growth mindset

Ciera Walker is a sixth-year systemwide elementary school ELL teacher in east Tennessee:

At the beginning of the year, my students were working on a reading assignment with partners. As I circulated the room, one group walked over to the "Our Goals" bulletin board in the back of the classroom. They looked at and discussed their WIDA Access scores from the previous year. The group consisted of one lower listener/higher reader and one lower reader/higher listener. They decided the higher reader would read the text and the lower reader would echo read. The low listener would make sure that the echo read was correct. As the teacher, my only role in this process was to observe and guide as needed. The students were able to take ownership of their learning and make decisions that were best for them for the specific assignment.

In Tennessee, the WIDA Access is used as the English-language-development assessment for ELLs. This assessment measures language acquisition in four domains: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. It is important that students know their score in each domain in order to focus on goals throughout the year to continuously grow and improve.

In the 2019-20 school year, I tried a new

method for collecting, sharing, and using student data in my classroom that was utilized throughout the school year. At the beginning of the year, my classes and I discussed "growth mindset" and how to apply it to the classroom and to our language learning. We discussed how each of us learn differently and that we have different strengths and weaknesses—and that is OK. After this discussion, I gave students their WIDA Access score reports from the previous year. Students were given time to look at their scores and identify their strengths and areas that needed improvement. Students were eager to share their strengths and areas that were in need of improvement with their classmates. My students took time to highlight their strengths and then chose a domain they wanted to improve. This exercise helped students create a goal to work on throughout the year, while simultaneously building our classroom community and culture.

Next, students traced their hands on construction paper, cut them out, and wrote one domain and score on each finger; the thumb was for their overall score. On their arm, they wrote an academic goal for the year (based on their scores) and a sentence about how they planned to reach the goal. My students were eager to write a nonacademic goal as well. Students displayed their goals in the class and referenced them throughout the school year during various assignments. They used rubrics to think about how to improve their scores in each domain as

well. Additionally, these scores and goals helped me, as the teacher, determine groups for certain activities. I could group students based on similar or different strengths and weaknesses in order for them to successfully complete tasks in class. The "Our Goals" bulletin board served as a constant reminder of the importance in having a growth mindset as well as the importance of setting goals and trying to reach them.

My students and I referenced the bulletin board throughout the year. When students got discouraged, we would use the board to remind them of the goals they set. I would have students reference the board before an assignment, and they would recognize which part of the assignment they needed to focus on based on their WIDA Access scores.

In the weeks that led up to the WIDA Access, students would check their previous scores and purposefully focus on rubrics to improve their scores in lower domains. Students worked hard to stay on track with their academic goals throughout the year. Keeping track of student data is a way for students to build and sustain a voice in their own education. I will continue to use this method for collecting and sharing student data in the classroom.

"Data has a face"

Douglas Reeves is the author of more than 30 books and 100 articles on educational leadership, teaching, and student achievement. His videos and articles are all free downloads at CreativeLeadership.net. Doug Tweets @DouglasReeves and can be reached at DReeves@ChangeLeaders.com:

I worry that too often we think of data only in terms of test scores, and too many schools have been told that "looking at data" yields some mystical insight.

There is great value in combining the macro (how all students are doing) with the micro (the progress of an individual student). Compare the work of a single student from one month to the next and watch the paragraphs become more elaborate; the sentences, more complex; the problem-solving, more elegant. That's the impact of teaching at work.

You might also follow the lead of teachers I watched who place pictures of every student on their data wall to remind them, as their headline said, that "data has a face."

Thanks to Luiza, Ciera, and Doug for their contributions! ∎

Larry Ferlazzo is an English and social studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif.

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