

# Using Data to Effect Change:

## Understanding and using the information in School Report Cards and Needs Assessments

*We recommend that you use the following resources with your School's Report Card, and any additional resources from your community advocacy leaders.*



# Worksheet: Using Data to Advocate

Use this worksheet with your school's report card. Ask for support to read the data if you need it! Community based organizations, school leaders, and parent advocates can support you.

## Did you know? ESSA requires accessible information!

The federal law requires that all information provided by schools be "accessible" to parents and families - meaning that they need to be in a format and language that you can understand.

## Understanding Information in Your School's Report Card

1. What is the story the data is telling us about the students in this school?
2. Is there information on the report card that shows your school is doing well in some areas?
3. Does the report card give information that shows where your school needs to do things better?
4. Does the report card have information about school climate or discipline, like suspension rates?
5. Does the information on the report card match what you have seen in the school personally? Do you feel like your school needs to make improvements?
6. Has your school been identified for "Support and Improvement"?



What else do you see/notice? What questions do you have?

## Far From a Complete Picture

School report cards offer one picture of a school. For example, while test results can help us get a snapshot of student academic performance, student success can be (and is) measured in ways that cannot be seen in this report card.

Use this report to spark deeper understanding — to begin the conversations we need to have to better support students in the ways they most need to be supported.

Understanding data is part of "Learn and Share" in the school improvement cycle!

### What to do if information is missing

School report cards are required to report certain information. For what is required and what to do if your school's report card is missing important data, check out the **Data Quality Campaign's** resources at [dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata/](https://dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata/)



This is a tool from the **Engage for Education Equity Toolkit**. Find more at [partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity](https://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/engageforequity)

## Worksheet: Using Data to Advocate

# Using Data to Make Changes

We must make decisions based on complete and accurate information. School report card data is imperfect, but it can help us begin a conversation to better understand each other and the students we are all here to support.

### Questions to ask yourself:

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1. What information can I use to show my own child's experience is part of larger issues in the school?
  2. What information can I use as evidence to advocate for additional resources/support or a change in school policy?

### Questions to ask your community:

1. How can we get a better picture of student achievement and success at our school?
2. What questions do we need to ask in order to understand the root causes of the student success gaps we see in this report card?
3. Is there any additional information that you are interested in knowing?
4. How can we share the information we have so that more parents, families, and community members can join us in this effort?

## What data is “equity” data?

Equity data is information that helps to show how different student groups (e.g. students in special education, students of different races or family incomes) are experiencing different levels of success *as a result of less support or fewer resources*.

For example, equity data that you can find on your school's report card includes:

- Lower test scores for some groups of students (e.g. students with disabilities) than their peers, *despite equal capacity to learn*
- Higher suspension and expulsion rates for some groups of students (e.g. students of color) than their peers, *despite similar behavior*
- Differences in rates of chronic absenteeism (excused and unexcused) among student groups, *despite equal capacity to attend*
- “Per-pupil expenditures” — or, the amount of money a school spends each year per student. If this number is different for schools in the same district, that may mean that *students in some schools have access to supports and resources that other students do not*.

## Where can I find even more information?

- **The Data Quality Campaign** works on making data available and understandable for all community members. Check out their resources at [dataqualitycampaign.org](https://dataqualitycampaign.org) - like their **parent and family resources**, or their **Education Data 101** for policy makers.
- **GreatSchools'** tools support **parent and family advocacy** and provide families with independent **school ratings** and information you may not find in your school's state report card. *Note that these ratings can also contain an inaccurate picture of schools.*

# School Report Cards

Use this handout at a meeting on your school's report card, along with examples from your state's education department or school board website!

## What is a School Report Card?

- School report cards are similar to your student's report card, in that they show information about how your school is doing.
- School report cards are based on data and information on students, the teachers and staff that work at your school, and other things about the school's culture or the opportunities it provides to students.

### Want to Know More?

Check out the Data Quality Campaign's website! [dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata](http://dataqualitycampaign.org/showmethedata)

There you'll find information about:

- what states SHOULD be sharing,
- what to advocate for and how, and
- how to read your school's report card.

You can also find information in [Education Data 101](#)

## Where does the information come from?

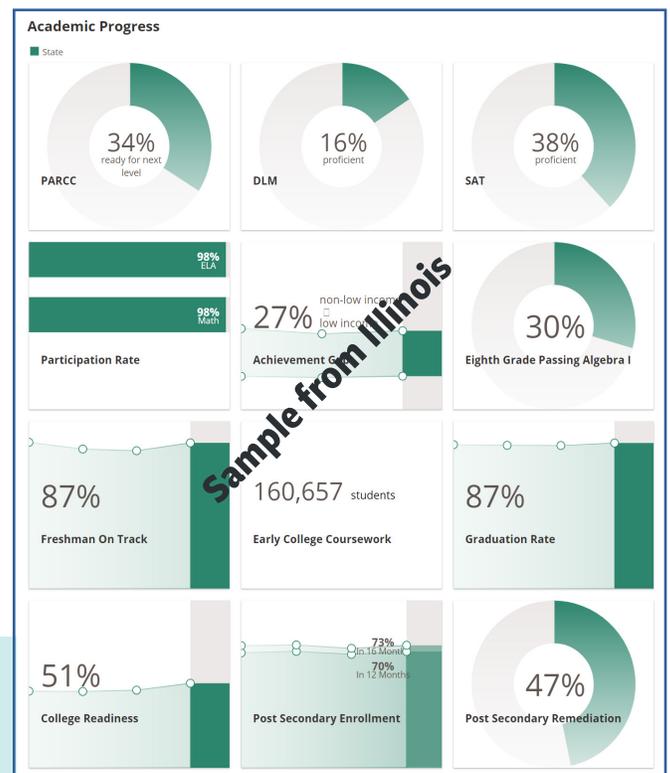
- States get information from districts and charter programs, who get their data from the schools themselves. If you want better or different information, you'll need to talk to your state representatives and your school leadership.

## Where can I find my school report card?

- School report cards are all hosted online on your state's education agency website. Search "(your state) school report card" and it will likely be the first link you see.
- You can also call your school or district office and request a printed copy. They are required to provide it!

## Who can help me understand my school report card?

- School report cards can be difficult to read. The first step is to find the report card and talk it through with a peer or other trusted advocate.
- Next, go together to meet with a school staff member - either a teacher, school site council member, or your school principal in-person. Ask them to walk you through the information on the report
- National organizations can also help! Check out Great Schools! at [greatschools.org/gk/ratings](http://greatschools.org/gk/ratings) and the Data Quality Campaign at [dataqualitycampaign.org](http://dataqualitycampaign.org)



What you learn will help you push for change. Use the information in your school's report card to empower your voice!

# Needs Assessments

Use this handout to support a meeting around your local needs assessment, or to help community members begin thinking about information as a tool for action!

## What is a Needs Assessment?

- To learn more about what a school needs to better support students, school and district administrators sometimes conduct a “**needs assessment.**” This is a set of in-depth questions about school environments, teachers and staff, extracurricular programs, coursework, and other information. **Needs Assessments are required** for all schools identified for school improvement under ESSA and are a best practice for all schools wanting to improve.

## How do Schools Gather Equity Information?

- There are many ways that school and district officials and administrators gather information about students and the personnel, programs, and policies that support them, including **rubrics, open-ended questions and storytelling, surveys, and in-person conversations.**
- Help your school and school community learn more by collecting and **sharing the right information:** information should include both outcomes and inputs so that you know both where there is need and what might be able to fill that need.



### Get Involved

As a stakeholder, you can inform a needs assessment by working with your school administrators to add questions, fill it out, help to analyze the results, and/or communicate out what is learned to your community.

## Key Terms:

### Standards and Curriculum

Academic **standards** describe outcomes for students: *what should students know at the end of 3rd grade?* **Curriculum** is a set of inputs: *what will the teacher and students do together in order for students to learn the standards?*

### Indicators

**Indicators** are pieces of information about students and schools that let us know how they are doing and are used by the school, district, and state to inform decisions. Under ESSA, some indicators are required, including student performance on tests, but can also be non-academic information like school climate.

### Data

Indicators are measured through the collection of **data**. Sometimes this data is straightforward, like scores on a test, but often the simplest data is the least useful for understanding not only how students are doing, but what they need in order to do better, like whether kids feel safe in school.

### Student Assessment

A key component that connects a curriculum to standards is an **assessment** — a test: have students learned what they needed through the curriculum in order to meet the standards?

### Inputs/Outputs

An **input** is something that contributes to the learning and success of a student, like curriculum, effective teachers, and access to healthcare, arts programs, and extracurricular opportunities. **Outputs** are indications of student success, like scores on a test or responses to a school climate survey.

### School Climate

**School climate** refers to environment, including whether students are safe, learning, and respected; teachers are supported; and families are actively involved. It is often measured by survey but can also refer to specific measures like student suspension/expulsion rates and/or teacher absences.

For more Key ESSA Terms, check out the [Glossary](#)

