

Educator Data System:

Creating a Talent Engine for Texas Public Schools

Education First

Educators matter. Educators matter—they have the greatest influence on student achievement within a school and are the most significant budgetary investment for any state education system.* Regrettably, much of the national debate around growing an effective corps of principals and teachers has been reduced to a single point of friction around systems for educator evaluation. The fact is, a much broader conversation needs to be taking place, both nationally and in Texas, about how to recruit, train, evaluate, support and retain educators at scale.

A comprehensive and readily accessible educator data system lays the foundation for this broader and more meaningful conversation to take place amongst policymakers, educators, parents and the public.

Effective use of educator data enables smarter, faster improvements across the educator continuum.

The routine use of data to drive decisions and to take action will result in sustained progress in our public schools. When Texans have readily available educator data, policies and resources can be directed toward improvements that advance our educator workforce. Texas lawmakers and education leaders need timely access to educator data to make critical policy decisions and wise investments; prospective educators need data to select the best preparation program for them; teachers and principals need data to identify programs and resources that truly make them better; and parents and the public need data to understand what's working and what isn't—so that all Texas children have the best educators in the country serving in their classrooms and schools.

Texas legislators must act to enable state and local education leaders to make effective use of educator data.

A comprehensive educator data system can serve as a game-changer for supporting Texas educators and strengthening the quality of the educator workforce. Texas leaders and stakeholders can use an educator data system to evaluate and address educator workforce policies and resources, and accelerate the pace of creating, supporting and retaining strong educators in classrooms and schools across the state.

In Texas, at this point in time, how much do we really know about what our educators need to succeed? A comprehensive educator data system allows policymakers, state and district education leaders, educators, parents and the public to answer key questions about our educator workforce to continue to develop, support and grow the most effective educator workforce in the country, such as:

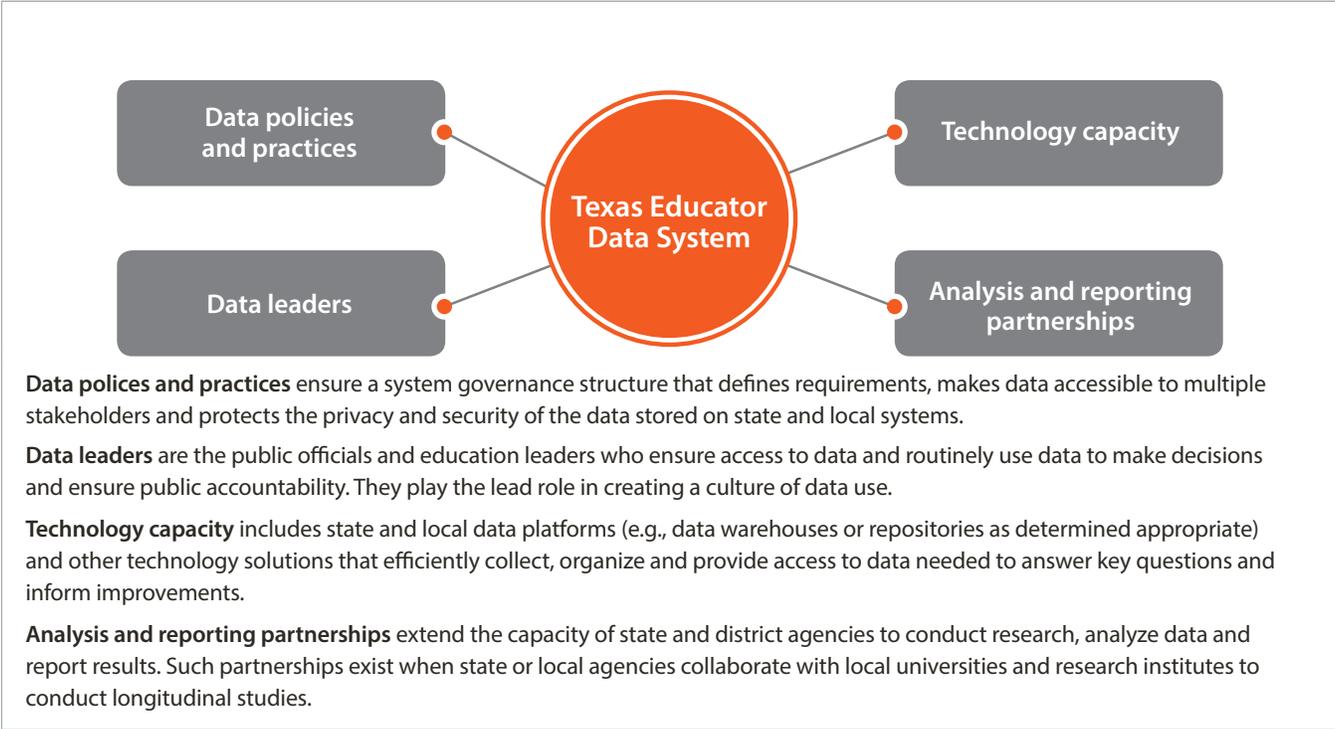
- Who are we recruiting into the education profession?
- How effectively are educator preparation programs preparing teachers for the classroom and principals for building leadership?
- Are we producing certified educators for identified areas of need?
- Are we providing appropriate supports for novice teachers and principals to improve their skills and retain Texas' investment in their development?
- Are we getting high-quality teachers and principals to teach and lead in high-need schools?
- What do great teachers and principals do differently and how do we develop those skills?
- What does it take to retain principals and teachers to keep our best educators in front of Texas students?

* Steven G. Rivkin et al., "Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement," *Econometrica* 73 (2005): 417-58, accessed August 9, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3598793>.

A robust and functional educator data system will yield remarkable results for students, positioning Texas to provide all children with the highest quality of education in the country.

Currently, the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Workforce Commission all collect critical information about our principals and teachers, but these data are buried deep within the websites and reports of multiple state agencies, making access difficult. Elsewhere, education leaders and the general public have quick and reliable access to educator data to guide decision-making. Texas deserves no less.

For policymakers, education leaders and the public to work together to build and sustain the strongest educator workforce in the country, Texas needs all four components of an exemplary educator data system:



These are the key building blocks Texas needs to ensure its education leaders and policymakers can access and routinely use data to inform policy, investments, implementation decisions and progress toward the state’s education goals.

Texas must use data to target action along the educator continuum if it is to lead the nation in preparing all students for future success.

Policymakers at the state and local levels must be concerned with the entire educator continuum to make sound policy, practice and investment decisions. Data drawn from various points throughout a typical educator’s career will help address each segment’s core issues—from the time a prospective teacher or principal enters a preparation program through the course of his or her entire career. For example, policymakers who are keen on improving the quality of educator preparation programs need an educator data system to link classroom evaluation results of alumni to the educator preparation program that prepared them. This analysis is only possible when data are collected consistently over a period of time—from pre-service to educators making their marks in classrooms and schools.

Across the five segments of the educator continuum, policymakers, education leaders and the public use an educator data system to:

Attract and Prepare	Recruit and Hire	Induct and Support	Develop and Evaluate	Retain and Reward
<p>Improve the quality of educator preparation programs</p> <p>Increase the competitiveness of candidate pools</p> <p>Ensure programs gear coursework toward subject areas of highest demand</p>	<p>Add efficiency to the hiring process</p> <p>Build the capacity of small and rural districts that lack human resources staff</p> <p>Enable principals and human resources staff to develop filters to identify the best applicants</p>	<p>Drive improvements to programs that support new educators</p> <p>Ensure accountability of scarce resources that aim to reduce attrition</p> <p>Supply local leaders with relevant information to support new educators</p>	<p>Identify effective educators</p> <p>Enable local leaders to customize professional development</p> <p>Drive improvements to professional development programs</p>	<p>Provide information to anticipate retention needs</p> <p>Identify top educators Texas cannot afford to lose</p> <p>Ensure resources are directed toward strategies that result in higher retention rates</p>

Policy recommendations: Using an educator data system to strengthen the educator workforce across the State of Texas.

Texas can create an educator data system capable of solving critical educator workforce challenges, increasing data transparency and understanding for public stakeholders, and identifying where strategic and efficient resource investments can have the most impact. Implementing the three core policy recommendations below will demonstrate Texas leaders' high expectations for efficiency, quality decision-making and transparency with the public.

Recommendation 1: Establish a comprehensive and transparent educator data system

Education leaders, like leaders from any industry, can make better decisions with regular access to and use of reliable data. The Texas Legislature must establish a comprehensive educator data system and take the lead in setting conditions to enable and support the innovative use of data to answer critical educator workforce questions and support action.

- **Call on Pre-K–12, postsecondary and workforce leaders to take stock of the educator data** that matter for increasing cross-agency and public transparency, collaboration and awareness. Leaders among these agencies often do not share data efficiently, making it difficult for Pre-K–12 leaders to anticipate hiring challenges or workforce leaders to ensure all regions of the state attract, develop, support and retain top educators.
- **Ensure a standard of data validity** to protect the integrity of data and its usefulness to the field. This includes ensuring data administrators use quality assurance protocols to review and verify data for accuracy.
- **Require Texas agencies to invest** in systems, technology and human resources that make data available, accessible and transparent, and that are not dependent upon specific, proprietary vendor solutions (i.e., open systems, to the extent practicable).

In a time of scarce resources, it may seem challenging to spend more dollars on data; however, data bring efficiency and allow decision-makers to direct resources where they matter most. Since 2011, 41 states have invested dollars to sustain data systems; prior to the height of the national recession, only 27 states made such investments. Texas needs continued legislative support and dollars to strengthen its data infrastructure.*

* Data Quality Campaign, *Data for Action 2013: Right Questions, Right Data, Right Answers* (2013), accessed August 29, 2014, <http://dataqualitycampaign.org/find-resources/data-for-action-2013/>.

Recommendation 2: Establish clear authority and governance over data

Top educator data systems require strong data governance. Different levels and types of data are made available to credentialed users than the aggregate level data made more broadly available to the public. Access to data broadens public understanding of educator workforce reforms, and invites stakeholders to become co-problem solvers alongside education leaders when challenges arise. In addition, data sharing invites accountability to the public at large.

Smart governance structures clarify who is responsible and accountable for managing and producing data, and dictate how data can be accessed and used. Texas legislators must provide a route for supplying data access to those with the right permissions, absent unnecessary restrictions or cumbersome data request processes. A properly functioning data governance structure will maximize the use of data by assigning key responsibilities for ongoing system maintenance, operations and data analysis, especially as data are collected and shared across agencies.

- **Establish a statutory governance committee** made of Pre-K–12, postsecondary and workforce agency leaders and public stakeholders authorized and trusted to guide and manage the educator data system. Trusted leaders, agency experts and other key stakeholders are best positioned to determine the state’s data needs and policies for using data. Ultimately, the principles of utility (how the data will be used), transparency (how the data will be shared) and privacy (how access to data will be determined) are all important considerations to make that determination.
- **Require the committee to convene annually or even more often to identify challenges and propose solutions** that improve data governance structures, data sharing and staffing to make the system function strongly and well. Call upon the committee to address ways to improve reporting and enhance the public’s data literacy, enlisting outside stakeholder perspectives to inform that process.
- **Ensure privacy protection, security and transparency policies and provisions**, such that stakeholders can access data without compromising individual privacy rights. Increased training to safeguard data and clear guidelines for what data can and cannot be shared reduce the need for rigid governance policies that make it difficult for stakeholders to efficiently locate and use data.

Recommendation 3: Build a data driven culture

Texas policymakers have the power and resources to usher in the latest advancements in data reporting. Efforts to raise the bar for using educator workforce data will enhance decision-making, solve problems and communicate progress and challenges with the public. But that is not enough. Policymakers must also demand that agencies behave differently.

Policymakers can change agency behavior and dialogue with stakeholders by demanding that agencies analyze, share and act on data, putting in place explicit expectations of a data-driven culture. Whether in an individual classroom, school, district, educator preparation program or statewide, long-lasting forward change requires the implementation of systems and processes that routinely measure what is and is not working. Those results must be regularly and transparently shared with the public.

- **Require state and local education agencies to use statewide data systems and data dashboards** to monitor the health and progress of the Texas educator workforce over time, based on pre-established metrics. Reporting systems-level progress by the educator continuum’s five distinct segments discussed in this report is a helpful way for education leaders to monitor and report on large-scale trends.

Policymakers should also require agencies to use baseline, formative and/or summative data in budget requests, policy planning and program progress monitoring. Encouraging the practice of comparing Texas’ data with other states’ data and exploring the practices getting results elsewhere are also much more straightforward when data are readily available.

- **Identify and call for new public reports** that will be used by education leaders, programs and stakeholders to make continuous improvement, support innovative solutions or inform the public of critical issues. For example, Texas might consider a report requiring leaders from across agencies to analyze data within the system to identify teacher and principal shortages by geography and content/specialty area and then map that to the educator preparation pipeline. Education leaders must use data to answer such questions as: How well are educator preparation programs filling key shortage needs across the state for principals, STEM classes, support for English language learners and other key subject-area teachers?
- **Require agency leaders to publish findings in user-friendly formats.** Task a committee of outside stakeholders to evaluate the reports currently available. Put parents, business leaders, higher education and K-12 leaders, teachers, principals and even students on the committee. The recently updated Texas P-20 Public Education Information Resource (TPEIR) site would be a great place to start. Ask the committee for feedback: Is the data meaningful, timely and useful for you? Are the data implications or trends understandable?

Conclusion

By strategically using data to inform decisions and investments, Texas has the opportunity to develop the most effective educators in the nation. Texas educators—teachers and principals alike—as well as Texas school children deserve nothing less than the best efforts of policymakers in combining talent, data and policy to support the people charged with one of the most significant jobs imaginable—developing the talent that is the future of this state.



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