



COMMISSION ON
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND
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Data Recommendations: Driving Progress Through Reliable, Accurate Data

Sophisticated data systems offer tremendous potential for educators at every level. Teachers can use data on student progress to adjust lesson plans. Principals can look at classroom data and gauge the effectiveness of teachers and curriculum. Superintendents can examine school data to make better decisions about resource allocation. State officials can determine district needs and target assistance more efficiently. Researchers can better discern meaningful trends and identify the interventions and innovations that are most effective in improving student achievement.

States have developed data systems of widely varying quality and capabilities. Despite the need for sophisticated data systems implied by the law, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) did not set standards for such systems. Currently, only Florida's data system includes all 10 elements identified by the Data Quality Campaign as essential for tracking student progress, evaluating program effectiveness and identifying consistently high-performing schools (NCEA 2006). A separate report showed that three states do not link their student identifiers to statewide assessments, and 27 states do not link the identifiers to high school transcripts (Education Week 2006).

High-quality data systems form the backbone of a high-achieving education system. We recommend that the federal government and states partner to create more sophisticated data systems that can track student achievement over time and provide critical information to parents, teachers and school administrators. While some states have begun to develop such systems, we need to pick up the pace to ensure that needed information is collected and available. We recommend requiring all states to design and implement a high-quality longitudinal data system within no more than four years of the enactment of a reauthorized NCLB.

- Each data system must be capable of allowing states to calculate growth in student achievement from year to year and teachers' contribution to classroom performance, and be constructed to enable states to easily share student and teacher information.
- The federal government would provide formula grants to assist states in their development and implementation.

We must train educators on how to effectively use the information in data systems to raise student achievement and improve schools. Key to the operation of these data systems is professional development for those who use it, as well as those who input information into the systems. Data systems can be effective only if they are accessible and if educators and administrators are trained to use them properly. Although effective use of data can improve results, many principals and teachers are not accustomed to using data for instruction and school improvement (Boudett, City, and Murnane 2005). We recommend that states provide professional development for all individuals who use and maintain these systems.