

Using and Collecting Data

What Does NCLB say?

Data is the driving force behind No Child Left Behind. Data allows us to make clear and accurate conclusions about the performance of our schools and identify areas of specific needs. The new NCLB requirements enable educators, parents, and advocates to get information about the groups of students that have historically been short-

changed by the **opportunity gap** including the **teacher quality gap**. Data can tell us where the most highly qualified teachers are teaching, which students are being exposed to the best curriculum, and where the most resources are

provided. Without data we have opinions. With data we have facts – facts that can help us make better decisions to help students and schools improve.

No Child Left Behind says that public education must report more information and make it more available to the public. Here are some examples:

- Individual reports to parents describing their children’s achievement and specific areas of need.
- Achievement levels for specific groups of students—in each state, district, and each school.
- Teacher quality and the distribution of qualified teachers among different schools.
- Lists of all schools in need of

improvement, and their plans for improvement.

- Notice of school transfer choices parents have with data on the sending and receiving schools.
- Information about free tutoring services for some children and data on the tutoring provider, especially the provider’s success rate in helping children to meet standards.
- Information for parents of English-language learners, including:
- A description of the program for teaching English to limited-English proficient students.
- A timetable for when the student is expected to join the regular English-language program.
- If the student is in middle or high school, the expected graduation rate for students in the program.

You can learn more about all these topics throughout this guide.

Why is this important?

Data is a tool not only for school districts and states, but is also a tool for parents to use in determining the quality of education their children are receiving.

No Child Left Behind recognizes parents as consumers of educational services provided by public schools. The more you know about your children’s education, the more you can be an informed consumer. This means making good choices for your children, and being involved at all levels of their education.

What can I do?

Collecting and analyzing data sounds like something you used to have to do in math class, and some people don’t have pleasant memories of their math classes. But collecting data about schools does not need to be complicated. Once you see how important it is, you will be eager to do it.

Here are some tips about how to collect data and information:

- **Be persistent.** Sometimes people will tell you they don’t have what you are looking for. If you know you are in the right place, tell the person that you have a right to this information. If you find you are not in the right place, ask where you can get the information you need.
- **Do your homework.** The more you know exactly what to look for, the easier it will be.
- **Keep records.** If you send a request by writing, always keep a dated copy for your personal records, so you can prove what you asked for. If you speak to someone by phone or in person, always ask for their name and keep track of the date. If that person refers you to someone else, use the first person’s name when you make the next call. “Mr. Jones at My Town Elementary referred me to you.”
- **Don’t give up.** It won’t always be easy, but don’t lose hope!
- **Work in teams.** More hands make lighter work.

If you want help collecting or analyzing school data, contact the Education Trust.

“Without data, you are just another person with an opinion”