



DATA GUIDE

Empowering K-12 Schools Through Data Readiness



Our data guide provides comprehensive insights and actionable steps for K-12 schools to effectively leverage data, ensuring personalized learning, transparent assessment, and efficient resource allocation to enhance overall educational outcomes.



Edulastic



02.

[Data in the service of learning](#)

04.

[Is your data ready?](#)

06.

[Preparing your data team](#)

- Why do districts need a data governance team?
- Including a data steward on your data governance team
- Why is a data steward important?

08.

[Creating a transparent data culture](#)

- Pulse check
- How to align systems and leadership to embrace a culture of transparency
- 9 steps to foster a culture of data transparency

10.

[Picking the right data tool to support your students](#)

- Who owns your data?
- Evaluating edtech tools
- How to use a procurement rubric
- A ready-to-use procurement rubric
- Holding a vendor summit

12.

[Turning data into action with Edulastic's Data Studio](#)

12.

[About the author](#)

Data in the service of learning

Data offers a framework to assess the knowledge, requirements, and backgrounds of our students, enabling educators to deliver targeted instruction that fosters essential skill development. Moreover, data empowers educational leaders to gain insights into their teaching staff, facilitating improved support.

*How can we bolster educators across all tiers to comprehend and employ data effectively, thus elevating student achievement? **With data in the service of learning.***

DEFINITION

Data in the service of learning refers to the collection, analysis, and utilization of information to enhance educational outcomes and the overall learning experience within schools.



Data is crucial to schools for several reasons:

Personalized learning: Data helps educators understand the unique needs, strengths, and weaknesses of each student. This knowledge enables teachers to tailor their instruction to cater to individual learning styles, pace, and preferences, ultimately leading to more effective learning.

Assessment and progress tracking: Schools use data to evaluate student performance and progress over time. This allows educators to identify areas where students excel and areas where they may require additional support. Regular assessment data aids in curriculum refinement and intervention strategies.

Resource allocation: Data helps schools allocate resources efficiently. By analyzing student performance and demographic information, schools can determine which programs, teaching methods, or additional support services are needed and where to allocate funding and personnel.

Educational research: Schools can contribute to educational research by sharing and analyzing data. This not only benefits their own students but also contributes to a broader understanding of effective teaching and learning strategies, benefiting the entire educational community.

Accountability and improvement: Data plays a crucial role in holding schools accountable for their performance. Schools are often required to report student achievement data to state and federal education agencies. This accountability encourages schools to continually assess and improve their educational practices.

Early intervention: Timely data analysis allows schools and districts to identify struggling students early in their academic journey. This enables them to provide targeted interventions and support to prevent academic setbacks from becoming insurmountable.

Caregiver and community engagement: Data can be a powerful tool for engaging caregivers and the community. When schools share data on student performance, caregivers can understand their learner's progress and contribute to their educational success. It also fosters transparency and trust within the community.

Long-term planning: Data helps schools make informed decisions about long-term planning and goals. By tracking trends and outcomes over time, educational institutions can set realistic targets and implement strategies for continuous improvement.

In summary

Data in the service of learning is essential for schools because it empowers educators and admins to make informed decisions, optimize resources, personalize instruction, and ultimately improve student success. It serves as a foundation for evidence-based educational practices, driving positive outcomes for students and the educational community as a whole.

In this guide, we will discuss how to ensure your school is data-ready, with the right teams and tools needed to ensure you are utilizing the best data practices to positively impact your students, staff, and community.



Is your data ready?

In today's data-driven era, it's impossible to overlook the significance of having unified K-12 data in your schools and districts. While this task might seem overwhelming initially, bear in mind the numerous sources of data your school gathers on your students.

Consider the following questions in regard to your data:

- Where does it live?
- Who has access?
- Is your data siloed?
- What story does your data tell?
- Who owns your data?

Starting the process of unifying K-12 data and venturing into full data interoperability is a journey, not a destination. Some districts are ready, and some have work to do. But if not now, when?

Instead of logging into several portals to access information, wouldn't it be more efficient to see all points of data in one place?

DEFINITION

Data interoperability can assist your school or district in using actionable data for real-time decision-making concerning instruction, student support, tracking student progress, and managing district resources.



But what steps can you take to reach data interoperability? **Check out these 10 steps to reach data readiness:**

STEP 1

Form a data governance team

Data management isn't a one-person show. It requires the collaboration of stakeholders from various departments, along with caregiver and student representatives. Data governance teams play an important role in formulating processes for handling the district's sensitive data, like personal information and its collection, maintenance, usage, and distribution. These teams safeguard the district and its students through these vital processes.



Data management isn't a one-person show. It requires the collaboration of stakeholders from various departments, along with caregiver and student representatives.



STEP 2

Audit your data

Find out where your data lives. Make a chart of all the data points you collect from attendance to assessment to interventions and beyond.

STEP 3

Determine data accessibility

Are there any standardized processes for onboarding and offboarding employees who access student data? In case of contract termination with a vendor, who retains the data ownership?

STEP 4

Appoint a district data steward

Data stewards are very important individuals who are the gatekeepers to student data and ensure data-sharing protocols are followed.

STEP 5

Educate stakeholders

Ensure stakeholders know the importance of student data, data interoperability, and student data privacy. Here are a few beginner-friendly resources:

- [Project Unicorn](#)
- [The Data Quality Campaign](#)
- [Digital Promise's Data Ready Playbook](#)

STEP 6

Evaluate your district's data culture

Establish transparency is prioritized when analyzing and reporting data. Do your teachers and admins recognize the value of accessible and actionable data? Sharing the “why” and the significance of unifying K-12 data is of the utmost importance.

STEP 7

Inform your edtech vendor partners about your DATA IO goals

They may have specific features that need to be prioritized to achieve your district data goals. They could also aid you by providing access to internal resources.



STEP 8

Assess data accessibility for your stakeholders

Seek feedback from end users regarding the ease of data access, data export, and report generation.

STEP 9

Review your state's and district's student data security and privacy policies

Understand and comply with state and district policies concerning student data privacy.

STEP 10

Apply an equity lens to your data

Apply an equity lens to student data to create a fair and inclusive education system that ensures the success of all students, irrespective of their background or circumstances. This approach is essential to identify disparities, formulate interventions, and encourage equitable practices, leading to improved learning outcomes for marginalized students.

Remember #DATAIO does not happen overnight. It will likely have many iterations. Standardizing data processes now will make your school or district more agile when it comes to decision-making and planning for the future.

Preparing your data team

As you prepare for data readiness, it is essential to set time aside to set up your systems and teams for success. One key step is forming your data governance team.

Why do districts need a data governance team?

Data management isn't a one-person show. It involves stakeholders from various departments, along with caregiver and student representatives. Data governance teams play a pivotal role in formulating processes for handling the district's sensitive data, especially personal information and its collection, maintenance, usage, and distribution. They safeguard the district and its students through these vital processes.

Additionally, these teams work together to create processes for how to deal with a district's sensitive data — specifically personal information — on how it is gathered, maintained, used, and distributed. While it can be difficult to establish data governance teams in schools or districts, they are essential for providing ongoing support in the future.

Including a data steward on your data governance team

During the formation of your data governance team, one crucial role to establish is that of a data steward.

DEFINITION

A **data steward** is a person(s) in your school or district responsible for the management and fitness of data elements — both content and metadata. Some common titles for this role might include:

- Director of Data Quality
- Data Coordinator
- Database Administrator
- Accountability Director
- Management Information Systems Director

A data steward should have a deep understanding of the connection between the data and district needs. They also ensure data is collected correctly for local and federal reporting, and for ensuring the integrity, security, and efficient use of data within the educational institution.

You will often hear the word, “NO!” from your data steward, and that is a good thing! Data stewards are the best protectors of highly sensitive data. They are the unsung everyday heroes of school district operations.

Why is a data steward important?

Data stewards are essential partners for the success of unifying K-12 data. This position plays a crucial role in managing and ensuring the integrity, security, and effective data usage in educational institutions, including:



DATA GOVERNANCE

A data steward establishes and maintains data governance practices within the educational institution. This includes defining data policies, standards, and procedures to ensure data is collected, stored, managed, and shared in a consistent, reliable, and secure manner.



DATA QUALITY + INTEGRITY

The data steward is responsible for data quality and integrity, ensuring accurate and reliable information is available for decision-making processes. They oversee data entry, validation, and cleansing activities, confirming data is accurate, complete, and up-to-date.



COMPLIANCE + PRIVACY

Educational institutions need to comply with data protection laws and regulations, like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in the United States. The data steward ensures staff and student data is handled in accordance with relevant privacy regulations and guidelines.



DATA ANALYSIS + REPORTING

Schools collect so much data, including student performance, attendance, and demographic information. A data steward analyzes this data to identify trends, patterns, and insights that can inform curriculum development, instructional strategies, resource allocation, and policy-making decisions.



DATA SECURITY

A data steward safeguards sensitive data by establishing and enforcing data security protocols, including access controls, encryption, data backup, and disaster recovery plans. They work with IT professionals to protect data from unauthorized access, breaches, and data loss incidents.



COLLABORATION + COMMUNICATION

A data steward serves as a liaison between stakeholders in the educational institution. They collaborate with admins, teachers, IT staff, and other parties to understand their data needs, provide support, and facilitate effective communication and collaboration around data-driven decision-making.



Creating a transparent data culture

Let's be frank: *Data can be scary.* Whether it's credit scores, health records, or those weekly screen times, data often feels invasive and judgemental. But here's the paradigm shift: In education, data isn't just numbers. It's an enabler.

When approached with the right mindset, data can guide educators to strategies that foster success for all students. It can spotlight resources and opportunities, opening doors that might have previously seemed shut. How can schools create a culture around data that is welcoming to every stakeholder?

Pulse check

Before we dive deep, let's initiate a brief pulse check of your data culture. Reflect on these essential questions:

- Is transparency a priority in your district when analyzing and reporting on data?
- Do your teachers and administrators understand the value of accessible and actionable data?

A thorough understanding of these foundational aspects can significantly impact your district's data journey.

How to align systems and leadership to embrace a culture of transparency

Having systems, resources, policies, and the right people to consolidate K-12 data is an initial step. However, the next phase in your district's data journey is more critical — building a culture that seamlessly accepts, interprets, and derives insights from this data.

The top members of your district leadership and school board play a significant role in creating a data culture. Their buy-in is a lynchpin for creating a culture of data transparency and accountability. This consensus shapes decision-making, fostering trust among all participants in the educational process.

School districts with healthy data share the **why** behind the data and how it, in the service of learning, helps all learners succeed.

It's essential to confront and accept the reality of current data practices. Sometimes, they're not equitable or they're messy. Recognizing these aspects with accountability and planning for progress is the way forward.

9 steps to foster a culture of data transparency

To assist in navigating your journey to a healthy data culture, consider these nine steps:

1

Establish norms for data conversations

Create an environment that welcomes open dialogue about data transparency, even if the discussions sometimes venture into uncomfortable territories. CASEL provides a helpful resource for setting norms for data-informed conversations.

2

Enhance data literacy

Equip educators with tools and training that demystifies data, ensuring they can effectively harness its insights.

3

Streamline data collection and management

Establish protocols that maintain the accuracy, consistency, and security of collected data.

4

Champion data-driven decision-making

Foster a data culture where decisions stem from concrete data insights rather than gut feelings or isolated incidents.

5

Set transparent data goals

Clearly articulate what data will be shared, how it's presented, and the intended recipients.

6

Employ data visualization

Utilize tools that transform complex datasets into understandable and actionable visuals. Graphs, charts, and dashboards can help stakeholders easily interpret complex data.

7

Commit to continuous improvement

Adopt a mindset of ongoing growth, with regular evaluations and adaptations of data practices.

8

Promote inter-departmental collaboration

Ensure insights and strategies are shared, fostering a unified, district-wide approach to data.

9

Celebrate data wins

Acknowledge and share successes that come from data-driven initiatives, reinforcing the impact of a data-focused approach.

Picking the right data tool to support your students

In a world where education and technology are increasingly intertwined, it is vital to ensure your district's data readiness and interoperability continue going forward. One of the most effective strategies for this is standardizing your edtech procurement process.

Who owns your data?

Data ownership in schools and districts can be a very complicated issue, particularly when third-party vendors are involved. When evaluating new edtech platforms, it is crucial to seek a clear understanding of who will own the data.

Consider the following questions when evaluating edtech platforms that you will be sharing data with:

- Will your data be stored securely? Are there protocols for breaches?
- Is it clear what will happen to your data when it's erased, and can it be exported in a format that can be easily used by your district?
- Will the vendor inform you about any security issues?
- Does the vendor provide information about student data privacy and adhere to industry-level certifications, such as [iKeepSafe](#) and the [Student Privacy Pledge](#)?

Understanding data ownership when shared with third-party vendors is crucial in ensuring the security and privacy of your data, as well as its readiness to be used for informed decision-making within your institution.

Evaluating edtech tools

As you begin to evaluate different vendors, you will need an impartial tool to consider each tool and the needs of your district.

DEFINITION

A **procurement rubric** acts as a standardized framework for evaluating edtech platforms. It ensures a fair and consistent comparison, assessing all platforms based on the same criteria. This rubric can be customized to align with your institution's educational goals, priorities, pedagogical approach, curriculum requirements, and cybersecurity standards.



By employing a procurement rubric, you can clearly define evaluation criteria that align with your institution's needs and goals. It helps pinpoint the essential features, functionalities, and requirements you're seeking in an edtech tool.

How to use a procurement rubric

Edtech platforms can be measured against the following criteria:

- Alignment to district curriculum and initiatives
- Ownership of data
- Compatibility with Learning Management System (LMS)
- Single sign-on
- Professional services
- Compatibility with district devices
- Licensing/cost
- Student data privacy
- Accessibility
- Import/Export of data
- Data backup
- Import frequency
- Longevity of vendor
- Vendor references
- Ease of use for end user
- Interoperability with district platforms
- Quality of data
- Purchasing
- Contract terms
- Compatibility with Student Information System (SIS)
- Industry standard certifications/ proof of efficacy
- Redundancy plan
- Uptime/Cybersecurity
- Pilot terms

A ready-to-use procurement rubric

A procurement rubric considers factors like scalability, data interoperability, compatibility with existing infrastructure, and the potential for growth.

To assist you in implementing this procurement process, we've created a comprehensive procurement rubric you can tailor to your district's needs. This ready-to-use template covers all the criteria we've discussed and provides a structured format for vendor evaluation.

You can access the procurement rubric [here](#).

	Poor - 1	Average - 2	Proficient - 3	Exceptional - 4
Aligned to District Curriculum and Initiatives	No or minimal alignment with district approved curriculum (less than 50%)	Somewhat aligned to approved district curriculum (50% or higher)	Mostly aligned to approved district curriculum and/or initiatives (strategic plan) (80% or higher)	Closely aligned to approved district curriculum and/or initiatives (strategic plan). Futureproof purchase.
Ownership of Data	Not clear who owns data	Vendor owns data	Clear articulation as to ownership of the data, what happens when data is erased, data can only be exported in non-editable formats.	Clear articulation as to ownership of the data, what happens when data is erased and in what formats data can be exported. If vendor relationship ends, customer receives data exported in a format that can be easily manipulated by the district.
Compatibility with LMS	Not compatible/NA	Can link or embed in LMS	API integration with LMS	Complete custom API integration with Canvas, Schoology, Blackboard (6-12) or Google Classroom (K-5) or Common Cartridge; LTI Thin Client compatible when necessary.
Single Sign On (SSO)	Teacher must create accounts for students	Enrollment code SSO	Single sign on with Google, Microsoft, etc.	Seamless Single Sign on with Clever (or Classlink), One Roster
Professional Development	No professional development offered	Professional development is an additional cost to product and can only be delivered in person	Professional development is included in quote and meets staff needs and district goals; there are options for virtual, self-paced and in-person staff trainings.	Professional development is included in quote and meets staff needs and district goals; there are options for virtual, self-paced and in-person staff trainings. An implementation timeline is provided by vendor. Product certifications for teachers and/or staff is available.
Compatibility with District Devices	Only runs on a select few devices	Modifications must be made to district devices and OS in order for product to work.	Product works on all approved district devices and operating systems.	Product works on all approved district devices and operating systems as well as mobile devices for off-site use. Product is device agnostic.

Holding a vendor summit

A vendor summit is also a highly effective approach. Invite all your current and potential edtech vendors and share an overview of your data readiness and interoperability goals, along with any district strategic goals and current challenges. Inform vendors of your data interoperability goals: They might have specific features that need to be prioritized to achieve your district data goals and could also provide access to internal resources.



Turning data into action with Edulastic's Data Studio

Data doesn't have to be overwhelming. When properly approached, data transparency and literacy pave the way for enhanced decision-making, equitable practices, and improved student outcomes. A strong data culture is about more than just grasping the numbers; it's about leveraging them for consistent growth, fairness, and establishing trust within the community.

At Edulastic, our mission is to support you on this path, offering the necessary tools, backing, and guidance to cultivate genuine data ownership in your school or district.

Discover the [Edulastic Data Studio](#), a carefully designed platform to empower schools and districts in unifying K-12 data seamlessly. It encourages enhanced data literacy, fosters collaborative insights, and recognizes data-driven triumphs. This platform is more than a tool; it's your ally in making data not only accessible and understandable but also actionable.

Edulastic's Data Studio can help districts build a thriving culture around data ownership and readiness, with a comprehensive platform to navigate, analyze, and use your school or district's data effectively.

LEARN MORE

Explore [Edulastic's Data Studio](#) and see how it can be the catalyst for change in your district.



About the author

Erica Hartman, Subject Matter Expert, CTO Person Rev/Strat

Erica Hartman is a former director of technology in public education and serves as a Subject Matter Expert on GoGuardian's strategy team. Erica has 20 years of teaching and administrative experience helping school districts choose digital platforms that best suit their strategic goals. She specializes in large-scale edtech deployments, digital architecture of online platforms, data interoperability, blended learning, digital citizenship, and student safety.

