THE POWER OF
COMMUNICATION

Words matter. What you say, how you say it, and when you say it are critical to effectively communicating with your audience.

When talking about education data, you should never talk about data alone. Communicating the value of data effectively requires putting data in context of policy—data messages in a vacuum rarely succeed.

If you're reinforcing the need for data to drive teacher effectiveness, meet your college and career readiness goals, or implement the Common Core State Standards, **the way you communicate with your peers, stakeholders, and the public will be critical to your success.** Engaging in effective communication about the connection between education data and policy will help **prevent mistrust and confusion;** allow state leaders to **be proactive about messages about data**—or "own" the conversation; and provide stakeholders at every level with **common language** to discuss tricky issues.

Tips for Effective Communication

➤ **Communicate often and on point.** Silence is not always golden. Communicate messages proactively, frequently, and consistently for the best results.

➤ **Know your goal.** Have a clear grasp of the intent of your message, and make sure the words and methods you choose reflect that goal.

➤ **Target your intended audience.** Different audiences may need slightly different messages, delivered in slightly different ways. Keep those needs in mind as you plan your communications.

➤ **Use language consistently.** Always use the same words to talk about the same concept. If you are successful, your audience may adopt the language you use.

➤ **Use multiple outlets to convey your message.** Use whatever tools are at your disposal and appropriate for your audience, including face-to-face discussion, traditional and social media, videos, newsletters, and other outlets available in your role.

Never underestimate the power of communication. Communicating effectively is a critical piece of policy implementation. And as you are communicating to stakeholders—be they the public or your office mate—do not forget to listen to what they say back. Feedback loops help improve processes and products, not to mention relationships and trust.

A Missed Opportunity

In an effort to submit a grant application to the federal government, one state decided to include a new A–F grading system for schools in its plan but neglected to communicate the plan to education stakeholders before submitting it. When the application went public—and educators and the public discovered the new A–F plan—the state department of education received an unmanageable 10,000 calls **per day.**

• What would you have done differently?

• How would you handle the backlash?

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MYTH BUSTERS!

Sometimes misconceptions arise in policy discussions. Talking about education data and policy is no different—sometimes myths about data use, security, and value bubble up. Many of these myths have come and gone, but some persist. The following list of myths—and the information you need to bust those myths—comes from Data Quality Campaign's experience in the education data and policy field.

You should also consider what other myths have bubbled up in your state. Have you catalogued and proactively busted those myths? As you hear misconceptions rise to the surface, publicly stating the facts before the misconception moves from **myth** to **truth** in the eyes of the public is helpful.

MYTH — Data are nothing more than a test score.

BUSTED! Education data do include test scores, but they also include information from multiple sources that are relevant to diverse stakeholders. Data include student and teacher attendance, demographics, financial information, interventions, learning disabilities, formative and summative assessments, postsecondary success, outcome data, and much more.

MYTH — Districts and schools already provide parents with all the information they need about their students.

BUSTED! While districts and schools do have important information to share with parents, they cannot do everything, such as provide an actionable vision of student performance over time. States are best positioned to provide data that require sophisticated analytics or linkages to other sectors, such as postsecondary and workforce data, as districts do not have this capacity. State and district data together provide the richest information to parents.

MYTH — Teachers have taught for years without using data—they don't need to start now.

BUSTED! Teachers have always used a variety of data points from formative and summative assessments and other measures to inform their professional judgment. But rich information about their students can be difficult to attain and assemble, comes from widely varying sources, and is not user friendly. Actionable data from state and district systems can provide teachers with a robust look at their students' performance in formats that are easy to access and use.

MYTH — Data-driven decision-making means that educators should use single data points from summative tests to drive student learning.

BUSTED! Single snapshots of student performance alone have limited use. Data-driven decision-making for teachers is the practice of using information including test scores, behavior, attendance, past performance, and multiple other student-level indicators to inform professional judgment to tailor instruction and improve student learning. As states embrace data-driven decision-making as a key tool for empowering teachers, they must also ensure that robust data are available to educators.

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MYTH **Growth models are too complicated to be understood and trusted by educators.**

BUSTED! We are underestimating our teachers by assuming that they cannot understand or find value in something complex. People access and trust information based on complicated algorithms every day through search functions like Google and Amazon. Value-added and other growth models are a proven measure of teacher impact, and states and researchers are working to refine the models based on current uses.

MYTH **State data systems exist for bureaucrats to blame and shame and for researchers to mine.**

BUSTED! State longitudinal data systems provide more robust and sophisticated information than what is needed to meet compliance reporting requirements. While data have been used as a compliance tool and a "hammer" in the past, states and districts are beginning to use data as a "flashlight" to inform policy, provide critical information to stakeholders, and improve instruction.

MYTH **States are complying with federal mandates to create a national database of student-level information.**

BUSTED! There is no federal mandate to build a national database, and the federal government does not have the authority to collect K–12 student-level data. Many states were collecting student-level information to inform state policy and practice well before federal grants that fund statewide longitudinal data systems were put into place.

MYTH **State data systems allow any state employee to view my child's data.**

BUSTED! All states have policies in place that determine which stakeholders, from state education agency employees down to teachers and parents, have access to student-level data and what level of information they are authorized to see. Only those people, such as teachers and parents, who interact with students are allowed to see students' names along with additional student-specific information. State staff can access aggregate data that enable them to better develop, implement, and evaluate education policy and programs.

MYTH **We cannot share student-level data with higher education or other entities because the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits it.**

BUSTED! FERPA does not prohibit the sharing of data between educational entities. FERPA protects student privacy and students' personally identifiable information, facilitating access to student data to increase accountability and transparency for education outcomes and to contribute to a culture of continuous improvement in education.

MYTH **State agencies use their authority to collect as much data as possible on teachers and students, regardless of the data's utility.**

BUSTED! Data are not collected for collection's sake but are intended to provide the most robust picture of student learning in the state. As state education agencies increasingly move from using data solely for compliance to using data to meet policy goals, they are streamlining data collections toward answering critical stakeholder questions. Although streamlining data can be a lengthy process, and can require change in statute, it does ensure that data collection better reflects current policy and practice needs.

MYTH **All these data conversations are just an education reform fad.**

BUSTED! While certain uses of data may come and go, the demand for data and culture of data use is here to stay. The proof is that most states have made their own investment through legislation and allocation in state data systems and/or have received grants from the federal government to do so. Given these robust investments in data systems, and their increasing value for multiple stakeholders, data access and use are unlikely to diminish.

CHEAT SHEET:
TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Pithy advocacy points—and details to back them up—to make your case in any venue

Like many states, your state may be focusing on improving the quality and skills of the teacher workforce. While data-driven teacher effectiveness policies are important, they can also be difficult—and sometimes contentious—to talk about. You may be confronted with tough questions in your state, such as the following:

➜ Aren't data-driven evaluations just meant to punish teachers?

➜ Aren't these data nothing more than test scores?

➜ Teachers already have too much data—do they really need more?

This *Cheat Sheet* provides the five advocacy points that you can use to communicate the value of data in improving teacher effectiveness. (The following page includes a glossary of key terms related to teacher effectiveness.)

MYTH Data are nothing more than a test score.

BUSTED! Education data do include test scores, but they also include information from multiple sources that are relevant to diverse stakeholders—such as attendance, demographics, past performance, and other student outcome measures.

① **Data help teachers help students.** Data are most powerful in the hands of teachers. Having access to information about their students' performance informs teachers' professional judgment, which allows them to tailor instruction to better serve students' diverse needs.

② **Teacher effectiveness data provide our state and districts information about the most important classroom factor—teachers.** Teacher performance data, such as those derived from growth scores, provide a unique picture of educator effectiveness that is helpful to school, district, and state leaders in their efforts to prepare, recruit, hire, and equitably distribute teachers.

③ **Teacher effectiveness data allow teachers to reflect on their own practice.** When teachers have access to their own performance data, they have an opportunity to unpack their teaching, identify their strengths and challenges, and guide their own professional development.

④ **Data on teacher performance are about more than test scores.** Linking teachers and students is about more than just test scores. Links that include contextual data about teachers and students, such as preparation, professional development, past performance, student outcome measures, and demographics, provide a more robust picture of teachers and their successes and challenges.

⑤ **The state is best positioned to link data and develop performance measures.** The state can reduce the burden on districts by ensuring a high-quality link between teachers and students and by developing and implementing certain teacher effectiveness measures, such as growth or value-added models. Doing this work at the state level also provides a clean, comparable, statewide picture to better develop, implement, and evaluate our state's policies.

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Visit **www.DataQuality Campaign.org/ CommunicatingData** for more information.

Term	Definition	Why this is important
Growth Data	Data that come from statistical methods—growth models—that reflect student progress on assessments. These data tell us how much a student's learning "grew" in any given year.	These data are more than just raw test scores, which only provide a moment-in-time snapshot of student learning. Growth data demonstrate student *progress* over time.
Value-Added Models	A statistical model to illustrate how a student's achievement has been influenced by a variety of inputs (e.g., teacher, school, use of technology, etc.) to determine the value each has added to the student's individual performance. Value-added models are a type of growth model.	Value-added models have the same importance as growth data because they demonstrate progress and can predict future performance based on several conditions, including elements such as the student's past performance. Educators must also understand how to use these data to inform their practice, as the data are also increasingly used to identify effective teaching.
Proficiency/ Status Data	A data point that demonstrates how a student has scored relative to state standards, demonstrating whether that student is at, above, or below proficiency based on those standards.	Student proficiency has for years been an important indicator of student, school, district, and state success. The definition of proficiency is changing based on new state standards and state accountability policies. Standards of proficiency are still the bar states will use to determine whether their students are prepared for college and career and should be used in conjunction with growth to best understand achievement.
Roster Verification	A process by which teachers verify their student roster for accuracy to ensure that the correct student-level data are attributed to the correct educators. Roster verification is a best practice in making quality links between teacher and student data.	The single fall enrollment collection is not sufficient to accurately link teachers and students because many students and teachers move within and across schools and districts during the school year. Providing teachers the opportunity to check for accuracy ensures data quality and also engenders educator trust in the data.
Teacher of Record	An accurate reflection of the teacher(s) responsible for instruction and student learning. Best practices indicate that assigning the teacher of record should reflect classroom realities, such as team teaching. Statewide teacher of record definitions are a best practice in making quality links between teacher and student data.	Efforts to understand educators' impact on student learning must reflect the reality of today's classroom assignments. Absent a common statewide definition that captures the multiple ways students and teachers interact, states and districts will be unable to accurately attribute student learning to the appropriate educators.
Teacher Effectiveness Data	All of the available data that show a teacher's impact on students. These data may include growth and value-added models, observations, portfolios, teacher attendance, student surveys, and other output measures.	Now, more information—beyond student test scores or even student growth—is available on the impact of teachers on student learning. By incorporating these multiple measures, we better understand teachers' strengths and challenges and the educator workforce overall.

CHEAT SHEET: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Pithy advocacy points—and details to back them up—to make your case in any venue

Your state likely is pursuing a college- and career-ready (CCR) agenda for all students. CCR encompasses a lot of work—from new standards to early warning systems to dual enrollment courses. The success of such a large agenda will depend, especially in a climate of diminished resources, on the effective use of data. As you proactively communicate your state's CCR goals, be sure that the importance of using data to meet those goals is included in your key messages.

The advocacy points below highlight the value of data for meeting the many goals associated with a CCR agenda. You should also emphasize key work your state has committed to, such as providing high school feedback and early warning reports, and demonstrate how the state is best positioned to leverage its system and support district work to meet your CCR goals. (The following page includes a glossary of key terms related to college and career readiness.)

① Longitudinal data are critical to the development and implementation of our state's college and career readiness policies. With fewer resources and higher expectations, it is vital that we leverage our existing state data and continuously focus on improving those data to meet stakeholder needs. Without data to inform decision-making and help us determine what works, we will not meet our college and career readiness goals.

② We need to get useful data in the hands of people who affect students to meet our goals. Access to data such as student grades, attendance, behavior, growth, and postsecondary information, including remediation rates, helps educators identify whether students are meeting state standards, whether they are on track for graduation, and whether graduates are prepared for postsecondary education. If we do not provide this clear picture of strengths and weaknesses to educators, counselors, principals, superintendents, and school boards, we will not meet our college and career readiness goals.

③ Without data, our educators are shooting in the dark. The state, districts, and schools are all committed to ensuring that all students are on track for graduation, college, and careers. For some schools and districts, making this happen means intensive improvement and turnaround strategies. Robust information provides us all with a better picture of our strengths and weaknesses and how to move forward.

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DATAQUALITY CAMPAIGN
Using Data To Improve Student Achievement
www.DataQualityCampaign.org

Term	Definition	Why this is important
Diagnostic Report	Information on individual students designed to identify each one's strengths and academic needs.	Diagnostic reports help educators understand which instructional strategies are working and where more support and alternative strategies are required to increase student success.
Early Warning System	A system, developed around research-based indicators such as student academic performance (grades) and attendance and discipline records, that helps educators accurately and quickly identify students who are most at risk of academic failure, not being on track to graduate college and career ready, or dropping out of school.	Early identification of students who are at risk enables educators, principals, and counselors to provide students with additional supports in a timely way to help them succeed by addressing their unique academic, social, and emotional needs. While the focus of early warning is to "catch" students at risk of failure and dropping out, it can also be a valuable tool to ensure that students are on track for success by identifying, for example, when more rigorous courses could be taken. Aggregate data on indicators such as grades and attendance also help school and district leaders identify weaknesses to address in school improvement and turnaround strategies.
Predictive Report	A report that relates student success later in the P–20/workforce pipeline to the status of the same type of students currently in the education pipeline. Early warning is one type of predictive information.	Predictive reports help educators and parents see a student's likely trajectory given current academic performance. Understanding how students are likely to perform in future grades and on college-ready assessments helps teachers, parents, and students better guide students' learning and ensure that they are on track to meet their academic goals.
High School Feedback Report	Information on student postsecondary outcomes, such as enrollment, remediation, and persistence, reported back to districts and schools.	High school feedback reports provide information to high schools and districts that identifies how well prepared their graduates are for postsecondary success. Without this important picture of students *after* they have graduated from high school, high school leaders lack a clear picture of their schools' strengths and weaknesses, how best to move forward, and whether they are meeting their CCR goals. For instance, a school with high graduation and college acceptance rates may find that most of its students need remedial math. Better aligning curriculum with students' postsecondary needs will help those students be more successful after high school. States are best positioned to provide this feedback because of the ability to link K–12, postsecondary, and workforce data.
Growth Report	A report that shows changes in the achievement of the same students over time. *Descriptive growth reports* show individual student growth over time. Reports on *growth to standards* show whether student growth is sufficient to meet or exceed standards and academic expectations. *Comparison growth reports* compare the growth of one student to the growth of a cohort of similar students in the school or district. *Value-added models* attribute growth to a particular input (such as a teacher, school, etc.) while controlling for other variables.	Growth reports provide educators with a much more robust picture of their students' success than has ever before been available. Comprised of multiple pieces of information, such as past and current performance, attendance and demographics, growth reports help educators identify student areas of strength and weakness over time. Educators can use them to inform their professional judgment and tailor instruction to improve student learning. States are best positioned to develop and implement growth models because of their complexity. A state-produced model reduces burden on districts and provides comparable data.

CHEAT SHEET:
DATA PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Pithy advocacy points—and details to back them up—to make your case in any venue

Every state has a responsibility to protect student privacy by ensuring that data are secure and confidential. Because privacy, security, and confidentiality are sensitive issues, it is important to proactively communicate key messages about how your state is protecting students while using data responsibly to improve student achievement.

You may be confronted with both those who raise concerns that data cannot be shared because of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and those who claim that data should not be collected or shared at all. Knowing your state's policies and regulations for protecting data as well as what federal policies such as FERPA do and do not prohibit will be important.

The advocacy points below are messages that address common concerns that arise around privacy, security, and confidentiality. You should be proactive and transparent about these subjects. If other issues arise in your state, be sure to have additional points that respond to those concerns. (The following page includes a glossary of key terms related to data privacy, security, and confidentiality.)

1 **We take our moral and legal responsibility to protect student privacy and ensure data security and confidentiality seriously.** We value the use of data in improving student achievement and system performance in our state, and we also understand how vital it is to ensure those data are accessed and used appropriately by creating clear policies around data security.

2 **We do not collect data for collection's sake, and access is limited and appropriate.** The data the state collects meet specific policy, practice, and service needs, and no one can access the data who should not. You can find our state's data security policy online. *(Highlight where your state's data dictionary and data security policy can be found.)*

3 **FERPA is the floor for protecting student privacy, not the ceiling.** FERPA provides parameters for what is permissible when sharing student information. The law does not prohibit sharing data across agencies. The state needs to implement policies and procedures above and beyond FERPA to manage our data and protect student privacy. We are responsible for determining **how** data will be protected. *(Highlight your state's data security and privacy policies.)*

MYTH **We cannot share student-level data with higher education or other entities because FERPA prohibits it.**

BUSTED! FERPA does not prohibit the sharing of data between educational entities. FERPA protects student privacy and students' personally identifiable information, facilitating access to student data to increase accountability and transparency for education outcomes and to contribute to a culture of continuous improvement in education.

④ The responsibility to protect student data is systemwide. While the state must play a leadership role in data security policies, districts, schools, and their staff also have a responsibility to adhere to these policies and be good stewards of student data.

⑤ When it comes to sharing and using data to improve student outcomes, it's not *whether,* but *how.* For data to be most powerful for meeting our state goals, we need to effectively balance protecting privacy with linking and using P–20/workforce longitudinal data. The state has developed policies and practices for determining ways to link and share these data without compromising student privacy. *(Highlight where the public may find these policies.)*

Term	Definition	Why this is important
Confidentiality	The obligation of a person with access to another individual's personally identifiable information not to share it without consent.	Some adults, such as teachers and some department staff, have access to student-level data to inform instruction or to inform and implement policy. It is important that those who have the authority to access these data take seriously their responsibility to adhere to state and federal law by not sharing data with others who do not have permission.
De-identified Data	Data that has been "anonymized" by removing all personally identifiable information, such as students' names, to protect personal privacy.	Often, research and policy require looking at student-level data, but researchers do not need to know the names of students (or other personally identifiable information). De-identified data allow policy and practice to be informed by research using actual student characteristics without compromising students' privacy.
Personally Identifiable Information	Personal information (such as an individual's name, Social Security Number, birthdate) that can be used to connect data with the correct individual.	It is important that school, district, and/or state staff who have authority to see and access personally identifiable information can do so to ensure data quality and accuracy. For instance, in states where teachers are linked with their student data, it is important that students are accurately matched to their records, such as test scores and past performance, so that the link between teachers and students is comprised of quality data.
Privacy	The balance between collection and dissemination of data, technology, and individuals' right to have their personal information kept private.	Privacy concerns exist wherever personally identifiable information is collected and stored. Failure to communicate policies on how data are stored, protected, used, and disclosed can be the cause for public concern about data and privacy. Overcoming the challenge of protecting privacy while collecting and using data to meet state goals requires sharing data under clear guidelines that protect personally identifiable information.
Security	The policies and practices implemented at the state, district, and school levels to ensure that data are kept safe from corruption and that access is limited and appropriate. Data security helps ensure privacy and protect personally identifiable information.	As states become increasingly effective at using data, constantly focusing on ensuring that those data are secure through state policy and protocols and through practice at the state, district, and school levels will be imperative. Trust in how the state handles data is imperative to continued success in using data to improve system performance and student achievement.

Learn More

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Your state is likely pursuing the goal of having more students than ever prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. Aligning your state's policies across the P–20/workforce (P–20W) spectrum also requires aligning data across agencies to effectively develop and implement education policy. Unfortunately, the data you need are often siloed and hard to access. Establishing a formal P–20W governance body is the best way to get data working across agencies in ways that tackle the critical education policy issues in your state—but it is not always easy to talk about.

The following advocacy points will help you discuss why establishing a P–20W governance structure is critical to meeting your state's goal of graduating every student college and career ready. (The following page includes a glossary of key terms related to P–20/W data governance.)

❶ P–20W data governance bodies help stakeholders— including teachers, parents, and policymakers—get the information they need. Useful information, such as high school feedback reports, exists because of links among systems across different agencies. Without a formal structure to manage this information and reinforce the purpose of linking data systems, data will lack quality and will not be useful to the stakeholders who need them to improve student achievement.

❷ When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. When states do not establish a formal governance structure, no one entity is publicly responsible for ensuring that data systems meet stakeholder needs. Our state needs to establish a structure that meets our policy needs; select the right people, such as governor's staff and agency heads; empower the body with authority to make decisions and align data to policy; and ensure that the body is sustained through various administrations to provide continuity.

❸ Governance will help tackle our state's barriers to effective data use.

➤ Governance structures will ensure that data decisions are made through a P–20W, multiagency policy lens and break down existing siloes.

➤ They will engender shared decision-making, provide transparency, and ensure data quality and security.

➤ Governance will clearly define roles and responsibilities and facilitate coordination that ensures efficient time use.

➤ Governance will work to connect P–20W policy to data and ensure that data and data systems meet agreed-upon needs and answer critical policy questions.

Learn More

Visit **www.DataQualityCampaign.org/ CommunicatingData** for more information.

Term	Definition	Why this is important
Governance	A multiagency structure of rules, procedures, and decision-making established for data sharing, access, use, and privacy. It is a multi-tiered structure, with policy at the top driving the work of other pieces, such as information technology.	Data governance bodies comprised of leadership from across agencies (K–12, higher education, early childhood, workforce, the governor's office, and more) help ensure that data meet state education policy priorities and stakeholder needs and establish authority and accountability for data systems. For the greatest accountability and commitment to vision, these bodies should be led by agency leaders and state policymakers.
Interoperability	Compatible technology among data systems that enables seamless data sharing.	When systems lack interoperability, states must spend time and resources reprogramming data before the data can be shared, which can lead to data quality issues. Interoperability is limited by the tendency to design and maintain unique data systems in isolation from one another, forcing the need to develop ways to link systems after they are built. These siloed systems make it challenging to generate the data, reports, and tools most helpful in meeting state policy priorities.

SHOW ME: PROOF POINTS FROM STATES

Sometimes even the most well-communicated messages leave the listener wanting more.
Explaining the value of your state's data investment may yield the response: "Prove it." Luckily, several of your peers have blazed the trail, demonstrating that data can make a big impact. When your conversation turns to **"how do I know this will work?"** call on these anecdotes to move the conversation forward.

Empowering Stakeholders with Accessible Data in Colorado

SchoolView.org is an online data source that gives educators, administrators, and the public access to Colorado growth model results and tutorials, school performance, a learning center, and community connections in an easy-to-understand format.

Responding to Educator Demand and Feedback in Georgia

In response to demand from district staff for faster access to robust student data to help improve student outcomes, Georgia developed an innovative solution to deliver actionable data to educator desktops. The system allows teachers and district staff access to the state's longitudinal data side by side with district data and resources through a single sign-on. One hundred percent of districts have access to and use the state link.

Employing the State Longitudinal Data System to Reduce District Burden in Maine

Maine reduced reporting burden on schools by implementing an automated system that collects data directly from local systems and reducing the number of data submissions required of districts by centralizing and synthesizing data collections at the state.

Increasing Postsecondary Enrollment in Arkansas

Arkansas was able to increase postsecondary enrollment and reduce burden on students and schools by implementing a process to connect students' K–12 transcripts and their online application for the state's higher education scholarship program through the state longitudinal data system.

Empowering Educators to Use Data and Seeing the Impact on Student Achievement in Oregon

The Oregon DATA Project provides the state's educators access to student data and comprehensive, job-embedded training on how to use those data to inform instruction; education data use in Oregon has been shown to be a key element in increased student achievement.

Learn More

Visit **www.DataQualityCampaign.org/ CommunicatingData** for more information.

THE POWER OF STATE DATA:
MESSAGE MAP

Talking about data, and especially the value of a data system, can be tricky. The list of reasons to **not** invest in data can include concerns about local control, diminishing budgets, and big government. Whatever the realities are in your state, you need to ensure that your messages about data are linked to policy and are clear, concise, and memorable.

"Message maps" help clarify the value of and messages around a product or idea. Creating message maps is a valuable process that helps leaders address the gaps and weaknesses in their strategy. Creating the maps around key policy initiatives will help you ensure that your messages about data and policy are effective.

Message maps have three critical components:

① The Big Idea

You should be able to boil your message down into one succinct phrase.

② No more than four supporting subpoints

These points should add to and reinforce the value of your Big Idea.

③ Factual support for your subpoints

Have facts, or even stories, in your back pocket to support and reinforce your main message when given the opportunity.

The message map on the following page displays a tried and true "big idea" and supporting points about the value of data to improve system performance and student achievement. You can use these ideas as a launch point for developing message maps for key policies and work in your state.
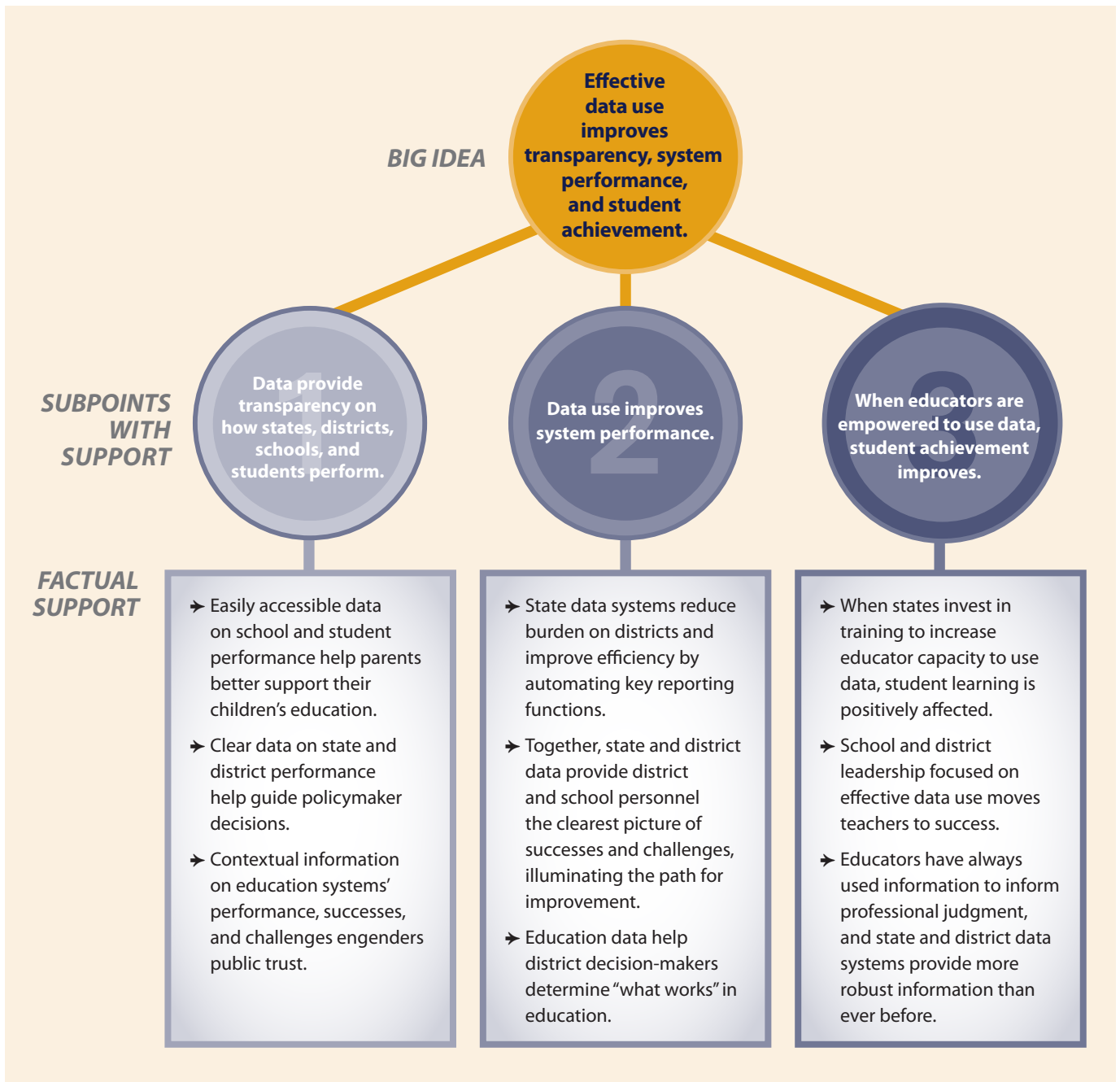
As you develop message maps, distribute them generously. Make sure everyone in your office, agency, and other offices has access to these clearly defined messages. And as demonstrated here, visuals help!

Take Action

Create your message map about key education data and policy areas in your state. Go to **www.DataQualityCampaign.org/ CommunicatingData** for a downloadable template to help you get started.

Example Message Map

BIG IDEA

Effective data use improves transparency, system performance, and student achievement.

SUBPOINTS WITH SUPPORT

1 Data provide transparency on how states, districts, schools, and students perform.

2 Data use improves system performance.

3 When educators are empowered to use data, student achievement improves.

FACTUAL SUPPORT

➤ Easily accessible data on school and student performance help parents better support their children's education.

➤ Clear data on state and district performance help guide policymaker decisions.

➤ Contextual information on education systems' performance, successes, and challenges engenders public trust.

➤ State data systems reduce burden on districts and improve efficiency by automating key reporting functions.

➤ Together, state and district data provide district and school personnel the clearest picture of successes and challenges, illuminating the path for improvement.

➤ Education data help district decision-makers determine "what works" in education.

➤ When states invest in training to increase educator capacity to use data, student learning is positively affected.

➤ School and district leadership focused on effective data use moves teachers to success.

➤ Educators have always used information to inform professional judgment, and state and district data systems provide more robust information than ever before.

BUILD YOUR
ELEVATOR SPEECH

Having clear, convincing messages in your back pocket that you can quickly deliver is a key way to ensure that you will have the opportunity to have a longer conversation.

An elevator speech is a quick, two-minute-or-less, pithy statement that is meant to make the listener want to know more. Elevator speeches are a vital tool for communicating with anyone whose time and attention to one topic are limited.

There is no need to memorize an elevator speech. The important part is that you remember your key messages. To help you remember the three key messages around the value of data, punch out the card below and keep it with you.

Armed with the benefits of data, you are now ready to develop your elevator speech. Elevator speeches have two key components: the **hook** and the **solution.** The hook, meant to grab the listener's attention, should describe a

DATA IMPROVE ...

1

TRANSPARENCY

Quality data provide the best picture of student, educator, and system performance.

2

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

Data systems reduce burden, improve efficiency, and provide a clear picture of the best path forward.

3

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

When we empower educators with quality data to inform their professional judgment, student learning improves.

tough policy issue that is interesting to your listener. The solution, for our purposes, **should always be data.** You can make your elevator speech more robust by adding one sentence describing a specific state program that would fulfill the solution—such as your state's new early warning system or data literacy training—and another that is a call to action—such as a request for a meeting for further conversation.

Sample hooks and solutions are on the punch-out card below.

BUILD YOUR SPEECH

HOOK: We lack the clarity and tools to understand how our schools and systems are performing.

SOLUTION: Data provide us with the transparency needed to understand what's happening in classrooms, schools, and districts.

STATE EXAMPLE: Our state's data system provides us with information on how subgroups of students, such as poor and minority students, are performing over time, which helps us identify our state's strengths and areas for improvement.

HOOK: Districts have too much work and too little capacity to meet local, state, and federal requirements, leaving them inefficient and focused on paperwork instead of students.

SOLUTION: State data systems reduce burden on districts, increasing efficiency and improving overall system performance.

STATE EXAMPLE: By creating an automated, uniform district financial reporting system at the state level, we have reduced burden on districts, and our data are now higher quality.

HOOK: Student achievement is not yet significantly improving because teachers lack the skills and tools needed to affect student learning.

SOLUTION: Providing educators with data, tools, and training on how to use data has been proven to improve student achievement.

STATE EXAMPLE: By providing educators a single sign-on to the state data system and providing comprehensive training on how to access and use those data, we have seen teacher comfort with data **and** student outcomes improve.

! **Don't forget to incorporate specific data work from *your* state into your speech, and ask the listener for action, such as a meeting to discuss the issue further.**

RED LETTER DAYS:
SEIZING COMMUNICATIONS OPPORTUNITIES

The key to communicating effectively is communicating *proactively.*
Certain times throughout the year are good opportunities to proactively communicate messages about your state's education data and policy priorities. **The beginning and end of the school year, state assessment periods, when the state report card is released, anniversaries of education policy hallmarks in your state,** and others are great times to engage in proactive messaging.

Proactive messaging should do the following:

➤ remind stakeholders about the value of the work you are doing for the state

➤ cast a positive light on those efforts

➤ pre-empt potential issues or misconceptions

➤ be an opportunity to provide well-crafted messages about legitimate challenges the state faces.
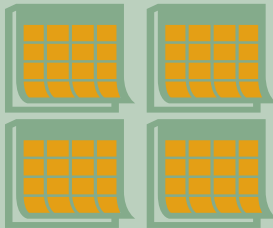
Take Action

Every state has a slightly different school calendar year, but the value of these events for communication is universal. The dates on the following page provide examples of some key opportunities and messages that you can use as a guide to build your communications calendar. Go to **www.DataQualityCampaign.org/CommunicatingData** for a downloadable template to help you get started.

AUGUST

AUGUST *Back to school*

- Remind parents, students, and educators about new standards, such as the Common Core State Standards, that will be assessed in the spring and the impact they may have on student and school performance.
- Highlight the importance of student attendance to academic success.
- Raise awareness about new initiatives, such as early warning systems, that will help keep students on track for college and career.

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

OCTOBER *Parent-teacher conferences*

- Drum up awareness about the value of conversations between teachers and parents and how integral student performance, attendance, and behavior data are to these conversations.
- Highlight how teacher access to student data through your state's system provides educators with a more robust understanding of their students' progress.
- Highlight the types of data your state has made available to parents—and the ways it has made those data available—to help inform parents' school, college, and career choices and help them keep their children on track to success.

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

JANUARY *Beginning of the new semester*

- Use this time after the winter break to remind parents, teachers, and students again about new, higher standards, such as the Common Core, that will be assessed in the spring and the impact they may have on student performance.
- Highlight the importance of college readiness assessments, such as the SAT and ACT, and discuss your state's progress on those assessments, as well as highlight student factors that have been demonstrated to lead to success on those assessments in your state.
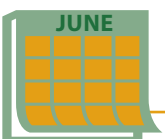- Start discussing graduation rate successes and challenges.

JANUARY

FEBRUARY
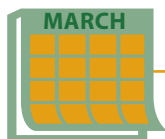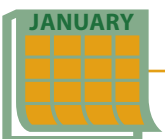
MARCH

MARCH *College readiness assessment period*

- Highlight the college and career readiness agenda in your state.
- Highlight state efforts, such as high school feedback reports, that provide more robust pictures of student postsecondary success than were previously available; also highlight the successes and challenges they reveal.

APRIL

APRIL *State assessment period*

- Highlight new standards that are being assessed, such as the Common Core, and the impact they may have on student and school performance.
- Start reminding parents and the public about the state report card and when they will be able to find new data on their school.
- Discuss your state's data-driven teacher effectiveness policy and what role student assessments and other measures will play in evaluating teachers.

MAY

JUNE

JUNE *Graduation and teacher evaluation deadlines*

- Celebrate graduation successes and challenges in your state, and discuss what these graduation rates mean.
- Clarify the types of data used for teacher evaluation and why they are valuable.

JULY