



# BRINGING HOPE THROUGH DATA

Prepared for AASA, The School Superintendents' Association

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# INTRODUCTION

The School Superintendents Association's (AASA) Vision of Systematic Design includes building leaders' capacity in working with data. To assist district leaders in understanding and communicating their data, used in a growth model continuum, AASA seeks to support districts in effectively communicating the current state of their district. To support AASA's mission of helping districts communicate with data, Hanover Research (Hanover) has prepared the following report reviewing best practices around communicating data effectively to diverse groups. This report includes the following sections:



- **Section I** reviews best practices for using data to understand the state of the district and support the student growth continuum of AASA's Vision of Systematic Design.
- **Section II** reviews best practices for district leaders in communicating data, with an emphasis on framing data to build hope during the improvement process.

# PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover Research suggests that AASA consider the following recommendations:

-  **Integrate all data communications into a strategic communications plan.** A strategic plan for communication ensures that communication provides constituents with the context needed to understand the implications of data and reassurance that data will be used to support improvement rather than impose punitive accountability.
-  **Support the development of constituents' data literacy to ensure educators have the skills to use data to improve teaching practices and student outcomes.** Developing data literacy requires superintendents to implement professional learning, engage constituents in communication around the importance of data use, and provide staff with the infrastructure they need to use data.
-  **Use asset-based framing when communicating insights from data to build hope.** District leaders support asset-based framing by embracing asset-based language, and work with data and communications staff to ensure that all communications around data reflect an asset-based mindset.
-  **Use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to understand the state of the district.** While quantitative data provide users with precise information about trends across groups of individuals, qualitative data offer more detailed information about how individuals and groups experience their local context, which constituents can use to develop improvement strategies that reflect the local context and to enhance communication around data by providing narrative that helps contextualize quantitative data.

# KEY FINDINGS

-  **District leaders need to proactively support data users in analyzing and using data collected by the school district to drive student achievement.** District leaders support teachers in developing data literacy by ensuring that teachers engage in targeted professional learning to develop data literacy skills and have the resources they need, including time for collaborative data analysis and planning, to use data effectively. Leaders at all levels of the district can support families in using data by providing families with information about how data are collected and used and ensuring equitable access to data.
-  **AASA's Vision for School Redesign guide encourages schools and districts to expand the data they collect to measure school quality and student outcomes to include data on systemic**

**supports for students and individual student data that can be used to make real-time adjustments to teaching and learning strategies.** In the Vision for School Redesign's growth model continuum, teachers use individual student data from multiple sources to support instructional decisions and engage in data-driven conversations with students and families, meaning that teachers need data they can access in time to adjust instruction. The Vision for School Redesign also calls for metrics that assess Whole Learner outcomes, which include the availability of supports and resources as well as individual student outcomes.



**Communication is more likely to be effective and sustained when districts integrate communications around data into a strategic communications and engagement plan.** A strategic communications plan specifies what data should be communicated and the actions steps needed to ensure these data reach constituents, including timelines and individuals responsible. A communications plan including these elements supports district leaders in ensuring that data are transparent and that communications support strategic district goals.



**The process of developing a data communications strategy provides an opportunity to engage constituents in planning communications that meet their needs.** Engaging constituents such as administrators, teachers, families, and students in the planning process ensures that data users have access to the data they need, that data communications are inclusive and accessible for diverse constituents, and that communications accurately represent communities' strengths and needs.



**District leaders can use asset framing when contextualizing data to maintain optimism and avoid stigmatizing students or teachers.** In many cases, data will reveal challenges or gaps between current and desired outcomes, which can lead constituents to feel demoralized or assign blame. Asset framing enables leaders to present challenging data while maintaining hope and respect for constituents by moving the narrative around data from a focus on deficits or challenges faced by marginalized communities to a focus on the assets individuals and communities possess and their aspirations for the future.

# SECTION I: USING DATA TO UNDERSTAND THE STATE OF THE DISTRICT

In this section, Hanover presents best practices for using data to understand the state of a school district. This section begins with a brief review of definitions of key terms related to data before discussing best practices for using data to support the growth model continuum of AASA’s Vision for School Redesign.

## DEFINING DATA

In education, data refers to all information used to support decision-making process, including both quantitative numerical data and qualitative data. This information ranges from formative assessment data used by classroom teachers to inform daily instructional decisions to long-term outcome data such as graduation rates. School and district improvement efforts rely on data to support decisions about classroom instruction and organization at the school and district levels, and empirical research finds improved outcomes for students in schools with a strong culture of data use.<sup>1</sup> Figure 1.1 presents definitions of key data-related terms.

Figure 1.1: Definitions of Key Data Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Data	Information, especially facts or numbers, collected to be examined, considered, and used to help decision-making <sup>2</sup>
Data Source	The medium where the data that are being used come from <sup>3</sup>
Quantitative Data	Data that can be expressed as a number <sup>4</sup>
Qualitative Data	Data that describes people, actions, or objects that cannot be expressed as a number <sup>5</sup>

Source: Multiple, cited in figure.

School and district leaders need both valid and reliable data, as defined in Figure 1.2. Data that do not meet standards for validity and reliability will not support effective decision-making. However, all data face limitations in their validity and reliability. Accordingly, leaders and other data users should be aware of validity and reliability limitations and ensure that data align with the purposes for which they are being used.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1.2: Definitions of Validity and Reliability

TERM	DEFINITION
Reliability	The extent to which a procedure yields the same results on repeated trials
Validity	The extent to which an indicator measures or reflects what it intends to measure

Source: Pell Institute<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Verbiest, E. “Becoming a Data-Wise School Leader: Developing Leadership Capacity for Data-Informed School Improvement.” *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies / Sodobna Pedagogika*, 65:4, December 2014. p. 66. Accessed via EbscoHost.  
<sup>2</sup> Definition taken verbatim from: “Data.” Cambridge Dictionary. <https://education.org/resources/growth-mindset-in-a-data-driven-culture>  
<sup>3</sup> Definition taken verbatim from: “What Is a Data Source?” Techopedia. <http://www.techopedia.com/definition/30323/data-source>  
<sup>4</sup> Definition taken verbatim from: “OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms - Quantitative Data Definition.” Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, January 3, 2006. <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=2219>  
<sup>5</sup> Definition taken verbatim from: Ibid.  
<sup>6</sup> Militello, M. et al. “How Data Are Used and Misused in Schools: Perceptions from Teachers and Principals.” *Education Sciences*, 3:2, June 2013. p. 101,104. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=data+best+practices&ft=on&pg=2&id=EJ1117980>  
<sup>7</sup> Definitions taken verbatim from: Ibid.

## USING DATA TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH MODEL CONTINUUM

Individual student data is a key component of the Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth Model embedded in AASA’s Vision for School Redesign. In the Vision for School Redesign’s growth model continuum, teachers use individual student data from multiple sources to support instructional decisions and engage in data-driven conversations with students and families.<sup>8</sup> Supporting this growth continuum will require schools and districts to expand the measures they collect to measure school quality and student outcomes. The Vision for School Redesign’s Whole Learner Framework requires metrics that assess Whole Learner outcomes, including those listed in Figure 1.3. Because these outcomes include the availability of supports and resources as well as student outcomes, data collected to support the Whole Learner Framework will need to include measures of student supports in addition to student assessment data.<sup>9</sup> Assessment data will also need to evolve to provide students, teachers, and families with transparent and actionable data that supports real-time adjustments to teaching and learning strategies.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 1.3: Outcomes of the Whole Learner Framework



Source: American Association of School Administrators National Commission on Student-Centered, Equity-Focused Education<sup>11</sup>

Districts can collect data needed to support the Whole Learner Framework, including both qualitative and quantitative data, using a variety of sources. Although districts have historically relied primarily on quantitative data, including qualitative data in the improvement process is essential to understanding institutional and contextual factors that drive outcomes.<sup>12</sup> Quantitative data provide leaders with precise information related to broad trends across groups of individuals.<sup>13</sup> Qualitative data provide more detailed information about how individuals and groups experience their local context, and can be used to develop improvement strategies that reflect the local context and to enhance communication around data by providing narrative to contextualize quantitative data.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, a **mixed-methods approach to data**

<sup>8</sup> “An American Imperative: A New Vision of Public Schools.” American Association of School Administrators National Commission on Student-Centered, Equity-Focused Education, April 8, 2021. p. 6. [http://aasacentral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CommissionReportFINAL\\_040821.pdf](http://aasacentral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CommissionReportFINAL_040821.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Gonzalez, N. et al. “Education-to-Workforce Indicator Framework: Using Data to Promote Equity and Economic Security for All.” Mathematica, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Mirror Group, August 15, 2022. p. 273. <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/education-to-workforce-indicator-framework-using-data-to-promote-equity-and-economic-security>

<sup>13</sup> “Introduction to Quantitative Data.” New South Wales Department of Education, April 14, 2022. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability/sef-evidence-guide/guidelines-for-using-data/intro-quantitative-data.html>

<sup>14</sup> “Introduction to Qualitative Data.” New South Wales Department of Education, April 14, 2022. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability/sef-evidence-guide/guidelines-for-using-data/intro-qualitative-data.html>

collection that combines qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources is likely to yield the most accurate information on the current state of a school or district.<sup>15</sup> Figure 1.4 presents common sources of quantitative and qualitative data.

Figure 1.4: Common Sources of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Quantitative Data Sources	Qualitative Data Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human resources systems</li> <li>• Assessments</li> <li>• Questionnaires</li> <li>• Interviews with specific answers given as choices</li> <li>• State data resources</li> <li>• Observations looking for frequency of an activity</li> <li>• Program records</li> <li>• Financial records</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended interviews</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Ethnographies</li> </ul>

Source: Pell Institute and New South Wales Department of Education<sup>16</sup>

## SUPPORTING CONSTITUENTS' DATA USE

For data collected as part of the Whole Learner Framework to drive improved outcomes, district leaders need to support data users, including students, teachers, and families, in analyzing data and using data to inform decisions.<sup>17</sup> Teachers need professional development to develop comfort using data to personalize student learning and collect evidence of learning.<sup>18</sup> Other constituents, such as students and families, need engagement to ensure buy-in and the sustainability of data use.<sup>19</sup> Constituent support for data use is essential to ensure that data is widely used to support decisions and understand the state of the district, and to ensure that the funding and resources needed for data use are sustainable.<sup>20</sup>

District leaders play multiple roles in supporting the collection, use, and publication of data among school staff to support the growth model continuum. Classroom teachers are unlikely to use data effectively unless school and district leaders communicate the importance of data use, provide expertise and technical support for data use, and create a working environment that facilitates collaborative data use. Empirical research finds that leaders in schools with effective data use set expectations for using data and provide teachers with professional learning and dedicated time to analyze and use data.<sup>21</sup> Figure 1.5, on the following page, presents superintendents' responsibilities for data use identified in a seminal guide to school data quality published by the National Forum on Education Statistics.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "Types of Data," Op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Chart contents adapted from: [1] "Introduction to Quantitative Data," Op. cit. [2] "Types of Data," Op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> "Stakeholder Engagement and Data Use: Helping Stakeholders Get the Most from an SLDS." National Center for Education Statistics, May 2013. p. 2. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/stakeholderengagement\\_and\\_datause.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/stakeholderengagement_and_datause.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> "An American Imperative: A New Vision of Public Schools." AASA, The School Superintendents Association. p. 7. [http://aasacentral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CommissionReportFINAL\\_040821.pdf](http://aasacentral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CommissionReportFINAL_040821.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> "SLDS Target Team: Stakeholder Engagement." National Center for Education Statistics, March 2013. p. 1. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/target\\_team\\_stakeholderland.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/target_team_stakeholderland.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> "SLDS Sustainability Planning Guide." National Center for Education Statistics State Support Team. p. 3. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/sustainability\\_guide.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/sustainability_guide.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Verbiest, Op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> "Forum Guide to Building a Culture of Quality Data: A School and District Resource." National Forum on Education Statistics, 2005. p. 29. [https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub\\_2005801.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2005801.asp)

**Figure 1.5: Superintendent Responsibilities for Data Use**



Source: National Forum on Education Statistics<sup>23</sup>

Fulfilling these responsibilities supports the development of data literacy, which enables teachers to use data to improve teaching practices and student outcomes.<sup>24</sup> The Data Quality Campaign, an advocacy organization focused on effective data use, recommends that school districts align teacher recruitment and professional learning with the following definition of data literacy:<sup>25</sup>

Data-literate educators continuously, effectively, and ethically access, interpret, act on, and communicate multiple types of data from state, local, classroom, and other sources to improve outcomes for students in a manner appropriate to educators’ professional roles and responsibilities.

Leaders can begin the process of supporting data literacy by developing their own data literacy skills. A 2017 review of data use by school level leaders finds that effective leaders use multiple sources of data to inform improvement goals and identify gaps in curriculum and student supports, develop the data literacy skills of teachers and staff, and create a schoolwide culture of data use.<sup>26</sup> Figure 1.6 lists data competencies for leaders in education and the skills, knowledge, and attitudes associated with each competency. Leaders can begin Figure 1.6.

**Figure 1.6: Data Competencies for Leaders**

COMPETENCY	SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ATTITUDES
<b>Help staff define information needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at reframing problems from multiple vantage points</li> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at helping staff reframe problems from multiple vantage points</li> <li>▪ Being knowledgeable about school self-evaluation</li> </ul>

<sup>23</sup> Chart contents adapted from: Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Mann, B. “Education Data 101: A Briefing Book for Policymakers.” Data Quality Campaign, March 31, 2021. p. 12. <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/resource/education-data-101-2021/>

<sup>25</sup> “Teacher Data Literacy: It’s About Time.” Data Quality Campaign, February 2014. p. 6.

<http://2pido73em67o3eytaq1cp8au.wengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/DQC-Data-Literacy-Brief.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Sun, J., B. Johnson, and R. Przybylski. “Leading with Data: An Increasingly Important Feature of School Leadership.” *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, 44:3, September 15, 2016. pp. 98–99. Accessed via EbscoHost.



COMPETENCY	SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ATTITUDES
<b>Help staff commission research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Being conscious of possible uses of data</li> <li>▪ Being aware of the of the need for different data for different purposes</li> <li>▪ Being knowledgeable about data collection and analysis tools</li> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at helping staff become conscious of possible uses of data, aware of the need for different data for different purposes, and knowledgeable about data collection and analysis tools</li> </ul>
<b>Initiate dialogues in the school to make sense of data together</b>  <b>Help staff integrate this information into other data sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reserving judgment</li> <li>▪ Tolerating ambiguity</li> <li>▪ Valuing and promoting deep understanding</li> <li>▪ Engaging others (teachers, critical friends) in a professional dialogue about the data</li> <li>▪ Taking a range of perspectives and systematically posing increasingly focused questions</li> <li>▪ Recognizing other kinds of data (numbers, opinions, anecdotes, observations)</li> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at helping staff to develop an attitude of critical thinking (reserving judgment, tolerating ambiguity, valuing deep understanding)</li> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at helping staff recognize other kinds of data</li> </ul>
<b>Help staff read, understand, and interpret data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Being knowledgeable about statistical and measurement concepts</li> <li>▪ Being willing and able to make collective sense of the data</li> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at helping staff recognize sound and unsound data</li> </ul>
<b>Help staff provide explanations of the strengths and weaknesses of their own school as these appear in the data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Being knowledgeable about curriculum, teaching and learning problems</li> <li>▪ Being knowledgeable about school development and organizational learning problems</li> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at helping staff become knowledgeable about curriculum, teaching and learning problems and school development and organizational learning problems</li> </ul>
<b>Help staff plan quality assurance initiatives or improvement actions based on these explanations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Being knowledgeable about how to improve curriculum, teaching and learning</li> <li>▪ Being knowledgeable about how to improve school development and organizational learning</li> <li>▪ Being willing to and skilled at helping staff become knowledgeable about how to improve curriculum, teaching, learning, school development and organizational learning</li> </ul>

Source: Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies<sup>27</sup>

Developing data literacy requires superintendents to lead professional learning and engage constituents in communication around the importance of data use in addition to providing staff the infrastructure they need to use data.<sup>28</sup> Leaders can share the research base underlying the use of data and the selection of specific data indicators and connect this research to the district’s strategic goals to build constituent support for data use and data expertise.<sup>29</sup> Superintendents should ensure that all teachers participate in professional learning that develops data literacy skills, and that school schedules provide teachers with time to collaboratively analyze

<sup>27</sup> Chart taken verbatim with modification from: Verbiest, Op. cit., pp. 68–69.

<sup>28</sup> Ruedel, K., L.B. Kuchle, and T. Bailey. “Essential Elements of Comprehensive Data Literacy.” National Center for Systemic Improvement at WestEd, January 2021. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=data+literacy&ft=on&id=ED620527>

<sup>29</sup> “Coming Back to Climate: How Principals Use School Climate Data to Lead Improvement.” Aspen Institute, 2020. p. 2. [https://eric.ed.gov/?q=data+literacy+school+improvement&ft=on&ff1=dySince\\_2018&id=ED610360](https://eric.ed.gov/?q=data+literacy+school+improvement&ft=on&ff1=dySince_2018&id=ED610360)

data and plan data-driven instruction.<sup>30</sup> Figure 1.7 presents recommend implementation steps for each key element of data literacy identified by the National Center for Systemic Improvement at WestEd.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 1.7: Implementation Steps for Data Literacy**

KEY ELEMENT	CONSTITUENT ENGAGEMENT	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	INFRASTRUCTURE
<b>Data Exploration:</b> Considering the purpose or “why” of the data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish buy-in prior to moving to other data literacy elements to help ensure you ask the right questions and identify the right data (including existing data) to answer them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure staff in all roles get professional development in data exploration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure adequate time for:</li> <li>Teaming,</li> <li>Engaging constituents</li> </ul>
<b>Data Management:</b> Getting and storing the right data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather input on the burden (e.g., time, cost) and usefulness of existing data sources/tools and processes for entry, submission, access, etc., including use of data system(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide role-tailored professional development so staff understand how different data sources can be used and can accurately administer, score, and enter data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign staff to lead data management efforts</li> <li>Develop, update, or maintain an easy-to-use data system</li> <li>Articulate standardized processes for components of data management.</li> </ul>
<b>Data Use:</b> Analyzing, interpreting, reporting, etc. to achieve your purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage constituents in interpreting data</li> <li>Gather feedback on effective data use and reporting practices</li> <li>Use data visualization strategies to share data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide role-specific professional development on analyzing and interpreting data, reporting data, and using data to inform different types of decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure easy, role-appropriate access to stored data and reports</li> <li>Provide time for teaming and data use</li> </ul>
<b>Reflection and Improvement:</b> Examining each element to consider how we can better or more efficiently achieve our purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather feedback on professional development, systems documentation, and other processes across elements; and stakeholder engagement (extent, quality, ways to improve, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide professional development on improvement science with a focus on improving data literacy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide time to engage in the improvement process</li> </ul>

Source: National Center for Systemic Improvement at WestEd<sup>32</sup>

**In addition to supporting teachers and other staff in schools to develop data literacy, districts need to support families in analyzing individual student data and school-or district-level data so they can support their children’s learning and engage in the improvement process.**<sup>33</sup> Figure 1.8, on the following page, presents strategies leaders at all levels can use to support families in using data.

<sup>30</sup> Mann, “Education Data 101,” Op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Ruedel, Kuchle, and Bailey, Op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim with very minor alterations form: Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ball, A. “Best Practices for Communicating Data to Parents and the Public.” Data Quality Campaign, May 21, 2021. <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/best-practices-for-communicating-data-to-parents-and-the-public/>

**Figure 1.8: Strategies to Support Families' Use of Data**

- Provide families with an orientation about student data. This orientation should cover how to access and understand data such as standardized test scores and “credit units earned,” as well as how to log onto online parent portals and make sense of the information that families see posted about their child.
- Make sure that families are aware of any new education reform initiatives that will impact their child’s learning, especially when state or district assessments change.
- Help families understand how teachers and others in the school use student data and why this information is valuable. For instance, explain to families that teachers use data to adapt teaching strategies to students’ needs as well as to help students work toward specific learning goals. Knowing how teachers use data helps reassure families that the data are used in meaningful ways and that their child is not seen as just a set of numbers.
- Ensure equity in families’ access to student data. Whenever possible, make certain that families have access to information in their native language. Also, designate certain computers in the school for families to use to access online parent portals. Partner with community centers and libraries to establish computer kiosks where families can access the portals.
- Ask families if the student progress notes or school-wide data reports that they receive are easy to understand. Find out what information parents find valuable, and ask if there are other types of data that they would like to receive in these reports. To gather more feedback about their ideas and needs, consider holding a parent focus group or conducting a parent survey.
- Involve the larger community in reaching out to families to help them access, understand, and act on student data. Work with community partners and parent leaders to help families understand the importance of attending orientations, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences. Families can learn about the school’s data-sharing practices at these events and can also learn how to use data to support their child’s learning.

Source: Harvard Family Research Project<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim with very minor alterations from: “Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families: How to Share Data Effectively.” Harvard Family Research Project. p. 4.  
<https://archive.globalfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/7-DataSharingTipSheets-HarvardFamilyResearchProject.pdf>

## SECTION II: COMMUNICATING DATA

Creating transparency around data for key constituents (such as those listed in Figure 2.1) is essential for encouraging constituents to partner with schools to support improved outcomes. Individual student data help families support their children’s learning, while school and district-level data support constituents’ engagement in the school improvement process.<sup>35</sup> Transparency around data collection benefits student learning and constituent engagement, particularly when data has the potential to impact marginalized constituents.<sup>36</sup> In this section, Hanover discusses best practices for strategically communicating data to ensure that all constituents understand the state of the district and build hope for improvement.

Figure 2.1: Constituents to Engage in Communications Around Data



Source: *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*<sup>37</sup>

### COMMUNICATING DATA STRATEGICALLY

Simply providing constituents with access to data is insufficient to support a robust engagement process. Rather, effective superintendents lead district staff in using data to articulate district strengths and needs and engage constituents in the improvement process. Superintendents with strong communications skills, including communication around data, are more likely to remain in their position and lead their district to improved outcomes.<sup>38</sup>

Engagement is more likely to be effective and sustained when districts integrate communications around data into a strategic communications and engagement plan.<sup>39</sup> Strategically planning communications helps superintendents align communication about data with their district’s overall mission and goals, supporting the articulation of a consistent mission and vision for the district to all constituents.<sup>40</sup> A communications plan supports district leaders in ensuring that data are transparent and that communications support strategic district goals by answering the key questions listed in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Key Questions Addressed by Communications Plans



Source: Pell Institute<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Mann, B. “Parent Portals: Key COVID-19 Recovery Strategy.” Data Quality Campaign. <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/resource/education-leaders-must-not-be-gatekeepers/>

<sup>36</sup> Gonzalez et al., Op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>37</sup> Chart contents adapted from: Hilliard, A.T. and E. Newsome. “Effective Communication and Creating Professional Learning Communities Is a Valuable Practice for Superintendents.” *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 6:4, 2013. p. 357. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1073185.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>39</sup> “SLDS Sustainability Planning Guide,” Op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Hilliard and Newsome, Op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>41</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim from: “Develop a Communications Plan.” Pell Institute. <http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/communicate-improve/develop-a-communications-plan/>

Effective communication plans provide data users with the context needed to understand the implications of data.<sup>42</sup> Constituents, especially teachers and staff, also need reassurance that data will be used to support improvement rather than impose punitive accountability.<sup>43</sup> The most effective communications plans go beyond simply providing users with data and context to build a districtwide culture of engagement and trust that supports improvement.<sup>44</sup>

Figure 2.3 presents a suggested process for developing a data communication strategy. Although designed for communicating data around career and technical education (CTE) programs, this process is also relevant for communicating data around other strategic priorities.<sup>45</sup> The final communications plan developed through this process can take the form of a template, such as a checklist or matrix, that specifies what action steps need to be completed and the timelines and responsible individuals for completing them.<sup>46</sup>

**Figure 2.3: Process for Developing a Data Communication Strategy**

STEP	TASKS
<b>Step 1: Determine the Strategic Goal and Audiences for Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the goals of communicating and align communication goals with strategic plan goals.</li> <li>▪ Identify and prioritize audiences for communication.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 2: Determine Action Steps for Audiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify what steps audiences should take as a result of receiving communication.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 3: Select Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify data points for inclusion in communication, focusing on data points that will inspire audiences to take desired action.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 4: Create Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop communications materials to publish data, such as infographics, presentations, or newsletters.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 5: Develop a Narrative and Design Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create a narrative that honestly and concisely communicates data.</li> <li>▪ Ensure that communications materials are accessible and inclusive for diverse users, include a call to action aligned with strategic goals, and provide audiences with the information they need without including extraneous or irrelevant information. Consider providing links or other ways to access additional information for users who want a more in-depth examination of data.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 6: Identify Evaluation Measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify metrics that can be tracked to monitor the success of the communications strategy overall and of specific communications tactics. Short-term measures such as downloads and email opens can measure the effectiveness of specific outreach strategies while longer-term measures such as enrollment trends and progress toward improvement goals can measure the overall effectiveness of a communications plan.</li> </ul>
<b>Step 7: Build an Action Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop an action plan that identifies who will be responsible for each element of the communications strategy and a calendar that specifies when data and communications materials will be published.</li> </ul>

<sup>42</sup> “Beyond the Numbers: A Toolkit for Communicating CTE Data.” Advance CTE, November 2020. p. 2. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED610150>

<sup>43</sup> Knudson, J. “Leveraging Data for a Culture of Improvement: Priorities for District Leaders. Policy and Practice Brief.” California Collaborative on District Reform, June 2020. p. 4. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED606510>

<sup>44</sup> “Communications Planning for Innovation in Education.” Education Elements and The Learning Accelerator, March 2017. p. 4. <https://www.edelements.com/hubfs/PL%20Communications%20Gilde/Personalized%20Learning%20Communications%20Guide.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> “Beyond the Numbers,” Op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> “Create a Template.” Pell Institute. <http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/communicate-improve/create-a-template/>

STEP	TASKS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collaborate with communications staff to plan the release and distribution of communication materials.</li> </ul>

Source: Advance CTE<sup>47</sup>

## ENGAGING CONSTITUENTS IN COMMUNICATION

**Strategic communications plans differentiate communications to meet the needs of diverse constituents.**

Communications should be accessible to constituent groups using them and avoid using technical terms or jargon that make it difficult for readers to comprehend and interact with data, while providing readers with the necessary context to understand systems and outcomes.<sup>48</sup>

**During the process of developing a communications plan, district leaders should consult key constituent groups, such as administrators, teachers, parents, and students, to identify what each constituent group needs from communications and develop targeted communications that provide constituents with the information they need to fulfill their specific roles in the improvement process.**<sup>49</sup> Engaging constituents in the planning process also ensures that data communications are inclusive and accessible for diverse constituents and that communications accurately represent communities' strengths and needs. Constituent engagement is particularly important for historically marginalized constituents to ensure that communications are culturally responsive and accessible.<sup>50</sup>



**District leaders can also continue to engage constituent leaders during the implementation of the communications plan to ensure that accurate information about district data reaches the community.**

For example, the superintendent of Olmsted Falls City School District in Ohio has identified a network of 40-50 individuals in the community to serve as key communicators. Key communicators include individuals with a high profile in the community, such as the mayor, as well as parents and community members with a particularly strong interest in the district. The superintendent makes sure key communicators have accurate data about the district, and key communicators in turn use these data to inform conversations about schools in their daily lives. As a result, key communicators can correct misperceptions about the district and build community trust.<sup>51</sup>

Districts with strong cultures of communication engage in two-way communication which provides constituents with opportunities to provide input and feedback to district leaders in addition to receiving information from district leaders.<sup>52</sup> The input and feedback provided by constituents through two-way communication forms an additional source of qualitative data that leaders can use to develop improvement strategies that reflect constituents' needs and concerns, improving the quality of decision-making and constituent support for improvement efforts.<sup>53</sup>

At the student level, two-way communication creates an opportunity for families to share information about their children that supplements the data schools collect through assessments and other sources. Figure 2.4 presents characteristics of schools with strong two-way family communication.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Chart contents adapted from: "Beyond the Numbers," Op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Gonzalez et al., Op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>49</sup> Knudson, Op. cit., pp. 5–6.

<sup>50</sup> Gonzalez et al., Op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>51</sup> Sawchuk, S. "Building Better School Boards: 3 Strategies for District Leaders." *Education Week*, November 18, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/building-better-school-boards-3-strategies-for-district-leaders/2020/11>




<sup>52</sup> "Communications Planning for Innovation in Education," Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Trimis, E.A. "Shaping School Climate and Improving Communication in a Digital World." *Leadership*, 47:5, June 5, 2018. p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> "Creating a Culture of Two-Way Communication." Oregon Department of Education. p. 1.

[https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Documents/Two\\_Way\\_Communication\\_Culture.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/Documents/Two_Way_Communication_Culture.pdf)

**Figure 2.4: Characteristics of Schools with Strong Two-Way Family Communication**

CHARACTERISTIC	RESPONSIBILITIES
 <p><b>Leadership Team</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sets norms and expectations for how to communicate with families that are culturally and linguistically sensitive</li> <li>▪ Is available to hear family concerns, listen to family feedback, and individualize communication with each family</li> <li>▪ Is familiar with cultural and linguistic characteristics of families enrolled in the school and knowledgeable about needs of each family</li> <li>▪ Monitors and supports positive two-way communication between families and staff</li> <li>▪ Encourages and supports the use of multiple communication methods to meet the needs of all families</li> <li>▪ Maintains regular documentation of communications between school staff and families</li> <li>▪ Uses language that conveys trust and respect</li> <li>▪ Plans and offers regular opportunities for meaningful connections</li> <li>▪ Focuses communication on strengths rather than challenges</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Families</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ See themselves as partners with teachers and schools</li> <li>▪ Are aware of and use multiple options for two-way communication</li> <li>▪ Contribute to or offer information about their child's progress and any challenges</li> <li>▪ Feel welcome in the school and classroom</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Overall Language and Messaging</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Used to convey trust and respect</li> <li>▪ Culturally and linguistically adapted to reach and effectively engage each family</li> <li>▪ Connected to student learning and well-being</li> <li>▪ Oriented toward all family members (including fathers, mothers, grandparents, and other caregivers)</li> <li>▪ Focused on establishing shared goals and aspirations</li> <li>▪ Focused on strengths</li> <li>▪ Emphasizes solutions and oriented toward supporting learning at home and at school</li> <li>▪ Communicates trust and respect while avoiding judgment</li> <li>▪ Adjusted to linguistic preferences</li> </ul>

Source: Oregon Department of Education<sup>55</sup>

## COMMUNICATING HOPE THROUGH ASSET FRAMING

**When communicating with external constituents, especially community members, district leaders must balance honesty about the challenges facing the district with optimism and a sense of pride in the district's accomplishments.**<sup>56</sup> In many cases, data will reveal challenges or gaps between current and desired outcomes, which can lead constituents to become demoralized or assign blame.<sup>57</sup> When superintendents communicate challenging data without inspiring hope in the possibility for change, constituents may resist the implications of data and oppose improvement strategies.<sup>58</sup> When leaders attempt to force improvement

<sup>55</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim from: "Creating a Culture of Two-Way Communication," Op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> "Communication Essentials: What Superintendents Need to Know and Want to Share About Communicating." Region 10 Education Service Center. p. 2.  
<https://www.region10.org/r10website/assets/File/communicationessentialsforsuperintendents.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> "Growth Mindset in a Data-Driven Culture." EL Education. <https://eleducation.org/resources/growth-mindset-in-a-data-driven-culture>

<sup>58</sup> D'Orio, W. "You've Got the Data Now What? (Cover Story)." *Scholastic Administrator*, 9:2, October 9, 2009. p. 31. Accessed via EbscoHost.



strategies despite constituent resistance, the implementation of these strategies is likely to be unsustainable.<sup>59</sup>

District leaders can use asset framing when contextualizing data to maintain optimism and avoid stigmatizing students or teachers.<sup>60</sup> A 2022 report on data equity prepared for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation defines asset framing as “using language that focuses on the strengths, rather than deficits, of individuals or communities.”<sup>61</sup> Developed by the nonprofit leader Trabian Shorters, asset framing aims to move the narrative around data from a focus on deficits or challenges faced by marginalized communities to a focus on the assets individuals and communities possess and their aspirations for the future.<sup>62</sup> This focus reflects research in psychology finding that framing data in terms of hope is more effective in supporting decision-making than framing data in terms of fear.<sup>63</sup> Figure 2.5 presents the shifts in mindsets promoted by assets-based communications.

**Figure 2.5: Assets-Based Mindset Shift**

DEFICIT-BASED MINDSET	ASSET-BASED MINDSET
Needs driven	Strengths driven
Problems focused	Opportunity focused
Externally focused	Internally focused
What is missing that we must go find?	What is present that we can build upon?
May lead to downward spiral of burnout, depression, or dysfunction?	May lead to new, unexpected responses to community wishes?

Source: University of Memphis Engaged Scholarship Committee<sup>64</sup>

Asset framing is particularly important when presenting data about historically marginalized groups, as deficit framing can reinforce bias against these groups and undermine trust in data.<sup>65</sup> When presenting data related to historically marginalized groups, district leaders should make sure that communications include the sources of data and contextual information on the root causes of disparities in data so that data is not misused to further marginalize or stigmatize these groups.<sup>66</sup> Asset framing promotes a more equitable interpretation of data examining marginalized students by emphasizing these students’ aspirations and strengths and placing the responsibility on systems to change to realize equity goals, rather than implying that disparities reflect innate problems with underserved individuals and communities.<sup>67</sup>

District leaders support asset-based framing by embracing asset-based language, and work with data and communications staff to ensure that all communications around data reflect an asset-based mindset. Superintendents can lead conversations with leaders across levels of the district about the value of asset

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, J. “What’s Trust Got to Do with It? A Communications and Engagement Guide for School Leaders Tackling the Problem of Persistently Failing Schools.” Public Agenda, 2011. p. 4.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=superintendent+communication&ft=on&pg=3&id=ED529276>

<sup>60</sup> Ddamulira, J. “Asset Framing: Putting Data Disaggregation in Context.” Data Quality Campaign, February 13, 2019.

<https://dataqualitycampaign.org/asset-framing-putting-data-disaggregation-in-context/>

<sup>61</sup> Gonzalez et al., Op. cit., p. viii.

<sup>62</sup> Zinnen, S. “From Deficit-Framing to Asset-Framing: The Power of Narrative in Working toward Equity.” Reading Partners, June 30, 2021. <https://readingpartners.org/blog/from-deficit-framing-to-asset-framing/>

<sup>63</sup> “Understanding Asset-Framing: Guidelines for CHCF Authors.” California Health Care Foundation, April 2021. p. 4.

<https://www.chcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UnderstandingAssetFramingGuidelinesAuthors.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim from: “Comparison Between Asset and Deficit Based Approaches.” University of Memphis Engaged Scholarship Committee. <https://www.memphis.edu/ess/module4/page3.php>

<sup>65</sup> “The Consumer’s Guide to Data.” Data Quality Campaign, June 2021. p. 3. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615099.pdf>

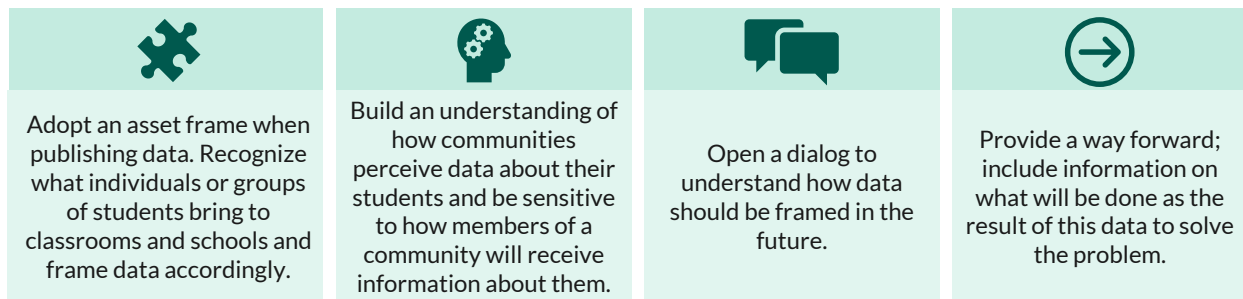
<sup>66</sup> Gonzalez et al., Op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>67</sup> “The Consumer’s Guide to Data,” Op. cit., p. 6.



framing and best practices for using asset framing to communicate hope.<sup>68</sup> Figure 2.6 presents the Data Quality Campaign’s recommendations for applying asset framing to communications around school data.

**Figure 2.6: Recommendations for Asset Framing in Communications Around School Data**



Source: Data Quality Campaign<sup>69</sup>

In addition to incorporating asset-based language into formal communications, district leaders can exercise their leadership to support constituents in developing the skills and dispositions needed to apply an asset-based lens to examining data. Transformative leaders engage constituents in shifting mindsets and knowledge frameworks to support equity and improvement.<sup>70</sup> Research finds that targeted professional learning supports teachers in applying an asset-based lens to teaching, including both instructional design and data analysis.<sup>71</sup>

Similar to asset framing, **strengths-based communication emphasizes individual students’ strengths and aspirations in communications with families about assessment data.** Strengths-based communications convey respect for families’ cultures and backgrounds and engage families as equal partners in education. When communicating with families about individual students’ data, school staff should begin by highlighting areas of strength or positive traits rather than challenges or learning needs and contextualize assessment data using knowledge about learning and child development.<sup>72</sup> Strengths-based communication with families meets the criteria listed in Figure 2.7.

**Figure 2.7: Criteria for Strengths-Based Communication with Families**

- Open and honest
- Positive and focused on understanding family strengths
- Accepting and non-judgmental
- Respectful of families’ language, culture, beliefs, learning priorities, and cognitive experiences offered at home
- Focused on identifying positive attributes and unique family perspectives
- Free of jargon and field-specific terminology
- Able to incorporate interpreters and translated materials when needed

Source: Oregon Department of Education<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Fortner, K.M., J. Lalas, and H. Strikwerda. “Embracing Asset-Based School Leadership Dispositions in Advancing True Equity and Academic Achievement for Students Living in Poverty.” *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research*, 7:1, 2021. p. 8. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=asset-based+data&ft=on&id=EJ1288402>

<sup>71</sup> Celedon-Pattichis, S. et al. “Asset-Based Approaches to Equitable Mathematics Education Research and Practice.” *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 49:4, 2018. p. 380. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326219362\\_Asset-Based\\_Approaches\\_to\\_Equitable\\_Mathematics\\_Education\\_Research\\_and\\_Practice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326219362_Asset-Based_Approaches_to_Equitable_Mathematics_Education_Research_and_Practice)

<sup>72</sup> “Creating a Culture of Two-Way Communication,” Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Chart contents taken verbatim from: Ibid.

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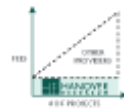
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