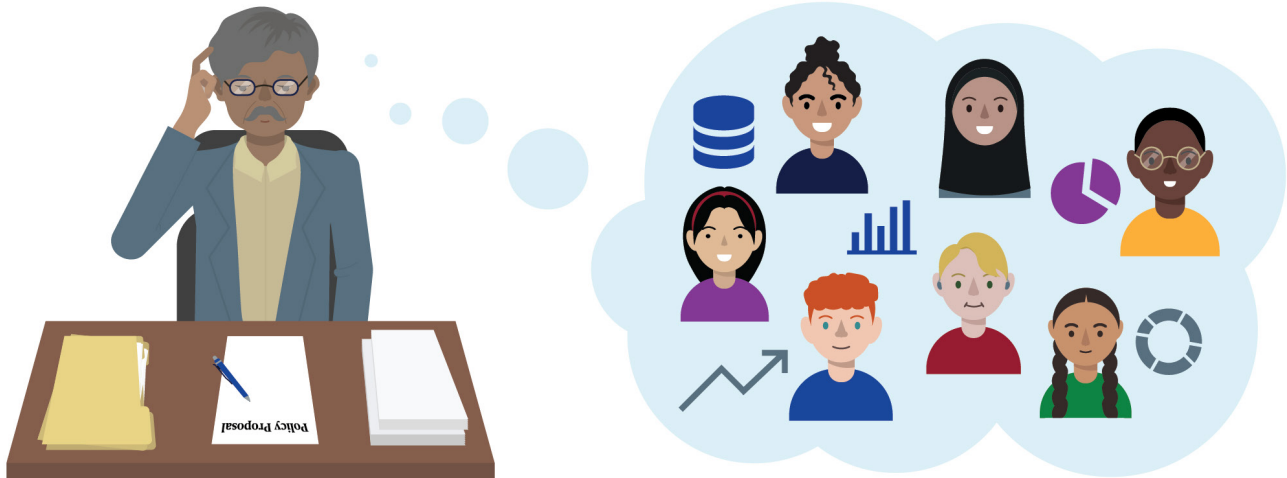


Interpreting and using school performance data: Dos and Don'ts for 2022 and beyond

A publication of the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance



The accountability provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act are back in effect after 2 years of pandemic-related disruptions. In the wake of the pandemic, states need to know that they are using their data appropriately to identify schools for targeted or comprehensive support and improvement—as they must do in fall 2022 for the first time since 2019. More broadly, to support their efforts to promote learning acceleration and recovery, states and districts need to know what data they can trust and what inferences they can draw to best understand schools’ needs. Even as schooling has returned to something resembling “normal,” the disruptions of the pandemic cause lingering problems for measures typically used to assess school performance—leading state and local decisionmakers astray if they are not careful. Bad inferences from data can point toward interventions that are ill-suited to schools’ particular needs. As they examine school performance data and consider options for supporting schools, state and local decisionmakers should keep in mind some dos and don'ts:

DON'T ...



Read too much into declines in proficiency rates relative to pre-pandemic levels.



Interpret proficiency levels alone as clear evidence of a school’s performance, if disruptions to testing in 2020 and 2021 have removed student-growth measures that normally provide better information on what a school is contributing to student achievement.

Do ...



Recognize that proficiency rates are likely to be lower everywhere due to pandemic disruptions.



Look for student growth information where you can get it, such as from diagnostic tests like [NWEA’s MAP](#) or from pre-pandemic baselines with [growth measured across several years](#).

DON'T ... ❌



Give too much credibility to any measures that have unusually low participation rates. If most students didn't take a test, those who did take the test are probably not typical.



Overinterpret numbers that might be very unstable from year to year. Random variation means that numbers are likely to be less stable for small schools, for subgroups, and for growth measures (which are inherently less stable than proficiency measures).



Think student outcome measures can tell you everything about what a school needs. For example, although student-growth measures can provide useful information about a school's performance, they are essentially useless for evaluating the performance of a school principal. And even if you have good information about the performance of a school and the achievement of its students, that doesn't tell you how to intervene.

Do ... ✅



Focus on measures that include a full representation of students in each school or are appropriately adjusted to account for nonparticipation.



Look for ways to stabilize measures, such as by averaging across multiple years, or better, by employing Bayesian statistical methods, as Pennsylvania and New Jersey are exploring.



Seek additional information to understand what is happening in a school and identify appropriate interventions. Data from surveys of school climate completed by staff and students—such as those used statewide in Maryland—are a good place to start. State or local decisionmakers seeking more specific guidance should contact their local REL.

