

New York Data Policy Landscape

New York has many data systems isolated in silos that simply cannot “talk” to each other. Only New York City has annual testing that is scaled to a common set of learning standards, which enables value-added assessments. The rest of the state cannot do this kind of assessment, limited to the Regents exams and testing in Grades 4 and 8. Although No Child Left Behind Act soon will require the entire state to have testing in Grades 3–8, there is little talk of developing these tests to allow for value-added analysis. New York City is already doing a little bit of student and teacher data linking, but only internally.

Current Data Capacities

At the state level each October, every teacher fills out a Basic Education Data System (BEDS) form. The BEDS form consists of two self-reported data files: the Personnel Master File (PMF) and the Institutional Master File.

In the PMF, the teacher records every class that he/she teaches with special codes for each class. These codes denote content differentiations such as Advanced Placement (AP) Honors or Remedial. Also recorded in the PMF are salary, gender, and in most cases ethnicity. The experience is broken down into total number of years in the district, overall, and in private schools. The district experience data is difficult to examine, however, due to confusion about New York City districts versus regional districts.

Each teacher is identified by a unique ID number, which is the teacher’s scrambled Social Security Number (SSN). This is a very difficult system to use for research purposes. Outside researchers have been allowed access to the data, but they must borrow the scrambler machine from the State Education Department in order to scramble the SSNs to ensure confidentiality. Further, the State Education Department still has some say in how the information is used once it is obtained. The commissioner has pushed the State Education Department attorneys to allow access to the data.

Information is also kept on teacher certification and exam history. The Certification File indicates the levels of certification, dates, and areas each teacher holds. This file also indicates the type of preparation the teacher had by sorting the certificates into three categories:

1. Recommendation received from Traditional Preparation Program
2. Transitional B Certification: New York’s only type of lateral entry, which is really only different timing of the regular certification. This does not distinguish between a Teach for America teacher and a New York City Fellow.
3. Independent Evaluation: This is if all the certification requirements are fulfilled, but the candidate did not have a recommendation from an individual institution of higher education.

The general public does have access to some of the certification information through an online resource, called the Online Certification Resource Verification (OCVS), which

allows the public to verify the certification of any teacher employed in New York State public schools. The system also shows the user which subjects can be taught by the teacher under his or her particular certificate. Additionally, the Office of Teaching Initiatives publishes online a Higher Education Institutions Results Report. This report gives state-level aggregate and summary assessment pass-rate data for certification exams for teachers in regular preparation programs as well as those in alternate route preparation programs. Data are only available from 1999 through 2003.

In terms of student testing data, Regional Information Centers (RICs) house test information from the over 700 New York districts, but these are not linked at all. In fact, they are automatically formatted differently from the start.

The Political Landscape

There is some momentum through the State Education Department and other outside parties to collect and consolidate all these student and teacher data in an independent "Teaching Center." However, this idea has generated enough political concern potentially to prevent such consolidation. The teachers' union is very concerned about linking student and teacher data. In addition, the State Education Department has issues with data collection because the department simply lacks the requisite technological infrastructure or capacity.

If the equity funding comes to fruition, much more money would be available for education in New York, and in turn the courts would hold schools accountable for the use of this additional funding. This additional accountability piece could be the catalyst for motivating data collection improvements and possibly requiring student and teacher data linkage.

Overall, three things are still necessary before student and teacher data can be linked statewide: (a) political support, (b) large amounts of additional funds, and (c) vastly improved technical capacity.

Web Resources

New York State Education Department
<http://www.nysed.gov/>

Online Certification Verification System (OCVS)
<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/respublic/ocvs.htm>

State Education Department, Office of Teaching Initiatives
<http://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/index.html>

The Education Finance Research Consortium
<http://albany.edu/edfin/EFRC.Background.html>

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