

SHARING DATA WITH PARENTS

Sending home student data can be a vital strategy for supporting student success. Research shows that parent involvement has a strong impact on student achievement, particularly informing parents about their child's progress in school. Giving parents student progress and achievement data allows them to maintain appropriate expectations, seek out the right academic services at school or in the community, and better support learning at home. The data include not only scores on standardized tests and grades on report cards but also the information teachers and schools gather about students' knowledge, strengths, skills, and interests throughout the year.

In fact, most parents want more information than they're currently getting, both from teachers and from their district or state. The Data Quality Campaign has found that [nearly nine out of ten parents say they need data like grades and test scores to understand how their children are progressing in school so they can help them do their best](#) but that [parents in just seventeen out of fifty states](#) have access to data that follow their children's progress over time. Despite this demand for data, more than 60 percent of parents say that their child's [teachers rarely \(39 percent\) or never \(22 percent\) discuss assessment results](#) with them, according to testing organization NWEA.

Below are some tips to keep in mind when sharing student performance and progress data with parents. (Note that these tips are mostly focused on sharing data with families about their own student's progress rather than about schools or student populations overall. For a great guide to understanding and using that data, check out [Making Data Work: A Parent and Community Guide](#) from the nonprofit The Education Trust.)

1. Get Started

- ▶ **Create a culture of data-sharing among staff.** Sharing information about student progress with families starts inside the school. Principals, teachers, and other staff must understand and make use of this data first. [The Global Family Research Project \(which spun out of Harvard University\) recommends that administrators emphasize the importance of data-sharing in strategic plans, create online student information systems and parent portals that make data-sharing easier, and use professional development time to help teachers understand effective data-sharing practices \(as well as data gathering, analysis, and action planning\).](#)
- ▶ **Consider which types of information parents want.** Testing firm [NWEA surveyed parents about why they wanted student progress data](#)—top reasons included:
 - Monitoring their child's general progress in education
 - Knowing when to be concerned about their child's progress
 - Monitoring their child's achievement of education standards
 - Communicating with their child's teacher and school administrator
 - Helping their child with homework
- ▶ **Provide a variety of ways for parents to receive information.** Families are different: some prefer weekly, monthly, or semiannual communication, and some may choose text, phone calls, mail, email, or face-to-face conversations. Keep these preferences in mind when sharing data rather than offering only one opportunity or format.

- ▶ **Ensure equitable access to the data.** Remember that parents have varying levels of familiarity with English and with technology as well as different levels of access. [The Global Family Research Project suggests not only providing online access to data but also offering training on how to log in and access reports and instructions translated into different languages as well as computer kiosks in easily accessible areas for those who might not have devices or connectivity at home.](#) Your school information system or data warehouse might also offer batch printing of class data or individual student profiles, which would allow you to accommodate families with limited access or familiarity.
- ▶ **Share information in both individual and whole-group settings.** The Flamboyan Foundation encourages teachers to conduct one individual conference and three whole-class meetings each year. At whole-class meetings, families “learn about the most important grade-level skills, review students’ progress on these skills, practice activities they can do at home to support their child’s learning, and set interim goals for their child’s progress.”

2. When Sharing, Don’t Forget

- ▶ **Put data in context.** [“A number in isolation is essentially meaningless, and a bunch of numbers can be confusing,”](#) says Harvard Graduate School of Education researcher Lorette McWilliams. Compare student progress and performance with state standards and developmental or grade-level expectations as well as student’s own performance earlier in the year or the year before. [“Using a student profile that includes multiple types of data—including data about attendance, behavior, grades, participation, and more—will allow parents to get a more comprehensive sense of how their child is experiencing school,”](#) agrees former school psychologist (and former Schoolzilla executive) Dr. Leo Bialis-White. Piedmont Unified School District psychologist Sarah Wheeler suggests [considering the story or takeaway you want parents to come away with then using data points and charts/graphics to support those points.](#)
- ▶ **Explain tests and terminology.** [Give parents insight into what specific tests are designed to measure.](#) Kelly Goodrich, an executive with testing organization NWEA, says teachers should be prepared to share the following:



Teaming Up: Building Understanding and Community through Data-Sharing

A decade ago, the Creighton Elementary School District in Arizona—a K-8 district in Phoenix where 85 percent of students are Hispanic and 40 percent are English learners—was looking for [ways to involve more families in their students’ progress.](#) They moved from two 15-minute meetings per year to a 30-minute individual conference and three 75-minute whole-class meetings.

During the whole-class meetings, families set goals for their students and also shared strategies with one another. “Many parents wonder what the parents of kids at the top of the class are doing at home to make that happen,” says Maria Paredes, the district’s former director of community education. “Parents give other parents ideas for successful practice at home. It forms a community.”

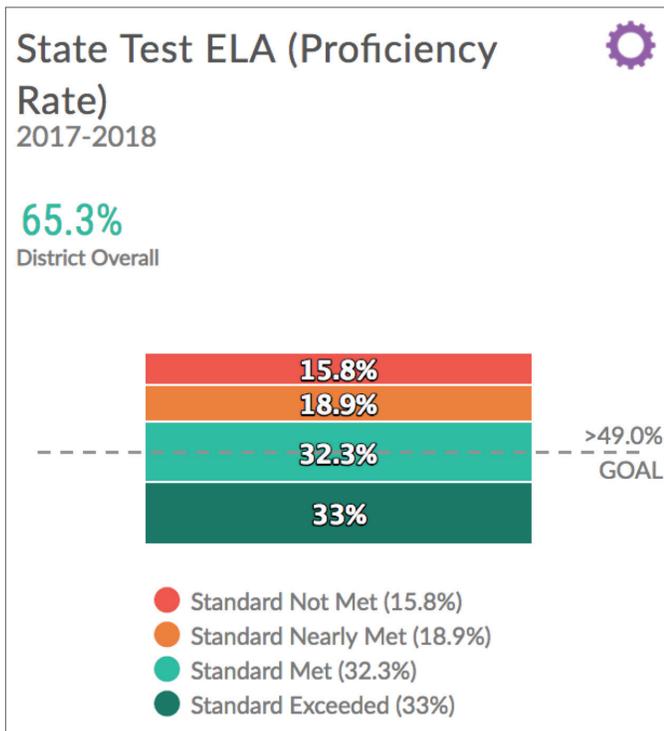
Paredes now works for the training organization [WestEd](#) showing hundreds of other schools nationwide how to use this Academic Parent-Teacher Teams approach.

- What each assessment is intended to measure
- The importance of all classroom assessments and the need for all students to do their best on all tests
- How assessment results will be used by the teacher and the school

- ▶ **Connect data to related interventions to reinforce good habits or prompt new ones.** Piedmont psychologist Wheeler says [it's helpful to not only show parents data over time but also to connect that to interventions or tactics that may have contributed](#). "It's helpful to show a parent, 'your child was absent five times last month but only one time this month, and so the changes you've been doing to get them up early, that's making a difference,'" she says. "That really connects things to what they do and their impact."
- ▶ **Illustrate to make data easily understood.** [The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory \(SEDL\) suggests considering graphic displays of information—such as tables, charts, and graphs—to demonstrate data comparisons and trends](#). Different types of graphics can convey different types of information.

Type of Graphic - Histogram

Used For - Display the frequency or proportion within defined intervals.



HUMBOLDT ELEMENTARY

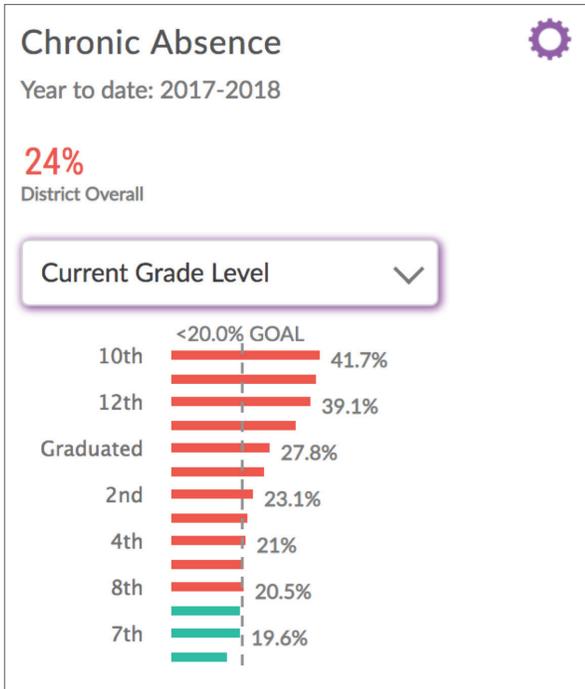
Data Nights and Cheat Sheets: Tools for Parents and Teachers

Title I teacher and reading specialist Maureen Holt of Humboldt Elementary in Arizona organizes [Parent Data Nights](#) starting shortly after the first diagnostic test of the year. There, she explains data reports to parents, including acronyms, test scores, and trouble spots for each child. Holt also has a meeting to share this same information with teachers, so they'll be on the same page and ready to field any questions that arise.

Along with charts showing test performance, Humboldt teacher Holt gives parents a "[cheat sheet](#)" of assessment acronyms and a short paragraph explaining them in lay terms as well as worksheets or tips for practicing that skill at home.

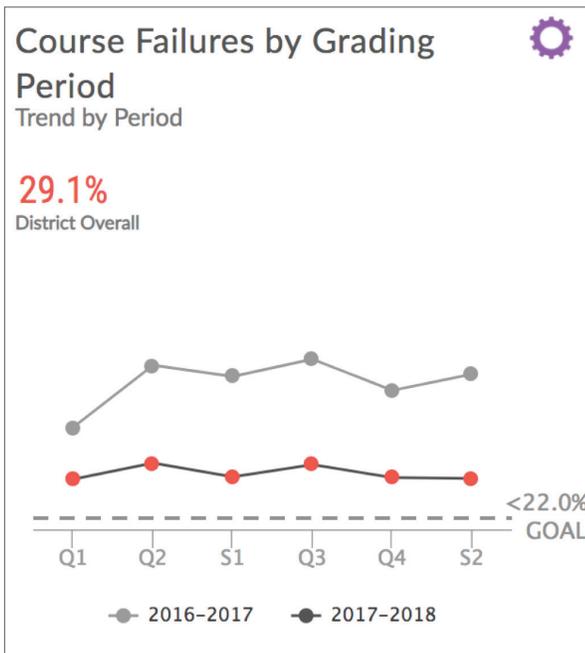
Type of Graphic - Bar Graph

Used For - Compare values across categories or track changes over time.



Type of Graphic - Line Graph

Used For - Display the relationship between two types of information, or compare changes over the same time frame for more than one group.



Source: Adapted from SEDL with permission from Using Graphs and Charts to Illustrate Quantitative Data, July 2008, Evaluation Briefs, No. 12, p. 2. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- ▶ **Share samples of student work to bring the data to life.** Global Family Research Project researchers [suggest](#) that [moving the conversation beyond numbers and percentages into real learning and work products is important](#). Samples of the student's actual work can demonstrate progress over time (using two or more samples from different periods) or make challenges concrete. "[My favorite parent-teacher conference of all time was when my child's teacher walked us through three writing assignments that my child completed over the course of a year](#)," says parent and EdSurge columnist Alex Hernandez. "It was like watching a flower bloom using time-lapse photography."

Continuing the Conversation

Remember that sharing data with parents works best as a conversation, not a lecture. Invite parents to share their own observations, ask questions, and make suggestions—they are partners in the work of teaching and learning.

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) identifies [three types of data conversations: gathering information, guiding improvement, and finding solutions](#). RIDE also describes several effective techniques for such conversations, including presuming positive intent to keep communication open, paraphrasing what you think you heard to confirm and clarify understanding, and asking powerful questions to focus on the main goals for student achievement. The Institute for Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education also has a [toolkit](#) designed to help teachers engage in data conversations with parents and others in the community.

As part of the conversation, consider gathering feedback from parents on whether your data-sharing efforts are meeting their needs. [The Global Family Research Project recommends asking families whether student and school progress reports are easy to understand, whether the information is valuable, and whether there is other data they'd like to see](#). In addition to informal check-ins during conferences or meetings, consider gathering this data more formally by holding a parent focus group or conducting a parent survey.

Sharing Schoolzilla Data with Parents

From parent-teacher conferences to public school board meetings, districts around the country use Mosaic District Progress Monitoring. Please visit schoolzilla.com or email info@schoolzilla.com to learn more!