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Data Disaggregation: Frequently Asked Questions

Why is school data important?

Data provides educators, families, policymakers, civil rights advocates, and community stakeholders with information to understand how our children are doing in our public education system. Through data we discover how and why some students are doing well and others may not be. Without data, we would not know 4- or 6-year high school graduation rates, reading and math proficiency rates, student performance in one district compared to another, which schools rely heavily on suspensions and expulsions for discipline, and which schools focus more on student retention, or even the number of students being served in the state. Data is used to understand who our children are, how they are doing, what instruction and support works well and for whom, what the challenges are underserved, and help point to opportunities to ensure every child has a quality education.

What is data disaggregation?

Data disaggregation is breaking down data into smaller subgroupings. This kind of data collection and analysis is crucial to understanding student performance, identifying what current instruction and support works well and for whom, and identifying rich information to identify opportunities to close the achievement gap. The breakdown of data by any set of categories is known as data disaggregation.

Can student achievement data be identifiable?

No. According to Minnesota's law, all student data must *not* be identifiable to teachers or the public. Any student group that is smaller than 10 students must be hidden to avoid identification of the data.

What are the federal requirements on data disaggregation?

Federal law requires all states collect and report student data by race (i.e. white, black, American Indian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, and mixed race), ethnicity (i.e. Hispanic/Latino), and several other categories such as gender, free and reduced lunch status, foster care status, English learner status, disability, military family status, etc.

What are Minnesota's requirements on data disaggregation?

Since 2016, Minnesota law requires districts to provide parents and students with updated enrollment forms that further disaggregate data by race. According to Minnesota law, racial and ethnic categories must be based on the U.S. Census data, and must include:

1. seven of the most populous Hispanic and Latino groups;
2. seven of the most populous Asian and Pacific Islander groups;
3. five of the most populous Black and African heritage groups; and
4. three of the most populous Native American groups.

State law also requires districts and states provide data on the most populous intersecting groups, such as Black, male students with disabilities and Mexican English Language Learners on free and reduced lunch.

Are parents or students required to provide data?

No. According to Minnesota law, parents and students can choose *not* to provide data including data on race or ethnicity.

Does the state require educators to guess student's race or ethnicity if the data is not offered?

Educators are *not* required to guess student's race or ethnicity for any state categories because state law makes it optional to disaggregate student data by specific groups. Federal law, on the other hand, still requires students identify as one of seven races or ethnicities for nationwide reporting. If a student does not complete the federal requirement, public schools will either make their best guess or default a student's race to white.

When are new data disaggregation requirements set to take place?

All schools are already collecting and reporting data based on federal categories. Minnesota law now requires all schools collect and report disaggregated data by the 2019-20 school year. Five schools and school districts will begin collecting data during the 2018-19 school year, and will report back to policymakers any improvements that must be made to implement the law statewide.

How are districts required to collect disaggregated data?

The Minnesota Department of Education is currently sending out directives to schools and districts on how best to collect and report disaggregated data. State law requires schools to implement the law, giving schools, districts, and MDE the flexibility on how best to collect data from students and parents.

What can we do with disaggregated data?

Over the last few decades, we have seen startling trends in Minnesota's education system which has prompted a necessary conversation on achievement gaps and what must be done to address them. Students' race, household income, zip code, or any other factors do not dictate students' ability to learn nor should these factors determine the quality of education students receive. The reality is the distribution of resources, the placement of effective educators, culturally relevant curriculum, and many other factors have significant impacts on student learning, resulting in our education system tending to favor our most privileged students over students of color, American Indian students, low-income students, and students with disabilities, among others. Only with disaggregated data will we have the detailed, actionable information we need to hold our education systems accountable for student growth and proficiency, replicate best practices in our schools and districts, and learn what might be harmful to students.

For more information, please contact the following:**Minnesota Department of Education**

MDE is currently collecting feedback on how best to implement the new data disaggregation laws. Please contact MDE's Results Measurement Specialist Gayra Ostgaard, gayra.ostgaard@state.mn.us.

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