

Canon 6: Promote data quality by adhering to accepted best practices and operating standards

All students enrolling in the district were flagged in the student information system (SIS) as either “eligible” or “ineligible” for free- and reduced-price meals. In addition to these data, food services maintained its own record of students receiving free- and reduced-price meals to support the daily management of the cafeterias. Because of these redundant sources for similar data (“eligible” and “participating” counts were easily confused), the district was erratic in its free- and reduced-price meals reporting—the number of students reported for the program varied depending on whether the data were reported by the SIS or food services staff. Moreover, because there were two different counts, district staff faced the temptation to use the number that better met their reporting needs. Sometimes the count of participating students made the district look better, and sometimes the count of eligible students was beneficial. It didn’t take long for the staff to realize that this confusion between eligible and participating counts was leading to ethical dilemmas.

Two new data governance policies were enacted to remedy the situation. The first stated that the student information system was the authoritative source for all data in the district. The second policy was an offshoot of the first, declaring that only data staff could respond to data requests, and program or service staff were no longer permitted to provide data independently. Thus, if a count of students receiving free- or reduced-price meals was needed, the report would clearly distinguish it from the number of students eligible for this program.