



Best Practices for Using Education Indicators

An education indicator measures the status of, or change in, an educational system with regard to its goals. Indicators are composed of data elements that are meaningfully and mathematically combined to measure and describe the status or change. Examples include class size, graduation and completion rates, and teacher retention rates.

Education indicators are critical parts of the data-informed decision-making process. Indicators allow agencies to make relevant comparisons, show the impacts of policies or practices, identify levels and types of need, and demonstrate strengths and weaknesses. Best practices for developing and using indicators for decision-making include:

- ✓ focus on the indicators most relevant to a query;
- ✓ use indicators that are research or evidence-based;
- ✓ ensure high-quality data are current and used for appropriate purposes; and
- ✓ update reporting and data visualizations to reflect changes.

Checklist of Best Practices and Recommendations for Using Education Indicators

- ✓ Consider the validity and reliability of the source data.
- ✓ Remember that nationally normed data may be better and more consistently collected than a locally scored indicator.
- ✓ Provide clear definitions of rules and scales associated with the source data and indicator.
- ✓ Determine whether the audience for the indicator is clearly defined.
- ✓ Clearly communicate the data elements of the indicator.
- ✓ Collaboratively develop indicators with input from policy analysts, data specialists, and practitioners.
- ✓ Encourage professional learning to increase data literacy.
- ✓ Evaluate education indicators before implementing policies or programs.

For more information on education indicators and their use, see *Using Education Indicators: A Forum Guide for State and Local Education Agencies* (https://nces.ed.gov/forum/pub_2022132.asp).