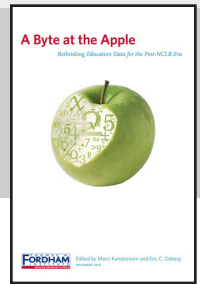




in a nutshell

# A Byte at the Apple



America brims with education data and these days it seems everyone in education claims—or at least wants—to be guided by data. Why, then, do so many school leaders, analysts, policymakers and outside reformers lament that the information they need is non-existing, obsolete or hard to find? Does America's education-data system need a makeover? What can be done to ensure that the right information reaches the right people at the right time?

In **A Byte at the Apple**, leaders and scholars tackle these questions. This new book from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute maps the landscape of data providers and users and explores why what's supplied by the former too often fails to meet the needs of the latter. It documents the barriers to collecting good information, including well-meaning privacy laws and the maze of overlapping government units and agencies. Most importantly, it explores potential solutions – including a future system where a “backpack” of achievement information would accompany every student from place to place.

## **America has made significant gains in education data.**

No Child Left Behind, while much-criticized, has led to important strides in the creation of and demand for student achievement data. New technologies are making data entry, collection, analysis, and dissemination vastly easier.

## **Yet many education-data systems remain archaic, cumbersome and non-comparable.**

For instance, higher ed data typically don't align with elementary-secondary. Students who change schools get lost. Finance data are a mess. And some information, such as which pupils are taught by which teachers, isn't even gathered. Key definitions, such as “dropout” and “graduate”, remain unsettled. Leaders also need better ways of digging through mounds of existing data to identify useful information that will actually tell them “what works” in education.

## **Barriers to quality data are tough but surmountable.**

California has struggled to develop a statewide data repository, hampered by politics, bureaucracy, and human foible. Yet Kansas and Virginia have found ways to overcome such challenges to make solid advances in their education data systems.

## **There are data ‘gaps’ to be filled.**

American education craves more longitudinal data and value-added analyses. Educators and analysts seek information that tracks student achievement over time. Policymakers yearn for better means of investigating the sources of school effectiveness. Many want to link student and teacher data. Some, however, have good data that they can't use to meet their needs. Knowing what to do with education data—and why—is as important as having them.

## **This mission IS possible.**

Getting the education data America needs to the people who need it will not be easy, but it is doable. Other countries and other sectors suggest some possibilities. Innovations like “dashboards” showing school management data and savvy uses of technology would lead to dramatically better information about our schools and our students, helping us understand what works and what we can improve.

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# A Byte at the Apple

## Rethinking Education Data for the Post-NCLB Era

### **Foreword**

*Marci Kanstoroom and Eric C. Osberg, Thomas B. Fordham Institute  
Robert D. Muller, Practical Strategies LLC*

### **Introduction: Education Data Today**

*Paul Manna, College of William and Mary*

## I. Why We Don't Have the Data We Need

### **Getting FERPA Right: Encouraging Data Use While Protecting Student Privacy**

*Chrys Dougherty, National Center for Educational Achievement*

### **Federalism and the Politics of Data Use**

*Kenneth K. Wong, Brown University*

### **Political Roadblocks to Quality Data: The Case of California**

*RiShawn Biddle, Journalist*

## II. Innovations and Promising Practices

### **States Getting It Right: The Cases of Kansas and Virginia**

*Nancy Smith, Data Quality Campaign*

### **The Student Data Backpack**

*Margaret Raymond, Stanford University*

### **Balanced Scorecards and Management Data**

*Frederick M. Hess, American Enterprise Institute and Jon Fullerton, Harvard University*

### **Circling the Education-Data Globe**

*Daniele Vidoni, Italian National Institute for Educational Evaluation  
Kornelia Kozovska, Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning*

### **Cutting-Edge Strategies from Other Sectors**

*Bryan C. Hassel, Public Impact*

## III. The Way Forward

### **From Building Systems to Using Their Data**

*Aimee Rogstad Guidera, Data Quality Campaign*

### **Education Data in 2025**

*Chester E. Finn, Jr., Thomas B. Fordham Institute*