

Appendix A: Data Resources

In August 1987, the New York State Legislature enacted an amendment to Section 215-a of Education Law that requires the Board of Regents to submit an annual report on the educational status of the State's schools. The Chapter 655 amendment specifies the information to be reported with a strong focus on data related to student performance. An important element of this law, one consistent with the Department's dual commitment to educational excellence and equity, is the requested display of data by racial/ethnic group and gender, on both a statewide and individual district basis "to the extent practicable."

Data Sources for the July 2004 Edition

The Department relied on its current reporting systems to supply most data for the July 2004 edition of this report: the Basic Educational Data System (BEDS); the School Financial (SF) system; VESID's Strategic Evaluation Data Collection, Analysis, and Reporting (SEDCAR) system; and the School and Student Accountability Data System (SSADS). The BEDS system includes three parts: school building data, district data, and professional personnel data. From public elementary, middle, and secondary schools, BEDS annually collects data on enrollment, professional staff, students with limited English proficiency, students from families on public assistance, student support services, and technology and library media resources. Similar data are collected from nonpublic schools. From public school districts, BEDS collects data on district-wide enrollments, personnel, and programs. Finally, from public school professional staff, BEDS collects demographic information, such as salary, education, experience, and certification.

The School Financial (SF) system stores the data from the Annual Financial Report for School Districts. The SEDCAR system collects counts of students with disabilities by kind of disability, placement, and age. SSADS collects State test

results, credentials awarded, and related information from public and nonpublic schools.

Data from these Department databases were supplemented by several sources. Information was generated from several reports based on the 2000 Decennial Census and from other governmental reports. Information about results on the Scholastic Assessment Test and the Advanced Placement Program was developed with the cooperation of The College Board. Finally, several program offices within the State Education Department contributed both statistical data and programmatic information.

Status of Department Data Collection Efforts

The Department routinely collects two categories of data about schools and students. The first is student-specific information. The second is aggregated data reported to the Department for school buildings and school districts.

The Department gathers student-specific data through a variety of collection methods, such as the Local Education Agency Program (LEAP) reporting system; the System for Tracking Educational Progress (STEP); and the System to Track and Account for Children (STAC) forms (for students with disabilities). The STAC data-collection forms are also linked to unique case-registration numbers, which permit the implementation of a tracking system for all participating students. The LEAP system collects electronic records for all public school students in elementary- and middle-level grades in which State assessments are administered (grades 4, 5, and 8 in 2002–03). STEP collects electronic records for all students in grades 9–12.

Enrollment, attendance, and suspension data are locally recorded on an individual basis, but submitted to the Education Department aggregated to the school level. The attendance data used in this report were aggregated without gender or racial/ethnic breakdowns. The same limitations apply to

efforts to determine the level of academic success of children from low-income families.

Where individual records are not available, the Department uses a second strategy based on available information about the composition of school enrollments to relate data about race/ethnicity and poverty status to outcome data. These data permit this report to display school statistics by the percentage of minority enrollment and by the percentage of students from families on public assistance.

In summary, the Department has the capacity to respond to a variety of policy questions involving students of different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This capacity, moreover, is expanding as the Department revises its procedures to collect individual student data.

Department Initiatives Related to Data Collection and Analysis

The Department has also undertaken several major initiatives to ensure that data collection and analysis become integrated with and support critical planning, supervision, and evaluation activities at both the State and local levels. These initiatives include the Statewide Student Database and the Fiscal Profiles project.

Statewide Student Database

The Department has revised its data-collection policy to require all school districts to submit individual student test scores electronically. Past policy required districts to submit essentially the same information aggregated by grade and/or school in paper-and-pencil format. In Spring 1997, the Department began using LEAP to collect results for all State assessments administered in grades 4 through 8.

In the 2001–02 school year, the Department expanded the collection of individual student records to secondary schools. The System for Tracking Education Performance (STEP) collected student results for all secondary-level State assessments as well as graduate and dropout data. Because the LEAP and STEP systems do not meet all Department needs for student data, we have ini-

tiated planning for a comprehensive individual student record system that will replace these two systems. In collaboration with the Big 5 districts and the regional information centers, the Department is designing and implementing an electronic system to collect individual student data at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels. This system will integrate sections of BEDS, SSADS, the SEDCAR system, and other smaller systems that collect data on individual students from public schools.

The planned statewide student database is designed to meet current and anticipated information needs, to support better decisionmaking regarding resource allocation, to improve services to students, and to provide information for State policymakers on matters such as the usefulness of current laws and regulations in ensuring that young people receive the educational services they need. The database will be accessible to local education agencies for use in planning, evaluation, and policy development. The individual student data will enhance the usefulness of the New York State School Report Cards, initiated in December 1996, and provide necessary performance data for State and federal accountability programs.

The first step toward implementing the database was the awarding of a contract for the development of a statewide unique student identification (ID) system. The unique ID is expected to be assigned to all public school students by the end of the 2004–05 school year. The second step was the awarding of a contract to eScholar for a licence to use its student data model. The Department plans to issue contracts for the development and maintenance of a regional warehouse and a State repository based on the eScholar model. The Department is also issuing a Request for Proposal for the development of an analytical tool that will allow a variety of audiences to view data in the warehouse as a basis for better understanding student performance. Access to the data will be controlled by authorization codes to preserve individual student privacy.

Fiscal Profiles of School Districts

The Education Department has developed a computerized reporting system, the School District Fiscal Profiles, which provides a detailed and comprehensive view of spending, revenue, staffing, sal-

ary, and educational performance trends in districts. The profiles are derived from data submitted by school districts. Generating the profiles requires the merging of files from several different computer databases and the calculating of statistics not previously used by the Department. The Department publishes the School District Fiscal Profiles annually.

Regents Policy

In developing these data collection and analysis initiatives, the Regents and the Department addressed several policy questions concerning the purposes of data collection and analysis, the importance of individual student data, the appropriate use of technology, and the need for a common, integrated database.

Information is crucial for decisionmaking. Teachers and administrators must have reliable, accurate, and timely information about all of their students, provided in ways that make it easy to analyze student progress individually and by groups. At the same time, by law, information about individuals must be kept secure and confidential. The Regents, therefore, support the prosecution, to the full extent of the law, of any individual or group that accesses or uses information in an unauthorized manner or uses information systems (or the information they contain) maliciously, destructively, or for personal gain.

The Regents support local district planning to use technology in management and in support of instruction. This process must examine hardware and software, sources of funding, and the relationship of these with curricular objectives, focusing on technology as a supportive tool, rather than an end in itself.

