



Aimee Guidera
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the NASBE Interview

Aimee Guidera is president and CEO of Data Quality Campaign, a national, nonprofit organization leading the effort to empower educators, students, parents, and policymakers with the information they need to make the best decisions to improve student outcomes. Kris Amundson, NASBE executive director, interviewed Guidera in February on the role of data in public education, the impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and student data privacy.

Pundits have written that the Every Student Succeeds Act may be the most data-reliant piece of legislation ever passed about American education. I would love to hear your reaction to that statement and what you see as the role of data as we move forward with ESSA implementation.

I'm very optimistic that we are entering a new era in which it's possible to empower all of the stakeholders in education with the information they need and deserve to help support student learning and success.

ESSA represents a pivot from thinking about data as [part of] a compliance exercise, purely for accountability purposes, and starting to think about data as a tool to empower better decision making and to inform continuous improvement. That's a very big culture change in education. We have always had data, but it's always been seen as something people have to do, as a hammer. ESSA helps us turn the corner toward creating a culture where we can start using data to personalize learning and as a flashlight to truly inform the decision making of everybody. ESSA does help launch an era of thinking about accountability to fellow citizens, to our neighbors, and, most important, to children.

What are the big questions that state boards of education ought to ask as they move from thinking of gathering data for compliance toward data as a flashlight?

I would say we have to start with asking people what they need and prioritize getting them the information. What I need as a mom is different from what a state board member needs, which is different from what a teacher needs or a school superintendent needs. We need to ask people what questions they have and then we need to map backward and figure out what information those individuals need in their roles. Then we make sure we are collecting the right data, minimizing the amount of data that we are collecting [and] only collecting data that are necessary to answer the priority questions, and making sure we are not just collecting that data but that we are turning it into information. And we are getting that information into the hands of those individual users in a way that's timely, that's useful, that's tailored to those questions they have, and in a way that respects privacy, security, and confidentiality requirements. [We need to] be able to show the value of data and to build trust that this information will be used well and protected.

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Thanks to the incredible leadership of state policymakers and district leaders across this country, we have the data. It's sitting there. So now, how do we make sure that we're building the capacity to access [this information and] to use it responsibly and well? We change how we use time and how we use training to make sure that people are well prepared and aren't feeling overwhelmed by the use of data but instead are feeling empowered by it.

Talk about balancing that tension between protecting privacy and marshaling data and some examples of states that might have tipped too far one way or the other.

We're never going to be done with privacy, nor should we. It's not something [to] get through and move onto other stuff. As long as we talk about empowering people with quality information, we have to talk about how we protect that information. It's just part of the effective use of data. I won't use data if I don't find value in it and if I don't have trust that it's not going to be used to hurt me. So those two pieces—making sure that people understand what's in it for them or their children and making sure that they trust it's going to be safe, secure, and confidential—are critical to people's willingness to have data collected and used in education. It's not an either/or; it has to be both.

First, we have the ability to use this information and protect it, but second, we can't afford not to use it to help every child in this country be prepared for success in life. We can't afford to lose a single child in this country, and the power of data is about making sure that at every point in a child's life we know when a child is falling off track.

And when a child is struggling, we're able to figure out what works and what interventions are helpful to get that child back on track. We're able to personalize and tailor learning for every child to excel and meet high expectations.

Yes, we've seen states that have gone draconian and just shut [data collection] down, but I'm heartened that, in most cases, leaders in our states have very much realized that's harmful to children and that's not going to help their states. Leading states like Georgia are, first of all, making a statement about the value of data and understanding that the state will not meet goals

of having every child succeed if they don't tap into the power of data and new technologies. Second, states have put in place strong data governance, making it clear who is in charge of making sure that data are kept safe. Where does the buck stop in decisions of who has access to data, how long can it be held, will data need to be destroyed, what are the rules guiding this, and what are the processes in place to update policies and practices? We've seen the rise of chief privacy officers, which is just great. Third, we absolutely have to recognize that these best practices are going to continue to evolve. Last, [there is] a real focus on training, on those closest to our students and having the most access to data. Anyone who has access to student data has to understand how important it is to keep this data safe and then receive the tools to do that. Georgia has also taken the next step of talking about how to regulate outside partners that are helping to leverage the power of data through technology and also just to keep the buses running.

We've seen hundreds of pieces of [data privacy] legislation introduced over the last three years. At the end of the day, the vast majority of the laws that have been passed have been productive and have changed the tenor of the conversation about data in education. There is only one law on the books from two sessions ago that really has constrained the role of data in Louisiana and put a damper on innovation and the power of data to help kids.

How would you prepare teachers to make the most of the data that they have available to them?

You can have the most high-quality data at everyone's fingertips, yet when teachers don't find value in that information, don't know how to use it, and don't trust it, that data won't change anything. We are working at Data Quality Campaign to make sure teachers see data as a good thing, and that change in perception is what matters. DQC has worked with national organizations, including the teacher unions, to develop a shared definition of data literacy and policy recommendations to make sure every teacher in this country is data literate. Specifically, preparation programs for educators have to prioritize data literacy.

That needs to be one of the core courses as you prepare teachers. It's important to note that it's not just assessment literacy; it is much more than a test score. States have to change their licensure and certification policies to recognize and demand data literacy: making sure their teacher force knows how to use information and how to keep that information safe.

If you leave a laptop open on your desk, the data are not secure.

We've all attached a wrong attachment to an email or kept someone on an email that shouldn't have been. They are not malicious mistakes but [reinforce the point that] everyone has a role. For so long, our approach to privacy has been compliance. You would hear people say, "Well, we're compliant with FERPA." That breeds trust on no one's part. Yes, federal laws matter. But we're truly protecting data when everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. You can't legislate trust, and trust is about people changing their behaviors.

What is the most exciting thing you see on the horizon?

DQC is launching a policy roadmap for states. We'll be talking about four policy priorities states should take if they want to leverage the power of data to serve student learning. At this point, only 13 states can guarantee that parents and teachers have access to the information they need on their students. With ESSA, [there is] the opportunity for states to think differently, creating accountability systems and using data to manage for those results. As part of that, we'll have a more engaged citizenry, especially parents, than we've ever had before. When you start giving people the information they need to answer the questions that are foremost in their minds, it changes the conversation, it changes the decisions made, it changes actions and behaviors, and ultimately it changes the results. ■

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Pruitt said. "Because with all these new laws, if teachers don't know how to navigate the new landscape, I don't think the laws are going to be that effective."

Slaven agreed. "Whenever I see a proposal that's around professional development to help teachers or to help any school official who has to deal with data and privacy ... that's a game changer, he said. He added that most teachers and administrators likely "don't know a quarter of what they need to know on this issue. So they end up either not worrying about it like they should, or they overcompensate and do too much."

States that desire a comprehensive and smart approach to privacy, like Georgia and Delaware, have taken the next logical step: passing both a SOPIPA and an Oklahoma-style law in order to maximally protect student privacy while allowing for education technology in the classroom.

This may not be the right approach for all states. Some states, like New Jersey, already had Oklahoma-style regulations for student data in place prior to 2013. But for others, this approach could provide a starting place for states seeking the best ways to balance privacy and innovation.

Experts urge policymakers to first look at what laws or regulations they already have and then to identify gaps: "The answer to solving a problem or issue that is already covered by existing legislation is often not more legislation," Attai said, "but enforcement of the legislation we do have." ■

¹Jason Nelson, "Oklahoma's New Student DATA Act Sets Guidelines, Protections," *The Flashlight* (blog), September 26, 2013, <http://dataqualitycampaign.org/blog/2013/09/oklahoma-new-student-data-act-sets-guidelines-protections/>.

²Amy Wilson, "National Poll Reveals Deep Concern for How Students' Personal Information Is Collected, Used, and Shared," KidsAction blog (San Francisco: CommonSense Media, 2014), <https://www.common SenseMedia.org/kids-action/blog/national-poll-reveals-deep-concern-for-how-students-personal-information-is>.