



## Data Driven: Making Student and School Data Accessible and Meaningful To Families

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This is a briefing on the third webinar in the series *Achieving Excellence and Innovation in Family, School, and Community Engagement* brought to you by the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with United Way Worldwide, National PTA, SEDL, and Harvard Family Research Project.

### Webinar Brief

**Anna Hinton, Director of Parental Options and Information, Office of Innovation and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.** To introduce this webinar, Ms. Hinton explained the purpose of the webinar series and summarized the topics addressed in the first two installments. The first webinar, *Transforming Schools through Family, School, and Community Engagement*, sought to reframe the ways we think about and implement family engagement strategies. The presenters offered a new definition of family engagement as a systemic, integrated, and sustained effort, as opposed to a handful of “random acts” of family engagement. The second webinar, *A New Day: Family, School, and Community Engagement in Education Reform*, provided concrete examples of systemic family engagement—what it looks like integrated into schools and programs, and how it is a strategy to improve student achievement. This third webinar seeks to provide examples of how to engage families through the use of student data.

**Kevin Jennings, Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, U.S. Department of Education.** Mr. Jennings explained, “It is the goal of the Department that there be transparency in everything schools do, so that the more information people have, particularly families, the better they can do in terms of advocating for and supporting their kids.” The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools recently launched the Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant program to measure and inform administrators, students, and parents about the school safety. According to Jennings, a school has to be both physically safe and emotionally safe: “Everything else we’re trying to do in schools will fail unless students first feel safe, because obviously a kid who does not feel safe cannot focus on learning and cannot focus on academic progress.” School safety means not only stopping violence, but also the much more prevalent problems of harassment and bullying.

The S3 program collects data by surveying the people who know the schools best—students, staff, and families—on three key indicators: engagement, safety, and environment. Engagement pertains to relationships between students, staff, and families, as well as school participation and respect for diversity. Safety focuses on physical, emotional, and psychological safety as well as substance use. Environment deals with the physical (cleanliness, safety; access to books and supplies); academic (access to teachers, nurses, school counselors); wellness (healthy meals, access to a playground or exercise during PE); and disciplinary (rules are clear, consistent, and fairly enforced). These survey data are combined with incident reports to get a comprehensive picture showing what is really happening in our schools. These data are given to schools to use internally and to share with families.

**Zena Rudo, Project Director, National PIRC Coordination Center, SEDL.** Underscoring the purpose of the webinar, Ms. Rudo stated, “Longitudinal data not only strengthens accountability and transparency, it empowers families to make informed decisions and that is where we want to be in education.” Data, according to Rudo, “is

a way of telling us a story”: Data can help teachers, administrators, families, and students understand where they are and where they are going. Further, data systems can help all stakeholders get to where they want to be, since data are both diagnostic and prescriptive. Good data systems should stretch from cradle (early childhood development and school readiness) to career (the pathway to college and productive citizenship). Yet data alone are of little value if no one understands what the information means or how to use it—or if it cannot flow across institutions. Ms. Rudo emphasized the importance of a technological infrastructure that allows “Common, yet open, systems” through which data can be managed and shared between families, programs, and schools—and across local, district, state, and federal levels. “Data has to flow in all directions,” states Rudo. A shift is needed from compliance-driven data (such as required state assessment tests) towards data that also tracks progress. To sum up, Rudo added, “Without data, we are all just people with opinions.”

**Jennifer Saltzstein, Program Director, ARIS Parent Link, New York City Department of Education.** Ms. Saltzstein offered another take on the webinar focus as she spoke of “empowering parents to develop a new level of partnership with their educators,” through data use. She described the Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS), the New York City Department of Education’s data reporting system. Saltzstein explained, “In New York City, there is a significant effort to hold schools accountable and we have a robust accountability system. ARIS Parent Link gives parents a way to look at all those accountability reports and it also provides them with the support to use and interpret them to support their child’s school and also to find schools that are right for their child at those moments of transition.” ARIS is an online tool for educators to view data on individual students and class-level reports; it provides attendance data and assessment scores for all grade levels, as well as transcripts for middle and high school students. Parent Link is the parent portal of ARIS, which allows parents and families to see up-to-date data for their child; thus, parents are able to have informed conversations with school staff about their child’s academic progress and challenges. ARIS developers solicited feedback from parents to ensure that they could access and use this rich data source. As a result, the tool has been translated into nine languages, and information appears in both graphics and text. Additionally, tutorials walk parents through logging in and using Parent Link. The system also provides a list of resources so that parents are able to take action based on what the data is telling them. To learn more about ARIS Parent Link, view the Voices from the Field article in the October issue of the *FINE Newsletter* ([www.hfrp.org/FINEOctober2010](http://www.hfrp.org/FINEOctober2010)).

**Barbara Taveras, Director, Community Engagement, New Vision for Public Schools.** Ms. Taveras built on Ms. Saltzstein’s presentation about ARIS by highlighting two data tools created by New Visions for Public Schools to complement the ARIS Parent Link system. New Visions is best known for leading the creation of small public schools which replace some of the large underperforming high schools in New York City. Recent studies have shown that these schools have contributed significantly to the city’s increasing graduation rates. But beyond encouraging students to graduate, New Visions has the goal of making sure students are college-ready at graduation, via a college readiness campaign known as Good to Go ([www.newvisions.org/the-good-to-go-campaign/overview](http://www.newvisions.org/the-good-to-go-campaign/overview)), which focuses on making sure students will enter and succeed in college. Part of this program are two unique data tools which communicate student progress and status in a clear, accessible way so that parents can quickly assess whether their children are on track to college readiness, or whether they need further support. One tool is the Ninth Grade Tracker, which shows how freshman are doing against specific ninth-grade benchmarks. Taveras explained, “New Visions has a specific focus on ninth grade because both local and national data tells us that the majority of students held back in the ninth grade will not graduate in four years.” The Ninth Grade Tracker is color-coded and allows parents to track progress in four key areas: attendance, grades, credit accumulation, and state exams. The other tool is the College Readiness Tracker for 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-graders. Also color-coded, this tool details grade and credit accumulation in the core subject areas that students need to graduate successfully, as well as the state Regents exams that students must

pass with a score of 65 or higher. In-depth examples of these tools and how schools are utilizing them can be viewed in the case study published by Harvard Family Research Project at [www.hfrp.org/NewVisions](http://www.hfrp.org/NewVisions).

Taveras reiterated Saltzstein's point that these are just tools: "So if it's just handed out to parents at parent-teacher conferences or just clipped to a report card, it doesn't really make a difference." Staff have to engage with parents and make sure they understand the benchmarks and graduation requirements in order to help them use the tools successfully.

**D'Lisa Crain, Grant Administrator, Nevada State PIRC, Education Alliance of Washoe County.** Prompted by a finding that the cohort high school graduation rate for the Washoe County was only 56 percent, Ms. Crain explained, the district decided to focus on utilizing data to engage families to improve graduation rates of students. When they began taking a closer look at how families were informed of graduation requirements, Crain said they found that it was typically done on Back to School night, with 200 families on the bleachers in the gym. Sometimes the information was given in multiple languages, and sometimes not. Because many of the families were from foreign education systems, they were likely to have questions about how the United States school systems worked.

The Washoe district uses an online data tool called Edline, and research showed that this was an untapped resource for parents to monitor their children's progress. So the district began holding parent workshops to not only train parents on the use of Edline, but also to give background information about the education system and terminology and in-depth explanations about graduation requirements, attendance, and academic resources and support. The workshops were typically held at night and consisted of 25-30 parents. To ensure parents understood what it takes to graduate from high school, the workshops used case studies to show examples of credit accumulations, unexcused absences, and exam scores, and asked parents to evaluate each case and determine whether the student was on track for graduation or not. One of the biggest barriers, according to Crain, was dealing with schools that have a large percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price lunches. The schools themselves had decided not to use Edline because so few families could afford internet access at home. PIRC used this opportunity to empower the schools to reach out to parents by opening up their computer labs and inviting the parents into the school. Outreach has also taken the form of partnerships with community-based organizations to create a presence where parents already spend time—for example, by building a kiosk at a local Boys and Girls Club where parents are able to access Edline while picking up their child from afterschool programs, and a kiosk in a local library that is open on weekends.

To learn more about Washoe County's work, view the Voices from the Field article in the October issue of the *FINE Newsletter* ([www.hfrp.org/FINEOctober2010](http://www.hfrp.org/FINEOctober2010)). Training materials can be downloaded as a zip file from [www.nevadapirc.org/programs-initiatives/parentschoolpartnership](http://www.nevadapirc.org/programs-initiatives/parentschoolpartnership), under "Basics of Secondary."

### **For More Information**

To view an archived presentation of the full webinar, download presentation slides, or view a transcript including the Q&A at the end, please visit: [www.hfrp.org/AchievingExcellence-Webinar3](http://www.hfrp.org/AchievingExcellence-Webinar3).

### **About the Webinar Series**

The Achieving Excellence and Innovation in Family, School, and Community Engagement webinar series is an opportunity for stakeholders representing national, regional, and local organizations to learn about family, school, and community engagement research, best practices from the field, and new innovations that are making a difference in school improvement and student learning. The next webinar installment, The Teacher-Parent Relationship: Using Professional Development to Improve Family and Community Engagement, is coming later this fall. Visit <http://www.hfrp.org/AchievingExcellence-WebinarSeries>, to learn more.