

How people are using the Education Performance Map™

While the map is useful for many purposes, it is not for everyone and it is not for every situation. It is important to remember that the map is just a tool - it is the means to an end and is not the end itself. Stay focused on what you or your group is trying to achieve, and only use the map if it helps you reach your goal.

Because people and groups have different responsibilities and goals, the way people use maps varies considerably across groups. Below are some examples of how individuals and groups are using maps to focus and jumpstart their education improvement efforts.

PARENTS

What parents are saying:

"The map provides a good reminder of all the ingredients necessary for my kids to do well."

"While there's nothing here I don't know already, it helps to have a checklist of the things I need to pay attention to – and to have reminders of things I can do."

"This isn't the way my parents thought, and there are a lot of things we didn't do. I want to do more to help my own kids."

"This helps me understand where our school is focusing attention and effort – and where it isn't."

"It can seem a bit complicated until you really read through it and realize there's nothing here that's at all complex."

"When we get together with other parents to talk about our schools, we talk a lot about issues. The map will help us go the next step and talk about what we want to actually do."

Some parents see the map as a list of the things they should keep tabs on to ensure both their kids and their schools are performing well. These parents tend to read the entire map, top to bottom. Believing it provides insights into what highly-effective parents and educators know, they often request copies for friends and family.

Here are the most prevalent ways parents are using the map so far. If you have examples you would like to share, please send an email to info@educationmap.org.

Use the map as a checklist for their kids' needs and strengths

Some parents use the map to help guide their thinking about their own kids' performance and needs. They tend to look under the first orange box (student performance) for ideas about what they might be doing to ensure their kids arrive at school ready and motivated to learn. Using the map as a bit of a checklist, they evaluate where their child is doing well and where he or she might need some help.

If, for example, they know their child is not particularly motivated to go to school, they home in on this area of the map to get some ideas about what they might do. Or if their child is having trouble working well with others, they might focus on the “interpersonal skills” section for ideas in this area.

On the other hand, if their child is doing very well in a particular area, they might help their students recognize their accomplishments in this area and suggest they use those skills to take on new challenges or help others.

Some parents post the map on a bulletin board or refrigerator to remind them to periodically revisit what they can be doing to help their kids.

Understand and evaluate their schools' performance and plans

Some parents use the map to help guide their thinking about the performance and needs of their kids' schools. These parents tend to focus on the second big orange box (school performance) as a way to evaluate the performance of a school. They consider not only bottom-line metrics like API scores and graduation rates, but also examine what the school is doing at a tactical level to improve those bottom-line metrics.

It is not uncommon for parents to be provided, on a yearly or twice yearly-basis, with a school report or plan that summarizes key school accomplishments and plans. The map can help parents make sense of the information that is and is not being provided to them.

For example, in considering the “teacher performance” branch of the map, parents might look at what is being done to improve teacher effectiveness – what the school is doing to raise the level and utilization of teacher expertise, and what it is doing to ensure teachers are appropriately evaluated, rewarded and motivated. The report from the school might provide information about teacher training programs, evaluation and pay systems, and the retention or a loss of teachers. (If this information is not provided, parents might ask questions of school administrators.) Parents might also consider what they themselves can do to help teachers be more effective.

In considering the “teaching and learning support” branch of the map, parents might consider what they can do to provide better facilities and materials or to better support school events and activities. Or they might choose to recognize administrators and community members who have made substantial contributions to a school's success.

TEACHERS

What teachers are saying:

"The map does a good job of showing just how many factors affect kids' achievement at school."

"The map reminds us how important it is to consider both the individual student and the school when we are setting priorities."

"It correctly shows that student readiness and level of effort are major factors in a student's performance; as teachers we have to recognize and contribute to both of these."

"Parents frequently ask me what they can do at home to help their kids do well in school. This map would be valuable to them."

Overall, teachers seem to see the map is a picture of what they face every day. While some of them do not make direct use of the map, they frequently admit that the map is useful in helping people understand the range of factors that drive student performance. Following are the most prevalent teacher uses of the map. If you have examples you would like to share, please send an email to info@educationmap.org.

Use the map as a checklist for diagnosing causes of performance issues

Some teachers find the map useful as a checklist for considering why a particular student is struggling. Under the "student performance" orange box, they use the "student readiness" and "student effort" branches of the map to think about the skill, motivation and behavioral factors that might be making it harder for the student to do well. This helps the teachers consider the full range of possible factors, and helps them identify what they, the student, and the parents might do to aid progress.

Formulate opinions about school priorities

Teachers are frequently asked for their input (by school leaders, teacher union, or both) around school improvement priorities and recommended improvement steps. The map can help teachers consider the full range of potential priorities and improvement steps so they can better formulate their own opinions.

Provide the map to parents

Parents frequently ask teachers for guidance around what they might do to improve their student's performance. Some teachers advocate giving copies of the map to parents along with some deeper insight into the particular student's strengths and needs.

SUPERINTENDENTS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATORS

What district and school leaders are saying:

"The map shows that we have to balance a number of factors, including costs, in determining where we spend our time and effort. It will be a valuable planning tool."

"The map shows just how many factors and actions we have to consider. To succeed, we have to prioritize and focus our efforts - within schools and across entire communities."

"Parents and community members ask what they can do to help students and schools do better. The map provides a multitude of ideas."

"The map might provide a language that will help parents, teachers, administrators and the broader community work together to improve schools."

The map depicts the broad range of responsibility typically shouldered by superintendents and principals. Accordingly, these people typically see the entire map as within their range of consideration.

Following are the most prevalent administrator uses of the map. If you have examples you would like to share, please send an email to info@educationmap.org.

Establish district (or school) priorities and plans

When administrators formulate plans, they have to address all three major sections of the map. That is, they have to consider what they will do to improve the performance of students and schools while working within the budgets they are able to secure from public and/or private sources.

As it does for parents and teachers, the map helps administrators identify and prioritize potential improvements to student and school performance (please see the parent and teacher sections for more information about this topic). Whereas parents and teachers tend to apply the map to a single student or school, administrators (especially superintendents) tend to apply the map to a district or group of schools. When they look to improve student performance (the first big orange box), they tend to consider programs and activities that will help many families or entire communities improve the performance of their students. The same goes for improving school performance; they tend to consider programs that will improve resources and teacher performance across multiple schools.

The map also helps administrators consider what they can do to reduce operating costs and/or get the most out of their expenditures. For example, teaching costs (which are "direct costs") are one of the biggest components of education expenditures. Administrators can use the map to identify ideas for controlling the cost of teacher acquisition and benefits, as well as for making the most of the teaching resources the

district or school already has. Similar to the case for student and school performance, administrators tend to look across multiple schools for ways to control costs and make the most of resources.

The result of all this activity is typically a plan that articulates what the most pressing priorities are, and what a particular district or school plans to do to address those priorities. Some administrators use the map as a backdrop for explaining what they plan to focus on and why. One superintendent had already established six major improvement programs. He overlaid the programs on the map, showing how each of the programs essentially dealt with one or two sections of the map. For example, one of the programs focused on increasing the amount of time students spent learning (under the “student effort” branch of the map). The program outlined plans to lengthen school days and improve student attendance rates.

Solicit teacher, parent and community input/opinion

In generating plans for districts and schools as described above, administrators frequently seek input from a variety of stakeholder groups – parents, teachers and other people within the community. Some are using the map as a way to solicit, collect and assimilate feedback from these groups.

Using the map as a framework and common language across groups, administrators can ask stakeholders for their opinions around which parts of the map are most important and which actions would be most beneficial to a district or school. (For more information about using the map as a survey tool, please see the teacher union section of this document.) This makes it easier to communicate across groups and to identify consistency and diversity of opinion. For example, teachers might place an emphasis on improving attendance (under “student performance”), while parents might emphasize adopting approaches their kids find more engaging. The map can help the discussion by showing that both groups are essentially focused on the same section of the map (improving study/learning time under the “student effort” branch). In this case, both stakeholder groups seem to agree that study/learning time needs to be improved – they just seem to disagree on the best way to do it. This realization can help constituencies discuss their opinions and work together to decide whether either or both solutions should be pursued.

Or suppose that, in contrast to the teachers above, a group of teachers at a school with high attendance emphasizes improving the quality of teaching approaches and curricula (under “school performance”) instead of improving attendance. The map can help administrators and other stakeholders recognize and account for differences in opinion that stem from student, teacher and resource differences across schools.

TEACHER UNIONS

What union leaders are saying:

"The map shows just how many factors drive the performance of kids and schools. This underscores the importance of parents, teachers, administrators and the broader community working together."

"To be fully effective as unions, we have to think and act around all sections of the map."

"The map provides a language and framework that helps us be more effective in soliciting teacher opinions and setting priorities."

The map depicts the broad range of issues teacher unions must address in working with administrations and communities. Consequently, they are similar to administrators in their use of the map for planning and communication purposes.

Following are the most prevalent teacher union uses of the map. If you have examples you would like to share, please send an email to info@educationmap.org.

Solicit and interpret teacher opinion

Teacher unions have begun to use the map to facilitate conversations among their memberships regarding what types of improvements would have the most impact on student achievement. Using the map as a survey instrument and as a discussion framework is helping the unions achieve a consensus of opinion that in turn drives the union's platforms and initiatives.

One union, having recently completed a survey of nearly 700 teachers, used the map as a way to not only record the individual opinions of the teachers, but also to depict and communicate a collective view of which improvements were most important. As one union leader explained, "The map provided a way for us to record and analyze the results of open-ended surveys with narrative responses. The challenge with this type of survey lies not only in reviewing a large number of free-form responses, but also in identifying and communicating consistency and inconsistency of opinion. The map was invaluable as a framework for normalizing, analyzing and communicating survey results."

Establish priorities and plans

Unions also use the map to facilitate workshops focused on setting union strategies and priorities. For one union workshop, the first exercise on the first day was having participants (teacher representatives from fifteen separate schools) review the map and circle the three most pressing improvement areas (small blue-green boxes) from their own perspective – based on the specific needs of the students at their schools.

As the workshop leader explains, “Having the participants review the map and circle their top three priorities was a great way to start a workshop for several reasons. First, it encouraged people to acknowledge and consider the full spectrum of what drives student achievement. This did a lot to spark people’s thinking about which improvements would be most powerful within their own schools. Second, making participants choose only three improvement areas forced them to utilize everything they knew about their students’ needs in choosing their own priorities. In many workshops, the tendency is to spend a lot of time and energy brainstorming things we might choose to do and a minority of time prioritizing among them. This workshop was better because it got us to the question of priority much more quickly. Third, reviewing people’s individual selections as a team provided early insight into the perspectives and rationale of the participants. This helped everyone understand and acknowledge where and why there might be differences in opinion throughout the remainder of the workshop. Finally, the map served as a backdrop and common language for the remainder of the workshop. During many of the discussions and exercises, people referred to parts of the map for generating ideas and clarifying perspectives.”