

InnovateEDU's Project Unicorn Releases Inaugural School Data Interoperability Update

Coalition Produces State of the Sector Report With Insights from Over 100 Local Education Agencies and Regional Education Service Agencies

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, October 15, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Project Unicorn, a coalition of 16 organizations led by InnovateEDU, is excited to release their [State of the Sector report](#) which provides an analysis of the current state of interoperability and privacy best practice implementation in the K12 sector and the first overview of challenges and opportunities. The report represents an unprecedented collaboration with a coalition of 16 education organizations working to address the challenge of data interoperability in K12 education. Coalition members include Access for Learning (A4L), Common Education Data Standards (CEDs), Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), Council for Great City Schools (CGCS), Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT), Common Sense Media, Consortium for School Networking (CoSN), Data Quality Campaign (DQC), Digital Promise, Ed-Fi, Future of Privacy Forum (FPF), The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Getting Smart, InnovateEDU, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA). Recognizing that the challenge of addressing data interoperability in the K12 sector was too complex for any one organization to address individually, the members of the coalition began working together in 2017 to support and promote the use of data interoperability through a wide range of activities under the Project Unicorn banner. This report, utilizing the results of their School System Data Survey, is designed to help Project Unicorn, and the K12 education technology community better understand current K12 school system capabilities and infrastructure for leveraging education data.

"The report highlights important progress made but also the need in the field for technical assistance around data privacy and interoperability practices," said Susan Bearden, Director of Digital Programs at InnovateEDU. "Overwhelmingly, district leaders desire to engage in data-informed decision making but often lack the capacity to do so. Project Unicorn is committed to addressing these gaps and so that all districts can leverage the power of interoperability to improve educational outcomes. We believe this data can also provide powerful signals to edtech vendors and suppliers about what their customers are asking for and how to better meet the needs of today's K12 district data ecosystems."

Key findings from the report include:

- School systems who have signed the [Project Unicorn pledge](#) scored higher than non-pledge signatories in all domains - in some areas, significantly higher. Districts that signed the pledge reported more advanced data practices and/or capabilities than non-pledge signatories.
- Many district leaders are not familiar with interoperability standards and/or how they might be used in their school system.
- Larger and more urban districts tended to score higher on the survey overall than smaller and more rural ones.
- Among the 6 survey domains, governance was indicated as the domain with the least support and resources. This domain is the largest challenge area for school systems and needs the most technical support.
- School systems that have established procurement practices around technology tools are more mature in their use of interoperability standards and protecting student data privacy.
- School systems are slightly more aware of privacy needs than they are of interoperability needs, but an understanding of their importance generally comes hand in hand.
- Funding is a substantial challenge for implementing data system modernization - including interoperability and privacy.
- School systems cite privacy and interoperability planning as one of their most substantial technical assistance needs. Other needs include developing procurement plans and processes.

“Access to high-quality meaningful data is critical for educators to make effective decisions and inform instruction. Without systems in place that provide integrated access to data, educators are often saddled with the burden of putting the pieces together themselves or lack access altogether to the critical information they need to be able to meet the needs of all their students,” said Mindy Frisbee, Senior Director of Learning Partnerships at ISTE. “Reports like the State of the Sector highlight the positive impact of work that has been done to date by many organizations, the leadership of Project Unicorn, and districts across the country and shine a light on the needs and challenges still facing schools and districts today. Findings from this report are essential for helping organizations like ours better understand how we can grow our work and further support the commitment many districts are making to integrate advanced data practices within their systems.”

The School System Data Survey will be administered annually to track data interoperability and privacy trends across the field with the findings reported in the State of the Sector report. The results of this annual survey and report will also be used to inform the development of technical resources and create a coordinated support strategy for districts and vendors that seek to further this work. This year’s report can be downloaded [here](#).

Gabrielle Lue
InnovateEDU
+1 626-257-4766
gabrielle@innovateedunyc.org
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