

For Immediate Release

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STRATEGIC DATA PROJECT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY TO RELEASE KEY INDICATORS ABOUT SCHOOL SYSTEM AND STUDENT SUCCESS

***Reports will highlight new indicators for school districts on
college achievement and teacher placement and retention***

Cambridge, MA. (APRIL 11, 2012) - Today, the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University announced that it would soon be releasing a series of findings from its ongoing Strategic Data Project (SDP). Known as Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs), these newly developed analytic indicators provide deeper insight into the health and performance of school districts. They are derived from rigorous analytical studies conducted in partnership with five school systems across the United States. The SPIs reveal policy and management levers that have the potential to improve student outcomes.

The SPIs will be officially released in two sets - key findings about the college-going patterns of students in the partner districts and a set of findings about teacher placement and retention patterns. The first group of indicators show how college-going rates vary across schools and student groups, revealing interesting differences. The second group examines where districts place novice teachers and how well districts retain their most effective teachers.

“Our goal for these indicators is that they shine a light in a helpful way for education leaders who are committed to improving achievement,” said SDP Executive Director Sarah Glover. “We believe they will allow education policymakers, advocates, parents and other stakeholders to take a clear look at key factors that have the potential to significantly improve outcomes for kids.”

“School districts have gotten good at using information to show which students or schools performed well or poorly, but they haven’t always taken the leap to use data proactively,” said

Vicki Phillips, Director of Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “This project encourages the education sector to use data strategically, so they can get a better understanding of how progress is being made and what can be done systematically to shape better outcomes for students.” The Gates Foundation has supported this project with a multi-year grant.

The Strategic Data Project developed the SPIs with the goal of establishing common indicators – not unlike a financial ratio that can illuminate the financial health of a firm or the on-base percentage of a hitter in baseball – that can be measured in a standard way and analyzed repeatedly over time and in many places. Education systems can use these indicators to benchmark their progress – both against themselves over time, and in relation to other districts with similar populations.

In the last 50 years, sectors such as business, health care, public safety and even professional sports have been transformed through increasingly sophisticated analyses of the vast amount of information being collected. Currently, a vast amount of educational data is left untapped for policy development and strategic planning. For example, few school districts track where they find or place their most effective teachers or what their students go on to after high school. SDP’s goal is to work with its partners – school districts, state education agencies, and charter school networks – to build a growing network of leaders who use rigorous and thoughtful analysis to transform K-12 education in America.

“The strategic indicators have allowed us to highlight new and actionable insights about students and teachers that every high-performing district should know,” said Superintendent Dr. Robert Avossa of Fulton County Public Schools, an SDP partner agency. “I believe that serious data analysis can help every school district improve its performance and make a real impact on student achievement.”

Several pioneering districts across the US partnered with SDP to make this possible. They shared up to 10 years of historical data, allowing the research team to pull together enormous data sets and assemble and link data across organizational silos. SDP staff and district staff worked side-by-side to analyze these data for a deep understanding of current performance and opportunities to improve. The partners highlighted in these initial reports – Boston Public Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (Charlotte, North Carolina), Fort Worth Independent School District, Fulton County Schools (Georgia), and Gwinnett County Public Schools (Georgia) – collectively serve over 500,000 students, 56 % of who are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and 72 % of who are ethnic minorities.

SDP will be developing and releasing sets of SPIs at regular intervals throughout the year. Two additional analyses are in production and scheduled for release in early fall.

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The Strategic Data Project was founded in 2008 on the belief that analyzing and using data in new ways can dramatically improve student outcomes. Better access to appropriately analyzed data will allow system leaders to better diagnose issues, develop potential solutions, and monitor the results of implementing these solutions. Our theory of action is that if we bring together the right people, assemble the right data, and perform the right analysis, we can collectively improve decisions such that student achievement improves significantly.

The Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University

The rapid accumulation of student achievement data represents an untapped national resource, one that holds the promise of breaking longstanding stalemates in the education policy debate. Based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) works with University-based researchers and policymakers to bring these new data to bear in evaluating policies and drawing implications for reform. As a national convener with alumni in leadership positions in districts around the country, CEPR, HGSE and Harvard University are uniquely placed to play this national leadership role.

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