

## **Start with Questions, End with Student Achievement: The Role of Data and Research**

### **Abstract**

Researchers typically begin the research process by asking a question and then collect data in an attempt to answer their question. Conversely, state education agencies begin by collecting data, often to meet federal and/or state compliance requirements, and then identify the questions they may be able to answer, given the data already on hand.

Researchers may or may not investigate the questions most relevant to policymakers, district leaders, principals, or teachers. States may or may not have the data most relevant to these same stakeholders. Nonetheless, both researchers and state officials share a common goal: using data to improve student learning and achievement. However, they will not reach this goal if all stakeholders do not use the data to inform their decisions. Data, and the research that turns data into information, are only valuable if they are *used* in conjunction to inform the policy discussions and the decisions that determine educational practice.

From parents to policymakers, meeting stakeholders' information needs requires researchers who have the skills to translate data into useful information, policymakers who use data to make informed decisions and have the authority to create, implement, and refine programs, and state data managers who collect the data needed to improve student achievement.

The Data Quality Campaign advocates for states to develop a purposeful research agenda and collaborate with researchers and universities. Innovative states have developed collaborative partnerships among state agencies, researchers, and universities to advance their common research agendas and leverage the analytic expertise in the state. Lessons learned by these leading states can inform similar efforts in other states. Through the formation of strategic partnerships with universities and other organizations, states may provide information to policymakers, teachers, and other stakeholders that will empower them to make informed decisions that lead to improvements in student and system performance.