



KNOW YOUR
SCHOOL

Case Study 1

November 2016



Reimagining School Report Cards

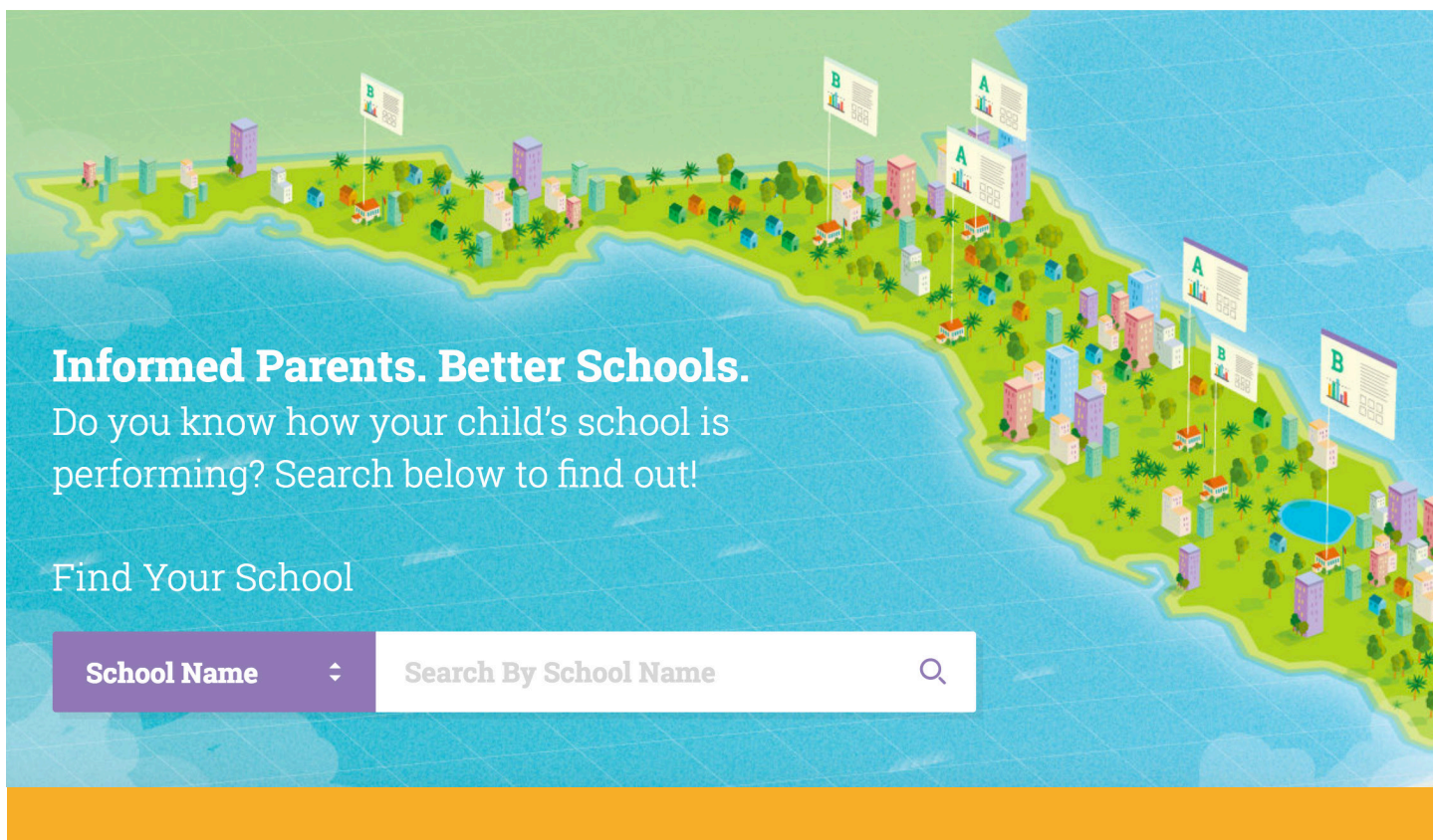
Laying the Groundwork for Enhanced Data Transparency and
School Accountability through an Innovative, Parent-Friendly
Online Resource

Why?

The Need for Parent-Friendly, Online Report Cards

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) compels states to make school accountability reporting more accessible. Under this new framework, states are required to provide more school-level data than ever before by highlighting indicators such as student performance, funding, teacher quality, post-secondary success, and more—all of which are in a parent-friendly format. While few would argue with the intent of the law, it is difficult for state education agencies (SEAs) to design and deploy complex online data tools of the sort called for in ESSA.

The Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcellinEd) has been exploring what it takes to build a next generation public school accountability reporting tool. We are energized by this opportunity for states to create online school report cards that provide parents with useful information to understand complex school data, make informed choices about the school that is right for their child, and offer strategies to engage with schools to discuss academic achievement. In a series of three case studies, we provide a framework for states to consider as they build their own parent-friendly online school report cards.



Informed Parents. Better Schools.
Do you know how your child's school is performing? Search below to find out!

Find Your School

School Name Search By School Name

What?

An Innovative Solution for State Education Agencies

Know Your Florida School makes it easy to find and understand information about your school and see how it compares to others.

The tool puts the details of Florida's school grades into context to help parents access and use the data.

Learn more about
Know Your Florida
School



In recognition of the limitations of current state public school accountability reports, ExcelinEd sponsored the My School Information Design Challenge in December 2014 to reimagine the public reporting of school accountability data. Now, ExcelinEd is bringing the design challenge to life with the winners of the design challenge, Collaborative Communications and Social Driver, as well as community data partner Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JaxPEF).

These partners are developing and launching Know Your Florida School, an exemplar online school report card tool featuring data from the state of Florida. Know Your Florida School's engaging, mobile-friendly interface puts information about local schools—from student performance to the details of Florida's school grades—into context to help parents access and use the data.

In alignment with ExcelinEd's mission to support states in their efforts to put student success at the core of the education reform agenda, the tool is built using an open source development process. The code will be made publicly available following its anticipated launch in January 2017. While the version at that time features a cohort of data components (see next page), the framework presented here will provide states with a head start to own a public reporting tool that reflects their priorities and the breadth of their school data.

A Solution with Widespread Impact

Know Your Florida School addresses the critical question that Florida parents want to answer: what does the school grade actually mean? The tool unpacks the components of each school's grade, showing how elements like achievement, learning gains and graduation rate factor into the overall grade.

Know Your Florida School provides important, actionable information so that:

- Parents can establish and chart progress toward student achievement goals and meaningfully engage with educational leaders;
- Community members, including advocates, researchers and the business community, can highlight the policies behind schools' successes, encourage those same initiatives to bolster the schools that are struggling, and help parents make better informed choices for their children;
- State and local policymakers can access the information they need to develop evidence-based and community-driven improvements for schools; and
- SEAs and other partners can use Know Your Florida School as a template to centralize available data, accelerate school accountability efforts, provide greater transparency and enhance community engagement.

Know Your Florida School brings these audiences together, supporting evidence-driven dialogue and action toward improvements that help create the great schools that all kids deserve.

How?

The My School Information Design Challenge Became “Know Your Florida School”

With a combined knowledge of user experience, data science, and a growing understanding of the kinds of information policymakers and parents want to have in such a tool, the Know Your Florida School project team set to work.

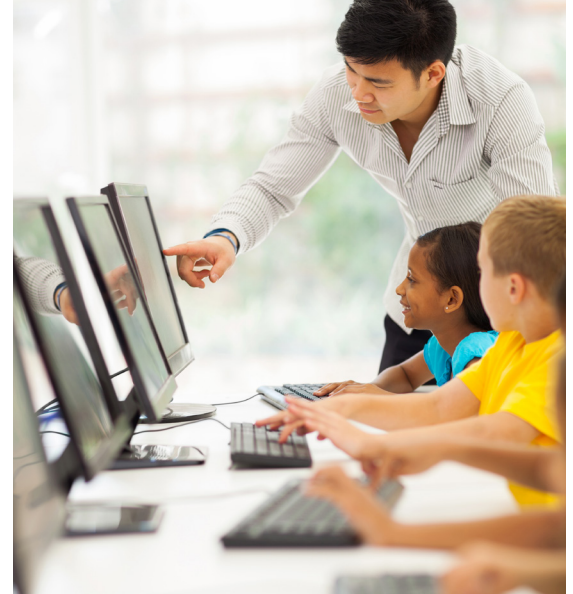
Through the process, the project team learned that the keys to success are:

- Access to clean, credible data presented in context, with explanation, and without bias;
- A user-friendly mobile-first design that clearly portrays the data;
- Thoughtfully organized data exhibits that meet users where they are;
- Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, especially parents;
- A diverse project team with broad subject matter expertise, including: user experience design; data visualization; data management and organization; policy and legal; stakeholder outreach and communications; and
- A plan for long-term sustainability of data updates, functional enhancements, public engagement, and related costs.

The Core Goal of Know Your Florida School: Helping Parents and the Community Understand and Utilize School Data

The My School Information Design Challenge built upon research from the Education Commission of the States, which found that parents want school report cards that illustrate comparisons between schools and the rest of the state. To contextualize school performance and growth data and to inspire engagement with school leaders, the tool also includes parent empowerment statements alongside the data. These statements are driven by the data and offer a starting point for conversations with their school’s principals about school accountability metrics that include: high school graduation rate, performance on state assessments, and even school climate.

It is our hope that Know Your Florida School will grow with time, where along with the opportunity to show trend data, it will eventually include additional, non-academic factors that impact student success but are not appropriate for inclusion in the school grade calculation itself, such as: chronic absenteeism, teacher quality, and school safety.



Data Included in Know Your Florida School January 2017 Launch:

School Information: Descriptive information such as grades served, school offerings, address, and school website.

School Performance: Reading, Math, Social Studies and Science achievement, learning gains, learning gains for the lowest 25% and acceleration status.

Graduation Information: Graduation rates (high school only).

Student Enrollment: Enrollment information by demographic, economically disadvantaged, English language learners (ELL) and exceptional student education.

Thoughtful design will empower parents and community members—both in Florida and nationwide—to access and make meaning of education data as they never have before.

The Importance of Mobile-First Design

With Florida parents as primary users in mind, the project team built the tool with a focus on the mobile user experience and a responsive design that works across a variety of devices. Parents who are looking for on-the-go, easily accessible information can navigate the tool and critical datapoints in conversations with principals and other educational stakeholders—at any time and from any location. Such a feature can underscore a state's commitment to transparent, parent-friendly school accountability reporting.

Presentations that Aid Understanding

When well designed and clearly presented, data can engage and inspire parents to communicate with school leaders. Effective visualizations for non-technical audiences arose from decisions informing the design, functionality, contextualizing content, type and amount of information of any particular data display. Knowing that parents want credible, accurate data, the tool also displays source data collected by the Florida Department of Education. Working backwards through this list, we built the case for how a particular data element can most effectively be displayed for parents:

Content. We began by considering how that data is defined, how much of it there is, and whether there is a need for comparison. We then used content to explain the data presented, offering definitions of complex terms or using consistent benchmarks in the charts and graphs such as the state average.

Functionality. We then evaluated the potential functionality of that data, which refers to the different ways a parent can access the tool and how the user can manipulate it. For example, for effective display of summary information that draws from multiple data sources, a bar chart with multiple views allows parents to dynamically manipulate or explore the data themselves to unpack information. Basic chart concepts, like display of dependent variables on the Y axis or use of consistent colors, contributes to a visual vocabulary that enhances understanding of the data.

Design. Finally, we considered the design, which refers to the layout of how the data is displayed, like in text, a graph, or a table. Design should inform user understanding whenever possible. To that end, written content accompanies many of the data visualizations, which helps explain the meanings of different data sources and how they relate to school accountability metrics.

Finally, the project team created an “About” section for the tool that transparently shares the origins of all data displayed in the tool.

Forming the Project Team

As states gather feedback from stakeholders and communities on ESSA implementation, ExcelinEd's national Know Your School project will share lessons learned from development of the Florida prototype that can inform their own school accountability report cards. The second case study, for example, will highlight essential action steps around data and development.

Building a tool like Know Your Florida School requires a cross-functional team where each member contributes a unique set of capabilities—from subject matter expertise and design to data collection and analysis. The team behind Know Your Florida School (see below) contributed these skills to the development and communication of the tool. States should incorporate the following functions as they begin to create their own report card design team:

User Experience Design. States should identify an organization that can tailor a report card tool, and create comprehensible visualizations from large datasets, to effectively serve parents and community members.

Trusted Data Source. For the tool to best serve parents and community members, it should draw upon credible education data. States generally serve as the best source of comprehensive, up to date information.

API Source. States should engage with an entity that can build a robust, open-ended Application Programming Interface (API), a framework that supports routinized information collection. The tool can draw upon data at any given time, ensuring the information that parents access is continually accurate and up-to-date.

Policy Analysis and Content. States should engage with a partner that has a firm grasp of federal and state policy and an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter. This perspective can inform the selection of key indicators, the ultimate goal of the tool and the design that best serves the field.

Funding Source. States should seek a dedicated reserve of financial and personnel resources that support the development of the tool. This project requires continual coordination and investment to assure cutting-edge design, the effective gathering of insights from its target audiences, and the generation of comprehensive data.

Even with a project team that addresses all of these roles, members should also engage in a transparent, vibrant dialogue to ensure each of these components fit amid the overall mission for a tool that inspires parents to dive into the data and engage with their schools.

Know Your Florida School Project Team



ExcelinEd is the sponsoring organization behind the project through which it is continuing to support state efforts to participate in rulemaking and implementation of ESSA and preserve rigorous standards and assessments and strong accountability systems.

www.excelined.org



JAXPef serves as an on-the-ground partner with a deep and rich understanding of local communities and maintains an agreement with Florida to access state education data.

www.jaxpef.org



Collaborative Communications provides unmatched knowledge and understanding of the end users of the tool and manages overall project delivery, leveraging related experience in public reporting projects for states in DC and Illinois, as well as with Data Quality Campaign and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).

www.collaborativecommunications.com



Social Driver leads the strategic thinking behind tool design and replication. They also drive Know Your Florida School's mobile-first approach—and enhanced the API that other states can adapt.

www.socialdriver.com

What's Next?

Steps for a Successful Online Report Card

Upcoming Case Studies:

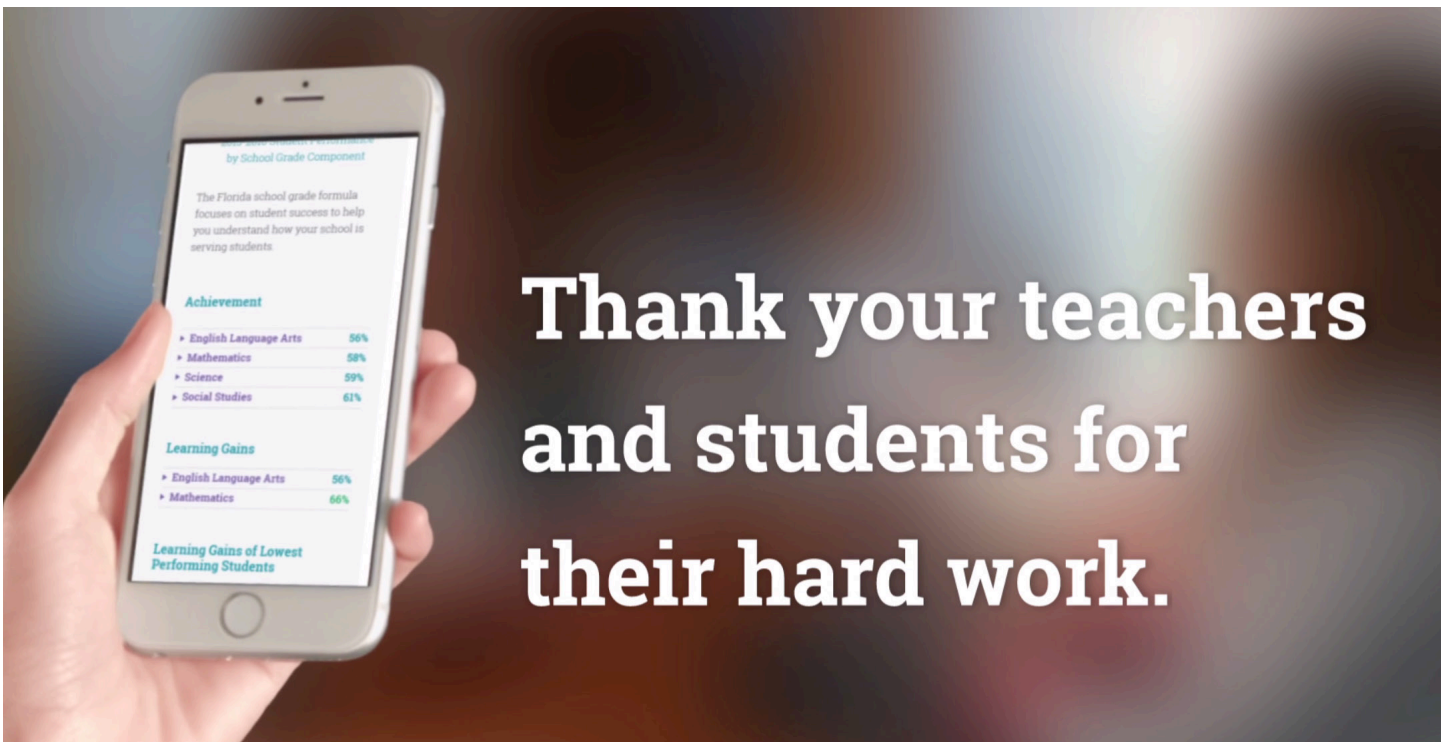
Case Study 2:
Data, Development, and Functionality for Know Your School

Case Study 3:
Design, Content, and Engagement for Know Your School

The Know Your Florida School tool for state policymakers, parents, and community members will launch in early 2017. In our next case study, we will provide an in-depth analysis of the data and development action steps needed to create an online school report card. With these comprehensive checklists in hand, SEAs and their project teams can effectively develop online tools that clearly display educational data for parents and empower them to engage with their schools.

Following the launch of the tool, we will solicit input from community members, educators, school leaders, legislators, and families from across the state to gain a sense of the key successes of the tool and the improvements that may need to be made. We plan to release a third case study to reveal the feedback and insights around the tool, a set of recommendations that will drive further edits to the tool here in Florida and inform other states' online report cards.

We offer a checklist of considerations on the next page to SEAs and education stakeholders as they begin to develop plans to create new, or revise existing, state school accountability tools. In the process, we plan to continue to build on the version of the tool launched in January and move toward incorporating additional data elements that other states may wish to highlight or include. These considerations align directly with the lessons learned by the project team and can be used to not only inform development plans—but also serve as the basis for a tool of comparable functionality and breadth.



Getting Started

Checklist of Considerations for Creating School Report Card Tools

Design and Content

What data do parents actually need to get a better sense of a school's performance and how can we present it in a way that is accessible?

- Identify your target audience for the tool.
- Use insights from focus groups and interviews to determine the tone and content that align with the audience's expectations.
- Outline a project plan that reflects the goals and needs of all end-users.
- Come to agreement on the scope of the tool (local or state-wide), the categories the data catalog will cover, and the uses of the tool by parents and community members.
- Pinpoint and agree upon the user-friendly elements of the tool (i.e. comparison options, filters, and visuals).
- Consider: How can you make an online report card accessible to parents?
- Craft the messages that empower parents to engage with their schools.
- Highlight significant data points in user-friendly language and suggest action steps.

Data

What important considerations go into the collection and development of the data for an effective public reporting tool?

- Decide on and prioritize the datapoints that need to appear in the tool. (Include different cuts of that data across years (over time) or subgroups.)
- Learn the SEA's data collection methodology and data release schedule.
- Create a plan to accommodate newly released data during the development process.
- Ensure that all original data is "clean" and reconcile any irregularities or incomplete entries.

Functionality and Development

What is the open-source development process? What degree of functionality will make the report card useful for the greater public?

- Identify the functionality needed for the tool to be useful for desired audiences.
- Consider search, comparison, customization, and other parent-friendly elements.
- Once these elements are incorporated, develop a sitemap and chart out the "user journey."
- Identify the fields and the linkages that ensure a parent or community member can navigate information about a school's performance.
- Consider a mobile-first approach and design to accommodate use on handheld devices.
- Select and build off of an API that is accessible and open-ended, supporting customization and automated data collection.
- Choose a robust, adaptable content management system (such as WordPress or Drupal).

Feedback and Engagement

How did Know Your Florida School draw upon local and state stakeholder groups—including the state advisory board, focus groups and national coalition—to enhance the power of the tool?

- Look to local pilots that can serve as frameworks for a state platform
- Smaller-scale organizations can provide a local understanding of the community and key education policies.
- Generate a stakeholder map for the project, identifying allies and challengers.
- Identify national and state stakeholders to bolster the tool.
- Determine how to include them in the development and communications processes.
- Create a thoughtful strategy for interacting with parents and community members.
- Hold focus groups, deliver surveys and convene your target audiences to gain credibility with local constituencies and build institutional knowledge.

