

# 8 Essential Questions to Ask About Any Metric



Analyzing your metrics data can be daunting, especially the first couple of times. One great way to start is by asking questions. Questions help you uncover the stories your data is telling and form hypotheses about how to drive change. The Schoolzilla team has observed hundreds of teachers and leaders analyze data, and the data savvy ones don't merely look at their data, they interrogate it. Here are the eight most common and useful questions we hear teachers and leaders ask about school metrics:

## 1. Which students are included in that number?

*Example: Wait, 40 percent of my students are failing a class? That's so surprising— which students?*

**Why it's essential:** Showing which students helps people both trust the data and target the right students for intervention.



## 2. Have I been moving in the right direction since I started working on this?

*Example: My school has started to focus on ELA. Are more kids meeting the standard in the spring benchmark than did in the winter benchmark?*

**Why it's essential:** It helps show progress, and it can be a much-needed piece of good news for schools or students with lots of red metrics.

## 3. Am I ahead or behind where I was at the same time last year? Is this trend unusual for this time of year, or is it a normal seasonal trend?

*Example: Four percent of my students are chronically absent; is that good or bad for October?*

**Why it's essential:** Many metrics have seasonal trends, like chronic absence, which can fluctuate wildly in the first month of school. Comparing this year's trend to the same time last year helps you spot those seasonal trends and understand whether you're on track to do better or worse than last year.





#### 4. How many students are close to being on track, and how many are far off track? What's the distribution?

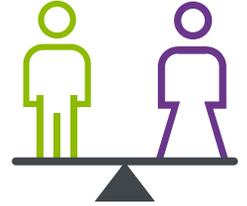
*Example: I have many chronically absent kids. How many others are close to being chronically absent?*

**Why it's essential:** If many students are close to going off track (or getting back on track) for a given metric, the metric has the potential to move dramatically up or down. For example, in a school where many students are on the cusp of being chronically absent, a missed day for several "cusp" kids can suddenly put that school's chronic absence rate in the red.

#### 5. What groups are way above or below the goal? Do I have an equity issue? Where should I be targeting my intervention?

*Example: I know our suspension rate is the lowest in the district, but are there any groups that are suspended at significantly higher rates than average?*

**Why it's essential:** For a metric that's off track, identifying groups that are disproportionately affected can help you target your interventions. Even if a school is meeting its goal for a metric, checking for outcome gaps between demographic groups can start important conversations about equity.



#### 6. Who are the outliers? Which students or schools are success stories we can learn from? Which students or schools need the most help?

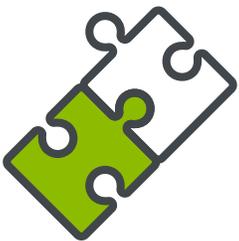
*Example: Only 20 percent of the students in our district were college ready on the ACT, but did any schools do better? If so, why?*

**Why it's essential:** Schools (or students) that are performing well or are growing significantly can be great sources for best practices that will help others grow. On the flip side, schools (or students) with the lowest results are often the best candidates for targeted intervention.

#### 7. How are schools similar to mine doing?

*Example: Twelve percent of my students are failing a class; is that good or bad? How are the three other high schools doing?*

**Why it's essential:** Seeing data for schools similar to yours can provide a valuable benchmark for your school.



#### 8. What else is going on at that school or with that student that might be affecting this metric?

*Example: I'm targeting Anna for intervention because she was below standard on the winter benchmark. What else should I know to choose the right intervention?*

**Why it's essential:** One data point is almost never enough to understand what's going on with a student (or with a school). Seeing multiple metrics together can help you understand underlying issues and create a better plan.

## How Data Teams Can Use the 8 Essential Questions:

### Data Analysis Protocol:

You can use these questions to facilitate team discussions of your metrics data.

### Data Preparation Checklist:

If your role includes creating reports or dashboards for your team, you can use the eight essential questions as a checklist to see if your reports are missing critical information people will want.

### Reporting Platform Selection:

If you're considering purchase of any data visualization or reporting software to help your school track key metrics, you can use the eight essential questions as a checklist to evaluate whether such material would help you answer your team's most important questions.