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Inside this Brief

- **Why Collect School District Data?**

- **How Is the Data Used?**

- **Data Available**

- **Staff and Agency Contacts**

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Background Brief on …

Database Initiative Project

The Database Initiative Project **(DBI)** began in 1997 with the goal of standardizing the financial accounts of schools in order to generate reliable, comparable data on which to make policy decisions.

Why Collect School District Data?

Historically, schools have been a local issue; money was raised locally and spending decisions were made by the locally elected board. Consequently, accounting systems varied from district to district.

In 1990, passage of Ballot Measure 5 shifted the responsibility for funding education to the state. In 1991, the Legislative Assembly enacted the Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century, a measure that authorized the Oregon Department of Education **(ODE)** to determine state standards and develop state assessments based on those standards. Suddenly, the state was deeply involved in both driving curriculum decisions and setting funding levels. Yet actual spending and curriculum decisions were still being made at the local level. Questions arose as to whether districts were using funds efficiently. The school-based data system could not answer those questions for policymakers for two reasons: inconsistent financial reports, and lack of automation and reliance on manual paper systems.

Frustrated by this lack of data, the 1997 Legislative Assembly passed House Bill 3636, that directed the State Board of Education to adopt, by rule, a budget accounting system for school districts and education service districts **(ESDs)** to produce comparable spending information and make the gathered data available to the public. Initially, 16 pilot districts were involved in developing the database system. Two years later, upon the successful completion of the pilot project, the department began statewide implementation of the DBI. Oregon is one of only a handful of states that has used the Internet to both collect and report comparable education data.

How Is the Data Used?

The data submitted to the ODE may be analyzed and used for a number of purposes, including:

- Legislators and other policymakers having consistent data for all school districts in the state;
- School districts comparing their funding levels and student performance with other districts, driving improvements and efficiencies;
- Communities having access to information about their schools;
- The ODE having information to analyze and determine student outcomes for those in Head Start pre-kindergarten programs;
- Consolidating existing information and eliminating redundancies;
- Incorporating data into the Oregon Report Card;
- Modeling the impacts of different funding levels, in conjunction with the Quality Education Model, to show the effects of funding increases and decreases; and
- Meeting federal reporting requirements.

The Chalkboard Project, a non-profit, non-partisan initiative of Foundations for a Better Oregon, uses data from the DBI for its Open Book$ Project website, which tracks spending of Oregon's 197 school districts and allows comparison of similar-sized school districts.

Data Available

A number of reports are available from the DBI web page, including:

- Funding Information: Revenue; expenditure; and budgeting information, by school district
- School District Profiles: A snapshot for the school year for each district with information on student enrollment and performance; community demographics; staffing; spending per student; average class size; instructional time; and infrastructure
- District Comparisons: A comparative snapshot for the school year for two selected districts with information on student enrollment and performance; community demographics; staffing; spending per student; average class size; instructional time; and infrastructure
- ESD Profiles: A snapshot for the school year for each ESD with information on student demographics; member district staffing; infrastructure; and schools directly administered by ESDs
- School Profiles: A snapshot for the school year for each school with information on student enrollment, demographics, and performance; staffing; spending per student; average class size; instructional time; and infrastructure
- School Comparisons: A comparative snapshot for the school year for two selected schools with information on student enrollment, demographics, and performance; staffing; spending per student; average class size; instructional time; and infrastructure
- Average elementary class size, by school
- Hours of instruction for each grade within a school
- Student information: Number of drop-outs; students that have completed high school; gender; ethnicity; and number of those eligible for free and reduced-price school lunch
- Staffing number and type by school
- Technology: Showing student access to a school's computers and the Internet

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