High School & Beyond Plan Universal Platform Data Q&A

This is a resource for data leaders and IT leaders in Washington's school districts and local education agencies. OSPI takes seriously its obligations to secure data systems, protect the privacy of students, and allow for the disclosure of personally identifiable student records as authorized under federal and state privacy laws. Strict processes help safeguard the confidentiality and security of student data.

How might students, families, and educators use the SchooLinks platform?

This statewide online platform will equip Washington's students and their schools with customizable tools to set, track, update, and achieve their postsecondary goals. The platform includes universally required activities related to self-exploration, goal setting, course planning, career exploration, financial aid information, and résumé building.

Why is student data shared with SchooLinks for a High School and Beyond Plan platform?

In 2023, the state Legislature mandated a universal online statewide High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) platform. Following a competitive process, OSPI selected SchooLinks as the vendor for the universal online tool.

Before this legislation, over a dozen different platforms were used by school districts across the state, causing variations in resources, information, tools, and support offered to students depending on the place where they lived. Additionally, students who transferred between districts during middle and high school often encountered different platforms at their new schools, forcing them to restart their post-high school plans.

What types of data are on the SchooLinks platform?

Data on the SchooLinks platform includes academic course, credit and term grade data; assessment data, including Smarter Balanced, SAT/ ACT, ASVAB, and Advanced Placement, Cambridge International and International Baccalaureate scores; student demographic, socioeconomic, and other identified characteristics; and data associated with students' progress toward graduation pathways.

SchooLinks, in consultation with OSPI's High School and Beyond Plan team, also collects info about scope & sequence indicators reflecting required activities and processes, onboarding completion, annual goal-setting and updating, and annual submission of students' HSBP. Features include assessments that can inform students' career and postsecondary goals, including access to general financial aid information; a

dedicated space in which to build a direct connection to potential employers; a secure space to share notes between staff, parents or guardians, and approved community partners supporting students' academic progress and career and college preparation; and other functionalities as specified in RCW 28A.230.215.

How does SchooLinks use these data?

SchooLinks processes the student data to personalize the student experience within the universal online HSBP platform for students in Washington. SchooLinks cannot use the student data for other purposes.

How does SchooLinks protect student data?

The SchooLinks platform implements high standards of security and privacy to protect sensitive student and school information. They follow guidelines and best practices set forth by the Open Web Application Security Project (OWASP) to ensure that the application and infrastructure are secure. SchooLinks also maintains SOC 2 Type 2 certification, ensuring that technical and organizational practices are aligned with industry standards. For more, see SchooLinks Data Security and Privacy practices.

Can anyone in the district see details about each student?

No. Like many software systems, SchooLinks uses assigned roles with corresponding permissions to control access. District leaders decide which staff can see what by assigning them to specific Roles (there are 9) and Capabilities (there are about 40). SchooLinks provides technical guidance, and districts can create custom roles with unique permissions to fit their local needs.

Will OSPI use the data from the SchooLinks platform?

Yes. Data from the universal HSBP can help state leaders make informed decisions and better support school districts. For example, three times a year OSPI's High School and Beyond team will take a "Pulse Check" – they will examine platform use data to see which districts may need support implementing specific HSBP activities. SchooLinks will also provide to OSPI student-level data related to HSBP components.

Can students opt out of having their data shared with SchooLinks for their High School and Beyond Plan?

No. Each student must have a HSBP that must include certain requirements. In facilitating the transition to a universal online HSBP platform, students' data must be shared with SchooLinks. Data are sent from districts directly to SchooLinks, and from OSPI to SchooLinks.

Are there protections or limitations on SchooLinks' use of the student data?

Yes. As with other projects where OSPI works with an external partner, SchooLinks has been hired to develop a platform based on specific requirements. There are also restrictions on how SchooLinks can use student data.

Can SchooLinks sell students' data, or use it to sell more products?

No. SchooLinks cannot use Washington students' data for anything it wants and cannot sell the data. SchooLinks uses these data as described in the RCW, and in some cases, has optional features available related to HSBPs.

What are the optional features?

SchooLinks, working with OSPI's HSBP team, makes available several optional features that support students when applying to colleges and preparing for employment. If these optional features are enabled, students may share their data associated with college applications, a profile with potential employers or other postsecondary partners, and other sharing outside of the SchooLinks platform.

Some families opt out of sharing student-directory information. On the SchooLinks platform, can students prevent sharing their information to other parties?

Yes. The SchooLinks platform must comply with all necessary state and federal requirements for student privacy and must allow for students to opt in or opt out of portions of the universal platform related to third-party information sharing. Students may opt in or opt out of sharing data associated with college applications, a profile with potential employers, and other sharing outside of the SchooLinks platform.

For more, see these links –

Protecting Student Privacy
High School and Beyond Plan
RCW 28A.604.030

Questions? Contact –

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