



Minnesota Parents Alliance
RECLAIMING OUR SCHOOLS

How To Easily Request Public Data from Your School District

Sometimes the only way to get real answers from your school district is to submit a public data request. This is easier than it sounds, and we're here to help!

In accordance with [Chapter 13](#) of Minnesota Statutes, the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act gives everyone the right to inspect and have copies of public data. Public data include all the data a school district keeps unless there is a state or federal law that classifies the data in some other way.

Requests for public data can include literature and curriculum materials, school policies, and other media or communication from or through political/advocacy groups, to name a few.

Requests must be in writing and reference that the request is being submitted under Chapter 13 of state law. [Click here for a sample data request letter.](#)

Here are some tips to keep in mind while making your request:

1. Make your request as specific as possible.

One easy way to do this is to limit the request to a range of dates. For example, instead of asking for all data containing the word "equity," ask for all data containing the word "equity" between the dates of 9/1/2020-6/1/2021.

2. Make sure your request is worded in a way that legally requires a response.

By law, the district must respond if request to look at or obtain copies of information, but it does not have to respond if you ask questions or ask it to create new data.

Don't ask: "Why did the school board decide to end its gifted and talented program?"

Do ask: "I am requesting access to all data between the dates of January 1-September 20, 2021, that refers to proposed changes to the gifted and talented program."

3. Request data in electronic format if it exists.

It doesn't hurt to request the data to be emailed back to you if it exists in electronic format. School districts do not have to comply with this request, but often will.

4. Decide whether to submit the request using your name or anonymously.

A school district must provide public data to whoever asks, regardless of who is asking or why. They also cannot require you to identify yourself or explain the reason for the data request.

If you'd prefer to remain anonymous, this is easy to do by creating a new email account to submit the request. Keep in mind, though, that the district isn't required to fulfill your request electronically. You may be asked to pay for copies and pick them up at the school or provide a mailing address. The only surefire, free way to obtain the data is to go into the school offices in person to inspect it.

5. Send your request to the right person.

Every district must designate a "Responsible Authority" who is legally required to respond to your data request. Most districts list the Responsible Authority's name and email address on their website, but if you can't find it, call the Superintendent's office. In smaller districts, the Superintendent may act as the RA. Regardless of who the RA is, it's a good idea to copy the Superintendent on your initial request.

6. Be prepared to inspect the data in person or pay for copies to be mailed to you.

Even if you requested electronic copies of the data, the district isn't required to send them electronically. Most likely, you will be asked to pay for copies, plus the staff time required to collect the data, and schedule a time to pick them up at the school. You can also provide a mailing address where the data can be sent.

Unless the district provides you with electronic data, the only free way to obtain it is to go into the school offices in person. There, you will be able to "inspect" the data, but you cannot take it with you. You can, however, bring a portable scanner or take pictures with your phone. The district cannot charge you to inspect the data in person, regardless of the time and manpower it took to collect.

Sometimes, school districts will send you an invoice and request payment for the hours it will take district employees to collect the data. Don't let this discourage you! As we mentioned above, the district must allow you to inspect the data in person for free. Simply respond by saying you wish to convert your request to an in-person inspection of the data, for which no charges can be assessed.

7. Be patient while waiting for a response, but not too patient.

The district should confirm receipt of your request within a few days. If you don't hear back, email or call the Superintendent until you verify it was received. Keep in mind that you may experience a delay in response if your request was sent during a school break.

The time it takes to fulfill your request will depend on the data requested, staff members available to respond to the request, and how many other data requests the district is processing. However, the district is legally required to fulfill your request within a reasonable amount of time. If your request was very specific, a reasonable amount of time is between 13-35 days.¹ If you are the data subject, the government must respond immediately or within 10 business days.

If you are having trouble getting a response in a reasonable amount of time, and are interested in pursuing your legal options, the Upper Midwest Law Center may be able to help. They can be reached at 612-428-7000.

¹ E.g., Advisory Opinion 95-006, Feb. 2, 1995, available at <https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/opinions/library/?id=36-267434> (13 days is reasonable); Advisory Opinion 97-005, Jan. 31, 1997, available at <https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/opinions/library/?id=36-267434#/detail/appId/1/id/267700> (more than 35 days is unreasonable).