

DATA RELEASE STUDY
OVERVIEW

May 1, 1980

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following Guidelines for a Data Release Policy have been prepared in response to a request from the Deputy Minister's office.

The report could not have been prepared without the efforts of the members of the Information Needs Committee who gathered the raw data from their respective areas of the Department and who participated in the drafting and revising of the guidelines.

Appreciation is extended to the Branch Heads who reviewed and commented on an earlier draft of these guidelines.

These guidelines are general by design but provide the basis for a policy statement and set of procedures to govern data release.

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Data Release Study
Overview

The Information Needs Committee was given the responsibility of conducting a study to determine the data release practices used by the various branches in the Department and to propose recommendations for a Departmental Data Release policy.

The committee commenced the task by undertaking an inventory of current data release practices. Each committee member took responsibility for collection of data from his or her area. To ensure a uniform basis of collection a form (Appendix 1) was created.

The results of the inventory were compiled by the Research Branch and reviewed by the committee. The committee is aware that the efforts of this data collection have not resulted in an exhaustive inventory of information available in the Department. This task in itself would have taken a much longer time frame than was available for the entire review. However, the information collected provided the committee members with insight into both the scope of data collected as well as the policies and/or practices which govern the release of data from the Department. The most common practice in use to regulate data release would appear to be referral of the request for disposition by the branch head. On the other hand, the most elaborate set of criteria or policy guidelines would appear to be those used by the Teacher Certification and Records Branch.

An analysis of this inventory is given in Appendix 2. This analysis includes a summary outline as well as individual data collection forms.

The second part of the task assigned to the Information Needs Committee dealt with the development of a set of guidelines which would serve as a basis for a policy and practice to govern the release of data. In addressing this task, the committee considered policies in existence in the Department, in other provinces, and information gathered by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada. A draft set of guidelines was circulated to Branch Heads within the Department and the feedback received was used to finalize the guidelines. The committee was unable to reach a consensus on whether to release or not to release data aggregated on a school division basis and thus has provided two options for consideration. In the support of releasing data on school divisions it was argued that the release was justified because of the public support to divisions and because other organizations (eg. MAST) released much of the data in their own publications. Also, there is a parallel between the Department of Education and the Department of Municipal Affairs which publishes financial data on individual municipalities. On the other hand, it was argued that school divisions are managed by locally elected officials and that as autonomous bodies should be responsible to determine policies on the release of data pertaining to their own operations.

Much discussion took place with respect to the arrangements that should be made with MAST and MTS and similar organizations in the light of "historical arrangements that exist". Appendix 3 provides some indication of arrangements made to date. It was felt that release agreements or contracts should be negotiated with each of the major users and be based on the general guidelines as well as the individual merits of the situation.

The guidelines for data release which the committee recommends for adoption by the Department of Education follow.

GUIDELINES FOR DATA RELEASE

The following are proposed as guidelines for release of data from the Department of Education for non-provincial government requests.

1. Data aggregated on a provincial basis and already in existence should be available, on request, to any member of the public.

Aggregated refers to group data in which individual data items cannot be identified.

Requests for provincially aggregated data, not currently in existence should be referred to an individual at the branch level charged with the responsibility for reviewing such data requests, and a decision be made based on the time and costs necessary to produce the data, possible use the Department may have for the particular type of data, the appropriateness of the data requested, and other factors. It is felt that, in general, the requestor should pay the costs of producing the data.

2. Two options are provided for data aggregated on a class, school, or division basis.
 - (a) Data aggregated on the basis of a class, school, or division and already in existence in the Department should be made available, on request, to any member of the public.

OR

- (b) Data aggregated on the basis of a class, school, or division although held by the Department is still under the jurisdiction of the school division; therefore any individual or group requesting this data should be referred to the school division.

The rationale for (a) is that data on publicly funded institutions should be available to those who support the institutions. Much of the data already is public through release by MAST and MTS. There would be similarity with Municipal Affairs in adopting this option.

The rationale for (b) centers on the concept of local autonomy and the relationship between the Department and school divisions given the existence of school divisions as corporate entities.

3. Data on individuals should be released only with the authorization of the individual or in response to a court order.
4. Separate agreements should be negotiated with respect to data requested by the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS), the Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST) and similar organizations.