

Bringing scientific evidence into any beat: education

Science reporting quick tips from [SciLine](#) and [The Open Notebook](#)

Just as test scores, interviews with teachers, and school board meetings provide crucial information and context in education stories, scientific evidence similarly strengthens reporting by substantiating claims, identifying trends, and placing school issues in broader context.

Five ideas for adding science to education stories

If you're reporting on...	Search for relevant research on...
Education policy	■ Local impacts of changes to state and federal education budgets ■ How DEI programs affect student learning outcomes ■ Evidence surrounding proposed curricula changes
Educational costs and finance	■ How different educational infrastructure investments pay off ■ How student loans affect borrowers and their families ■ How state budget cuts affect public university funding and tuition rates
Teacher shortages	■ Trends in teacher retention and turnover ■ How teacher turnover affects student learning ■ Interventions for teacher resilience and retention
Digital literacy and classroom technology	■ Whether certain digital tools improve learning outcomes ■ Impacts of early exposure to technology ■ How AI can help or hinder learning
After-school programs	■ Inequities in "out-of-school time" opportunities ■ Trends in after-school offerings and attendance ■ Cost-benefit tradeoffs for after-school programs

Inform your education reporting with data

Here are some data sources you can use to bolster your reporting with evidence. Whenever you're using data, [ask experts](#) how those data are gathered and what their limitations are.

- [National Center for Education Statistics](#): Publishes federal datasets on school practices, staffing, student performance, and funding.
 - ▶ [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#): Reports population-level data on what U.S. students know and can do in various subjects.
 - ▶ [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#): Reports data on college enrollment, graduation rates, financial aid, institutional revenues, and student outcomes.
- [State Department of Education](#): Provides state-specific data on attendance, test scores, school funding, and staffing.

- [Civil Rights Data Collection](#): Collects data on student enrollment, access to school programs and services, bullying and harassment, and student discipline—all disaggregated by race, ethnicity, sex, disability, and English-learning status.
- [Education Data Initiative](#): Provides accessible reports and raw data on the cost of higher education, college enrollment and dropout rates, financial aid and student loans, and educational attainment.
- [Education Data Explorer](#): Aggregates school-, district-, and state-level data about demographics, coursework, finances, student outcomes, and staffing. You can comb through and customize these datasets to identify trends.

Common pitfalls to avoid

- 1. Conflicts of interest or bias:** Organizations or companies with an agenda, such as selling a curriculum or shaping policy, sometimes fund education research. Look into who's supporting a study and why, share what you find, and seek outside comment on potential conflicts of interest.
- 2. Divide between research and practice:** Professionals working with students every day and researchers exploring how they learn can sometimes be siloed. A strong story will bring together different forms of expertise.
- 3. Overlooking key context:** Education stories should delve into what happens beyond the classroom. Economic, sociological, and environmental factors have a profound impact on student outcomes—and on whether programs succeed or fail.

Types of experts to contact and questions to ask

Ask psychologists about: ■ Social emotional learning ■ How children learn to read ■ Learning differences and accommodations ■ Bias in grading and discipline ■ Evidence backing academic interventions	Ask epidemiologists about: ■ School nutrition programs ■ Air quality in schools ■ Extreme heat and outdoor activities ■ School sports and safety ■ Infectious disease spread in schools
Ask economists about: ■ Returns on early childhood education programs ■ School voucher program outcomes ■ Labor markets for different college degrees ■ Family socioeconomic status and school attendance ■ College tuition increases and enrollment	Ask technology experts about: ■ AI policies in schools ■ Digital literacy ■ Science of learning games ■ How classroom technologies compare with analog options ■ Virtual learning outcomes

Real stories including scientific evidence and experts

- [Pilot program helps reduce NJ teacher shortage](#) (NJ Spotlight News, 2025)
- [California colleges went big on online learning tools. Then the worst happened](#) (CalMatters, 2026)
- [A new set of distractions? Missouri's ban on cellphones in schools still divides](#) (The Beacon | Kansas City, 2026)