



# K-12 Student Information System Buying Guide

A strategic guide to upgrading  
your district's technology foundation



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# The SIS as your central engine

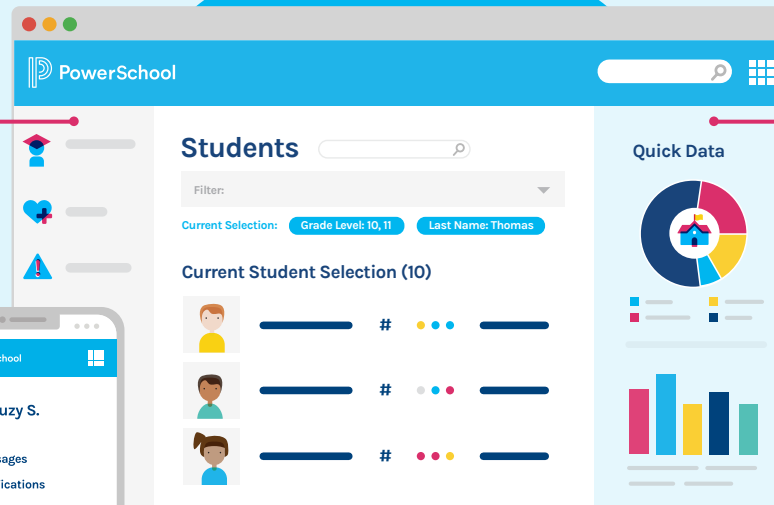
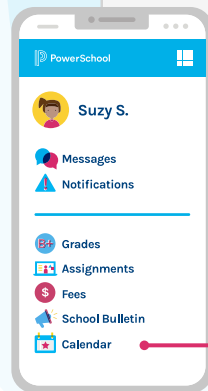
Think of your student information system (SIS) as the engine powering your entire district operations. When that engine runs smoothly, everything else—teaching, reporting, family communication—moves forward with fewer bumps.

But when the engine is outdated or not tuned? Every mile feels harder than it should.

# Why your SIS matters now more than ever

At its core, your SIS is the system of record that centralizes K-12 district data into a single, accurate, and reliable source for every stakeholder.

**Educators** use configurable workflows to manage grades, attendance, and scheduling tools that reduce manual work and surface student needs



**District leaders and principals** get consistent governance, compliance-ready reporting, and real-time insights to guide school-wide decisions



**Families and students** access a centralized location for assignments, attendance, and notifications

**The big picture:** ideally, your operations are powered by a centralized, secure system that reduces manual work, keeps data consistent, is AI-ready, and gives everyone what they need to focus more on student outcomes.

# Why change now?

Districts everywhere are feeling the drag of outdated systems. When software doesn't integrate, share data, and provide a seamless user experience, your staff end up wasting time and re-entering data in multiple places. When platforms lack flexibility, schools can't adapt to changing compliance requirements and risk losing critical funding. And when security isn't strong enough, sensitive student data is at risk.

These aren't just minor headaches. They slow down key daily processes and productivity, create frustration, and make it harder to support students.

**The opportunity is clear: updating your SIS addresses today's challenges and sets you up for future success.**

## A modern SIS offers:



### Interoperability

built from a connected foundation, so data flows securely between products



### Flexibility

so your system adapts as needs evolve



### Adaptability

to scale and grow without replacing core systems

Once you understand what's slowing you down, it's easier to see what a modern SIS can unlock.

# The impact of a modern SIS

A new SIS can simplify compliance reporting, improve family engagement, and cut manual processes that eat up valuable staff time. It gives you better visibility into data, helps you act faster, and positions your district to grow and innovate without disruption.

In addition to storing critical student data, a modern SIS manages schedules, tracks attendance, and ensures transcripts are accurate. It powers enrollment, transportation, and day-to-day operations. And it enables compliance by ensuring state reporting is correct and on time.

## Top edtech priorities for district leaders:

**1** Communicating with families

**2** Connecting data across systems

SOURCE: [Education Focus Report Spring 2025 Survey](#)

Most importantly, a modern SIS can help connect teachers, administrators, and families. According to the [Education Focus Report Spring 2025 Survey](#), district leaders ranked family communication as their top edtech priority, with data connectivity across systems close behind.

A modern SIS is more than a software upgrade. It's an engine replacement that powers your district toward efficiency, equity, and student success.

## What this guide will do

This buying guide serves as your roadmap for selecting the right system. It's designed to help you analyze your current SIS, compare options, and make the right, informed choice based on data. Inside, you'll learn how to:

- ✓ Spot gaps in your current SIS solution
- ✓ Understand the benefits of a modern, interoperable platform
- ✓ Evaluate systems that align with your operational goals
- ✓ Plan for a future-ready tech ecosystem with the SIS as your engine

**Let's start by looking at the essential features and functionality to look for in a modern SIS.**

# What to look for in a modern SIS

Upgrading your SIS isn't just about new software. It's about building a stronger foundation for your entire district. A modern SIS saves time, protects student data, strengthens communication, and gives your staff the insights they need to support student success.

Here's what to focus on as you evaluate options.

# Interoperability with other software products

Your SIS sits at the center of your tech ecosystem. But if it can't connect with the other tools you rely on, everyone pays the price. Data silos lead to errors, as teachers waste time re-entering information, IT staff are forced to create workarounds, and everyone must juggle multiple logins.

“School systems with a formal process for vetting edtech tools usually factored interoperability standards and data privacy protection requirements into the process.”

SOURCE: [2024 Project Unicorn State of the Sector Report](#)

Look for systems with robust API integration, a suite of complementary products, and compliance with industry standards, such as Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF®) and 1EdTech verification. A modern SIS should work seamlessly with the edtech tools you already use and prepare you for those you'll adopt in the future.

## Must-have checklist:

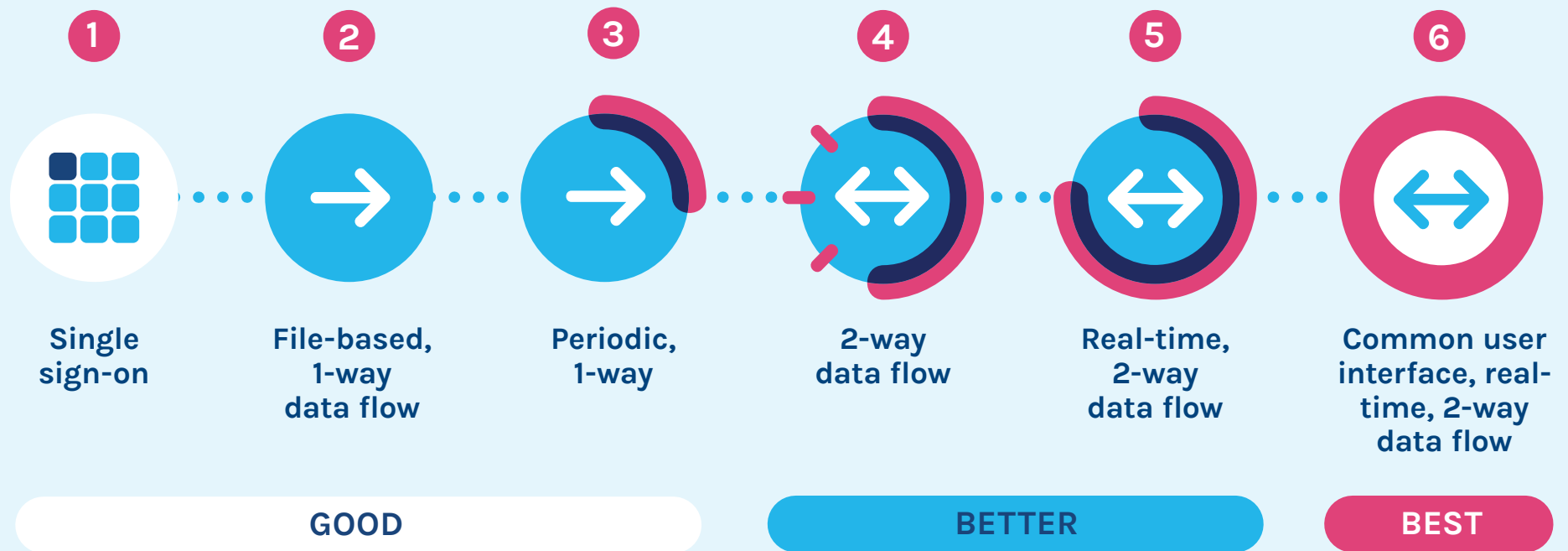
- API integration capabilities
- Complementary product suite for extended functionality, saving time and money
- Compliance with SIF and certified by the SIF Association (OneRoster and Data Privacy certifications)
- Compatibility with a wide selection of edtech products from major vendors

**#1 barrier**  
to improving interoperability is a lack of understanding by leaders

SOURCE: [2025 CoSN State of EdTech Leadership Survey](#)

The more interoperable your products are, the better the user experience and greater your ability to gain deep insights from unified data.

This graphic illustrates the increasing benefits provided by more interoperable edtech products.



## Data security

Cyberattacks on schools are on the rise, and outdated systems leave institutions vulnerable. Without strong protections, districts risk breaches that compromise sensitive student and staff data.

The right SIS provides cloud hosting, dedicated security monitoring, and compliance with FERPA, HIPAA, and SOC 2. You should expect multiple layers of prevention, backup, and recovery, along with features such as single sign-on (SSO) and multi-factor authentication (MFA).



Between July 2023 and Dec. 2024:

**82%**

of K-12 schools  
experienced a  
cyber incident

**9,300+**

confirmed  
incidents in  
K-12 institutions

SOURCE: [K-12 Dive, March 2025](#)

### Must-have checklist:

- 24x7x365 monitoring of applications, databases, cybersecurity, and infrastructure operations
- Cloud-hosted solutions, with hosting operations security posture and business continuity framework that are certified by internationally recognized standards
- Dedicated security team
- Data center facilities with physical/virtual security measures in compliance with IT security standards (FERPA, HIPAA, SOC 2)
- Robust and resilient systems backup, disaster recovery, and business continuity capabilities
- Multiple protection/prevention/mitigation levels against emerging cybersecurity threats
- SSO and MFA

## Actionable data

Many districts are data-rich but insight-poor. Information is scattered, incomplete, or too hard to access.

This makes it difficult for teachers, administrators, and families to get a complete picture of a student's progress.

### #1 challenge for district leaders is connecting data across systems (integration)

SOURCE: [2024 Education Focus Report](#)



Modern data systems put actionable insights at your fingertips. They offer dashboards for at-a-glance trends, flexible reporting to meet compliance needs, and tools that streamline teacher workflows. Some even connect with [data analytics AI software](#) to enable staff to “talk to their data” using natural language queries to generate reports instantly.

### Must-have checklist:

- Ease of use for running standard reports and building custom reports
- Dashboards to give teachers actionable data insights with a convenient, one-glance look at trends and progress
- Streamlined teacher workflows to access/update complete student information
- Efficient, intuitive, and automated data exchange
- Flexible and customizable reporting, adaptable to compliance needs
- Data management to ensure clean, accurate information
- Accompanying AI products that let users “talk to their data” and use real language queries to pull reports from SIS data

# AI strategy: Your SIS's critical role

Bringing AI to your student data can empower your teachers, administrators, and support personnel to proactively identify risks in student progress and enact effective support strategies.

However, it's essential for artificial intelligence to have data that's accurate, secure, and readily accessible. Your AI strategy and implementation are only as effective as the data it's pulling from.

**Your SIS serves as the central hub of your student data management, ensuring your data is complete, accurate, and secure. The system should securely store your critical student data—including demographics, attendance, behavior, enrollment, grades, assignment scores, and class schedules—that feed into your AI tools.**



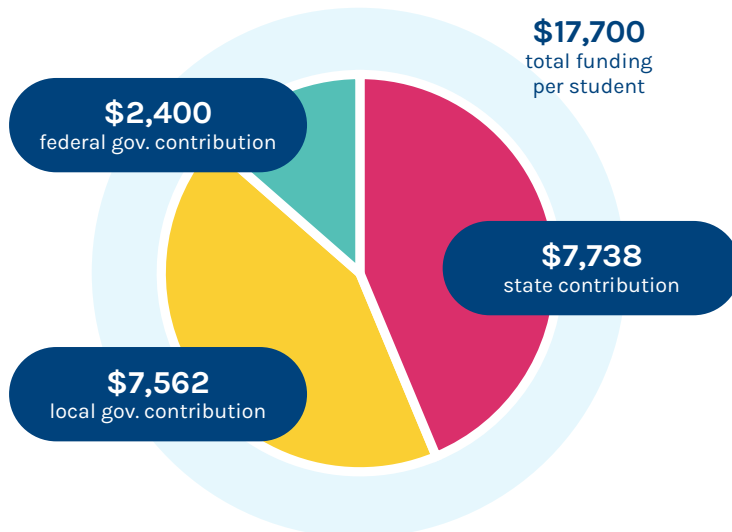
## Compliance reporting

Funding depends on accurate, timely state and provincial reporting. But requirements vary widely and change often. An SIS that can't keep up can put millions of dollars at risk.

Choose a system backed by compliance experts who monitor and update reporting rules for each state. Look for push-button report generation, built-in validation tools, and flexibility to pivot quickly when new requirements emerge.

### 2025 U.S. Student Funding

(dependent on accurate reporting)



### Must-have checklist:

- Push-button reporting capabilities and ability to run standard reports or build custom reports
- Handles report generation, adaptable to changing state/province requirements, and data validation
- Backed by compliance team experts and vendor that stay current for each state/province
- Support for reports and submissions, including compliance, for your state/province
- User/focus groups to communicate timely reporting changes and requirements

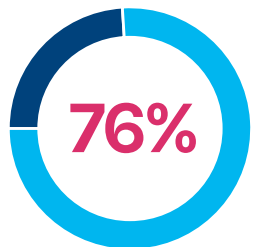
SOURCE: [U.S. Public Education Spending Statistics, 2025](#)

## Family engagement

Strong family connections can significantly boost student outcomes, but many districts struggle to share updates in real time. Parents shouldn't have to wait for report cards or teacher conferences to know how their child is doing.

**When parents are involved in their children's schooling, students show higher academic achievement, school engagement, and motivation**

SOURCE: [American Psychological Association, 2019](#)



**of district leaders say:**

**lack of family support and engagement challenges is a top cause of absenteeism**

SOURCE: [2024 Education Focus Report](#)

### Must-have checklist:

- Easy accessibility for parents and students to view real-time student performance, including grades and attendance, via a parent/student portal and mobile app
- Transparency through automated communications between school and family
- Availability of real-time insights by teachers, empowering them to engage in high-level interaction with families

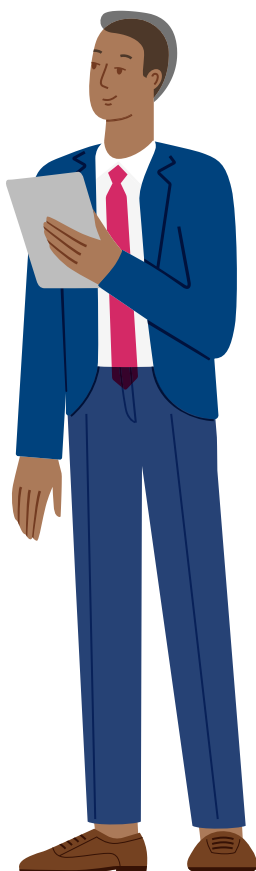
The right SIS can simplify family engagement. Parents and students can log into online portals or mobile apps to see grades, attendance, and assignments instantly. Automated communications keep families in the loop, while teachers gain tools to make conversations more meaningful.

## Ease of use

The best SIS in the world won't help if no one wants to use it. Complicated navigation, duplicate data entry, and clunky scheduling can waste valuable time.

“An unintuitive or overly complex experience when using a new tool can be infuriating as a user. Frustration is only amplified for a teacher helping multiple classrooms use the tool, or a technology team onboarding an entire staff—a reality made clear in low retention rates across edtech.”

SOURCE: [Learnlab Education, “Usability Testing for Edtech Companies”](#)



### Must-have checklist:

- Simple interface to make navigation easy
- Fluid user experience with fewer clicks to access information
- Flexibility to meet changing needs and requirements specific to your school or district
- SSO connection to other edtech products
- Mobile app and parent/student portals that let families access grades, assignments, and attendance at any time or place

Modern platforms focus on simplicity. A clean interface, fewer clicks, and intuitive navigation, including a mobile-friendly design, make daily tasks easier. Features like single sign-on connect the SIS with other tools, while flexible scheduling and grading options adapt to how you run your schools.

## Training and support

A student information system is likely the most robust, feature-rich product in your technology stack. And switching systems is a big change.

Without strong support, even the best technology can fail. Too many districts get stuck with limited training or support channels that don't match their needs.

**Only 33%**  
of school systems offer  
in-person training  
for their school IT  
departments, while **28%**  
provide online training.



SOURCE: [Learnlab Education, "Usability Testing for Edtech Companies"](#)

### Must-have checklist:

- Expansive support operation that's easily accessible and equipped to handle any challenge
- Multiple ways to train at your own pace, including online, on-site, at training events, or within a support community
- Organized implementation process that outlines each step, helping with change management concerns
- Active user-based community to share tips and best practices, and solve common challenges

Look for an SIS vendor with a straightforward, step-by-step implementation process and multiple training formats, including online, in-person, and on-demand options. A thriving user community can also be a game-changer, giving you access to best practices and peer-driven problem-solving.

## The bottom line

**A modern SIS isn't just a digital filing cabinet storing stagnant data.**

It's a connected, secure, and intuitive hub that supports your staff, engages families, and ensures compliance. As a future-ready system, it should offer flexibility to adapt and advance to suit your district's changing needs.

Most importantly, it frees educators to focus **less on managing data and more on supporting students.**



# Cheat Sheet

## Pillars of a robust SIS



### 1 Interoperability

- Your SIS should seamlessly connect with other edtech tools via APIs and standards, such as SIF and 1EdTech, to eliminate data silos and duplicate work.

### 2 Data security

- Look for cloud hosting, 24/7 monitoring, SSO/MFA, and compliance with FERPA, HIPAA, and SOC 2 to protect sensitive student data.

### 3 Actionable data

- Dashboards, flexible reporting, and even AI-powered queries should turn scattered information into insights that drive student success.

### 4 Compliance reporting

- A robust SIS provides push-button reporting, expert compliance updates, and built-in validation to ensure funding remains secure and accurate.

### 5 Family engagement

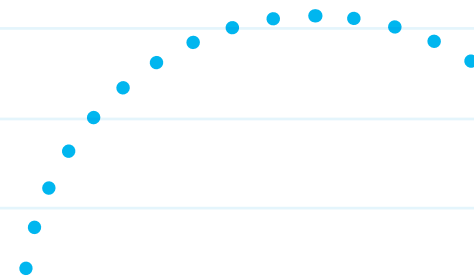
- Parents and students need real-time access to grades, attendance, and assignments through portals and apps, as well as automated communication.

### 6 Ease of use

- A modern SIS should be intuitive, mobile-friendly, and require fewer clicks, making daily tasks faster for both staff and families.

### 7 Training and support

- Choose a vendor with step-by-step implementation, multiple training options, and a strong user community to ensure long-term success.



# Why PowerSchool?

You need a reliable partner to drive your successful school and district operations.

PowerSchool SIS is built—and continually developed—specifically to meet that task, serving as the modern, streamlined engine for your operational needs.

PowerSchool SIS is the most widely used student information system, serving more than 27 million students in 6800+ districts. The reliable, agile system supports teachers, stimulates student growth, and leads schools and districts into the future.

Discover the true reach of PowerSchool SIS

**6,800+**  
Districts

**27M**  
Students

**46**  
States

**6**  
Provinces

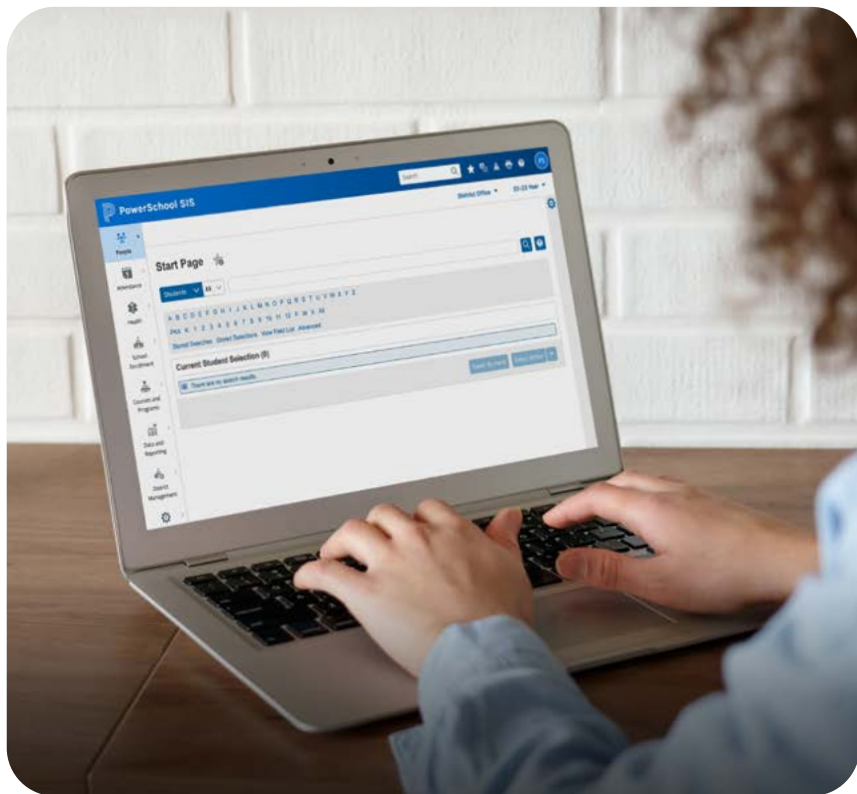
With PowerSchool SIS, you're fully prepared to scale operations through growth, challenges, and opportunities. The SIS provides schools and districts with a rock-solid foundation for a fully connected K-12 digital ecosystem.



# Interoperability

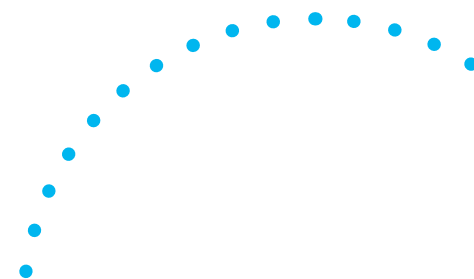
**PowerSchool SIS eliminates data silos and duplicate entry by connecting your entire K-12 tech ecosystem.**

With certified integrations, real-time data flow, and seamless connections across PowerSchool and partner products, districts save time and ensure data accuracy everywhere.



## PowerSchool features:

- Certified for Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF®), the Ed-Fi Data Standard, and 1EdTech's OneRoster® 1.1 and 1.2 standards, and Data Privacy
- Open system with real-time data exchange and bi-directional data flow
- Robust set of custom Application Programming Interface (API) plugins for integration with strategic partners in our PowerSchool Partner Program
- Connected digital ecosystem, integrating with PowerSchool's products for enrollment, learning management, assessment, data and analytics, student support, special education, ERP, HR, and talent
- One seamless user experience switching between PowerSchool products with AppSwitcher and SSO



## Data security

**PowerSchool SIS provides enterprise-grade protection to safeguard student and staff information.**

With continuous monitoring, layered defenses, cloud-based hosting, and compliance with top security standards, districts can operate confidently knowing their data is secure and resilient.



### PowerSchool features:

- Static and dynamic code scanning
- Best-of-breed network and workload protection
- Intrusion detection and protection
- More than 30 annual penetration tests
- Continual testing and validation of privacy, cybersecurity, and infrastructure controls
- Dedicated security team focused on ensuring compliance and security
- Datacenter facilities with an extensive series of physical and virtual security measures in place, and compliance with IT security standards such as FERPA, HIPAA, SOC 2 Type 2, and ISO:27001:2022 certification
- Continuity with a robust and resilient systems backup, disaster recovery, and business continuity capabilities
- Multiple levels of protection, prevention, and mitigation against emerging cybersecurity threats, certified by internationally recognized standards for security posture and business continuity frameworks
- Cloud hosting delivered through Microsoft Azure cloud-based technology, with no need to purchase server hardware or pay staff for maintenance
- Access to PowerSchool Enterprise Management Service (EMS) for self-hosted environments to manage and maintain a safe environment

## Actionable data

PowerSchool SIS transforms your information into insights.

Real-time dashboards, flexible reporting, and connected K-12 data across your PowerSchool ecosystem empower teachers, leaders, and families to make faster, more informed decisions that directly improve student outcomes.



## PowerSchool features:

- Access to real-time student information, including demographics, attendance, behavior, enrollment and registration, fees, scheduling, graduation planning, and more
- At-a-glance look at student trends and progress in dashboards that bring disparate data together
- Robust data import/export functionality to keep your data accurate and up to date
- Parents can check student scores, attendance, assignments, and more with real-time push notifications
- Student performance data available in PowerTeacher Pro Gradebook, allowing teachers to tailor instruction to meet each student's needs
- Integration with other PowerSchool solutions (LMS, assessment, data and analytics, Data as a Service) to pull in comprehensive data from throughout your edtech ecosystem
- Flexible, customizable reporting gives the ability to adapt to changing compliance needs

# Compliance reporting

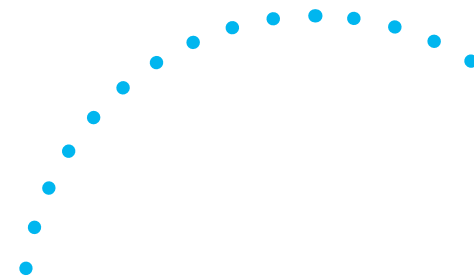
PowerSchool SIS streamlines state and provincial reporting, ensuring schools don't miss deadlines or funding opportunities.

With expert compliance support, pre-built and customizable reports, and automatic updates, districts can stay current and report with confidence.



## PowerSchool features:

- Validation reports can be run before submitting for state or provincial reporting
- Partnership with Level Data with integration to State Data Validation Suite
- Industry's largest, most complete compliance team dedicated to your state or provincial reporting needs
- Library of pre-built reports, most commonly used across schools and districts, and a custom report designer
- Support for a complete list of reports and submissions required for your state or province
- Access to highly active user and focus groups to learn timely reporting changes and requirements



## Family engagement

**PowerSchool SIS helps families stay connected through real-time access to grades, attendance, and assignments—anytime, anywhere.**

By simplifying communication and increasing transparency, it strengthens trust and partnership between schools, parents, and students.



### PowerSchool features:

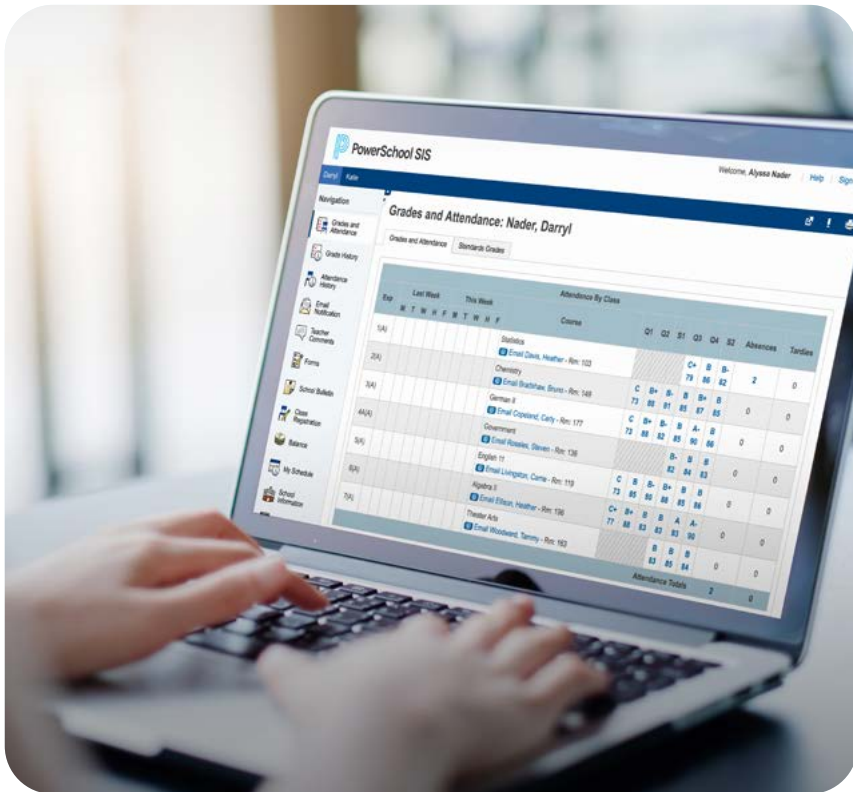
- Online and mobile access, providing families with visibility into academic performance, attendance, schedules, and school bulletins of all their children in one place
- Improves the quality of in-person parent-teacher meetings since all student performance data is continually communicated
- Parents can receive real-time push notifications of final grades and all attendance
- Families can access information on their own without having to contact the school



## Ease of use

PowerSchool SIS is built for simplicity and speed.

Its clean interface, intuitive navigation, and mobile-friendly design reduce clicks, streamline workflows, and make it easy for staff and families to find what they need, so more time is spent supporting students, not systems.



## PowerSchool features:

- Navigation is easy with a clean, modern, and intuitive interface
- Access to full functionality and data from any browser or device, including on mobile devices
- Smooth system explicitly designed for the web and catering to the requirements of individual users
- Parents and students have instant, easy-to-navigate access to grades, assignments, and attendance from the mobile app or online parent and student portals
- Best-fit master schedule creation in just a few clicks, taking into account all student and teacher needs
- Easy to customize the SIS quickly—with no coding or vendor help required—to collect critical data that supports your district's unique needs

## Training and support

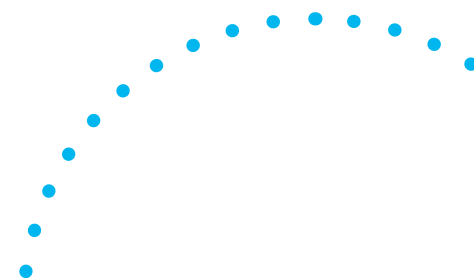
**PowerSchool SIS surrounds districts with expert guidance from day one.**

With a clear implementation roadmap, flexible training options, and a thriving user community, schools gain the confidence and ongoing support needed for long-term success and continuous improvement.



### PowerSchool features:

- Implementation is smooth with an organized, well-defined process that outlines each step, supporting your change management efforts
- Access to aggregated, community-based support with an online portal, including extensive knowledgebase articles
- Weekday support available (including early morning and evening) via phone, email, web, and live chat
- Weekend support via phone
- In-depth product training available in-person or virtually at PowerSchool University (PSU), PowerSchool's premier user-training conference
- Training available at every user's own pace, including online, on-site, at training events, or within a support community
- Connection to a worldwide community of engaged users who share their own experiences to improve education operations and share best practices



# Watch a PowerSchool SIS Demo

See **PowerSchool SIS in action** to see how the system gives you the ability to access actionable data, engage families, support teachers, and improve interoperability and data security.

[Watch Now](#)



**PowerSchool**

Personalized Education for Every Journey

[www.PowerSchool.com](http://www.PowerSchool.com)