

DATA FOR THE PEOPLE: PRIORITIZING EQUITY IN CALIFORNIA'S STATE LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM



The Education Trust–West

California needs better data on the state's education systems to uncover and remedy systemic, long-standing racial and socioeconomic inequities. To create more just institutions, students, families, policymakers, educators, and advocates need access to quality, disaggregated data that allows them to answer questions about how well our state's public schools, colleges, and universities are serving today's Californians. These data would provide common grounding so that lawmakers can move toward meaningful action and educators can improve classroom and campus practices, and students and families can make more informed choices.

Indeed, recognizing this state need and the strong constituent support for it, the Governor's office and the state legislature have proposed policies to create a statewide P-16 and workforce longitudinal data system (SLDS) that must be used to advance racial and socioeconomic equity in the state (see Table 1).

A California SLDS is critical, and its design matters. Too often, racial equity, in particular, is overlooked when crafting policy, such as the details associated with constructing a data system. To meet the needs of families of color and to spur equity-driven, evidence-based action and tools, policymakers must design the system with equity at the forefront. In addition to fully funding a SLDS, policymakers must incorporate the following foundational equity principles:

Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

Source: Center for Assessment and Policy Development

1. **Engage students and families.** A diverse array of stakeholders should be consulted throughout the data system development and implementation to ensure the needs of students of color remain front and center. A governance structure should mandate an advisory role for students and families—especially communities of color. Student and family engagement should continue through data system implementation as well to make certain all communities are equipped with the necessary information to drive informed decision making, especially with students and families of color throughout the state.
2. **Count all students and disaggregate data.** Until data are disaggregated, inequities remain hidden. To ensure the SLDS data can be used to advance equitable opportunities and outcomes, all P-16 students – including students enrolled in alternative schools, justice-involved students, and dual-enrolled students, for example – must be counted. Outcome information must be disaggregated by at least race and ethnicity, gender, and income status, and tools should allow users to cross-tabulate metrics by multiple student characteristics in ways that are relevant for the California context. This disaggregation should be detailed enough to understand the challenges facing a variety of underserved groups, including the large Asian and Pacific Islander American populations across the state (e.g., Hmong, Filipino, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, and Samoan), while also protecting student privacy.
3. **Protect student privacy, especially for our most vulnerable students and their families.** SLDS data should only be used to help students, never to harm them. As the SLDS provides necessary information to students, families, policymakers, and the public, it also must protect student privacy and secure students' data. It should include strong governance protocols, including strict guidelines for who can access which data and routine training for those with access to identifiable data, and should follow industry-leading best practices in security. Policymakers must take extra care to protect the most vulnerable students, including undocumented students or family members. Legislation should be explicit in prohibiting the system from (1) collecting especially sensitive data, such as a student or family's immigration status or (2) using this system for federal, state, or local law enforcement.

4. **Produce accessible, public-facing results and tools.** Different people need access to different types of information to inform their actions. Through standard reports and interactive, public-facing, consumer and analytic tools, the state should encourage families, educators, and communities to engage with the information in ways that answer their most pressing questions. The tools should display data in meaningful ways that spotlight the racial and socioeconomic disparities within the education system and that help students and families make decisions about which college and program will offer them the best chance of success.
5. **Be used to inform systemic, asset & equity-oriented change.** From the data that are available, the depth of educational inequities in CA are clear. For example, deficiencies in educational experiences and delivery result in fewer students of color graduating college-ready and lower overall education attainment for communities of color¹². These gaps point to an urgent need for action to unravel the systemic barriers holding back people of color from capturing all the economic, personal, and societal benefits that a college degree can provide. Data alone cannot fix a system riddled with inequities, but data are an essential tool to diagnose the problems and design the solutions. To leverage data for positive change, policymakers, educators, and all those who use data must interpret it with an asset-oriented mindset, recognizing that systems—not students—are the underlying cause of the inequities reflected in the data.

WHAT MUST LEGISLATORS DO NEXT?

Equity must rest at the forefront of California’s data policy conversations and must be built into the foundation of the SLDS. A reformed data system has the power to transform how policymakers, students, families, and advocates work to improve our state’s education systems. To direct this transformative power toward equity-oriented change, policymakers must not only fully fund the SLDS, but embed these equity principles in the system from square one.

Table 1: Equity Assessment of Current SLDS Proposals

This table presents our assessment of each current SLDS proposal:

- Governor Newsom’s [Budget Proposal](#)
- Senator Glazer’s [Senate Bill 2](#)
- Assemblymember Irwin’s [Assembly Bill 1466](#)

For each proposal, we assign an equity assessment on a scale of zero to three stars, with zero stars indicating weakest equity focus in the proposal and three stars indicating a strong equity focus in the proposal.

How equitable are the current proposals for a state longitudinal data system?			
Equity Principle	Governor Newsom’s Budget/ Trailer Bill Language	Senate Bill 2 (Sen. Glazer)	Assembly Bill 1466 (Asm. Irwin)
Engaging students & families	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★
Counting all students and disaggregating data	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★
Protecting student privacy	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★
Producing accessible, public facing results and tools	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★
Focusing on systemic, asset-, and equity-oriented change	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★

How Can You Get Engaged?

- To **learn more** about The Education Trust–West’s education equity priorities, please reach out to Dr. Christopher Nellum at cnellum@edtrustwest.org.
- **Share this data brief** with your neighbors, colleagues, and other equity champions in your community.
- **Join** Ed Trust—West’s email list to receive updates and resources and to learn more about other equity issues: www.edtrustwest.org/join.
- **Contact your local elected representative** and offer your thoughts on California’s statewide longitudinal data system: <http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/>.
- **Share this data brief** on social media using the hashtag #DataForThePeople and connect with us:



/EdTrustWest



@EdTrustWest



@EdTrustWest



@EdTrustWest

THIS BRIEF WAS AUTHORED BY CHRISTOPHER J. NELLUM, PH.D. OF THE EDUCATION TRUST–WEST, IN COLLABORATION WITH MAMIE VOIGHT OF INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY (IHEP).

ENDNOTES

¹ <https://west.edtrust.org/resource/the-majority-report/>

² <https://west.edtrust.org/resource/black-minds-matter-supporting-the-educational-success-of-black-children-in-california/>