

California Data Policy Landscape

California is in the midst of streamlining its data collection systems. The California Department of Education interacts with institutes of higher education from the standpoint of their K–12 students moving on to higher education, not from the standpoint of teachers graduating from teacher preparation programs and becoming a part of the K–12 system. California has many isolated, discrete systems, all collecting vast amounts of data. The Data Management Division’s main focus now is to gather all the data collection under one roof and reduce the burden on teachers, schools, and districts.

Current Data Capacities

The Data Management Division is only a year old, but the department is responsible for 150 different data collections each year. The division is hampered by duplicative data requests as well as some paper collections still in use, and there is little conversation about the quality of the data collected or reported. A guide to these various data collections is available online. The goal is to move quickly beyond this state and to begin strategically to plan data collection systems, with attention to the quality of data collected and reported.

Legislation in 2002, prompted by the data demands of No Child Left Behind, created the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), and every student is now given a unique 10-digit identifier. Of the 6.5 million students in California, roughly 5 million currently have this unique identification number. Presently, this identifier only holds demographic data, but next year it also should link to student test scores.

Earlier legislation established the California School Information Services (CSIS) Program, which aims to develop a statewide school information system to facilitate the exchange and reporting of information by the local education agencies (county offices of education and school districts). Presently, these local education agencies can choose to participate in CSIS, and one-time incentive funding is available to help with the financial burden of building up the district’s technology infrastructure and capacity. CSIS mainly helps local districts do three things: (a) build capacity to implement and maintain efficient pupil information systems, (b) enable accurate and timely exchange of pupil transcripts, and (c) assist with state and federal electronic records transfers. The goal is eventually to link these to higher education, which districts currently cannot.

The California Basic Educational Data Statistics (CBEDS), which collects both student and staffing data, are processed through CSIS. The Professional Assignment Information Form is part of CBEDS and is used to collect data on certificated staff specific to district and county offices on their highest education level, racial/ethnic designation, gender, birth year, educational service, course assignment, position, and teaching credentials. Information is gathered on teachers by schools, mainly because the current system does not use unique teacher identifiers.

California has its own separate credentialing commission, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC), which keeps its own discrete database on teachers. While the commission uses unique identifiers and can create longitudinal reports, the database is now isolated and discrete, unable to “talk” with CBEDS or other systems.

The State Teachers’ Retirement System (STRS) houses considerable personal information on California teachers. However, despite clearly common interests between CCTC and STRS, the two systems are not linked in any way.

The Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program also collects data, such as the number of teachers served in each district annually, but this database is yet another distinct, isolated system.

The Political Landscape

There has been little political will supporting the idea of linking student data to individual teachers, and the California Teachers Association is highly against the idea. The same legislation that created CALPADS mentioned the desire to use student information with postsecondary institutions, mainly motivated by interest in hard-to-staff schools. At this point, only school districts can link student data to individual teachers, so a researcher could do this on a small scale, but enormous hurdles still must be surmounted before such research could be conducted statewide. In order to create a culture of evidence, the interaction between the Department of Education and the Institutes of Higher Education must shift so that teacher preparation programs and their graduates are viewed as an integral part of the K–12 cycle.

Web Resources

California Department of Education

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/>

California School Information Services (CSIS)

<http://www.csis.k12.ca.us/>

California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/index.asp>

California Basic Educational Data Statistics (CBEDS)

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/>

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC)

<https://teachercred.ctc.ca.gov/teachers/index.jsp>

Data Resource Guide (DRG)

<http://inet2.cde.ca.gov/dataresourceguide/>