The Education Trust–West

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EDUCATION EQUITY IN CRISIS: #DATA4THEPEOPLE BUT HOW?

Data is critical to ensuring communities and educators are empowered with the best information to highlight inequities and advocate for educational justice for California's schools and colleges.

For over five years, The Education Trust–West has been leading a statewide campaign called #Data4ThePeople to ensure California builds a data system designed with achieving equity and the needs of students, parents, and families at the center. In this current climate of COVID-19 and school and college closures, state and education leaders must confront the challenge to data accessibility and quality and find workable solutions to ensure the collection of useful data in a timely fashion.

COVID-19 & EDUCATION DATA

School and college closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted early childhood, K-12, and higher education classrooms across the state. While state, regional, and local leaders must address the pressing needs of students and their families now, we cannot lose sight of the longer-term impacts of the closures. Clear and accessible data are crucial to ensuring education and employment opportunities for students, their communities, and the state as a whole.

COVID-19, school and college closures and the economic impact of the crisis pose real challenges to data accessibility and quality. With schools and colleges closed, it is not possible to adequately collect the data that parents, decisionmakers, and advocates need to understand where education systems need support and how to measure student outcomes. By identifying where systemic and potentially new problems exist, data is a critical starting point for shifting policies and practices to better serve students of color, students from lower-income communities, and English learners from the early grades through college.

THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES ON K-12 DATA

In the K-12 system, we know already that some key metrics will not be collected, leaving a gap in data available to track and monitor student outcomes. For example, the state's primary measure of academic performance (i.e., the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), will not be administered this year. In addition to the CAASPP, the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC), used for reclassifying English Learners, will also not be administered and raises the question of how to make informed decisions in the absence of this data. Additionally, with students not in school, other metrics that are important in tracking the experiences of students, such as chronic absenteeism and suspension rates, will not be possible for the whole academic year.

The lack of data for this school year also has significant implications for the centerpiece of California's K-12 accountability system: the California School Dashboard. Without this year's data, it will not be possible to identify school or district progress against Dashboard indicators or year-to-year change for the 2019-20 school year, and possibly the 2020-21 school year. Lacking data is of particular concern for identifying local education agencies (LEAs) for differentiated assistance, which is based on LEA Dashboard performance[1] and meant to provide additional support to LEAs struggling to meet students' needs. This is especially critical because LEAs will need even more of this support due to school closures.

THE EFFECT OF CAMPUS CLOSURES ON HIGHER EDUCATION DATA

Similar to K-12, campus closures impact higher education data used to understand trends and college students' needs. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, California Community

Colleges (CCC), California State University (CSU), and University of California (UC) systems each took steps to revise or waive admissions requirements and modified grading policies for the 2020-21 academic year. While system leaders intended to facilitate the application process for students during a time of crisis, these changes might affect institutions' abilities to understand trends for the incoming class. Since students are no longer on campuses and have limited access to student services (e.g., career services, student support services), universities will also not have the data they need to provide tailored resources that support student success. Campuses need to collect student-focused data to understand how to better support students, as well as plan for resources when students return.

All public higher education institutions host public data tools, which are also at risk of being impacted by the pandemic and subsequent campus closures. Regularly reported data, such as student enrollment, completion, and persistence may be challenging to measure and interpret accurately. In light of this, the current situation provides an opportunity for institution leaders to actively collect new data, specific to student experiences during the pandemic, and include this data in future iterations of their data tools.

Beyond impacting the availability of data to the public, the pandemic's impact on data reporting also has the potential to affect funding for postsecondary institutions. For the California Community Colleges, metrics used as part of the Student Centered Funding Formula (e.g., enrollment, financial aid data, outcome data) may be compromised, especially if the pandemic significantly impacts enrollment and completion rates.

AFFECTED DATA

The following chart provides a short list of some P-16 data sources that may be impacted by the school and college closures resulting from the current pandemic and highlights its potential impact.

Source	System	Potential impact
CA School Dashboard	CDE	The CA School Dashboard contains data demonstrating how local educational agencies and schools are performing on state and local indicators that are part of the state's school accountability plan. Delayed or missing data on the Dashboard could mean limited opportunities to understand school performance and impact the ability to identify schools for differentiated assistance. Examples of crucial indicators impacted include College and Career Indicator, Math and ELA performance, Chronic Absenteeism, Suspension.
DataQuest	CDE	DataQuest contains a wide variety of reports about California students, teachers, and schools, including school performance, test results, enrollment, school staffing, graduation, among others. Missing or delayed data on DataQuest could make it challenging for decisionmakers to make informed solutions. Additionally, the absence of some metrics will present challenges in examining longitudinal trends. Examples of impacted metrics CAASPP scores (Math, ELA), suspension and absenteeism rates, and a-g completion rates.
CSU Dashboard	CSU	The CSU dashboards contain comprehensive data for the system as well as individual campuses. Missing or delayed data could impact the system's ability to understand and adequately respond to the needs of students and hinder the public release of this data. Examples of potentially affected metrics include admissions, enrollment, retention, persistence, and completion.
Race to Submit	CSAC	The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) 's Race to Submit dashboard tracks FAFSA/CADAA completions across the state. Delays in data submission from students and districts may impact the Commission's ability to track the needs of students. Due to extensions provided by CSAC[2], FAFSA completion rates are likely to be affected and delayed.
UC Dashboard	UC	The UC dashboards contain comprehensive data for the system and individual institutions. Missing or delayed data could potentially impact the system's ability to understand and adequately respond to the needs of students, and the public release of their annual data. Examples of impacted metrics might include admissions, enrollment, retention, persistence, and completion.
CCC Datamart	CCC	The CCC DataMart hosts comprehensive data for the California Community Colleges. Missing or delayed data can potentially impact institutions' ability to address students' needs and publicly share data. Additionally, delays or issues in collecting specific metrics can have adverse implications for the SCFF. Some potentially impacted metrics include enrollment, completion, and financial need of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE AND EDUCATION LEADERS

1) **Encourage collaboration across education entities to provide a real-time understanding of student experiences.** Given the pandemic and its impact on communities, the California Department of Education (CDE), governing offices for all California systems of public higher education (CCC, CSU, UC),

and the Employment Development Department (EDD) should commit to publicly release annual disaggregated "to and through" data on the postsecondary pathways of current students. This includes graduating high school seniors enrolling in college, college persistence, and degree program completion, as well as wage and employment data. These state entities should make this data available immediately to determine how students impacted by the pandemic fare compared to prior cohorts and identify additional interventions and supports. This data should be accessible to the public through each entity's primary data dashboard.

2) ***Continued support for the Cradle-to-Career Data System.*** The Education Trust–West, through the Data for The People Campaign, advocates for more substantial and accessible data to address educational equity issues. We believe this to be necessary for understanding the real impact of school and college closures due to COVID-19 on such topics as learning loss on institutions, students, and their families. Establishing a statewide longitudinal data system (SLDS) allows all sectors (e.g., early childhood, K-12, higher education) to leverage resources to support each other and understand how to help students moving forward. Despite pressure on the state budget, it is critical to protect the one-time funding allocated for the development of the Cradle-to-Career Data System and appropriate future funding.

3) ***Identify schools and districts hardest hit for additional support.*** While the CDE is pausing identification of schools and LEAs for differentiated assistance through the state's System of Support[3], they should develop a plan to identify LEAs and schools that are particularly struggling due to school closures and offer them immediate assistance. The availability of traditional accountability metrics may be limited. Still, the CDE should work with school and district leaders to identify new criteria for determining who is in most need of support to serve their students during this challenging time adequately. Criteria should focus on identifying schools and LEA's with more significant percentages of students identified in the Local Control Funding Formula (i.e., Low-income students, English Learners, foster youth) who may be disproportionately underserved during the school closures.

4) ***Provide guidance and resources for schools and colleges.*** The state should collaborate with leaders of all P-16 educational systems (i.e., CDE, UC, CSU, CCC) to develop clear guidance and standards for addressing how schools and colleges can best make critical decisions in the absence of some data. This guidance could include establishing new COVID-19-specific data metrics, such as uniform measures of the digital divide, collected across all systems. Our recent equity alert provides additional recommendations on how to ensure this crisis does not widen opportunity gaps for our vulnerable students. Leaders should consider equity-focused suggestions like these when providing this guidance and resources.

5) **Push postsecondary institutions to collect more data**. In addition to annually collected data, postsecondary institutions should identify and collect metrics specific to the experiences of students during this period. Under guidance from the state, all public systems of higher education should convene and agree on these metrics. This will help leaders learn to actively support students, as well as inform early warning indicators for institutions to use in the future. The new metrics should include data on the impact of things like housing closures and financial aid loss on retention, graduation, and workforce implications, among others.

6) **Work toward a revised version of the CA School Dashboard.** While CDE received a federal waiver from ESSA and is no longer required to release 2020 state indicator data, CDE should still release a revised version of the Dashboard. It should include data that remain available (e.g., graduation rate). This data should not be linked to any direct accountability, but rather serve as a resource for districts, schools, students, and families to understand how their schools fared during this time. The Dashboard data will also support LEAs' plans for their general educational services, and the services specific to high-need students through the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Since full-year data will not be available for all indicators, CDE should work closely with LEAs to identify the best approaches for using any available data, with the explicit clarification that it is not complete data.

Learn more about the #Data4ThePeople Campaign
Find out more about ETW's Equity 8 – Legislative Principles Amid COVID-19 pandemic