

Policy Brief

California's Unique Opportunity to Build a Comprehensive Data System

...(T)he absence of a reliable teacher workforce data system leaves the state's education leadership working in the dark, trying valiantly to make best guesses about our students' real needs relative to the allocation of teacher resources...Making matters worse, the state has been plagued by an inability to make good use of the data it does collect.

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Comprehensive data is the oxygen of education improvement yet, to date, in California it has been in very short supply. Solid and reliable data is essential to inform policy choices; without it the strongest opinions or loudest voices can take the state in the wrong direction. For years, the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning (the Center) and others have argued for comprehensive student and educator data systems for California (see *Strengthening California's Teacher Data System* on the Center's Web site at www.cftl.org). Now, action resulting from SB 1614 (Simitian, 2006) and subsequent legislation, plus the infusion of up to \$100 million in new federal stimulus funding, offer the state's policy makers unique opportunities to expand, improve and accelerate implementation of California's student and teacher data systems.

If we move thoughtfully and expeditiously, California can add missing elements to these systems to strengthen analysis of education data by teachers, administrators, parents and policy makers while eliminating duplicative, burdensome collection requirements. Our teachers and their students will be the beneficiaries.

Teachers tell us that they need high quality data to successfully plan, modify and target instruction, work with students who are struggling, and inform parents of student progress. Having the data is the first step; using the data for continuous improvement is the goal. A recent study of principals released by the Center, *Strengthening California's System for Preparing and Supporting Principals*, found that sharing best practices among teachers or using performance data for instructional improvement is not a common practice in their schools. This finding suggests the need for data on the kinds of professional development opportunities

that are being offered to teachers and its impact both on teaching and learning.

Data on school administrators and their professional development needs are also sorely lacking. The same study indicated that there is an “urgent and basic need to develop a much more thorough understanding of the status of education leadership and the barriers to entering and staying in the profession.” Further, a 2008 EdSource survey found that California principals rank training in using assessment data as their “top professional development need.”

A 2008 report commissioned by the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction and conducted by McKinsey & Company makes specific recommendations regarding the scope and potential use of currently proposed data systems:

1. Enhance existing K-12 data collections by capturing key additional data on students, teachers and programs;
2. Develop systems to improve educator and administrator recruitment, effectiveness and retention; and
3. Develop feedback and innovation capabilities to continuously improve instruction, administration and policy making.

For policy makers, comprehensive data offers the opportunity to better understand how state funding can be spent more effectively, if programs should be expanded or curtailed, and if particular approaches to educator preparation, induction, retention and continuing professional development work better than others. However, as the Center has emphasized for some time, policy makers lack a state-level data and analysis system to provide them with answers to even the most basic questions such as, How many individuals who have completed teacher preparation actually take jobs? What types of schools and districts attract newly minted teachers and what types of jobs do these new teachers get? What types of schools have difficulty retaining qualified teachers? At the center of California Education policy is a legal and moral imperative to continue efforts toward education equity, ensuring that all students have access to qualified and caring teachers. High quality education data is crucial to this end.

To qualify for the federal stimulus funding designed to help backfill education budget cuts, states must assure the federal government that the state **is establishing data systems linking information from preschool to higher education.**

TEACHER DEMAND DATA

Policy makers need answers to questions such as ...

- *What is the demand for teachers by region and subject area?*
- *What are the projected shifts in demand?*

TEACHER PREPARATION DATA

Policy makers need answers to questions such as...

- *How many college and university students are actively preparing to become teachers and what subjects and grades they are preparing to teach?*

TEACHER SUPPLY

Policy makers need answers to questions such as...

- *How many teaching credential holders are not assigned by authorization (teaching out-of-field)?*
- *Which subject matter areas carry the largest numbers of out-of-field assignments?*
- *What kinds of professional development opportunities do teachers have to “catch up” with the subject matter content they are assigned?*

State legislation has gone a long way to address the federal requirement, resulting in creation of California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), set for a fall 2009 startup, and California Longitudinal Teacher Integrated Data Education System (CALTIDES) scheduled for 2011-12. When implemented, schools will, for the first time, be able to track individual student enrollment, course completion, grades and graduation through CALPADS. Reporting requirements will be modernized to eliminate duplicative reporting, freeing administrators to focus on education improvement. Yet, CALPADS is missing elements deemed essential by experts such as the national Data Quality Campaign. Missing elements include information on student level college readiness and the ability to match student records from pre-Kindergarten through higher education that are necessary to fully address federal assurances. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), a top priority is expanding CALPADS to address existing gaps in data that would make it possible to track students through their education careers, from preschool through higher education. Attending to these priorities will address some of the gaps, but others remain.

The federal stimulus package requirements also add strength to the argument to complete the data system for teachers as well as students as soon as possible. Any data system designed to “link information from preschool to higher education” must recognize that teacher quality is one of the most important determinants of student performance. More specifically, in order to receive federal funding states must agree to report by district the number and percentage of teachers and principals scoring at each performance level on local teacher and principal evaluation instruments. This requirement provides even more impetus to use a portion of the federal funding for CALTIDES to hasten its completion prior to 2011-12, expand its data sets to ensure their usefulness, and provide policy makers and the public with an adequate base upon which important decisions to strengthen teaching can be built.

In addition to the requirements of the federal stimulus package, the need for a high quality educator data

system has taken on even greater significance for California due to the most recent budget crisis. In an effort to provide resources necessary to stem teacher layoffs, the budget allows local districts to suspend, for four and a half years, programs designed to address the specific needs of students as well as strategies for teacher support and development. Along with the suspension of these categorical programs comes the curtailment of evaluation of the policy priorities these programs address. Reporting requirements, including those targeted toward education equity, are on hold. The compromise moves the state in the direction of measuring outputs rather than inputs and freeing local educators to direct resources as they see fit, which can enhance local accountability. The only way to measure the status of efforts to address such issues as education equity and teaching quality, however, is through the expeditious implementation of California's statewide data system.

Several actions are underway to continue efforts to design and implement comprehensive data systems. The Governor's Chief Information Officer is in charge of building a long-term data approach as required by SB 1298 (Simitian, 2008). A 2009 measure by Senator Simitian (SB 19) proposes to use the new federal funding to bring together a working group to create a strategic plan for expanding and improving education data systems. The CDE has pledged to apply to the federal government for stimulus funding dedicated to data system development. Upon acceptance of the application, California stands to receive over \$27.5 million to continue work essential to completing both the student and teacher data systems. This grant money, and other stimulus funding, totals nearly \$100 million to improve California's data systems.

A TIME FOR ACTION: Numerous questions essential to state and local decisions, including those highlighted in this brief, cannot be adequately answered by existing sources of educator data. We encourage California policy makers to carefully consider the missing elements, duplicative collections, and information gaps in current and proposed California data systems, and make improvements deemed necessary. Armed with the facts, the state should move quickly to take full advantage of the unique opportunity of this one-time offer to receive federal funding for these essential data tools for policy makers, teachers, local school boards, and parents. Our students deserve no less.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DATA

Policy makers need answers to questions such as...

- *What is the level of participation in professional development programs?*
- *Which programs are best aligned with student and teacher need?*
- *Which programs make an impact on teaching and learning?*