csba Research and Policy Fact Sheet

# How to Access Publicly Available and Reliable Data as a Board Member

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As members of a governance team, having access to up-to-date data is crucial for making informed and impactful decisions. While local educational agency (LEA) staff will likely have the most nuanced data, there are a wealth of free and available data resources about your LEA that are accessible 24/7. While, these sources can provide information about certain student groups, local staff will likely have more granular and disaggregated data. This data provides a foundation for starting discussions about student achievement and well-being with LEA staff.

## DataQuest

**Source:** The California Department of Education (CDE)

**What data can be found at DataQuest?** DataQuest is a central data depository run by the California Department of Education. The site offers a comprehensive 10-year collection of data that is easy to navigate, making it an excellent starting point to search for information. DataQuest can also display test scores; however, both EdSource and CDE have central websites with easy-to-use data tools for those scores. The data found at DataQuest includes:

- Enrollment rates
- Graduation and dropout rates
- Post-secondary enrollment rates
- School climate
- Staffing
- Student course enrollment

## The California School Dashboard

**Source:** CDE

**What data can be found on the California School Dashboard?** The California School Dashboard provides a wide range of progress indicators for LEAs. The indicators are presented in colors to help community members understand progress in assessments and other state measures. CDE has produced a short how-to video to help navigate the Dashboard. For county boards of education, CDE provides a Dashboard label for schools with Dashboard Alternative School Status, which is an accountability type for schools that serve high-risk students.

The data on the Dashboard includes:

- Academic — English language arts and Mathematics — California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP)
- English learner progress — English Learner Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC)
- Chronic absenteeism rates
- Graduation rates
- Suspension rates
- College/career readiness
- California Science Test (CAST) scores
- Growth scores — The measure of student progress year-to-year over time.

## Ed-Data

**Sources:** CDE, EdSource, Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT)

**What data can be found at Ed-Data?** Ed-Data is a joint data partnership that combines information from various state and journalistic organizations. This site contains student, staff, local revenue, and financial data for local school districts and county offices of education. Ed-Data displays data graphically over time, allowing users to see changes over several years.

## More advanced downloadable datasets

**Source:** CDE

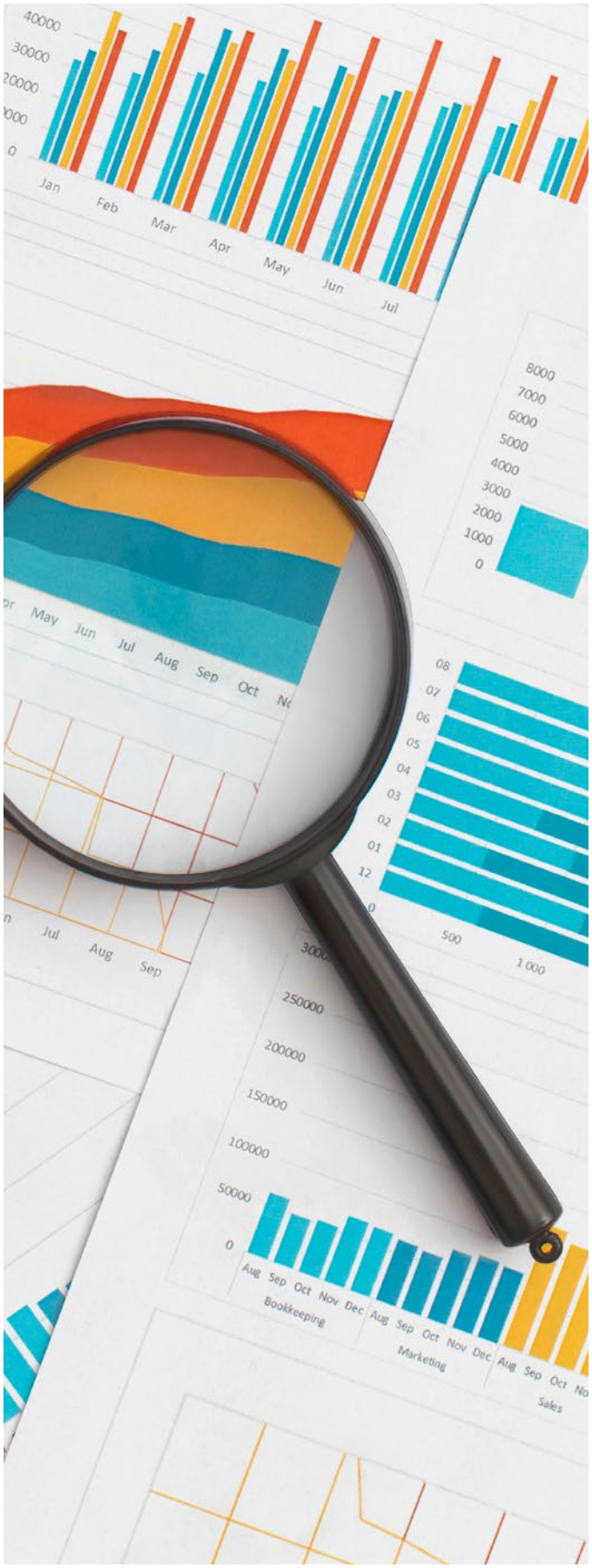
**What can you find here?** If a board member has more familiarity with data analysis and organization, the CDE provides downloadable source data, also known as raw data, which can be accessed on their website. This data format requires users to be comfortable navigating large, raw data files. However, these sets are suitable for those with a background in data analysis. They can provide more flexibility and can be reorganized to answer very specific questions.

## What are the limits of these data sources?

The data sources listed on this fact sheet provide reliable and current information that can be accessed at home or on the go. When accessing this data, it is essential to understand what it can reveal, but equally important to know what it cannot.

These resources provide indicators, but they do not reveal the causes of those indicators. They can help you identify disparities among student groups, but they won't explain why those disparities exist. This is where board members must work with LEA staff and their communities to address concerning trends and uncover underlying causes. Other factors may influence indicator results, and governance teams can collaborate to identify and resolve LEA issues. Conversely, positive data trends can be recognized early, enabling impactful programs to be funded and supported.

## Future state data

California is greatly expanding data access through the Cradle to Career (C2C) data system. This system, which is currently in early stages of development, will integrate data from social services, higher education institutions, school districts, county offices of education, workforce organizations, and other sources. As a result of integrating these different systems, the state will create an advanced longitudinal dataset to monitor student progress over time, extending well beyond their TK-12 education. This data system will include a dashboard that is intended to be easily accessible to the public and policymakers, with the possibility of future secure access to the underlying data to researchers.

**For more information on publicly accessible data, you can contact research@csba.org.**