

# Budgeting for Educational Equity



PODCAST SERIES  
*Episode 2*

# USING DATA TO ADVANCE EQUITY

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*Budgeting for Educational Equity is a podcast series that explores how education resources can be allocated to better meet the needs of all students. This brief was developed to provide opportunities for listeners to engage in tangible, practical application of the lessons derived from each episode. The brief can be used as a launching point for discussions about equity within communities and school district administrative offices. It can also be used to support existing ongoing work such as the Local Control Accountability Plan or district budget development. Episodes can be found on the [Budgeting for Educational Equity Podcast Series webpage](#).*

## INTRODUCTION: DATA AND THE PURSUIT OF EQUITY

For some, the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the term *education data* is “information that is collected from assessments taken by students.” But education data is much more than just test scores. It can be about attendance. It can be about safety. It can even be about the effectiveness of a specific program or practice. In the education sector, the following are four key types of data: achievement data, demographic data, program data, and financial data. Using these different types of data together offers a powerful way for educators and school communities to inform decisions and

drive changes. When used well, data helps us identify where students are being well served, where more support and resources are needed, and where disparities exist among populations of students, as Chris Edley described in podcast episode 1 (available on the [Budgeting for Educational Equity Podcast Series webpage](#)).

Using data to inform decision-making on the budgeting process requires careful consideration and, at times, rigorous analysis. For these reasons, data should be accessed and reviewed in a deliberate manner, as the findings derived from the data are not always straightforward and will require strategic planning to appropriately address. Moreover, knowing

FIGURE 1. STEPS INVOLVED IN BUDGETING FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY



where to begin is not always easy, and even knowing what data are available can be difficult.

In this podcast episode, we spoke with Jayne Christakos, former Chief Business Officer (CBO) with the San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCSD), who provided a real-world example (described in the following section) of how SBCSD staff use data to drive improvement across specific domains of student need. This example serves as a foundation for understanding the second step in Budgeting for Educational Equity: Review Existing Data, as shown in Figure 1. (Additional steps in this process will be described in later podcast episodes and their associated briefs.)

#### WHAT THE EXPERTS HAVE TO SAY

SBCSD, about an hour's drive east of Los Angeles, has more than 50,000 students, making it one of California's 10 largest school districts. Within its population, 87 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, and 23 percent are English learners.<sup>1</sup>

#### Reviewing Existing Data to Inform Targeted Support

In 2018, CBO Christakos and her team of SBCSD leaders were deliberating about how to best provide support for their lowest-performing schools in an innovative, impactful way. The leadership team decided that, in order to truly understand how to target its support, the district would need to do a comprehensive review of key data. They also decided that there would need to be dedicated staff time to facilitate this process in a meaningful fashion. Thus, a new role was created, and SBCSD hired its first Assistant Superintendent of Continuous Improvement.

Next, using district data, SBCSD staff reviewed achievement and demographic metrics across the district, arriving at the following key indicators that showed areas of opportunity within the district:

- California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) scores for English language arts
- CAASPP scores for math

- Suspension rates
- Schoolwide chronic absenteeism rates, particularly among English learners and African American youth

Based on data related to these indicators, CBO Christakos and her staff identified eight elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools for targeted support to school progress (TSSP). As the name suggests, TSSP includes targeted resources to support students at these identified schools.

To effectively finance this plan, SBCSD staff braided Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and Title I dollars, at an initial investment of about \$6.5 million. Christakos notes that, according to the California Department of Education, in the first year of TSSP, identified schools significantly improved across multiple areas. In the years since its introduction, TSSP has continued in SBCSD, with ongoing costs of around \$4 million from both LCAP and Title I funds each year.



## PODCAST SERIES Episode 2: Using Data to Advance Equity

As shown in this example, districts can examine their existing data to inform an effective, equitable school financing system. Analyzing existing data can reveal where improvements can be made, which, in turn, can help district leaders set appropriate budget priorities for the following school year to make substantive progress, particularly in schools that need the most support. While the process may sound straightforward and efficient, making these kinds of targeted investments requires strategy, research, and a thorough understanding of the available

data systems. Overall, this example illustrates a key point: **Relying on key data points to inform budget priorities is a way that district leaders can explicitly center equity in their fiscal planning processes.**

pressing equity gaps are within your student population. To help develop some preliminary approaches, the following data-based reform activity provides some general questions to ask about your context, and frames different ways to think about how useful data may exist within current processes. Review the information presented in the following sample data-based reform chart, and then use your own identified criteria to complete the blank template.

### DATA-BASED REFORM: HOW TO GET STARTED

Using the lessons learned from the SBCSD example, you can now look at your own context. Think about what kinds of data are necessary to understand where your system's most

### DATA-BASED REFORM ACTIVITY

#### Instructions

- 1 | Revisit your working definition of equity that you developed in *Brief #1: Defining Equity*. That definition should be the goal that you are trying to advance toward. It should drive how you decide which data are most important.
- 2 | Review student outcome data to determine areas of need that align with your definition of equity.
- 3 | Review demographic data to understand trends and targeted areas of need within populations.
- 4 | Review fiscal data to identify existing and untapped resources to better serve priority populations.

### SAMPLE DATA-BASED REFORM CHART

**Definition of Equity:** All students have equal opportunity to learn and succeed. Depending on a given student's needs, less advantaged students may receive more fiscal resources than more advantaged students.

2

What student needs must be addressed to advance toward our definition of equity?

Chronic  
Absenteeism

English Learner  
Reclassification  
Rates

Graduation Rates

3

Which student groups should be our priorities?

High Schoolers

English Learners

Title I Schools

4

What resources can be leveraged?

#### Existing

ESSA Title III funds for English learners

#### Untapped

1x American Rescue Plan funds to support hybrid learning for English learners as they transition back to the classroom

**YOUR DATA-BASED REFORM CHART**

(Insert your definition of equity from *Brief #1: Defining Equity*)

*What student needs must be addressed to advance toward our definition of equity?*

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*Which student groups should be our priorities?*

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*What resources can be leveraged?*

Existing	Untapped

The structure presented in this activity offers a framework for using data to understand where a school system’s most pressing needs are within its student population. It is not, however, a final reform strategy in and of itself. Districts must also identify feasible, sustainable reform strategies that can support implementation of the reform.

Upon completing this activity, take a moment to reflect on what questions still remain for you. Think about how this structured activity can help you and your district identify sustainable reform strategies that fit your current context.

We will explore what the implementation of equitable fiscal practice looks

like in the next podcast episode and brief in this series, *Budgeting for Educational Equity: Creating a Shared Plan for Change*. ■

<sup>1</sup> California Department of Education. (2021). *District Profile: San Bernardino City Unified* <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/details.aspx?cde=36678760000000>

