# FCMAT

**FISCAL CRISIS & MANAGEMENT
ASSISTANCE TEAM**

# *Fiscal Alert*
August 2020

## *CALPADS Data Reporting Challenge*

### Background

The scope of California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) continues to expand and become more integral to state education efforts. During the past year, the functionality of the California Special Education Management Information System (CASEMIS) was transitioned to CALPADS. This was a significant shift to centralize student data and substantially increased the overall volume of CALPADS data processing. The change was accomplished by adding more than 100 new data elements, over 200 new validations, a new application programming interface enabling CALPADS to accept automated data submissions, and a dozen new reports and extracts to detail students with disabilities data. CALPADS is a critical data structure feeding other data-reporting partners that are responsible for accountability, apportionments and teacher assignment monitoring.

The increasing breadth of CALPADS data helps decrease duplication of reporting efforts from local educational agencies (LEAs) and provides a more consistent and wider range of quality data for LEAs to access from a single data system. As education leaders consider the increasing number of COVID-19 issues that led to the economic downturn and the urgent need to deliver vital educational services, timely and accurate data is essential to determining how best to serve our communities. Data is a valuable asset because it helps inform both policy creation and implementation.

### The Concern

LEAs are facing uncertain times, and budget projections are more difficult to formulate than ever. To ensure accurate data that facilitates timely and informative decisions, educational leaders should know that operating CALPADS can no longer be considered an optional budget line accomplished with part-time staff. CALPADS data are increasingly used for populating funding formulas and identifying the district's students so that they can be adequately supported. Staffing, coordination, and the ability to meet certification deadlines are all relevant to the fiscal health of all LEAs.

Much has changed in this past year with the consolidation of student data in CALPADS and new focus on highly validated information. Most significant was a local process change: special education coordinators are required to approve fall 1 and EOY 4 data for certification. This Fiscal Alert highlights the challenges of fall 1 and EOY 4 certification and makes recommendations. To succeed in the current environment, educational leaders should prioritize local data management strategies to support data input, cleaning, and review activities among shrinking resources.

Over the years, the student information system (SIS) data coordinator has become the de facto CALPADS data coordinator and is expected to work across many departments such as assessments, nutrition, human resources, curriculum, special education, etc. Fall 1 feedback from the CALPADS data coordinators indicate they did not have time to collaborate with special education coordinators who maintain students with disabilities in the local special education data system (SEDS). An analysis of the fall 1 submission data collection found that 80% of LEAs were in danger of not certifying fall 1 CALPADS data until very late in the submission window because local planning left too little time for CALPADS data coordinators and special education coordinators to verify the data.

LEAs that could build cross-departmental data teams with ongoing collaboration between CALPADS data coordinators and special education coordinators were more successful at meeting deadlines earlier and had more time to ensure data accuracy than those that did not. Some LEAs struggled to meet submission deadlines because separate, isolated data teams worked at cross-purposes with little or no coordination.

Local staff who work on CALPADS data act as a hub, collecting data that is wide-ranging and proprietary. The CALPADS data coordinator needs assistance from others in the organization to complete his or her work and submit updates to CALPADS on an ongoing basis. Various staff in other departments define and maintain many data elements. Data corrections should be from informed LEA staff that can make the decisions that will create accurate data extracts to populate CALPADS. Most LEA-level CALPADS staff surveyed indicated they have no expectation of timely responses to data corrections and no established way to escalate the request if necessary.

CALPADS submission timelines continue to become shorter because of the demand for real-time, data-driven decisions, which also leaves less time to correct erroneous information after it is submitted to CALPADS. Early submission and review of data is essential. Specific detail about the use of CALPADS data and how state and federal funding can be endangered by failure to certify data is available here.

The 2020–21 certification and amendment window deadlines for data collections are posted on the California Department of Education (CDE), CALPADS, CBEDS, and CARS Submission Calendar web page at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/dc/es/subcal.asp.

*Table 1: 2020–21 CALPADS Certification Deadlines*

| Submission | Suggested LEA Approval Deadline | Certification Deadline | Amendment Window Deadline |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fall 1 | November 20, 2020 | December 18, 2020 | January 29, 2021 |
| Fall 2 | N/A | N/A | March 5, 2021 |
| EOY 1, 2 | N/A | N/A | August 27, 2021 |
| EOY 3, 4 | July 16, 2021 | July 30, 2021 | August 27, 2021 |

## Recommendations

Accurate, certified CALPADS data is essential to maintaining an LEA's fiscal health. In light of concerns about staffing, coordination, and the deadlines, FCMAT/CSIS recommends establishing a written data management plan that addresses the staffing and coordination necessary to meet certification deadlines. The plan should be discussed with all staff involved in local data input, verification, and certification processes.

It is critical to identify key individuals as data stewards who are responsible for verifying program and site data and establishing a "data team." A single person doing CALPADS work means a single point of failure; teamwork is essential in this high-stakes environment. It is important to have a contingency or backup plan for unforeseen staffing issues or natural disasters. The work of certifying CALPADS data can no longer remain a one-person job.

To succeed, LEA data teams need effective leadership. A leader should be designated, such as someone in the superintendent's cabinet, to schedule, communicate and coordinate the data team's activities. Integrated data teams at the LEA level must be fully supported from the top down. The data crosses over many departments as does responsibility for that data. As noted in the [CDE's Back to School Letter](), CALPADS data is used for many functions essential to the mission of LEAs and the state. Administrative understanding and support of integrated data teams at the LEA level are critical to ensuring the accurate and timely submission of CALPADS data.

Planning the activities and resources required for a sustainable and successful local data management strategy is essential. To assist in timely submissions, two benchmarks to strive for are as follows:

- Completing all data population and clearing all input validations within 30 days of the submission start date.

- Clearing all certification errors at least three weeks prior to the deadline to give staff, both the CALPADS data coordinator and the special education coordinator, ample time for review and work through any necessary corrections.

The data management plan should articulate deadlines, local- and state-level activities, and roles and responsibilities using the best practices to formalize a local data governance structure for each CALPADS submission. Routine meetings should be scheduled that include agendas, and a record of action items for accountability. Regular check-ins should be held to identify problems or slowdowns so they can be immediately addressed with all involved staff present to avoid confusion.

State-level data originates from local data systems. Accurate school- and LEA-level data is vital for necessary decision-making at the state level and contributes to important discussions about goals and resources at the local level. Leadership and action are needed at the LEA level to foster a local data culture that recognizes the importance of high-quality information for the benefit of students.

Timing is critical. FCMAT/CSIS strongly encourages LEA leadership to communicate to staff the importance of timeliness and quality of data, and provide resources to reflect that priority, as well as ensuring adequate management review of the data before certification. LEA administration should establish policies, processes, and timelines that foster staff collaboration resulting in ongoing CALPADS updates and the review and certification of submissions by the published deadlines.

## Additional Assistance

In addition to assisting the CDE in maintaining and operating CALPADS, FCMAT/CSIS provides training and technical assistance to LEAs to collect, validate and certify CALPADS data during the fall 1, fall 2, and EOY 1–4 data submissions.

For additional assistance, LEAs should contact FCMAT/CSIS for mentoring and learning opportunities to help create a sustainable local data environment. For more information, support and other resources, visit:

FCMAT/CSIS: https://csis.fcmat.org

CDE, CALPADS Calendar: https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/rptcalendar.asp