NEW AMERICA

Education, Community, and Housing Open Data Dashboard

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About

The Education, Community, and Housing Open (ECHO) Data Dashboard includes a wide range of national data related to education, housing, and community demographics and welfare. These data, available in map, table, and chart formats, are intended to inform and shape the discussion and construction of social policy in states and communities, with no need for specialized analytical skills. All data are presented at four levels of geography—school district, state legislative district, county, and census tract—to allow users to make new connections between data that are usually reported in incompatible ways.

We hope this tool will help policymakers, advocates, journalists, and others to break down silos, build coalitions across issue areas, and tackle complex and vital problems in their states and communities. What follows is an example of how **journalists** could use the dashboard to strengthen and advance their work.
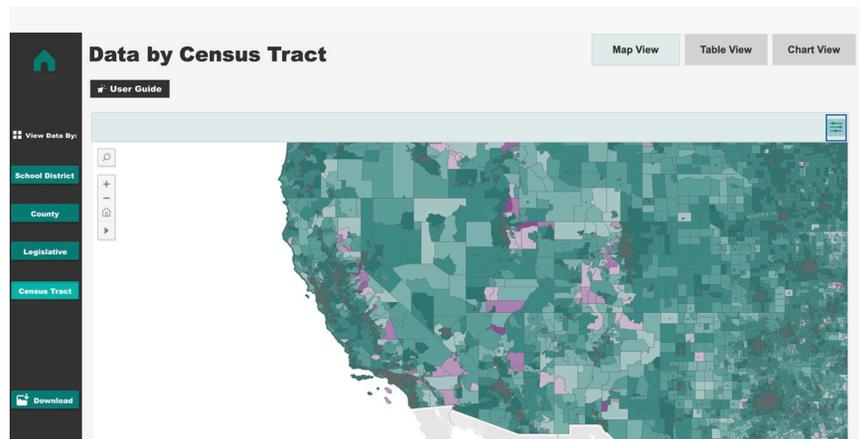
The Sample User Story: Journalism

A reporter has been assigned to write an article about proposed school closures within the city. She plans to attend the next school board meeting to cover the arguments for the closures—largely declining enrollment numbers in the schools—as well as parent objections. The reporter would like to draft the other elements of the story before the meeting, and show how neighborhood factors might interact with the closures to affect communities now and in the future.

The ECHO Data Dashboard makes it easy to **identify the racial makeup, poverty level, and other socioeconomic indicators for the schools' surrounding areas.** These data points provide helpful background information about the kinds of communities affected by the closures.

Realizing that the dashboard has a decade of historical data as well, the reporter thinks back to past school closures that have occurred in the city. Looking at data by census tract, she finds a **troubling trend:** In the neighborhoods of the schools now slated for closure, as well as in the neighborhoods around another set of schools closed five years ago, home vacancy rates went up and property values went down. A few years later, both total area populations and local school enrollments were in decline.

Looking more broadly in the metro area, the reporter uses the last five years of data in the dashboard to identify a few additional neighborhoods where this trend appears to be beginning, with vacancy rates up, home values down, and total population numbers just starting to drop. Using this information, the reporter is also able to add a new element to her coverage, pointing to neighborhoods and local schools where the data indicate a risk of future school closures. She attends the board meeting ready to place the day's arguments in the proper historical, economic, and community context.

The dashboard uses the map view to display vacancy rates by census tract.