NEW AMERICA

Education, Community, and Housing Open Data Dashboard

January 2025

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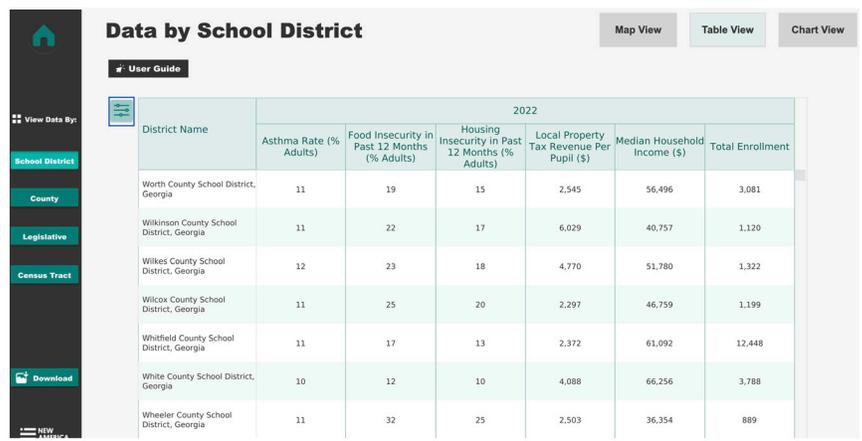
We hope this tool will help policymakers, advocates, journalists, and others to break down silos, build coalitions across issue areas, and tackle complex and vital problems in their states and communities. What follows is an example of how **public-interest litigators** could use the dashboard to strengthen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

The Sample User Story: Litigation

A public-interest law firm is representing a group of families in a lawsuit arguing that their children's school districts, which serve high-need populations, are underfunded by the state. Their initial approach has been to talk about inferior conditions in the school districts (e.g., large class sizes, fewer advanced course offerings,and less experienced teachers). They have also argued that funding levels fall short of economists' estimates of the amounts needed in school districts serving students in poverty. But lawyers for the state have countered that these families' districts actually have higher per-pupil spending than many other districts in the state, and argued that the problem is mismanagement, not underfunding.

The plaintiffs' lawyers need evidence that the higher-than-average spending levels are both necessary and not proof of sufficient funding. Using the ECHO Data Dashboard, they are able to **find community welfare data for the families' school districts that provides evidence for their greater costs**. For example, high rates of food insecurity in local communities have prompted many schools to set up food pantries for students and their families. High rates of housing insecurity and student homelessness have meant that districts have faced more challenges with student mobility and family engagement, requiring more dedicated staff. Poor air quality and high rates of asthma in the community contribute to problems with chronic absenteeism, necessitating costly interventions like new early warning systems and mentoring programs. And a lack of reliable home internet in these areas means that districts have had to pay for hot spots in order for students to connect and do homework.

With this information, the litigators have been able to both **justify these districts' greater spending levels and powerfully illustrate why budgets that seem high can still be far short of adequate**. The judge has shown interest in the data and asked the state's lawyers sharp questions about how and whether the state provides enough support for these kinds of programs.

The dashboard uses the table view to display community welfare indicators by school district.