

# Policy Briefs and Materials

## A California Education Policy Convening *Getting From Facts to Policy*

Hosted by EdSource  
October 19, 2007  
Sacramento, California



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October 19, 2007

Dear California K-12 Policymakers and Stakeholders:

How could anything be more important to California's future than the strength of its K-12 public education system and the rigorous academic preparation of its six million students?

As the state's student population has grown more diverse, state policymakers and educators rose to the challenge by developing and adopting what are considered the most rigorous academic content standards in the nation. They also completed the challenging initial systemic work of aligning the state's curricula, student testing, and school and district accountability systems to those standards.

Teachers and administrators across California have worked equally hard to implement the new state academic standards for all their students – learning new instructional material as well as how to review and act upon test data, better support struggling students, and mobilize coherence around local school improvement initiatives.

All this effort has made a difference: even as student diversity has increased, student outcomes have also improved on many fronts. But California is still a long way from the academic proficiency levels we'd all like to see for its students.

The impressive portfolio of education policy studies called "Getting Down to Facts," completed in 2007, suggested a number of significant education policy reforms that might better support the state's standards-based system. The release of the studies helped raise awareness of the need for Californians to make K-12 education improvement a top priority for the state and prompted Governor Schwarzenegger's declaration that 2008 would be the Year of Education for California.

At the request of many concerned individuals in California's education policy community, EdSource was asked in July, 2007 to host a "first-of-its-kind" education policy convening. Invitations were extended to about 700 respected individuals and groups from as wide a range of perspectives as we could find, including state policymakers, education leaders, researchers, and business and community leaders. We asked them to come to the meeting, not to reach a consensus on the state's next reforms, but to share their ideas and policy recommendations and to listen to the recommendations of others.

To our amazement, 350 individuals said they would attend. In addition, nearly 50 organizations submitted education policy briefs. Those briefs are contained in this book, which is being shared with attendees as well as with all state legislators and other state policymakers.

We offer this Convening Book of Education Policy Briefs as a rich resource of research- and evidence-based discussion and recommendations on which state education policy reforms might have the most impact on improving student outcomes in California. We encourage state legislators to draw from the book as a reference for their work in the coming year and to get more information from the briefs' authors as appropriate. In addition, we encourage attendees to the Convening and others who access this book to read and consider its ideas and to contact other organizations or individuals to look for opportunities to work constructively together.

EdSource was asked to serve as the neutral host of this Convening because of our 30-year history in California as an impartial nonprofit organization whose sole mission is to “clarify complex education issues” and “to promote more thoughtful decision making on behalf of California’s schools.” The paper in Section One and the policy briefs in Section Two represent the work and views solely of the authors cited and do not necessarily represent the views of EdSource.

That said, thanks to all who made the time in their busy schedules this Fall to submit written briefs for this Convening book, and thanks to everyone who made time to attend the October 19, 2007, California Education Policy Convening.

This body of work is strong and interesting in many ways – may it serve going forward as a basis for continued dialogue and momentum to truly make 2008 the Year of Education in California.

With warm regards,

TRISH WILLIAMS  
Executive Director  
EdSource

# A California Education Policy Convening

## *Getting from Facts to Policy*

### For More Information

#### A Website Devoted to California School Finance

For comprehensive background information about the issues presented in this book, visit EdSource's California School Finance website, at [www.californiaschoolfinance.org](http://www.californiaschoolfinance.org).

On this website you'll find electronic copies of each of the documents included in this book; summaries of all of the studies included in the *Getting Down to Facts* research project; clear explanations of how California's current finance system works; and, a wealth of additional resources for policymakers, educators, and the public.

#### The California Education Data Partnership Website

For information about specific schools and districts in California, including demographic, performance, financial, and staffing data, visit the Ed-Data website, at [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us).

### EdSource

The California Education Policy Convening was hosted by EdSource, an independent, impartial statewide not-for-profit organization established in California in 1977. Our mission is to advance the common good by developing and widely distributing trustworthy, useful information that clarifies complex K–12 education issues and promotes thoughtful decisions about California's public school system

EdSource's audiences include all K-12 stakeholders: state policymakers, local administrators, Boards of Trustees, members of the education media, community leaders and the public. Our work includes our annual spring Forum on California education policy issues, websites including EdSource online at [www.edsource.org](http://www.edsource.org), a range of annual publications provided either individually or via our information service subscription, and collaborative research studies.

Over nearly three decades EdSource has developed a solid reputation as a credible and respected source of K–12 education information, research, analysis, and data. The expertise of EdSource's small staff of policy analysts, researchers, writers, and communication and outreach specialists is strengthened by a top-notch, diverse, statewide board of 19 directors.





# A California Education Policy Convening

## *Getting from Facts to Policy*

### What's in this Book

#### Section One: Context

The first section of this book presents a brief overview that sets out the importance of an effective public education system in California in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Authored by Cross & Joftus, this white paper also draws from findings of the *Getting Down to Facts* research project, released in March 2007, as well as other existing research and data about California. The paper describes aspects of California's current finance, governance, personnel and data systems that Cross & Joftus suggest should be re-examined in order to support public schools dedicated to instructional improvement and academic success.

#### Section Two: Convening Policy Briefs

The second section of this book contains the policy briefs submitted on or about October 1, 2007 to EdSource for presentation at this convening.

These briefs are presented exactly as they were submitted to EdSource and they reflect the opinions and perspectives of the submitting organizations, not necessarily the opinions and perspectives of EdSource, Cross & Joftus, or the funders of this event.

The briefs are organized in alphabetical order according to the name of the submitting organization or author. A detailed table of contents is provided at the beginning of Section Two. Submitting organizations included:

ACSA, Association of California School Administrators  
Adams, Jacob  
Advancement Project  
AIR, American Institutes for Research  
AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination  
Bersin, Alan, Michael Kirst, and Goodwin Liu, a project of the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity, UC Berkeley  
CBP, California Budget Project  
California Foster Youth Education Task Force  
California State Legislature Rural Caucus  
CASBO, California Association of School Business Officials  
CBEE, California Business for Education Excellence



CCSESA, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association  
CFT, California Federation of Teachers  
Children Now  
College Board  
ConnectEd: The California Center For College and Career  
CSBA, California School Boards Association  
CSDC, Charter Schools Development Center  
CSEI, The California Science Education Initiative  
CTA, California Teachers Association  
EdTrustWest, The Education Trust-West  
Full Circle Fund  
Gándara, Patricia and Russell Rumberger  
HSDA, High School Districts Association  
IDEA, UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access  
Inverness Research Associates  
Justice Matters and The School Redesign Network at Stanford University  
NCTQ, National Council on Teacher Quality  
PACE, Policy Analysis for California Education  
Parents and Students for Great Schools  
Picus, Lawrence O.  
Preschool California  
PRI, Pacific Research Institute  
PTA, California State Parent Teacher Association  
Reason Foundation  
Rumberger, Russell and Jim Connell  
Sacramento City Unified School District  
SFEP, The School Finance Exploration Partnership  
Springboard Schools  
SSCAL, School Services of California, Inc.  
STC, School Transportation Coalition  
WestEd

*The California Education Policy Convening, this book, and all contents are provided on behalf of the CIF to gather information in response to requests for technical assistance. Written requests for technical assistance have been made to CIF from the President Pro Tempore of the California Senate, the Speaker of the California Assembly, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Office of the Governor, on behalf of their respective bodies. These requests for technical assistance sought CIF's opinions as well as factual information regarding the development and promotion of legislation to comprehensively reform California's public education system. The California Education Policy Convening and the contents of this book are in response to those requests on CIF's behalf.*





A California Education Policy Convening  
*Getting from Facts to Policy*

# Section One

Non-Partisan Research and Analysis  
Prepared by Cross & Joftus, LLC





## 2020 Vision

### Making the Case for Comprehensive Education Reform in California

October 2007

#### The Future is Today

The world is changing in ways few of us could have imagined even a decade ago. Computing and communications technology have fundamentally altered our everyday lives. To be sure, the world will continue to change and will present a host of new opportunities and challenges to the children of California. Our responsibility to those students is to provide a high-quality education that will enable them to meet future challenges and take full advantage of future opportunities. And, with Governor Schwarzenegger declaring 2008 as the “Year of Education,” we have an opportunity to achieve this goal.

As the state prepares for the “Year of Education,” the Office of the Secretary of Education within the Office of the Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly and President Pro Tempore on behalf of the California State Legislature, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction requested technical assistance from the CIF of the San Francisco Foundation. Cross & Joftus, LLC—on behalf of the CIF and with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Irvine Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation—prepared this document to respond to the request for technical assistance.

This report documents the dynamic demographic and economic changes facing the state, the challenges of the current education system in preparing students for those changes, and a glimpse into what a future education system might look like that better supports the students and educators within the system. If we fail to build on the momentum of positive changes accomplished over the last several years, we may face economic stagnation or even decline resulting from an undereducated workforce whose skills do not match those required by businesses. At the same time, the State of California will likely face higher costs associated with an aging population and increased social services associated with an undereducated population.

One thing is clear from the research: Comprehensive education reform is needed in order to accomplish our goal of creating a brighter California future; our traditional approach to reform—fragmented and piecemeal—will not suffice. The Golden State has a golden opportunity to make the changes to policy, systems, and practices that better support students and educators. These changes, which can and should be made immediately, will move California a long ways towards ensuring that today’s kindergartners are prepared to succeed and contribute when they graduate in 2020.

## Changing Times and Changing Needs

When the first school bell rang this fall, an estimated 450,000<sup>1</sup> anxious and excited California kindergartners filed into classrooms across the state. It is a sight that has repeated itself year after year, decade after decade. Though the scene may have been a familiar one, the future awaiting the class of 2020 will be anything but familiar from previous generations. The world that awaits them will likely be more dynamic and interconnected, filled with technologies not yet imagined. The most dramatic difference awaiting the class of 2020 is that it will be one of the first trying to fill the huge social and economic void created by the mass retirement of the baby-boom generation.

According to demographers, three million California workers from the baby-boom generation will exit the workforce between 2010 and 2020 with another three million expected to retire between 2020 and 2030.<sup>2</sup> Though four million new workers will join the labor force between 2010 and 2020, outpacing the number of retirees, the characteristics of these new entrants is significantly different than those leaving. The average level of education of this outgoing generation is higher than any previous generation and will be hard to match, particularly if current trends in California student achievement continue.

Compounding the issue of a mass exodus of highly skilled workers from the workforce to retirement—a fact that has significant social-program costs—is that the future economy is likely to require higher levels of education and skills. According to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), the California workforce is projected to grow by 30 percent, and the labor market will increasingly demand more highly educated, knowledge workers.<sup>3</sup>

Two related factors are at work here. First, the California economy continues to move towards those industries in which a college degree is required. For example, the services industry (e.g., personal, business, health, legal, and educational services), which typically requires at least a bachelor's degree, is expected to make up 39 percent of the California economy in 2025 compared to 34 percent of the economy in 2005. The second factor is the general trend in almost all sectors towards needing workers with at least some college, though not necessarily a four-year college degree.

What remains unclear is whether California's current education system will produce enough highly qualified workers to meet this demand: If current patterns persist, by 2020, California's economy will require more than 75 percent of its population to have at least some college education (39 percent with at least a BA), but only 61 percent of the population is predicted to have that level of educational attainment (only 33 percent with a BA).

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<sup>1</sup> Derived from enrollment trends 2001-05, [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com).

<sup>2</sup> Myers, Dowell (2007). *Immigrants and Boomers: Forging a New Social Contract for the Future of America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Baldassare, Mark and Hanak, Ellen (2005). *California 2025: It's Your Choice*. San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Standards, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Systems

Californians have a unique opportunity to change the future by changing the education path of the class of 2020 and those that follow. The state already started down this path when it adopted new K-12 academic standards in the late 1990s and deliberately made them among the most rigorous in the nation. And since that time, California's K-12 educators have been working hard to understand the new academic standards and align lesson plans with them, adopt new text books, and identify better strategies for teaching California's increasingly diverse student population.

As educators have worked to adapt to these changes while increasing student achievement and the percentages of students taking rigorous courses, student outcomes still fall short of the goals set by the California's educators and policymakers. Worse, the progress made to date may plateau or even slip without significant changes in state education policies and school funding that support improvement in district, school, and classroom practice. In fact, despite the progress, more than one-third of California's 11<sup>th</sup> graders still fail to read or perform math at proficient levels.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, only seven out of 10 of the state's entering ninth graders has gone on to graduate high school on time. For African American and Latino students, the chances of earning a diploma are even slimmer, with some studies showing that only slightly more than half graduate on time.<sup>5</sup> And of those who graduate, only a quarter have successfully completed with a grade of "C" or better California's college-preparatory curriculum (known as A-G) most likely to lead to college acceptance and other higher learning.<sup>6</sup>

A series of recent studies entitled *Getting Down to Facts* (GDTF) reinforced what educators across the state have known for quite some time: California schools are being held accountable to 21<sup>st</sup> century standards while supporting them with antiquated systems developed in piecemeal fashion during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Development of the school finance, governance, personnel, and data systems pre-date the new standards and accountability systems with little, if any, systemic coherence.

According to GDTF, the problems with California's education system include the following:

- *The current finance system is deeply flawed.* Funding gaps across districts are substantial and haphazard, with no regard to costs, student needs, or meeting state goals. There is no coherent rationale for why schools serving similar student populations in similar locations receive different funding amounts.
- *California's education system is not making the most effective use of its current resources.* This is true across a broad range of categories, from the irrational and ineffective distribution of resources across districts and schools to how staff time is allocated and the lack of transparency and evaluation.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com).

<sup>5</sup> Greene, Jay (April 2002). *High School Graduation Rates in the United States*, Manhattan Institute Civic Report.

<sup>6</sup> Education Trust West (June 2004). *Are California High Schools Ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?* Author.

- *California's schools may need more resources to meet student-achievement goals, but, to have a substantial impact, increased funding must go hand-in-hand with reforms.* Significant and systemic reforms directed at fixing our state's troubled finance and governance systems are needed with the understanding that reforms are not without costs.
- *Highly prescriptive finance and governance policies thwart schools and districts in their efforts to meet the needs of their students and promote higher achievement.* When asked about which changes would be most important to help them improve outcomes for students, principals ranked less paperwork requirements and more flexibility in allocating resources as more important than most other factors. More than 30 percent of districts' funding comes from more than 100 different categorical programs with varying levels of restrictions. Flexibility is probably even more important in California because of the diversity of students, schools, and districts. It is unlikely that a single program will meet all needs.
- *Current teacher policies do not let state and local administrators make the best use of the pool of potential teachers or adequately support current teachers.* Teachers are essential to student success, but current policies related to hiring, training, retaining, and dismissing teachers are not designed to optimize student learning or the quality of the teacher workforce.
- *There is not enough data available to make good decisions about schooling.* California lacks a culture of data and lags behind other states in collecting useful information on students' learning, teachers and the effectiveness of educational programs and operations. Basic data on such things as the learning patterns of students across grades and programs are currently absent. These data are essential for measuring progress and developing reforms, and any reform without investing in better data is unlikely to succeed.

In California, we do not have the information to tell us when schools, classrooms, or programs are working. Moreover, we do not have the flexibility in the system to inspire or learn from innovation. In such a system, only the most talented educators and students can be successful, and the extra resources needed to turn around low-performing schools and help struggling students meet high standards will have little impact.

While the research did not make recommendations on specific policy changes that would most benefit the students of California, the findings pointed the way toward solutions—a comprehensive approach to renovating California's antiquated education system into a 21<sup>st</sup> century model that empowers educators, fosters high levels of student achievement, and contributes to economic growth.

## **Reform Needs to be Bold and Comprehensive, Not Piecemeal**

Upon release of the *Getting Down to Facts* research, Governor Schwarzenegger declared 2008 to be the “Year of Education.” Given the consequences of inaction, bold action must be taken while the window of opportunity for change is open. As the GDTF researchers emphasize, marginal change—adding a few more resources or yet another well-intended program—is unlikely to have any significant impact on student outcomes.

There is a real need for realigning California’s school finance, governance, personnel, and data systems with the state’s goals for school and student performance and for accompanying those reforms with targeted resources that support educators and student learning. The momentum created by the *Getting Down to Facts* research provides educators and policymakers an opportunity to envision and put in place an education system radically different than the status quo.

Without such change, California’s educators will continue to struggle to provide a high-quality education to all students. A balanced and comprehensive approach, on the other hand, not only will improve student outcomes in California, it will be a vital investment in individual and community opportunity and the state’s economic competitiveness.

Stemming from the problems identified in the *Getting Down to Facts* studies, one might envision a set of reforms that address those deficiencies and consider how those reforms, if implemented, could benefit students, business, and the state of California in the years ahead. Below, we consider four main areas for potential reform, envisioning how these areas might look differently for the class of 2020 if California enacts significant policy and fiscal changes.

### ***Teacher Assignment and Professional Development***

#### **The Challenge**

Prior research has concluded that high-quality teaching can dramatically improve student achievement outcomes. The *GDTF* research team identified current policies related to teaching that prevent all students from having access to the best teachers, including:

- California state laws do little to address teacher-quality gaps among schools. Without other incentives, teachers typically choose to work in schools with the best working conditions, which are typically not those serving low-income and minority students.
- Current salary structures do not value teachers with skills that are in high demand, making it difficult to recruit and retain teachers of hard-to-staff subjects such as math and science.
- Substantive evaluation of teachers occurs infrequently, preventing meaningful feedback to teachers and informed decisions about professional development and staffing. In addition, teacher tenure in California occurs earlier in a teacher’s career than in other states, exacerbating the removal of low-performing teachers.

- The state's emphasis on requiring teachers to take generic education credits does little to improve teacher effectiveness, and existing teacher education is often disconnected from the actual skills teachers need most.
- California lacks effective programs that train and support principals in being the instructional leaders of their schools.

### **The Vision**

In the ideal California of 2020, the best and brightest college students from the nation's top universities choose to enter the teaching profession at the same rates that they currently enter the fields of business and law. Teaching is viewed as a prestigious and vital profession. Schools of education offer a rigorous curriculum that incorporates subject-matter content, classroom management, and child development; practice teaching with feedback from master teachers; and opportunities to observe master teachers. Students graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to be highly effective beginning teachers. School districts are able to recruit top-notch teaching candidates, particularly in high-need subjects and schools, with competitive salaries, bonuses, and other desirable incentives.

New teachers are actively mentored by veteran teachers and participate in professional development programs that are directly connected to their work and experiences in the classroom. Once in the classroom, teachers encounter a work environment that fosters their success. Conditions such as small class sizes, adequate preparation time, and sufficient support personnel (e.g., counselors and social workers) ensure that all teachers have the necessary resources needed to serve students. Based on their abilities and skills, teachers are able to progress along a career path that includes additional responsibilities without having to leave the classroom entirely. Teachers with the most experience compete to work in the schools that need them most, particularly those with high concentrations of low-income and minority students. Teachers are evaluated frequently through direct observation and various outcome measures to determine their effectiveness. Teachers failing to improve student outcomes are identified and provided with extra support. When necessary, low-performing teachers are dismissed.

### ***Resource Generation, Allocation, and Use***

#### **The Challenge**

*GDTF* researchers found that the current resource allocation system in California often hinders more than helps school districts in raising student achievement. In particular:

- School and district administrators often feel as though their hands are tied by cumbersome restrictions on the allocation and use of resources. Up to one-third of funding is associated with categorical programs from the state with varying levels of restrictions attached to them. As a result, many administrators report the complex nature of these restrictions, some of which work in direct opposition to one another, and an inability to respond creatively to the needs of their students in a way that would lead to real achievement gains.



- California’s school finance system is not aligned with the state’s education goals and standards—funding does not follow state priorities or the educational needs of students.
- State revenues and the funding available to school districts are highly dependent on a tax base subject to significant fluctuations.
- When compared with other states, California spends significantly less per pupil than other states. While few believe that more money alone will cure all ills, it is well understood that California schools have fewer teachers, fewer administrators, and fewer counselors in schools than most other states.

## **The Vision**

One can envision a time in the near future when California school funding is not subject to a volatile revenue base and when the state allocates and uses resources in a transparent manner that is consistent with its goals for student achievement and regional cost differences. Schools in California are supported by a sustained commitment of resources to adequately meet the demands of all students. California schools have access to educational resources within a system that fosters innovative collaboration with other social service agencies to effectively meet the needs of the students and their families and the flexibility to allocate those resources in a way that is responsive to students’ needs. Rather than a system built around compliance and distribution formulas based on narrow interests, we envision a system that recognizes and reflects student needs, provides local educators with the flexibility to tailor education programs to their unique circumstances, and is aligned to governance and accountability structures of the state’s education system.

## ***Information Systems***

### **The Challenge**

Lack of data and information in California drastically impede the efforts of state and local decision-makers to improve resource allocation and inform school improvement activities and classroom instruction, according to *GDTF* researchers. Findings include:

- California lacks a strategic plan for collecting and reporting information about its schools and lacks a culture of data in how that information can be used to drive effective decision-making, from the state level to the individual classroom.
- California has repeatedly failed to make the financial investment needed to support a comprehensive, longitudinal data system that adequately tracks students, programs, and teachers at the state level.
- The majority of school districts lack local information systems that enable critical analysis to make sound, strategic decisions about instruction, teacher and program effectiveness, and student learning. Furthermore, school leaders and teachers often lack adequate training in using data to drive student achievement.

- Without adequate data, researchers in California have been unable to evaluate the effectiveness of the state's public school reform efforts and thus unable to help inform future decision-making.

## **The Vision**

It is possible to envision California's education system in 2020 that includes schools that are hotbeds of innovation and high performance, driven by policies and practices that are informed by robust data systems tracking the performance and needs of students and schools over time. The use of data is a critical part of the educational culture in California. Data flow freely between school districts and the state to assist educators in delivering high-quality instruction. Well-trained teachers and school leaders have access to and use high-quality, real-time student achievement data to make well-informed decisions about instruction and student learning. Teachers know immediately whether a student is struggling with a recently learned concept, such as multiplication or reading comprehension, and can immediately call upon resources, such as reading specialists or tutors, to provide struggling students with the extra support they need.

Within this vision, principals can deploy additional resources where needed to support teachers and their students. For example, principals are able to track which teachers may need more professional development with certain subject matter given how their students are mastering specific content. High schools can predict which students are most likely to drop out of school and have the capacity to intervene before it is too late. Central office administrators can identify struggling schools in the middle of the year and provide specialized supports, such as school improvement specialists and reading coaches. Finally, educators and policymakers are able to observe and begin to understand long-term, post-schooling student outcomes (such as employment or further schooling) to further refine and improve the state's educational system.

## ***Leadership***

### **The Challenge**

State education policies have a strong effect on California school leaders, especially principals. And, as the *GDTF* researchers found with resource allocation and use strategies, they also found that some current policies hinder more than help principals' efforts to raise student achievement. Survey data of principals indicate that:

- Principals report that categorical program rules and paperwork requirements impede their ability to raise student achievement.
- California principals report spending less time on activities connected with instruction and more time responding to legal and regulatory requirements and to teacher and parent concerns.
- Principals report frustration with being unable to dismiss ineffective teachers. Greater authority in this area, even if infrequently used, would increase principals' ability to forge a more effective teaching team.

## The Vision

For the California of 2020, one can envision teachers and administrators most familiar with students making the decisions about how to use resources. School leaders are empowered to succeed within the school system, rather than in spite of it. Principals have the flexibility and authority to allocate resources where they are most needed to meet standards. Using student achievement data throughout the year, principals have the flexibility and skills to alter spending plans accordingly. For example, a principal may discover that her second-grade students are falling behind in reading and decide to shift resources to provide extra funding for professional development for teachers working with these students.

Principals also have the ability to allocate teachers to grade levels, courses, and students as they see fit without having to work within limiting labor-contract provisions. Operating within the context of the district's existing reform plan, principals have the flexibility to make instructional reform decisions, such as adding more time for reading instruction, based on their schools' needs rather than contract rules or categorical fund requirements. In addition, principals have the authority to hire, evaluate, support, and, in worst-case scenarios, remove teachers based on their effectiveness. Finally, principals have the time and training to serve as instructional leaders and are not bogged down by overly burdensome regulations and paperwork. In exchange for this greater degree of autonomy and authority, principals are held accountable, rewarded for school and student success, and if necessary, removed if unable to demonstrate results.

Finally, aspiring principals complete rigorous pre-service professional development programs that provide academic and hands-on training to develop their skills as instructional and organizational leaders. New principals receive coaching and mentoring from experienced principals. And all principals have adequate leadership support at their school sites from assistant principals, counselors, and other administrators to allow them to serve as instructional leaders to their teaching staff.

## A Better Future for Students

Clearly, the reform vision outlined above is ambitious and not without significant hurdles to implement. But, there is little question that the effort is worthwhile: We know both intuitively and from existing research that a strong education system provides extraordinary benefits for students beyond their years spent in the classroom.

For decades, research has shown a dramatic and direct correlation between educational attainment and earnings potential. In fact, in a snapshot of salaries in 2001, researchers found that the average college graduate earned 76 percent more money than the average high school graduate, and advanced degree holders earned 120 percent more.<sup>7</sup> What's more, less educated individuals face higher rates of unemployment and are more likely to live in poverty. The poverty rate for college graduates is about one-third of the poverty rate for high school

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<sup>7</sup> Carnevale, Anthony and Desrochers, Donna (2004). *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform* Washington, DC: Educational Testing Service. Baum, Sandy and Payea, Kathleen (2004). *Education Pays 2004: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. Trends in Higher Education Series. New York City: The College Board.

graduates.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, an education system in California that keeps students engaged throughout their K-12 educational experience and beyond will contribute greatly to their economic well being for years to come.

In addition, as Tom Friedman makes clear in his book *The World is Flat*, students today are not competing simply with the child sitting next to them in class, or in the rival school down the block. Today's students are competing in a global arena. The newfound ability to source talent and skills from across the globe is placing tremendous pressure on students to achieve at high levels so they can produce at those levels as adults.

Improving California's school system will help the state's future graduates meet the challenges of this ever-flattening world. It will prepare them to think creatively, adapt to changing circumstance and advancing technologies, and inventively develop solutions to the problems of tomorrow.

One can only imagine what the world will look like in the year 2020 as today's kindergartners cross the graduation stage, diploma in hand, ready to pursue their life's goals and dreams. We believe California has the ability, and obligation, to prepare its students to compete and succeed locally, nationally, and globally.

## **A Better Future for California Business**

The benefits of improving California's educational system extend beyond the students currently enrolled in the state's K-12 system. If we invest in making the changes necessary now to our educational system, we can expect a thriving business economy in California in the years ahead. Imagine a future in which students are prepared with the knowledge and skills demanded by California's growing economy; California businesses are able to choose from a diverse field of highly qualified job applicants who have been educated locally; and California is known throughout the country, and the world, as a leader in innovation and creative business solutions as a result of its highly skilled, homegrown workforce.

The exodus of the baby boom generation will affect every state, some more so than California. Though California businesses have traditionally had the luxury of importing highly educated workers from other states (and nations) to fill their workforce needs, the competition for these types of workers will grow more fiercely. With a better-educated homegrown workforce, the sting of that competition will be lessened.

## **A Better Future for California – The “Snowball Effect”**

As we consider the impact of a more effective educational system in California, it is important to recognize the overall societal return of a more highly educated population. In fact, there is the potential for a “snowball effect” whereby individual gain is compounded to greatly benefit society as a whole. What can Californians expect in return for improving its educational system?

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<sup>8</sup> Baum and Pavea (2004).

### **Less Crime and Decreased Prison Costs**

Studies show an inverse correlation between years of schooling and crime rates. In essence, more schooling decreases an individual's chances of committing a crime or serving time in prison. For example, researchers recently found that a one-year increase in average years of schooling for dropouts would reduce murder and assault by almost 30 percent, motor vehicle theft by 20 percent, arson by 13 percent, and burglary and larceny by about 6 percent.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, California currently houses 170,000 prisoners at a cost of \$7 billion annually. Recent studies of prison populations found that prisoners are significantly more likely to be less educated than the overall general population. For example, a study by the U.S. Department of Justice on the educational attainment of state and federal prisoners found that in 1997, an estimated 75 percent of state prison inmates and 59 percent of federal inmates did not complete high school.<sup>10</sup>

### **Expanded Tax Base and Decreased Need for Public Assistance**

As a more educated population enters the workforce, incomes rise, and in turn, state tax revenues expand. According to Princeton University researcher Cecilia Rouse, the average high school dropout earns \$260,000 less than a high-school graduate over the course of their lifetime. For California, this represents more than \$38 billion in lost wages and taxes.<sup>11</sup> If California could capture even a portion of these lost funds by improving educational outcomes for students, this expanded tax base would allow the state to improve its infrastructure, including schools, roads, and healthcare.

In addition, those with lower education levels have been shown to be more reliant than their peers on governmental social assistance programs such as welfare, unemployment, and Medicaid during their lifetime. For example, an African-American female that successfully graduates high school will cost the state and federal government \$8,100 less annually in social assistance programs than a high-school dropout of the same race and gender.<sup>12</sup>

### **Healthier Communities**

When policymakers and communities consider the impact of education reforms, they often focus on reading scores, achievement gaps, and graduation rates. While all are extremely important, the impact of education extends far beyond these academic metrics. In fact, as California improves its education system, it can expect healthier citizens that are more engaged in community life.

Studies have shown that more highly educated individuals perceive themselves to be healthier when compared to those with less education and that smoking rates go down as education levels go up.

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<sup>9</sup> The Campaign for Educational Equity (2005). *Cost of Inadequate Education to Society Is Hundreds of Billions of Dollars, Researchers Say*. Accessed at: <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/news/article.htm?id=5320>.

<sup>10</sup> Harlow, C. W. (2003, January. Revised April 15, 2003). *Education and Correctional Populations*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Available: [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/eep.pdf](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/eep.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education (2006). "High school dropouts cost the U.S. billions in lost wages and taxes, according to Alliance for Excellent Education," [http://www.all4ed.org/press/pr\\_022806.html](http://www.all4ed.org/press/pr_022806.html).

<sup>12</sup> Vernez, G., R.A. Krop, and C.P. Rydell (1999). *Closing the Education Gap*; Baum and Payea, (2004).

Research has also shown that educational attainment leads to higher levels of civic participation. For example, more education is correlated with higher levels of participation in volunteer activities. And a recent study found that “in every age group, adults with higher levels of education are more likely to vote than those who have less education.”<sup>13</sup> For democracy to flourish, civic involvement and informed voter participation are essential, and education is an important driver.

### **Passing High Achievement on to Future Generations**

As California’s children move through the state’s education system, graduate, and go on to have families of their own, their educational achievement will have an impact on the lives of their children and generations to come. Research has shown a strong correlation between parents’ educational attainment and their children’s academic success.<sup>14</sup> One can expect to see the success or failure of California’s students, perhaps the class of 2020, perpetuated in future generations.

### **Turning Vision into Reality**

For students and their families, the first day of kindergarten is a day of great hope and celebration. It is a major milestone marked by excitement and imaginings of all that the future has to hold. For this year’s class of 2020, we envision a bright future—one in which all students are prepared for college, career, and participation in a democracy.

We envision a school system in which all students have access to high-quality teachers and administrators, educators benefit from well-designed professional development and robust data systems, and school leaders have the flexibility and skills to allocate resources to meet student needs. We envision a future in which California’s students can compete globally, and businesses thrive because they are staffed by a top-notch labor force. Finally, we envision a state enjoying the benefits of a highly educated population, including less crime, decreased costs for prisons and welfare, engaged citizens, improved infrastructure, healthy communities, and generations of lifelong learners.

California can move closer to achieving this vision by developing and adopting comprehensive and research-based school finance, governance, personnel, and data reforms that will greatly enhance the ability of K-12 educators to succeed in raising academic achievement of California’s students.

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<sup>13</sup> Baum and Payea (2004).

<sup>14</sup> NCES (1996). “Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty.” Accessed at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/96184all.pdf>.

A California Education Policy Convening  
*Getting from Facts to Policy*

## Section Two

### Convening Policy Briefs







This section of the book contains the policy briefs submitted on or about October 1, 2007 to EdSource for presentation at this convening.

These briefs are presented exactly as they were submitted to EdSource and they reflect the opinions and perspectives of the submitting organizations, not necessarily the opinions and perspectives of EdSource, Cross & Joftus, or the funders of this event.

The briefs are organized in alphabetical order according to the name of the submitting organization or author.

<b>Submitting Organization or Author</b>	<b>Title or Topic</b>
<b>ACSA</b> , Association of California School Administrators	“The Impact of Leadership on Achievement”
<b>Adams, Jacob</b> , founding principal investigator, School Finance Redesign Project	“A Policy Strategy For Funding Student Success”
<b>Advancement Project</b> , Munger, Molly, et al.	“Facilities for Preschool and Early Education”
<b>AIR</b> , American Institutes for Research—California Collaborative on District Reform	“The Importance of Systems Alignment: Developing a Coherent Approach to Educational Governance and Finance Reform in California”
<b>AIR</b> , American Institutes for Research—California Collaborative on District Reform	“From Compliance to Getting the Job Done: Excessive Regulations vs. Accountability for Results”
<b>AIR</b> , American Institutes for Research—California Collaborative on District Reform	“Addressing California’s Data Needs: Implementing Comprehensive, Longitudinal Systems at the Local and State Levels”
<b>AIR</b> , American Institutes for Research—California Collaborative on District Reform	“Improving Teacher Quality: Redesigning Personnel Policies to Support Student Achievement”
<b>AVID</b> , Advancement Via Individual Determination, Ward, Granger and Laurie Wiebold	“Raising Student Achievement with AVID”
<b>Bersin, Alan, Michael Kirst</b> , and <b>Goodwin Liu</b> , a project of the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity, UC Berkeley	“Getting Beyond The Facts: Reforming California School Finance”
<b>CBP</b> , California Budget Project	“School Finance Facts” TOPICS: Required resources, allocation methods, achievement gaps, data needs.
<b>California Foster Youth Education Task Force</b>	“AB 490 Implementation: Ensuring Successful Education Outcomes for California’s Foster Youth”

<b>California State Legislature Rural Caucus</b>	“School Finance Issues – School Transportation”
<b>CASBO</b> , California Association of School Business Officials	TOPICS: Reform priorities related to data, efficiency, funding and governance.
<b>CBEE</b> , California Business for Education Excellence	“Closing Achievement Gaps at All Grade Levels: The Next Phase for Improving California’s Public Schools”
<b>CCSESA</b> , California County Superintendents Educational Services Association	TOPICS: School finance (resource generation and allocation), governance, personnel and leadership, and state data systems.
<b>CFT</b> , California Federation of Teachers	TOPICS: Funding, leadership, and personnel.
<b>Children Now</b>	“Children’s Education: The Clear Case For Data Systems Redesign”
<b>College Board</b>	TOPIC: Use of academic rigor to close the achievement gap with emphasis on equity and advocacy.
<b>ConnectEd</b> , The California Center For College and Career	“Multiple Pathways to Success: Preparing High School Students For College And Career”
<b>CSBA</b> , California School Boards Association	“Targeted Reform and Revenue to Improve Student Achievement”
<b>CSDC</b> , Charter Schools Development Center	“Is California Ready for Real Reform? Lessons Learned from the Chartered Schools Sector”
<b>CSEI</b> , The California Science Education Initiative	“Improving student outcomes in science classrooms through definition of minimum required levels of instructional equipment and materials”
<b>CTA</b> , California Teachers Association	“School Finance Issues”
<b>CTA</b> , California Teachers Association	“Promoting Teacher Quality”
<b>EdTrustWest</b> , The Education Trust-West	TOPIC: State data systems.
<b>Full Circle Fund</b> , Camp, Jeff	“Fostering Local Innovation in Differentiated Compensation of Teachers and School Leaders”
<b>Gándara, Patricia and Russell Rumberger</b> , Language Minority Research Institute, UC Santa Barbara	“Resources for English Learner Education”
<b>HSDA</b> , High School Districts Association	TOPICS: School finance and student achievement.
<b>IDEA</b> , UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access	“The Education Bill of Rights: Ensuring All California Students a High Quality Education”
<b>Inverness Research Associates</b> , St. John, Mark	“Building The Foundation For Raising Student Achievement: Investing In An Improvement Infrastructure”

<b>Justice Matters</b> and The School Redesign Network at Stanford University	“Policy Lessons from Schools Where Low-Income Students of Color Thrive”
<b>NCTQ</b> , National Council on Teacher Quality	TOPIC: State data systems.
<b>PACE</b> , Policy Analysis for California Education, Koppich, Julia E. and Amy Gerstein	“Reshaping Personnel Policies to Improve Student Achievement”
<b>PACE</b> , Policy Analysis for California Education, Loeb, Susanna and David N. Plank	“Continuous Improvement In California Education: Data Systems and Policy Learning”
<b>Parents and Students for Great Schools</b> , California ACORN, Californians for Justice, PICO California, and Public Advocates	“Now That We Have the Facts”
<b>Picus, Lawrence O.</b> , professor of education finance and policy, USC Rossier School of Education	“Getting Down To Facts: Now What?”
<b>Preschool California</b> , Atkin, Catherine and Scott Moore	“Education Reform Starts with Effective Pre-K”
<b>PRI</b> , Pacific Research Institute, Izumi, Lance and Vicki E. Murray	“Underperformance of non-socioeconomically disadvantaged students in California schools and the importance of increasing school choice options to address the problem”
<b>PTA</b> , California State Parent Teacher Association	“Parents’ priorities for school finance and education reform”
<b>Reason Foundation</b> , Snell, Lisa	“FAIR Student Funding--A Model for California Schools”
<b>Rumberger, Russell</b> , UC Santa Barbara; and <b>Jim Connell</b> , Institute for Research and Reform in Education	“Strengthening School District Capacity as a Strategy to Raise Student Achievement in California”
<b>Sacramento City Unified School District</b>	“School Finance Issues – An Urban School District Perspective”
<b>SFEP</b> , The School Finance Exploration Partnership: CSBA, Children Now, League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, California State PTA	“Interest-Group Mapping and Education Reform: The Case for a Comprehensive, Consensus-Focused Proposal”
<b>Springboard Schools</b>	“Building Capacity for Continuous Improvement: The Role of School District Data Systems”
<b>SSCAL</b> , School Services of California, Inc.	“Funding K-12 Education Investments Under Proposition 98”
<b>STC</b> , School Transportation Coalition	“School Transportation Crisis”
<b>WestEd</b> , Austin, Gregory and Bonnie Benard	“The State Data System to Assess Learning Barriers and Supports: Implications for School Reform Efforts”

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Policy Recommendation for  
*Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*  
October 19, 2007

**Individuals/organization submitting this brief:** The Association of California School Administrators, represented by:

- Michele Lawrence, Superintendent, Berkeley Unified School District
- Laura Preston, Advocate, Association of California School Administrators

**Topic covered:** The Impact of Leadership on Achievement

**Main contact:** Susan Davis, Communications Department, ACSA, 1029 L Street, Suite 500, Sacramento, CA; (916) 329-3819; [sdavis@acsa.org](mailto:sdavis@acsa.org)

### **Brief Problem Statement**

School leaders in California are advancing the dialogue about the true cost of educational excellence and are proactively offering recommendations for action. As representatives of the Association of California School Administrators, we agree that the evolution of our public education system depends on adequate, efficient, stable and ongoing funding to help students achieve the high academic standards we set for them. We also agree that specific improvements in four priority areas will lead to success for students.

Therefore, we believe it is essential for policy leaders to focus on the following priorities:

- Narrowing the achievement gap;
- Building capacity among teachers and administrators;
- Measuring results through reliable data on student achievement; and
- Providing adequate, stable and ongoing funding.

As the leaders of California's schools, our direct experience and knowledge lead us to support the following research findings and the policy changes that they demand.

### **Discussion of Policy Issues, Options, and Recommendations**

Research has demonstrated a direct link between student achievement and administrative leadership. In fact, of the school factors known to impact student achievement, only the quality of classroom instruction has a slightly higher impact than the quality of leadership. Thus, the moral imperative to eliminate the disparities in achievement among various student groups increases the need for administrators, especially school principals, to become exemplary instructional leaders. However, since California currently ranks near the bottom in the number of administrators serving students, policies must be put in place that acknowledge the demands on school leaders and provide an infrastructure that increases their numbers, promotes their retention, and develops their instructional expertise and leadership.

The link between what school leaders do and student achievement has been the subject of an enormous amount of educational research. Hallinger and Heck (1998) summarized such research in a mega-study of the work related to principals' effectiveness, and concluded that "the general pattern of results drawn from this review support the belief that

principals exercise a measurable though indirect effect on school effectiveness and student achievement. . . . [This effect] is statistically significant, and, we assert, meaningful” (p. 186). A subsequent mega-study by Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) also summarizes rigorous research on the influence of school leaders on student achievement. The study led the authors to conclude: “A highly effective school leader can have a dramatic influence on the overall academic achievement of students” (p. 10). Their report cites several leadership responsibilities that are accompanied by associated practices that describe exactly what a principal must do to promote student achievement. These studies, as well as many others, provide clear evidence regarding the importance of specific skills, abilities, and behaviors that leaders must exhibit in order to be effective. Thus, a critical element for policy development must be to ensure that school leaders have the opportunities to expand their repertoire of skills and time to practice what they learn. Michael Fullan comments on this dilemma: “The irony is that as the change in expectations heightens, the *principalship* itself has become overloaded in a way that makes it impossible to fulfill the promise of widespread, sustained reform” (Fullan, 2007, p. 156). This perspective is affirmed in a study by Cooley and Shen (2003), in which they surveyed more than 4,000 secondary principals from across the nation. Cooley and Shen conclude:

*Many principals find themselves mired in situations beyond their control that involve labor strife, students and parents with numerous social problems, and school violence. These complexities in schools and communities demand the amount of time that principals must spend on management areas just to ensure the school operates at acceptable levels at the expense of leadership initiatives (p. 20).*

Given the strength of the research, it becomes imperative that funding and policy about administrative leadership must change in two fundamental ways to positively impact student achievement.

### **1. Restructuring of Working Conditions:**

**A restructuring of the current working conditions of administrators, especially school principals, to direct their daily focus and routines toward the improvement of teaching, learning, and curriculum development is essential.**

The need to increase California’s administrator to student ratios is obvious from the data. However, models that provide classified school “manager” positions to manage and coordinate the many time-consuming day-to-day tasks, such as maintenance, grounds, facilities, materials ordering, security, etc., that are now done in many schools by a single certificated principal can free the time of the trained instructional leader to influence, supervise and evaluate instructional practices. The previous research citations acknowledge that time spent evaluating data, supporting teachers, and leading collaborative discussions aimed at pedagogical improvements will reap achievement benefits when done by a skilled and knowledgeable instructional leader. In parallel models with increased administrative allocations, central office administrators can provide opportunities to also mentor, develop and coach site principals, creating the organizational capacity for internal sustainability. Providing time for principals to hone their own skills by creating “principals in training” positions for novice or even seasoned principals can remove them from day-to-day

responsibilities while demanding increased aptitudes in those best practices used to attain robust student achievement. Such mentoring models rejuvenate the professional and promote leadership retention.

Fuller *et al* (Fuller, Loeb, Arshan, Chen, & Yi, 2007), in a comprehensive report on how school principals acquire and deploy their fiscal and human resources, said, “Principals report spending a great deal of time managing facilities, supervising staff, dealing with discipline and security and student learning. They devote less time to professional development and curriculum supervision”(p. 22). The authors go on to conclude that “these findings . . . indicate that [California] principals may be occupied with more short-run issues at the expense of allocating the time to form a cohesive learning community” (p. 22).

It is our belief that much of this necessary work could be completed by a classified school manager or other administrator. A few school districts, such as Los Altos School District, have funded such a position for schools over a specific size. In Los Altos the number is 500 students. Los Altos School District, one of the highest achieving school districts in the state with a district base API of 949 in 2005, understands that its principals must be instructional leaders. Its large parcel tax and bond measure allow district funds to be used to support this school manager position. The school manager position allows the principal to spend much more time ensuring high quality instruction. Our schools serving the lowest achieving students rarely have the funds to support such a position. New monies should be set aside at a state level so that districts, at their discretion, can support the leadership of instruction by creating classified school managers to coordinate many of the everyday issues that must now be dealt with by the school principal.

The amount of time principals must spend on “short term” issues is unlikely to change as long as the number of California school and district leaders remains insufficient to accomplish the many tasks their work demands. Again, California ranks at the bottom of the state-to-state comparisons in terms of the ratio of administrators to students. If California’s school and district leaders are to reach their full potential in maximizing their role in increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap, then there must be sufficient numbers of them and support for them to accomplish this task.

## **2. Broader Opportunities for Capacity Building:**

### **Expanding local and statewide opportunities for directed professional growth for prospective and current administrators that will enhance their instructional effectiveness and leadership skills.**

In addition to having the sufficient numbers of school and district administrators to do the work of increasing student achievement, it is of equal importance for those leaders to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to maximize their effectiveness. Unfortunately, again California ranks at or near the bottom of the 50 states when we examine state-level support for increasing the capacity of school administrators.

According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Ferrandino, 2007), 22 states currently have legislated support for leadership coaching, with many mandating a coaching-based induction program for new principals. Supporting this observation, Darling Hammond and Orphanos (2007) reported, “Many states are introducing requirements for full-time administrative internships under the direct supervision of veteran principals as part of their overhaul of administrator preparation. ... A

number of states have developed innovative funding streams for administrator internships that address issues of both supply and quality” (p. 43). They also noted, “Whereas other states we examined have funded ongoing leadership academies, and several have launched mentoring/coaching models to support principals ... the only direct state funding for leadership development in California currently is training provided by AB 75” (p. 48). They state that while AB 75 has certainly been helpful, “criticisms are directed at the brevity and one-size-fits-all nature of the training and the fact that it generally does not include direct mentoring or coaching of principals.” In California, reauthorization of AB 75 as AB 430 provided coaching as an alternative to satisfy the practicum required by the legislation, but offered no structure and no funding for this vitally needed program to build the leadership capacity of California’s principals.

Additionally, Darling Hammond and Orphanos noted that:

- 37 percent of California principals say they received in-service training at no cost, compared to 57 percent of principals nationally (p. 20).
- California principals were much less likely than their counterparts nationally to have had an internship as part of their training experience (27 percent vs. 63 percent) (p. 43).

Assuring that school leaders have the skills and knowledge required to fully serve California’s students requires more than hope. Darling Hammond and Orphanos point out that “[o]ne often-neglected role of state agencies is the dissemination of information about best practices through research and publication. ... The state could, in partnership with stakeholder organizations like the Association of California School Administrators, support the dissemination of best practices by collecting and disseminating evidence about successful program designs from its program reviews and from research, and supporting challenge grants to programs to plant specific, needed practices in programs” (p. 52).

Margaret Wheatley noted in *Leadership and the New Science* (1992) that the role of leadership has changed, as it now requires more of a focus on marshalling, focusing, and developing energy, information, and relationships. Garmston and Wellman (1999) remind us that the current system and ways of running schools produce the current results, and they call upon new educational leaders to build professional learning communities to release the energy and resources trapped by existing organizational patterns, traditions, and cultures. Embedded in these new school communities must be shared values, a collective focus on learning, professional collaboration, deprivatized practice, and reflective data-driven dialogue centered on student learning and instructional practice.

Building and maintaining this type of educational environment calls for new skills in California’s principals. Today’s principal must continue to be an effective operational manager and instructional leader, but must also assume the roles of visionary/culture leader, learning leader, collaborative leader, and situational leader. He or she must engage in systems thinking and must demonstrate the ability to both understand and guide complex processes of learning assessment and evaluation, change, and group development. Systems, change, shared values, collaboration, and data-driven dialogue all revolve around people, relationships, and communication.

Clearly, the capacity for this type of leadership cannot be fully developed by reading books or by attending workshops, trainings, or graduate classes. Certainly, principals need a foundational understanding of best practices, but true leadership is not about administering programs or installing and managing new structures. Today, effective school leadership must be centered on making connections between people, practice, and student learning;



building trust; and effectively exerting influence to change and improve the way educators work with one another in the service of children and for the sake of learning. This type of leadership can only be developed through on-site, of-the-moment, reality-based, on-the-job experience with real people and their unique sets of resources, challenges, background histories, and cultures. Preparation for and processing of these experiences is greatly enhanced if guided, shared, and reflected upon with a highly qualified, trained, and certified leadership coach. Research demonstrates that principals who receive coaching not only “are more engaged in instructional leadership, they actually are spending more time on instructional issues and are addressing them with more skill than unsupported principals” (Bloom, 2003).

The development of professional networks or purposeful learning communities is seen as a key ingredient of school improvement. Elmore (2007) has observed that “the network model is designed to provide a setting where school leaders can work together in a structured way on issues of instructional practice that are directly relevant to their work, developing their understanding and skill around practices of improvement” (p. 22). Fullan (2007) has pointed out that “the starting point for working toward a solution [for maximizing student learning] is the sobering realization that it cannot be done *unless each and every teacher is learning every day*. Personal learning in a collective enterprise is the *sine qua non* of large-scale success” (p. 153). **Leading the collaboration of these networks or professional learning communities is a talent requiring time, specific skills, and tremendous knowledge. Developing the capacity of school and district leaders in the art and science of leading such networks is essential to sustain school reform.**

Therefore, in order to increase the capacity and opportunities for California’s students to be served by the best leaders, new policies are required which would:

- Provide funding for a well managed coaching program to serve not only new principals and district leaders who are new, but also principals and district leaders who are new in their positions—particularly those leaders assigned to the schools and districts with the lowest achieving students.
- Provide incentives for the most capable school leaders to serve in the highest-need schools and district.
- Establish partnerships for the dissemination of best practices related to improving student learning.
- Encourage the development of purposeful learning communities of adults as well as students in and across schools and districts.

### **Summary of Research/Evidence Supporting Recommendations**

Research (Marzano et al., 2005), (Hallinger & Heck, 1998), (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) has made it clear that leadership has a profound influence on student learning. The increasing emphasis on instructional leadership (Fullan, 2007) has heightened the expectations for California’s school administrators. Unfortunately, these increased demands of leadership come at a time when California is at the bottom in the number of school and district leaders available to do this work. The ratio of school administrators to students must be lowered in order for California’s administrators to shift from what has been termed “management” (Cooley & Shen, 2003) to “leadership.”

Furthermore, California ranks near the bottom in state support for programs whose goal is to increase the capacity of school and district leaders (Darling Hammond & Orphanos, 2007). In particular, two approaches are recommended for increasing the knowledge and skills of those who lead our schools. One, to provide skilled coaches to support on-site, reality-based professional learning experiences. The other is to create programs in which leaders can develop the unique skills required to create purposeful learning communities in which teachers and administrators, as well as students, are learning every day. Expert practitioners and researchers (Elmore, 2007), (Fullan, 2005), (Garmston & Wellman, 1999) remind us that leading such communities requires time, specific skills, and tremendous knowledge, and that such networks are essential if school reform is to be sustained. The needs of California's children are vast. Providing both the number of leaders as well as increasing their capacity to meet those needs must be in the forefront of California's educational policies.

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## A POLICY STRATEGY FOR FUNDING STUDENT SUCCESS

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Topic: education finance

### Problem Statement

The fundamental problem in education finance today is that the time has come to fund student success and we don't know how to accomplish it.\* We don't know, in part, because educators don't know how to achieve the ambitious learning goals for all students that states and the federal government have established. They know how to improve performance, sometimes substantially, but even these gains lag behind expectations. If the instructional program to educate all students to standards is not available, then finance policies alone cannot fund success.

We also don't know how to fund student success, in part, because today's finance systems were never designed to support academic performance at the levels now demanded. Conventional finance systems constitute a haphazard collection of agendas, policies, finance mechanisms, and practices that accumulated over decades and that ill serve the performance agenda. In short, the system itself is the problem; funding student success depends on our ability to redesign the system so that its goals, funds, operations, and accountability work together to support high levels of student performance.

We don't know how to fund student success, finally, because ambitious learning standards, judicial calls for adequate funding, and the rising demand for effective spending in the public sector challenge education finance policy assumptions at their most basic level, making the way ahead uncertain. For instance, the central policy problem has shifted from wealth disparity to low student performance. The legal theory has changed from equal protection to adequacy. The equity focus has moved from districts to schools and students. The remedy has changed from resource distribution to academic results. Finance policies themselves, once addressed separately from

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\* This work was supported by the School Finance Redesign Project at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education through funding by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Grant No. 29252. The views expressed herein are those of the author and are not intended to represent the project, center, university, or foundation.

educational programs and student learning, now must be integrated with these core activities. Funding demands have changed from “what’s available” to “what’s needed.” Resource distribution, long a creature of standard operating procedures and automatic processes, now requires strategic investments. Similarly, resource management expectations have changed from accurate spending (in categories required for compliance purposes) to effective spending. In short, the imperative to fund student success demands new perspectives on funding: refocusing attention from “resources as general supports” to “the ways resources are allocated and used to support student learning.” The expectation now is that resources will be used explicitly and strategically to accomplish results. The question is: how?

### Policy Issues and Recommendations

The central policy issue in funding student success is how to redesign education finance to better support the student performance ambitions that states now demand. After all, if the system is the problem, then success depends upon more than simply adjusting funding levels, tinkering with distribution formulas, creating new categorical programs, imposing another sanction, or targeting any one element for change. A system’s components must fit together coherently to accomplish results. The policy issue demands that we align resources with performance, top to bottom.

Design principles. In terms of finance system design, a performance-oriented school finance system would promote adequacy, equity, productivity, and accountability. Adequacy requires that decision makers know what level of funding is required to accomplish academic goals. Then they must have the fiscal capacity to raise that amount and the political will to do so. If any one of these conditions is absent, then the required level of funding cannot be guaranteed. Funding could be too little, too great, or just right only by chance.

Equity requires that funding be tied to educational need and that needs-based aid reaches its intended target. If it doesn’t, then not only does inequity persist but finance systems become more inefficient, with targeted aid not serving its purpose.

Productivity is more complex. It involves the translation of resources into results. As such it encompasses the motivation and skill of educators and students alike, the settings in which they work, and the instructional means they use to get results. At base, productivity is a process of aligning resources with goals and of adapting instruction and resources to needs.

Accountability allows decision makers and citizens to oversee results. Accountability requires transparency in resource transactions, accounts that are aligned with goals, and responsibility assigned to the individuals who make resource decisions. To do otherwise—to hide transactions, provide accounts that reveal nothing of importance, or hold wrong parties accountable—would strip accountability of its role in democratic government and its utility in funding student success.

System operations. At the level of system operations, today's education finance systems do more to impede student success than support it. Problems exist across the gamut of finance system functions described above.

For instance, no one is certain how much funding is enough. No school or district has yet achieved standards across all student types, so there is no demonstration of a requisite level of funding in any one school setting, much less multiple ones. Educators' perspectives on funding also vary. Similarly, there is no empirical basis for determining how much funding is needed to compensate for special student needs, such as poverty, language, or disability, the "weights" that are used in funding formulas. Analysts have begun to address the how-much questions, but their answers are rudimentary, based on current schooling arrangements, business-as-usual professional perspectives, or a nascent research base. They lack the certainty we desire and themselves have become the source of growing debate.

Continuing inequities in resource distribution at all levels of government similarly work against closer resource-performance alignment. States have worked on inter-district equity for decades, but their policy successes have been limited. At other levels of the system, analysts recently have recognized that inequities exist among schools within the same district, and there is no interstate equity policy.

Problems exist with needs-based aid as well. The formula that distributes federal Title I aid, for example, in part exacerbates the very inequity it purports to address. Moreover, federal, state, and local distribution plans that fund schools, programs, or staff rather than students, and conflicting agendas across levels of government, impede needs-based aid from reaching the students it intends to serve. At the district level, too, resource distributions that do not rely on per-pupil formulas, and lower-level staff discretion over resource deployment, promote inequities among schools.

Resource management impedes productivity. Current finance arrangements fail to align resources with performance goals. For example, while state and federal accountability policies have captured educators' attention, few, if any, incentives reinforce that performance focus at the individual level. Staff compensation generally is disconnected from student results, and compliance and auditing requirements dictate how resources can be used, regardless of their fit with educational needs or consequences for student outcomes. The politics of collective bargaining encourage some superintendents to prefer new money in the form of categorical programs, even though, by their own admission, categorical funding diminishes the coherence of instructional programs. Perverse incentives encourage administrators to over-identify students with special problems or to keep them in specially-funded programs longer than necessary.

Where local educators have developed new resource capacities, they frequently lack the discretion to match resources with needs. Categorical program rules and collective bargaining agreements restrict local resource discretion, sometimes preventing its alignment with instruction. By dictating spending, categorical funding applies a one-size-fits-all solution to schools facing different challenges and levels of resources. As

states fund a greater share of total education costs and make wider use of categorical programs, local decision making will become more constrained and less strategic. In short, from the vantage of schools, where resource decisions directly affect student learning, finance systems appear incoherent.

Accountability is ineffective. Under current finance arrangements, accountability also fails to connect resources with performance. Three problems stand out. First, funding systems are opaque, making it hard to tell what is going on or whom to hold accountable. Funding arrangements are hugely complex, involving multiple levels, different allocation mechanisms, and multiple sources of control. Resource decisions are spread among different layers and are executed by different players. School district budgets can run to hundreds of pages. Education leaders sometimes do not recognize connections between school improvement strategies and resource mechanisms, nor do they always know where their resources end up.

Moreover, the connection between dollars and students is easily lost at the district level, as officials translate dollars into programs, services, and staff, and as salary averaging replaces real-dollar distributions to schools. Complex staffing formulas are understood by few, second- and third-tier decision making inside districts hides actual resource deployments and their consequences, and funding restrictions are not easily discernible or evenly applied. Congressional set asides circumvent finance mechanisms, and centrally controlled resources make it harder to account for resource effects on schools and students.

Second, the compliance orientation of accountability—focusing on how resources are spent rather than what they accomplish—structures accounts and draws policy attention away from student performance. In a performance context, such accounts have little meaning. Thus, compliance accountability runs counter to school accountability for results. Likewise, accounting practices focused on fund sources, functions, and objects, and the account coding that defines these categories in practice, reveal little of substance about how resources support student success.

Third, accountability is misapplied. Schools are held accountable for results even though federal, state, and central office agents dictate how resources are to be used. As a result, schools are held accountable for resource allocations and uses—for results—that state and federal policy makers and agency personnel dictate, and these upper-level agents escape accountability for the decisions they impose on others.

In sum, finance systems operations work against the resource-performance alignment that student success demands, and this misalignment represents a missed opportunity in American public education. The question now is how to regain it.

A policy strategy for funding student success. A policy strategy must accomplish two goals: clear existing finance system impediments and create conditions that better align resources with instruction, adapt instruction and resource use to needs, and account for results meaningfully. These changes will allow policy leaders, educators, and

researchers to better support the continuous instructional improvement and R&D processes that are most likely to move the system toward success. In effect, any strategy for funding student success today must be viewed as an investment strategy, not a get-rich-quick opportunity.

Task 1: Align resources with instruction. At the local level, aligning resources with instruction means conducting a *resource audit* and reallocating resources where necessary to ensure the best fit with instruction. The goal is to examine resource issues such as class size and planning time, small group support, individual tutoring, staffing strategies, scheduling, school-based professional development, teacher compensation, and the like and make adjustments accordingly. Audits are appropriate at both school and district levels, using available tools.

Aligning resources with learning at this level also encompasses *incentive-oriented human resource policies*, *district-to-school weighted student funding* that is aligned with a state WSF formula, and *district managed school fund accounts*. The latter are repositories for most or all funding generated by a school's students. The balance depends on whether instructional improvement strategies are driven by districts or individual schools.

At the state level, aligning resources with instruction means converting base funding and special-needs funding into a *weighted student funding* formula, attaching the monies to students and depositing them in school accounts at the district level.

At the federal level, aligning resources with instruction similarly means converting categorical funding for poverty, English language learners, and mild disability to *student-based funding* that is distributed on the basis of pupil counts and need.

Task 2: Adapt instruction and funding to need. At the local level, adapting instruction and funding to need means that schools engage in *continuous instructional improvement*, constantly setting goals and aligning resources, instructing students, gathering and sharing data, analyzing the data, using the information to create action plans for students, teachers, and others, setting new goals, and so forth. At the district level, this means *creating and managing school options* that experiment with new instructional and funding methods.

At the state level, adapting instruction and funding to need means *strengthening charter school laws* to enable expanded local experimentation that complements the continuous instructional improvement occurring in more traditional settings. It also means funding an *R&D agenda* to learn from both the continuous improvement and lab-school experiments, and it means creating an *investment fund* to boost school and district capacity to manage resources strategically and effectively.

At the federal level, adapting instruction and funding to need means creating an *R&D strategy* to promote learning about the appropriate size of funding increments and related issues that support student needs.

Task 3: Account meaningfully. At the local level, accounting for student results and the methods used to achieve them means, for schools, *reporting on the basis of instructional strategies, resource uses, and costs* and, for districts, *reporting on spending by student and school*.

At the state level, accounting in this manner means *coordinating with federal guidelines* regarding outcome principles and resource responsibilities that are conveyed in a new federal accounting handbook.

At the federal level, accounting meaningfully means creating a *new accounting handbook* that conveys outcome principles and resource responsibilities.

Across all levels of the system, accountability must include real consequences for adults and for resource flows, based on student performance, contingencies that galvanize educators and others toward the accomplishment of core academic goals. Such contingencies must take into account the state of knowledge and practice about accomplishing learning goals; that is, it must be meaningful and fair.

Such a strategy would clear the underbrush of impediments that exist in today's school finance systems, creating in its place a new landscape for continuous instructional improvement and the resource allocation and use that supports it. It would ensure that resources reached the students they intend to serve. It would promote productivity, and it would account for results meaningfully. It would redefine the responsible domains of policy and practice, placing substantial discretion at the local level, and it would promote learning about effective instruction and the resources necessary to support it.

### Research/Evidence Supporting Recommendations

The research evidence that supports these findings, conclusions, and recommendations comes from the work of the School Finance Redesign Project (SFRP) at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education. SFRP represents a program of research, analysis, and development that addresses the question: how can finance systems be redesigned to support the nation's ambitious learning goals? It draws on the nation's leading scholars in the field, including Marguerite Roza, Karen Hawley Miles, Dan Goldhaber, Janet Hansen, Allan Odden, Anthony Milanowski, and Richard Brandon. It also draws on a distinguished panel of scholars operating as the National Working Group on Funding Student Success. These efforts have resulted in approximately 30 reports to date, examining issues such as how resources are used now, how those uses impede better results, what options exist for better performance, and what technical and policy difficulties lie ahead. SFRP's papers and other products are available online at [www.schoolfinanceresdesign.org](http://www.schoolfinanceresdesign.org). Additional analyses and research syntheses will become available during the 2007-2008 academic year, including the final report of the National Working Group on Funding Student Success.



**Advancement Project's  
Policy Recommendations on  
Facilities for Preschool and Early Education  
for**

***Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*  
Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007, in Sacramento**

**By**

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Statement of Problem (one-half to one page)

*Assuming an ultimate objective of improved student achievement, please summarize the pertinent facts of the existing problems or challenges that your policy ideas or recommendations aim to address.*

California currently lacks preschool-suitable spaces for approximately one in five (1 in 5) of its four-year-olds. This one-in-five shortfall exists whether preschool were made universally available or on a targeted basis for children who are likely to attend low API schools and/or are socio-economically disadvantaged. 117,000 new spaces would be required for universal preschool, while 45,000 spaces would be needed for the targeted scenario.

The preschool facilities shortfall is very unevenly distributed—even more unevenly distributed within counties than between counties. In most regions of the state, some areas can easily serve all of their four-year-olds while many others lack space for over half of their children. In the universal preschool scenario, all but five counties have some facilities shortfall, though the amount varies greatly. In the targeted preschool scenario, though many counties have no shortfall, a majority would continue to require funds to construct facilities.

Failing to build a robust facilities plan into any preschool program will mean disproportionately failing to deliver preschool to the highest need children. The children who currently lack access to a physical preschool space are disproportionately the very children who would benefit most from early education and preparation for school: children in poverty, children whose parents do not speak English as their primary language, children whose parents did not graduate from high school, and children of

color. Even under the targeted scenario, this skew persists, leaving children who could benefit the most from preschool without meaningful access to preschool, when programmatic dollars are provided.

In order to make preschool a reality under a targeted or universal approach, policy and education decision-makers must make preschool facilities a key focus for the 2008 year of education reform.

#### Discussion of Policy Issues, Options, and Recommendations (4-5 pages)

*Please address how the policy area you are discussing is related to improved student achievement, what the policy issues are, what some of the policy options might be, and what you or your group is recommending and why. Discuss how your policy recommendations might fit into a more comprehensive set of education policy reforms addressing school finance, governance, personnel and leadership, and state education data systems.*

### I. Preschool Improves Student Achievement

Early education is critical to improving student achievement because it holds the promise of providing young children with a solid foundation to prevent the early onset of the achievement gap for poor children and children of color. For example, a 20-year study found that low-income children who attended preschool had higher levels of educational attainment and were less likely to be placed in special education or held back a grade than their counterparts who did not have the benefit of preschool. Similarly, Latinos who attended preschool show a 54 percent improvement in test scores, reflecting stronger cognitive development and language skills. In short, a strong foundation in preschool can lead to stronger academic outcomes in school.

Recent studies show that disparities exist in terms of school readiness even when children start kindergarten. Given that 95 percent of California kindergarten teachers state that their students who attended preschool were better prepared for kindergarten than those who did not, we must focus on early childhood education to close the school readiness gap before it metastasizes into the achievement gap.

### II. Educational Benefits of Preschool Will Reach Communities of Highest Need Only If We Address the Facilities Shortfall

Growing awareness of the benefits of preschool has led to bi-partisan support for gradually increasing State Preschool program revenues so that more children that attend low API schools may be served. But preschool expansion proposals necessarily beg the question of where we will find the physical facilities so that such preschools might be provided. In neighborhoods where many low API schools and poverty exist, there are far more children than there are physical spaces in which to deliver a preschool program. Pumping more revenue into preschool programs without addressing this facilities

problem means that program funding will flow disproportionately to areas where money from local sources exists for space and space is more plentiful, where the children are more likely to come from English-speaking, Anglo, and middle to upper class homes where parents can share the benefits of higher educational attainment in neighborhoods with uncrowded K-12 schools. Of course, all children should enjoy the benefits of preschool, but children should not have their early childhood educational opportunities predetermined simply by virtue of where and to whom they were born. In short, we cannot improve our K-12 school system if we fail to address the preschool facilities problem and continue to foreclose the early educational opportunities of the least advantaged children. Unfortunately, this is already happening. Los Angeles County already fails to receive all the Head Start funds for which it is eligible because it lacks facilities in which to house the program. Nor is this phenomenon limited to Los Angeles. On a statewide basis, the most common reason cited as to why the State's early education funds are left unspent is that providers cannot surmount the obstacle that facilities shortages pose. We have the opportunity to solve this problem in the coming Year of Education and should seize the opportunity now.

### III. The Facilities Bond Strategy

The simplest and most robust source of funding to lower barriers to preschool would be a general obligation bond, such as the highly popular and successful bonds for K-12 school facilities. Voters have approved 14 of the last 15 school bonds, generating almost \$46 billion for K-12 facilities since 1982.

We support making preschool facilities part of the next statewide Education facilities bond and doing so in the largest amount that is feasible. Inclusion in the Education bond will enhance political and financial support for its passage and is consistent with public preferences about preschool, based on polling and focus groups that show that the strongest support for preschool funding exists when it is linked to helping our public schools succeed.

The funds should be made as a grant, as occurs for K-12 facilities, which includes school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools. A match should not be required because there is no local funding source of matching dollars for preschool facilities to which all entities have equal access.

We would encourage local education agencies to use the land they currently have on their K-5 campuses and early learning centers, especially on campuses that are experiencing declining enrollment. This available land, which results from the large acreage of many campuses, is already owned and has already met state standards.

But where a district does not have available land in a particular neighborhood -- because the schools in that neighborhood are already hyper-dense as measured by students per acre -- districts will likely have to acquire land. Therefore, where new land is required, a local education agency would receive grant funding for the actual cost of the land,

subject to the approval of the State Allocation Board. The remainder of the grant would provide funds for a basic quality preschool facility, with a classroom for every 20 eligible children, which meets state standards, including options for modular construction, portables, and regular building construction. Amenities could be added at the discretion of the local education agency.

Early education facilities funds allocated as part of an Education facilities bond would be distributed to local education agencies because they already have the expertise and ability to rapidly construct educational facilities. Indeed, local education agencies have built over 1,000,000 new classrooms seats since 2000. Even with the expenditure of significant duplicative resources and time, other non-LEA systems would very unlikely be able to develop preschool facilities on the scale that is needed to meaningfully address the access disparities that currently exist in so many different parts of California. In addition, we support enabling local education agencies to take advantage of the strengths of existing non-LEA entities by permitting LEAs to contract with non-LEA preschool providers, which would offer preschool in public facilities at a nominal cost.

To be clear, preschool bonds would be structured to ensure that a school district's K-12 facility eligibility would not be adversely impacted if the district builds preschool facilities. Preschool facilities would be a separate program that would not affect a district's separate eligibility for K-12 facility funds, while encouraging them to use excess capacity in facilities where K-12 enrollment is declining.

The Advancement Project estimates that eliminating the current shortfall in preschool facilities spaces for four-year-olds – and thereby providing a preschool space for all preschool-eligible children – could cost approximately \$2.6 billion. Given the unlikelihood that such a large amount could be provided in the next bond, some prioritization is called for.

The Advancement Project suggests focusing the funds where the need is greatest: in neighborhoods where the shortfall in spaces is very large – over 80 four-year-olds lack preschool space – and either (1) the API score of the local school is a 1, 2 or 3 or (2) the local elementary school is in the highest 25% of the state receiving free and reduced price lunches. Our preliminary analysis suggests that there are at least 140 neighborhoods in California that meet these criteria, that they exist throughout the state, and that the cost of curing these high-need facilities shortfalls is approximately \$1.2 billion.

#### IV. Use of Preschool Facilities After Part-day Preschool

We envision that a preschool facility would be used from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. (or longer) to encourage working parents to avail their children of preschool and wrap around child care services to be provided on site. Local education agencies would build preschool/early education facilities on public land and then would be encouraged to provide “wrap around” services that could be contracted out to a private provider, who could use the facility rent-free. We are also aware that some private providers are willing

to transport children to/from their child care center or home before or after preschool, and we support child care reimbursement rate amendments to encourage this kind of inter-sector cooperation.

There are some excellent models of school-sited early education centers that serve not only four-year-olds but children 0-5 with a blend of program funding from Head Start, K-12, and other state and federal sources using a blend of public and private effort both in funding and personnel. We support that the early education facilities bond funds in the Education bond be blendable with other private and public sources of facilities funding so that local education agencies may build this kind of comprehensive center or may provide preschool to both three and four-year-olds if they can raise the program funding. There is precedent for this kind of blending in the joint use provisions of prior Education bonds.

Different communities and neighborhoods will have different preferences with regard to how preschool dovetails with childcare, and these individual preferences should be respected as long as the children are safe, well-cared for, and receiving a high quality preschool component for at least half the day that helps give them a fair chance in school. Local education agencies, as a matter of policy, should be encouraged to cooperate with private child care providers, ensuring that the needs of parents and children are met as they receive quality early education and care.

#### Summary of Research/Evidence Supporting Recommendations (one-half to one page)

Please give sources and citations for the nonpartisan research, study, data, and analysis supporting your policy brief and the recommendations you have proposed.

- California's Preschool Space Challenge (Los Angeles, CA: Advancement Project, February 2007): The study shows that California currently lacks facility space for approximately 1 in 5 preschoolers. Additionally, the facilities shortfall disproportionately affects low-income children, children of color, children whose parents do not speak English at home and who did not finish high school – the very children who would most benefit from expanding access to preschool.
- The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University, 2005): In a study comparing Oklahoma children who have completed one year of preschool with those just entering preschool and those who didn't attend preschool, the authors conclude that Oklahoma's universal preschool program has succeeded in enhancing the school readiness of a diverse group of children.
- High/Scope Perry Preschool Project through Age 40 (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 2004): Based on a study tracking the same group of low-income Michigan preschoolers for 37 years, researchers calculate a return of \$17 for every dollar invested and report that children who attended an effective program were more

likely than those who did not to graduate from high school and be more prosperous as adults, among other benefits.

- **The Effects of State Prekindergarten Programs on Young Children's School Readiness in Five States (Rutgers, NJ: NIEER, 2005):** This study of effective preschool programs in five states (Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West Virginia) finds that children attending state-funded pre-k programs improve significantly in early language, literacy, and mathematical development regardless of ethnic or socio-economic background.
- **Effects of a School-Based, Early Childhood Intervention on Adult Health and Well-being (Journal of the American Medical Association 161:730-739, 2007):** Arthur Reynolds and a team of researchers at the University of Wisconsin followed more than 1000 low-income children who attended the high quality Chicago Child-Parent Center Preschools, tracking their development over 20 years and comparing them to children who did not attend preschool. Preschool participants were more likely to graduate from high school, and less likely to need special education, be held back a grade, or get in trouble with the law.
- **Praise for Preschool: California Kindergarten Teachers Say all Children Will Benefit (Oakland, CA: Preschool California, November 2005):** More than 9 out of 10 kindergarten teachers in California say it is important for children to go to preschool before they start kindergarten, according to a new statewide poll of California public school kindergarten teachers. The poll, conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for Preschool California, found near-unanimous support for quality preschool among kindergarten teachers, no matter where they teach or for how long they have been in the profession.

## **The Importance of Systems Alignment: Developing a Coherent Approach to Educational Governance and Finance Reform in California**

*Submitted by:* District Practitioner Working Group; California Collaborative on District Reform  
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Juan Garza, Superintendent, Kings Canyon Unified  
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*Topics covered:* Cross-cutting approach to policy development

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### **Statement of the Problem**

As superintendents and administrators of California districts, we are committed to taking the actions necessary to raise the achievement level of all students while simultaneously closing the achievement gap. We are committed to reaching the point where all students graduate from our schools ready to succeed in higher education or enter the work force in a job with significant economic growth potential.

We strongly believe that the quality of instructional practice can trump other factors that may limit the ability of some students to succeed in school. It is therefore incumbent on us – all of us – to ensure that high quality instructional practice in every classroom everyday is the focus of everyone's work. Only with such focus and the committed action to back it up, can we hope to achieve the goal of providing all our students with the opportunity to graduate with meaningful choices about their future.

The challenge of getting all parts of the system to work together to achieve this goal is one of the most important we face. In the past decade, California has made progress toward instituting a standards-based system with the potential for aligning policy and resources in a coherent and strategic direction. However, current policy and practice fail in very substantial ways to realize the alignment and coherence promised by standards -based reform and necessary to accomplish the goals we hold for all our students. The "Getting Down to Facts" compendium of studies chronicles many of the sources and forms of educational policy fragmentation in California. Multiple decision-makers, interest group politics, and policy by accretion rather than strategic deliberation have undermined any moves toward system coherence.

Among the examples of fragmentation discussed in the papers and experienced daily in our districts are the following:

- A conflicted and confusing approach to accountability. On the one hand, schools and districts are held accountable for producing results for students; on the other, we are constrained at every turn by a myriad of process rules and regulations for which we are also held accountable. The excessive regulations engender a compliance mentality throughout the system, from the state capital down into our classrooms. This focus on compliance undermines results-based accountability, distracts attention from the real goals, and inhibits us from finding and using the most effective approaches to serving all our students well. Even within the results-based aspects of our accountability systems, we lack coherence. The differences in measures, programs, and interventions between the state API (PSAA) and the federal AYP (NCLB) systems send mixed messages to school personnel and increase the likelihood that schools will be found wanting by at least one of these measures.
- Failure to implement and fund a comprehensive data system at the state and local level that make it possible for districts to diagnose student needs, monitor student progress and determine the effectiveness of policies, programs, and practices. A strong data system, with unique student identifiers and vertically aligned assessments, is essential for measuring progress and ensuring both results-based accountability and evidence-based instructional and system improvement strategies.
- Conflicting and overlapping categorical programs, many of which have little if any relevance to standards and results and contain duplicative and conflicting requirements regarding reports, plans and processes. State reliance on categorical funding leaves districts with little real discretion in designing programs to meet their students' needs. If districts are to be held accountable for results – as they should be – then they have to have more control over the strategies and actions that will lead to staff and student success.
- Restrictions on the purchase and use of instructional materials that limit instructional options and can get in the way of producing high outcomes for all students. The current adoption cycle is costly, while districts lack flexibility in selecting materials that they believe (based on evidence) will be most effective for their students.
- An unpredictable state budget cycle that makes strategic planning difficult and thus undermines coherence in district strategies and programs. This cycle also adversely affects the timing of decisions that should be made regarding the employment and retention of staff.
- Overly restrictive credentialing, evaluation, tenure, and professional development policies that are not well aligned with standards and performance goals and that negatively impact district decisions about hiring, retaining, training, and evaluating staff.
- Policy development and administration that lacks an adequate evidence base, derived either from research or from program evaluations.

These and other areas of needed policy reform are addressed in the accompanying policy briefs on improving the state data system, on moving away from reliance on categorical funding, and on personnel concerns. In this brief, we focus on the need for all these reform initiatives to be aligned around the common purpose of reaching the state standards and reducing performance gaps among groups of California students.



The issue of alignment is critical to us because research on best practices strongly suggests that system coherence – at the school, district, and state levels – is far more likely to produce the desired results than a system plagued by fragmented programs, confusing goals, and misaligned regulations. Moreover, coherence in support of high quality instruction and improved student achievement is relevant not only to instructional personnel. It must incorporate the funding and business divisions, the human resources policies and offices, the facilities and management information offices, state and local governance bodies, and communications with stakeholders.

Yet the importance of systems alignment is neither well appreciated nor well understood. One of the primary implications of the Getting Down to Facts studies is that many parts of the system must improve but they must do so together. Focusing on one to the detriment of the other undermines the ability of the entire system to move forward. That is why our policy recommendations firmly state that policy responses to Getting Down to Facts findings must be coherent and comprehensive – that is, they must address all the major areas noted in the studies even if all recommendations cannot be implemented at once. We believe that a timeline that calls for action on the major policy recommendations in a staged manner over a defined period is not only an acceptable but also a desirable approach.

Our recommendations are also based on the belief that the state’s primary role is to set standards, establish expected targets, hold districts accountable for success, and provide districts the resources and local flexibility required to produce results.

## **Recommended Policy Approach**

In this brief we focus not on particular policy recommendations but rather on a recommended overarching approach to making the needed changes. (See our other briefs for more specific policy recommendations.) We emphasize three key aspects of this approach:

### **1. The reform of state policy should reflect a comprehensive, coherent and long-term vision for the governance and finance of California’s educational enterprise.**

Our first recommendation stems directly from our prior discussion. We view the many of the findings of the Getting Down to Facts studies and the policy recommendations emerging from those findings to reflect the need for a larger reform strategy. Our concern is that the policy response to these findings will be piecemeal and subject more to political maneuvering than strategic vision. Such an approach will not work in the long run and will in fact undermine continued improvement efforts. What is needed instead is a strategy that focuses on the whole, recognizing that the reform of all the identified systems is necessary and that it must be carried out in a clear and coherent manner.

A well-aligned education reform system that makes high quality instructional practice the focus of everyone’s work will create a much better context for success making it possible to achieve our goal of giving all our students meaningful choices about their future upon graduation from our schools.

Such an approach will not be easy. It will require foresight, political restraint, and time. Indeed, recognizing that everything cannot be done at once, we suggest that an explicit staged timeline be developed. In this approach, actions on different elements of the system would be mapped over an extended period – say a five year time frame. More straightforward (though still fundamental) changes – such as the full funding and implementation of the CALPADS data system – could be

accomplished on the front end. Indeed, we believe the data system is an excellent place to start, as it is absolutely crucial to realizing a more standards-based approach to accountability and instructional improvement. Moreover, the legislation is already in place – and has been so for some time – and the main missing ingredient is the funding to fully populate the system.

Other areas – such as fundamental overhaul of the finance system – would require further study and opportunities for stakeholder input and so would also need more time to design and implement. For example, to move away from categorical allocations necessitates that as a state we develop and agree upon an alternative funding system (such as a weighted student formula) that would allocate money based on identified student need. Such a major shift would involve significant design and implementation issues that require forethought and planning. Similarly, addressing the problem of our unpredictable budget cycle – also a key roadblock to coherence at the district level – would suggest moving to a multi-year budget or similar approach. Such a move would also involve significant implementation challenges and so would also require additional investigation and time to arrive at the best policy solution. These and similar policy changes would be slated for later on in the five year plan, after the required investigation was complete.

One other aspect of this comprehensive and staged approach must be emphasized. Whatever the specifics of the policies, they must reflect a substantially altered conception of the role of the state – one that is less focused on compliance with process regulations and more reflective of a commitment that all students in the state will have the opportunity to achieve to high standards and graduate from high school prepared for college, citizenship, and work. In this role, the state sets the standards and goals (with input from stakeholders, including district practitioners), provides adequate resources and capacity-building support for reaching these goals, and holds schools and districts accountable for doing so. For their part, districts and schools would gain flexibility in determining the best allocation of resources and strategies for responding to the local context and achieving the state goals.

## **2. Policy responses should be based on evidence from practice and research.**

With all the current rhetoric about evidence-based practices, this recommendation may seem obvious. Yet, as evident from the Getting Down to Facts studies, state policy rarely flows from evidence. Indeed, policies either accrete haphazardly over time or are put into place on a grand scale with little evidentiary base or R&D involved. We suggest a different approach, one which incorporates and supports opportunities for trying out policy directions before implementing them at full scale (see our recommendations regarding categorical programs in an accompanying brief, for example).

In addition, we believe that an important role for the state is to encourage, support, and disseminate research relevant not only to state policy options but also to strategies likely to be effective at a local level. Several research organizations in the state have been studying district practices that appear to contribute to improvements for students. Results of these studies should be disseminated broadly. In addition, districts collect their own data and conduct their own analyses and could serve as relevant case studies for improvement. We even have California districts that have been awarded the prestigious Broad prize or other awards. What lessons can others in the state learn from these successful examples of achievement and continuous improvement? Learning from the best practices of others and how they connect into a single coherent system will help all raise achievement and close the achievement gap.

Similarly, the state, including CDE and the state board, should review current policies and practices with respect to the strength of the evidence behind them. We are convinced that many of the current practices would not hold up under close scrutiny, thus opening up options for other creative solutions. The rule of thumb here should be that if a policy or practice is required, it should have a convincing basis in evidence. Without that, practices may be recommended but not mandated.

### **3. The state should support non-legislative as well as legislative responses.**

This third aspect of our recommended approach may be more relevant for districts and for outside funders than for state policy makers. The thrust here is that much can be learned and accomplished without direct legislative action. Indeed, establishing new laws often ends up locking the state and districts into a prescribed course of action at a larger scale or for a longer time period than is beneficial. By contrast, establishing or encouraging (e.g., through the use of incentives) collaborations among districts or between K-12 systems and institutions of higher education can lead to policy or practice initiatives on a more limited scale that are more fluid and responsive to context and new knowledge. Similarly districts with the support of external support organizations can join together in collaborative endeavors. These collaborations and partnerships can have extensive influence by successfully addressing a complex problem – such as improved instruction for English learner students or more appropriate and effective programs for pre-service teacher preparations. An appropriate role for the state would include support for such initiatives and for disseminating the lessons derived from their experience.

We believe that a policy approach that addresses the findings in the Getting Down to Facts studies and reflects the above qualities would go a long way toward improving the functioning of the state system and the opportunities it affords California's youngsters. If we are to achieve what we believe should be the non negotiable goals of preparing all our graduates for success in higher education and/or a career with significant economic growth potential, closing the achievement gap while raising the overall level of achievement, and increasing the academic proficiency of English Language Learners, then a more coherent and aligned approach is necessary along with a very different view of the state's role in educational decision making and administration.

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## **From Compliance to Getting the Job Done: Excessive Regulations vs. Accountability for Results**

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### **Problem Statement**

California has advanced significantly toward a standards-based system. As district leaders, we wholeheartedly support the emphasis on setting clear standards and outcome goals for students and then holding local systems and schools responsible for producing results for all students in their charge. We believe our job as educational leaders is to raise student achievement overall and to close performance gaps in achievement, graduation, and preparation for post-secondary education and employment.

However, our ability to perform that job is hampered by overly restrictive and outdated regulations and by a myriad of conflicting and unnecessary categorical programs that fragment resources and divert district and school attention from meeting the needs of our students. Indeed, **over-regulation actually weakens accountability for results and discourages districts from adopting coherent, evidence-based strategies to move all children to meet state standards.**

Particular problems stemming from the proliferation of categorical programs and of state regulations associated with those programs and with a burgeoning state education code include the following:

- Lack of alignment of state and local action to achieve state standards
  - Many categorical programs, goals, and Ed Code requirements are outdated and no longer aligned with state goals or current standards.
  - Meeting these requirements makes it more difficult for districts and schools to allocate resources and design instructional programs based on the standards and on student performance.
  - Lack of alignment goes beyond state categoricals – e.g., API and state accountability programs vs. AYP and Program Improvement, and credentialing/personnel requirements.
- Fragmentation of attention and effort
  - Programs differ with respect to timing, format, planning and reporting requirements, and assumptions about best practices. Multiple planning and reporting requirements (e.g.,

- technology, school site, and school recognition documentation) divert time and energy from more important priorities.
  - These differences are reflected in compartmentalization that begins in CDE and is mirrored in the districts. Programs create specialized constituencies and staff who develop allegiances to particular regulations or programmatic components rather than to meeting demonstrated needs of children – including the children that the programs were intended to serve.
  - The compartmentalization and conflicting requirements undermine the coherence necessary for instructional and organizational improvement.
- Compliance mentality and wasted resources
  - Categoricals tend to create a rule-compliance mentality that limits creativity and diverts attention from meeting student needs. Principals and district leaders too often ask first “Can we do this with that money?” and then make decisions based on what is allowed rather than what would be most effective.
  - Districts waste substantial amounts of time, money, and staff attention on establishing a clear paper trail for state monitors. This paper trail does not lend itself to the work that needs to get done, whether that work is professional development, student intervention, assessment, etc. While documentation can be a powerful tool for improvement (one reason we need a comprehensive data system in California), the documentation associated with most categorical programs is for compliance, not progress.
  - The compliance mentality and over-specification of required practices contribute to teacher and administrator burn-out and disengagement, thus undermining professional responsibility and commitment.
  - Current checklist approaches to program monitoring reinforce these negative conditions and do little to build the capacity of district and school personnel to improve practice and student learning. Moreover, program evaluations that identify these problems often fall on deaf ears and produce little substantive change.

## Policy Options and Recommendations

The primary objective must be to create an accountability and funding system that is truly standards-based; that keeps the focus on raising student achievement and closing gaps among groups of students; and that allows districts and schools the flexibility to develop coherent, evidence-based programs, while holding them accountable for results. We must replace the current compliance orientation to one of “getting the job done.” In order to do so, we suggest the following longer term and interim policy recommendations:

Longer term: We firmly believe that the school finance and governance systems in California need to be substantially overhauled, not tweaked around the edges. The findings and directions laid out in the GDTF overview and summary report (Loeb et al., 2007) are consistent with our experience and recommended course of action. Our recommended overhaul would necessitate a substantial rethinking of the ways in which fiscal resources are allocated to districts and schools as well as of the locus of decision authority as to how those funds, once allocated, are spent. At the minimum, the new system must:

- Put an end to the use of categorical programs as a central mechanism for funding improvement efforts for specific groups of children or favorite programs of particular interest groups. In its place, we must establish a system that provides adequate resources to meet the needs of the students in any given district. We strongly urge the state to investigate the use of a weighted student formula targeted to the district (that considers particular district circumstances such as degree of poverty and geography) or other similar approaches to resource allocation that would get the requisite funds where they are needed.
- Provide districts the flexibility to decide how best to allocate their resources in order to meet state standards and close achievement gaps.

- Hold districts and schools accountable for producing results – in a single accountability system (i.e., merge state and federal accountability requirements) – rather than for following overly prescriptive regulations. As stated earlier, we fully support a results-based accountability system. We would emphasize, however, that the thrust of this system should be directed toward building local district capacity to meet the outcome goals rather than on pre-determined punitive actions or checklists that do little to address underlying problems or shortcomings in identified schools and districts. We would also emphasize the need for an accountability system that is coherent and focused on measuring progress and on supporting continuous improvement strategies at both the state and local levels. This approach requires a comprehensive and easily accessed and used data system with data longitudinally linked at the student level (see our brief on improving California’s data system).
- Remove outdated and extraneous provisions in the education code that stand in the way of standard-based accountability and system improvement. For the reforms suggested by the GDTF studies to be effective, we need to simplify the education code substantially. The first items to go should be those provisions that are outdated and no longer consistent with our standards-based system. Recommendations for other simplifications have been generated by several studies focused specifically on this issue and should be revisited and implemented.

#### In the interim: District Flexibility and Accountability Initiative

While what we have just described is the direction we believe the state must go in to accomplish the task ahead, we recognize that this comprehensive overhaul requires further investigation of alternative models, creation of the necessary political support, and a staged approach to implementation. However, we cannot wait until these conditions have been met before addressing the barriers created by the state’s current reliance on categorical funding. Moreover, whatever governance reforms are finally implemented, they will be strengthened if the state has taken the opportunity to try out options and explore the implementation issues that are bound to arise before overhauling the system across the state.

With that in mind, we considered various alternatives for interim strategies, including a more aggressive waiver option, allowing 15-20% of a district’s categorical funding to be set aside for flexible allocation based on the district’s identified strategic needs, or allowing districts to combine the largest categoricals into a common funding stream for flexible allocation. However, we concluded that none of these options would significantly address the issues raised at the beginning of this brief. Research on past waiver programs demonstrates that they have little uptake and thus little effect on practice. Allowing for a percentage of categorical funds to be used flexibly would not reduce paperwork but might in fact increase it as districts would still need to follow the same requirements as before and then account for the flexible funds in addition. Finally, combining the large programs would reduce some paperwork and constraints but would leave the majority of small programs in place, again doing little to alleviate the problems of fragmentation and waste mentioned earlier.

What we are suggesting instead is an alternative strategy that would both address many of the most counter-productive constraints of current categorical programs and do so in a way that would provide an opportunity for a policy development process in which changes can be “implemented in a controlled fashion before they are introduced statewide”(Loeb, et al., 2007, p. 8). The focus of this interim strategy would be four-fold:

- a) Increased flexibility for selected local districts to make decisions about resource allocation based on identified local needs and a coherent, well-specified strategic plan to meet those needs. Participating districts would be released from all (or a specified majority of) state categorical requirements on input processes and allocation of dollars to specified uses. There would be one major exception to this flexibility: the categorical dollars could not be used to augment the salary schedule. This exception would ensure that monies originally allocated for categorical purposes

remained additional to the base budget with the express purpose of addressing key improvement goals in a responsive and agile fashion.

b) Accountability for results rather than processes in these districts. In exchange for being released from certain major regulations, participating districts would commit to and be held accountable for a very small set of specified outcome goals focused on reducing achievement gaps. These outcome commitments would be targeted to identified statewide goals, such as raising redesignation rates for EL students, adopting more aggressive targets for closing the gap between African American students and other groups, setting specific goals for moving students from Basic to Proficient, or increasing graduation rates and college preparedness (e.g., completion of A-G requirements, enrollment in Advanced Placement courses, and college matriculation and completion rates (when such data become readily available). Note that these goals should be small in number and both consistent with and supportive of any other accountability goals for schools and districts. For example, increasing redesignation rates for English learners is consistent with NCLB Title III AMAO targets for increasing the percentage of students scoring proficient on the CELDT and meeting AYP targets for the EL subgroup.

To remain in the initiative, districts should be expected to meet or exceed the state goals for the selected indicators – or, if initial district performance is not yet at expected state level, the district should demonstrate substantial progress toward the state goal. Districts that failed to do so within a specified period (e.g., three years) could lose some or all of the flexibility provided through the initiative. Finally, to prevent a potential narrowing of district focus solely to test-based accountability subjects and measures, we recommend that the initiative incorporate some attention to state expectations for non-academic development (such as physical fitness and arts standards) and to children who would be eligible for Gifted and Talented Education programs.

c) A new approach to state monitoring and accountability for the participating districts that focuses on capacity building and continuous improvement through the generation and analysis of local and state data, networks for sharing information and lessons, and opportunities for professional and organizational development. Local flexibility in resource allocation implies a very different role for the California Department of Education than its current emphasis on compliance to prescriptive input and process requirements. If California is to move to a more standards-based system of accountability and governance, the CDE needs to develop alternative methods of monitoring local districts and schools. We believe the crux of those methods needs to focus on continuous improvement of results, on the exchange of ideas through networking and collaborations among districts, and on local and state capacity building rather than checklists and process rules. Therefore, districts in this initiative would have to provide regular concrete evidence of progress toward the outcomes. They would need to agree to open their practice to observation and learning by others and to participate in mutually beneficial activities with other participating districts. We suggest that to develop and evaluate new methods for monitoring and capacity building, the SPI put responsibility for monitoring participating districts into a special unit in the CDE, under the leadership of a deputy superintendent whose sole responsibility is to ensure the success of the participating districts. Other monitoring typically associated with categorical funding would cease.

d) Systematic evaluation and documentation of lessons learned from the process, initiated at the very beginning of the initiative. This documentation and analysis would help to identify implementation issues that are likely to occur in a larger statewide move toward more local flexibility and best practices at both the local and state levels for addressing these issues. Information gleaned from this effort could then inform the design of a more flexible standards-based system statewide.

We believe this interim initiative has a number of advantages. It is systemic in nature, allowing whole districts to develop a coherent set of policies rather than issue more generalized releases from a limited set of regulations that will not substantially alter the barriers to effective resource allocation and decision-making at the local level. This approach also provides for standards-based improvement and results-based



accountability that can actually support change rather than simply penalizing failure. It begins to develop a new role for the CDE, a necessary ingredient of any major system overhaul. And it provides an opportunity to identify potential implementation issues as regulations are relaxed and the state moves toward a more flexible and responsive system.

At the same time, there are critical design and implementation challenges that would need to be worked out for such an initiative to yield the desired results. First and foremost, a well thought-out selection process for districts would need to be instituted. For this initiative to have the greatest chance of success and for it to yield meaningful lessons, the criteria for selection should center on evidence that the candidate district has the requisite conditions to use the regulatory flexibility to the best advantage of its students. This approach to participation would represent a major change from the usual selection processes of CDE, which tend toward reliance on lottery selection and minimal assurances from district leadership. We suggest that an independent panel be convened to refine the criteria and make the selections, removing this potentially sensitive process from the CDE, which would maintain responsibility for providing implementation support and monitoring after the selection is completed.

We recommend that the selection panel consider criteria addressing the following domains: achievement trend data; evidence of the leadership capacity and track record of the district's administrative team, and the clarity of their strategic plan regarding how they would use the flexible dollars to improve instruction and achieve the identified outcomes. Selected districts should be able to articulate a clear strategy for managing the change process and developing the capabilities of their district and school staff. They should also have analyzed potential barriers to success – such as particular collectively bargained agreements – and be able to articulate a strategy for working with their unions or others to resolve predictable issues or constraints. Finally, recognizing that flexibility may be equally necessary for currently low performing as for higher performing districts, we recommend that Program Improvement districts not be excluded from participation in this initiative if they are able to demonstrate that they have met the criteria regarding the clarity and strength of their strategic plan, the capacity of their leadership team, and analysis of the change process and potential barriers. It may also be advisable, however, for PI districts to have also established clear mechanisms for external support with their improvement efforts (e.g., through partnerships with support providers, collaborations with other districts, etc.).

Additional challenges regarding these recommendations involve creating the political support and public will required, both for the long term overhaul of the system and for this interim demonstration and developmental initiative. Interest groups and other education stakeholders would need to be willing to let go of pet programs and narrow interests, which are working neither to the benefit of the identified interested party nor for California students overall. CDE would need to be willing and able to step back from a compliance orientation and toward a more evidence-based focus on continuous improvement and capacity building. We would need to approach monitoring and evaluation in a different way, so as to derive lessons that can truly affect the design of future policy and the improvement of current implementation. Accountability criteria, processes and actions would need substantial reorientation, and capacity must be created and spread at all levels of the system if individuals and units are to take on new responsibilities and ways of operating. Critical to all of this effort are enhanced and user-friendly state and local data systems, built on longitudinally linked student data and aligned with state standards and goals. With these and other elements of a comprehensive approach in place, we have the potential for giving districts and schools the support they need to “get the job done” – that is, to raise student achievement and attainment for all students and close the gaps between the have and have-nots in California education.

## **Summary of Evidence Supporting Recommendations**

The evidence supporting the analysis and recommendations in this brief derive from a combination of research and our own multiple decades of practice as educators and district leaders. The lack of alignment between the current finance and governance systems, the fragmentation and inefficiencies created by the

reliance on categorical funding, and the barriers to real improvement presented by the over regulation have all been well documented in the Getting Down to Facts studies (see for example, Brewer & Smith, 2007; Fuller et al. 2007; Duncombe & Yinger, 2007; Timar, 2007; Kirst, 2007; and Loeb, Bryk, & Hanushek, 2007). By contrast, the research support for many of the categorical programs and for the specific processes they require of schools and districts is generally weak and often non-existent. It is not surprising that principals and superintendents interviewed or surveyed point to greater flexibility as a central condition for deeper and more effective improvement efforts. We wholeheartedly concur with our colleagues in other districts who responded to these surveys.

Unfortunately, no simple solution emerges from the research literature. While Duncombe (2007) finds that greater reliance on categorical funding lowers district efficiency as measured by the API, Brewer & Smith (2006) find no conclusive evidence supporting any particular governance structure with respect to its impact on school improvement. These authors do, however, posit a research-based framework of design principles that includes several of the characteristics reflected in our recommendations. In particular, they include innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness (as opposed to regulation and compliance) and simplicity, efficiency, and coherence (as opposed to complexity and fragmentation) as two of their five general indicators of effective governance. We believe that moving from reliance on categorical funding (accompanied by a funding formula based on student need) and removing extraneous and ineffective regulations from the state education code will help provide the conditions for greater local flexibility and coherence. Moreover, instituting a pilot initiative in which such flexibility is introduced and studied in a small number of districts can help provide the evidence needed for more effective and informed statewide policy in the future. A similar approach was tried at the state level under the federal Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999 (Ed-Flex). The Ed-Flex Program allowed six states authority to waive federal requirements seen to impede local and state efforts to improve their schools. This program, however, was limited in scope (relying mainly on devolving waiver authority to the state) and short-lived (it ended under NCLB). Local examples of productive use of flexibility and pilots also abound, however. Effective districts, such as Long Beach Unified, often also use pilots as a form of R & D before instituting practices more broadly in the district. Data on implementation and effectiveness of such efforts inform later policy development and have helped to cement a continuous improvement culture in the district.

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## **Addressing California's Data Needs: Implementing Comprehensive, Longitudinal Systems at the Local and State Levels**

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### **Statement of the Problem**

In the past decade California has made significant strides towards making important and relevant school and district data available to educators and the public. Databases, such as the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS) and student achievement data sets (including average test scores, API, AYP, Program Improvement status) are publicly accessible and provide important information on school performance, teacher and student demographics, and subgroup performance.

Despite these efforts, the state still falls short of a comprehensive and easily accessed system with longitudinally-linked student-level data. Schools, districts, and the state are unable to track the progress of students over time, link that progress to program participation or teachers, or accurately determine key benchmarks such as dropout, graduation, or student mobility rates. We are also unable to track the progress and/or success of students who graduate from high school, leave high school early, transfer to other schools or districts, or attend post-secondary institutions.

As a result, our evaluation and accountability measures, both at the local and the state levels, are severely hampered. Without an effective student tracking system, we as superintendents and administrators of California districts are significantly limited in our ability to determine the effectiveness of local policies, programs, and practices aimed at improving student learning and attainment. Without significant investment in our own local data systems, it is difficult to accurately monitor individual students' progress prior to and after implementation of new programs and policies, to look at effects of initiatives on subgroups of data, or to obtain needed information for diagnosing and addressing individual student needs. This hinders the productivity of schools and districts by limiting the ability of educators to make evidence-based decisions about instructional practice and policy.

Similar limitations exist at the state level. The lack of a strong state data system weakens our ability to conduct robust evaluations of important state initiatives such as the Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA). With respect to accountability, school progress at this point must be assessed based on improvement from one cohort of students to another, rather than on growth of individual students across years. This method of tracking progress is especially problematic in a state like California with high mobility rates. In addition, because longitudinally-linked student data are not available, the state has been unable to apply to the federal government to establish a growth model for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). On a very fundamental basis the ability of the state to determine the effectiveness of policies and initiatives is severely compromised.

Unfortunately, state efforts to put a comprehensive data system in place seem to have been a casualty of political struggles, usually around budget priorities. SB 1453 authorized the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) in 2002, but to date funding for the system has not been anywhere near the level necessary for full implementation.<sup>1</sup> For CALPADS to be successful, districts must establish a sound infrastructure to ensure that high quality data are collected and entered into the system. This infrastructure would primarily be a one-time investment, yet the necessary funds for this investment have not been allocated. In addition, for the system to realize its potential contribution to evidence-based decision-making, it must track a sufficient range of data on both educational outcomes (such as California Standards Test (CST) scores, graduation, etc.) and educational inputs (program participation, teacher qualifications, etc.). Yet the data to be included in CALPADS have been limited to only those variables required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), apparently due to fears that requiring additional information would generate district demands for more state funding to modify and expand local data systems. Thus, even if fully funded, the data system currently envisioned would remain focused on trailing indicators (such as the AYP and API scores) rather than also including variables (leading indicators) that might help predict or explain patterns in student achievement. We believe that if we are to raise the overall level of achievement and close the achievement gap in this state, we must identify and track the leading indicators that are likely to predict improvements in student performance.

In addition to the limitations in California's statewide data systems, we are also concerned about the limited capacity of many of our state's districts and schools to generate, analyze, and use data for instructional improvement. Districts and schools require data at a fine-grained level, collected at frequent intervals, to inform their instructional practices and policies. These data include scores on benchmark assessments, information on course enrollment and classroom assignments, student grades, and student supports, among others. Some of these variables would be unnecessary and overly cumbersome in a state data system, so districts must find ways to collect, store, and analyze them on their own. Since districts typically do not have the internal capacity needed to do so, we often work with vendors who can set up systems for data collection and analysis. However, accurate and sufficient information necessary for us to choose appropriate and reliable vendors is not readily available. Companies often over-promise on data systems for districts, and dollars and time are wasted on unsuitable or low-quality systems as a result. Furthermore the systems that are developed locally often are incompatible with the state system or higher education data systems, preventing the merging of data sets needed for important analyses. This lack of compatibility also hinders districts

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<sup>1</sup> For the 2006-07 budget, the CDE and LAO requested \$15 million to support districts' maintenance of the student identifier system and for other data quality improvements. The allocation of these funds was later withdrawn from the budget. See Hansen (2007).

from sharing necessary information when students change locale. We believe there is a state role for facilitating more effective data systems at the local level.

## **Policy Recommendations**

The following policy recommendations address the need (as described above) for improved systems that will make necessary data available and accessible to districts, schools, and teachers, and will facilitate improved monitoring and accountability by the state, as well as local entities.

### ➤ **Implement and fully fund a comprehensive, longitudinal state data system**

First, we recommend that the state fully implement the comprehensive longitudinal data system (CALPADS) that will enable districts and schools to examine individual students' performance over time. We must identify and take specific steps to break the gridlock that is preventing the implementation of this system, and the state must appropriate sufficient funds to initiate and maintain high quality implementation. Without an initial investment to ensure that this system is comprehensive, accessible, and easy to use, it will always fall short of meeting the data needs of the state.

In addition, the state should provide the funding necessary for districts to implement and contribute to this system, at least during the initial start-up period when new data collections and systems must be established at the local level. Any data system is only useful to the extent that the data it contains are accurate and complete; the quality and usefulness of our statewide system should not be dependent on the uneven capacity and will at the local level.

To address the needs outlined above, this system must include the following:

- A required unique identifier for each student in California. While this identifier currently exists, an effective system for using this identifier has not been established. Use of this identifier should be required of all publicly funded schools, including charters, in the pre-K-12 system. Full use of the identifier will enable the tracking of student progress over time, even if the student moves to a new school or district. This identifier will help districts to calculate dropout and graduation rates more accurately as well as student and teacher mobility.
- The use of this unique identifier should also be required at all publicly funded institutions of higher education (IHEs) (including community colleges, California State universities, and the University of California). Ultimately the goal of the pre-K-12 system is to prepare students for success in college and/or careers, and beyond. Without the ability to track students into and through higher education institutions, the ability for the state and districts to assess their success towards this goal is limited.
- A comprehensive review of the variables to be included in this system should be completed by the state. Decisions on what variables to include (including leading indicators) should be based on the data needs of local districts and the state, and not for political or financial reasons. At the minimum, the state data system should include individual students' test scores (STAR, CAHSEE, CELDT, etc.), dropout and graduation status, student demographic information, program participation (e.g., special education, vocational education), as well as linkages between students' and teachers' data.

To ensure that such a system is used appropriately and to its full potential, the state must also find ways to make the data accessible to educators and researchers while maintaining student privacy. Educators should have access to individual students' records of performance and teacher assignments for students in their jurisdiction in order to plan instructional programs. In addition, educators should be trained how to access and use these data effectively.

Such a comprehensive and fine-grained student-level dataset would enable more effective evaluation of statewide educational programs and policies. The growth of individual students across years could be used to measure school progress and contribution to student learning, rather than simply changes from one cohort of students to another. In addition, by linking students to teachers, and tracking teachers over time, the state could further evaluate the effects of programs and policies for teachers (e.g., professional development programs) on student achievement and could examine additional indicators like teacher mobility. Finally, the presence of such a system would enable California to further explore options with the federal government that would allow the use of a growth model for AYP in California, though such a system may also require changes in the CST such that scores are vertically equated across grades.

Such a system would also further enable local districts and schools to make evidence-based decisions about programs and policies to improve instruction. Educators could follow students over time, examine past performance of students who attended other schools or districts in California, and follow students beyond the K-12 system to determine how successfully they prepared students for post-secondary programs. Districts and schools could better identify shortcomings in curriculum, improve the design of their instructional programs, and analyze programs to ensure they are effective.

➤ **Provide support to develop and refine local data systems**

While the state system outlined above will provide necessary data for the state and local jurisdictions to analyze the effectiveness of practices and policies, individual districts and schools need to utilize a broader set of data to track progress on specific district goals. More detailed and comprehensive data sets can help to ensure districts and schools are meeting the range of their students' needs and are adjusting instructional programs accordingly. Thus, we also recommend that the state take measures to support regional and local efforts to develop local data systems that are customized to their needs, coordinated with the state system, and linked to post-secondary information. Specifically, we recommend:

- Vendor quality: The state should play a supportive role in helping districts identify vendors for local data systems that can articulate with one another and with the state system. For example, the state could compile a "Consumer Reports" style summary of various software systems available for district and school use, based on an independent review. Data that would be useful to districts in such local systems include (in addition to student performance data) information on intervention and remediation efforts, access to rigorous academic courses, use of particular teaching practices for English learners, professional development initiatives, social services provided to students, etc. These data could be used to determine the effectiveness of particular programs and instructional practices, as well as to identify specific needs of students.

- State and local system compatibility: The state should provide guidelines to ensure that data vendors create systems that are compatible with the statewide CALPADS system. In other words, districts should have the capacity to merge data from their local systems with data from the statewide system, IHEs, and other districts (for example, if students transfer into a district from elsewhere in the state).
- Post-secondary information: Currently, many districts pay a clearinghouse to obtain relevant information from IHEs. The state should consider partnering with other state-funded post-secondary education institutions such as the CSUs and community colleges as a part of the pre-K-16 system to enable the sharing of these data across all levels for purposes of instructional improvement and evaluation of educational initiatives.
- Leading indicators: The state should commission a study that will recommend leading indicators that could be carefully tracked by local districts to determine which systems, structures, and processes are most likely to impact the quality of instructional practice

We believe these recommendations address the primary data concerns and issues raised in the Getting Down to Facts reports. Significant evidence indicates that the use of data to inform instruction is an important strategy to address student needs and improve student learning. In addition, accurate and timely data are an essential component of any effective results-based accountability system focused on improving student learning and achievement. Therefore, as part of a statewide, coherent and aligned system of governance, accountability, and finance in California, a comprehensive data system is key. We urge the state to move ahead with its plans to implement such a system. We also caution against taking shortcuts in terms of funding and comprehensiveness. A strong one-time investment that addresses the data needs now and into the future will avoid additional challenges, limitations, and constraints down the road. Finally, to make the statewide system effective, it will be necessary for the state to provide the necessary supports for local districts to build their capacity to utilize the data and create customized systems to address local needs.

### **Summary of Evidence Supporting Recommendations**

A growing body of research (Williams et al., 2005; Bitter et al., 2005) in California provides evidence that systematic analysis and use of data to inform instruction is a key factor for the improvement of student outcomes and achievement in high-poverty schools. In light of this evidence, we recommend in this brief that the state put systems in place to make data that can be used to inform instruction available and easily accessible to educators throughout the state.

The data systems we recommend are based on evidence from a combination of research and our own practice as educators and district leaders. As documented in the Getting Down to Facts studies, California is behind most states in its data approach and the quality of the educational data system (Hansen, 2007). California still has a “traditional approach” to data collection, with multiple and separate collections that primarily satisfy accountability and monitoring requirements. We concur with Hansen’s recommendation that California should look to the experiences of other states to develop data systems that can be used for “robust, integrated analyses” to inform policy and program development and implementation. A comprehensive, longitudinal system as recommended in this brief would move us in the right direction.

Researchers have also identified little support among California’s state leaders for developing an education data system. As mentioned above, in 2006 the state Legislature denied the level of funding

recommended for districts to maintain the new student identifier system, something noted as critical to tracking longitudinal student progress within the K-16 education system (Hansen, 2007). In addition, other constituencies have restricted the variables to be included in the system to those required by NCLB. We believe that it is critical for state leadership to overcome these hurdles and to focus on developing a “culture of data” (Hansen, 2007) in order to focus on the connection between quality data and school and district improvement efforts.

Finally, California’s focus on compliance with federal and state testing and accountability has largely driven the existing state data system, but it has not supported *district* data needs (Springboard Schools, 2007). Districts must be able to link the effectiveness of particular strategies and practices to improvements in instructional practice and student achievement. While researchers have noted some recent promising changes, we believe it is critical for the state to fully fund and support a comprehensive longitudinal data system as well as support local efforts to collect, analyze, and use data to inform instruction.

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## **Improving Teacher Quality: Redesigning Personnel Policies to Support Student Achievement**

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### **Statement of the Problem**

Education is a personnel-intensive enterprise that depends on professionally trained staff and support personnel to provide the diverse services that make high quality teaching and learning possible. Approximately 85 percent of school district expenditures are directly related to the costs of hiring, training, and evaluating personnel. Of these personnel costs, the majority go toward the certificated employees who provide direct services to children, whether those services occur in the classroom, the counseling office, the library, or other locations.

We believe the key to effective teaching and learning is the quality of the certificated personnel who work in California's very diverse collection of school districts. The systems, structures, processes, and practices that guide the work of these districts must ensure that everyone stays focused on student success. They should support what works best for students, not for adults.

Unfortunately this is not the generally case in California. Certain policies and practices serve in fact to impede the district's mission-critical work to foster student success. We believe it is crucial for the state to address these policies and practices if we are to achieve our goal of preparing all students for success in higher education and/or a meaningful career. In this brief, we focus on policies related to the quality of our teachers and leaders. We categorize these policies into two groups: those related to the certification and hiring of qualified personnel, and those related to professional growth.

With respect to credentialing and hiring, examples of policies that impede district efforts to hire the best candidates abound. In particular, we highlight the following four:

1. A credentialing system that is cumbersome at best and that at worst undermines or impedes district efforts to identify and hire the most qualified staff. This problem especially impacts smaller, more rural districts.

2. The lack of connection of pre-service training to actual job requirements both for teachers and administrators. For example, high school teachers receive insufficient preparation to respond to the literacy needs of students; upper elementary and middle school teachers are often unprepared to teach content areas.
3. Laws related to the granting of tenure – arguably the most important personnel decision made by districts – which force districts to make a permanent commitment to personnel without adequate evidence to support ongoing success.
4. The absence of laws that require demonstrations of performance and continued professional growth to maintain teaching and/or administrative credentials.

The cumulative effect of these policies is to limit severely the ability of districts to make the personnel decisions that enable them to hire the best candidates both at the initial point and later when decisions about permanent status both for certificated and classified staff are required.

A second area is that related to the importance of encouraging and supporting participation in excellent professional development programs. Education is a dynamic and changing field. As new knowledge of practices that are likely to improve teaching and learning develops, teachers, administrators, and others must have continued access over time to this knowledge. Our particular concerns relate to three policies:

1. The severe curtailment of state support for professional development. While demands on teachers have intensified in the past decade, state support for professional development has decreased; we are nowhere near the level of eight professional development days we had in the 1990s, for example. Moreover, funding for professional development is either tied up in overly prescriptive categorical programs or spent on salary enhancements that accrue as a result of completing coursework unrelated to district and school improvement strategies. Neither is likely to contribute to improved student achievement.
2. The lack of state support for leadership development especially for teacher leaders, aspiring administrators, district office leadership, and governing bodies. We all know that the quality of our educational leaders is critically important to the ability of schools and districts to engage in continuous improvement strategies. Yet opportunities for leadership development and the maintenance of an effective pipeline to leadership positions are both woefully lacking in this state.
3. A credentialing system which fails to recognize the necessity of continued participation in professional growth and performance.

When we consider these issues in total, it is clear to us that absent a much better alignment of personnel policies and practices to other reform efforts, our ability to raise the level of achievement and close the achievement gap is constrained.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Based on the issues and problems above, we recommend the following changes in current policy and practice to improve the quality of certificated staff in California's districts. We have grouped our recommendations into four categories – teacher credentialing, recruitment and retention, tenure, and professional preparation and growth.

### **➤ Revise the Teacher Credentialing System**

We propose the following four recommendations for revising the teacher credentialing system:

Redesigned Credentialing System to Address Content and Language: First, we recommend that the state engage in a comprehensive study and reform of the current credentialing system with the intent of simplifying

the process to allow for three major credentials: K-3, 4-8, and subject matter specialty thereafter. The K-3 credential would focus on knowledge of literacy, numeracy, and instruction of English learners, which we consider to be the most important skill areas for this age group given California's student population. This credential would also have an option for a pre-K specialization. The 4-8 credential would address the transition to a content area focus. The credential would focus on subject matter knowledge (including a strong focus on mathematics and science) as well as writing, academic language, and instruction for English learners. We recommend the state negotiate with the federal government so that this 4-8 credential would satisfy the "highly-qualified" criteria at the middle school level. The primarily content-focused single subject credential would then just be used for high school teacher candidates. This new breakdown in the credentialing system would help to build necessary skills applicable to each grade span, balancing the need to address both content and language. Both the 4-8 and single subject credential should require demonstration of teachers' ability to incorporate literacy skills (reading and writing) into content instruction. We realize that changing the system in this way could pose logistical challenges initially, particularly for small schools and districts. The process for rolling out this change would need to be considered carefully and planned out over time to prevent operational difficulties during the transition.

Competence in Key Areas: We also recommend that the state identify and require the demonstration of competence in key skill areas for instructing California's students. These areas include (but are not limited to) the deep content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge tied to the curriculum and standards in California, assessment strategies (both formative and summative) and the use of data to inform instruction, cross-cultural competency, and strategies to work with parents and families. In addition, the elements of the Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate should be strengthened within the credential program. These skills are essential for teachers to meet the needs of California's diverse student population. Performance measures in these various areas should complement the training.

Supplemental Special Education Credential: We recommend that the special education credential be re-visited, particularly in light of the shortage of qualified special education teachers and increased expectations that students with disabilities be held to the same standards as all students. We recommend that the regular education credential require sufficient and solid preparation such that a teacher with this credential could teach students with mild to moderate disabilities. The special education credential would be a supplemental certificate beyond the regular education credential and would ensure a teacher is prepared to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities. The special education credential would therefore be based more directly on the regular education credential, ensuring that students with disabilities have an education grounded in the same standards required for all students. In addition, this system would enable more cross-over and flow among teachers between these two credential statuses. We expect that a structure like this could attract more qualified teachers to special education classrooms and better enable regular education teachers to address the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Credential Renewal Linked to Professional Growth: Finally, as part of the credential revision process we also recommend that there be a stronger link between credential renewal every five years and performance (or skill level) and professional growth. As is the case with other professions, maintenance of one's credential ought to be conditional, based on evidence of performance and professional growth requirements. The state would need to consider ways to do this without greatly increasing the bureaucratic processes around credential renewal.

➤ **Provide Flexibility and/or Incentives to Improve Recruitment and Retention in High-need Areas, Hard-to-staff Schools, and Identified Subject Areas with Shortages**

Along with revisions to the credential system, the state should address the difficulties that some districts and schools have finding and retaining credentialed personnel. Some districts, particularly rural districts, struggle

to find teachers in their locale or teachers who are willing to move to the district. Others struggle to maintain credentialed staff in specific high-need schools. These could include schools that are facing particular challenges (e.g., in improving achievement) or schools that are in various stages of Program Improvement such as restructuring, where there is the potential for staff to be released. In addition, districts and schools throughout California struggle to identify, hire, and retain teachers in certain subject areas, including mathematics, science, and special education. These difficulties are exacerbated by current state conditions and policies. For example, it is difficult for districts and schools to be pro-active in locating and hiring qualified staff when the state fiscal calendar prohibits them from knowing sufficiently ahead of time how much money they will have available to hire staff. In addition, the Williams requirement that schools have staff in place by the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the school year often forces schools to hire whomever is available to fill the position rather than spend additional time to locate a strong, credentialed, and experienced teacher.

In order to address these recruitment and retention challenges, we recommend the state implement incentives to help recruit and retain teachers in these areas and/or provide more flexibility in the hiring process for these districts. Specifically,

- **Incentives:** The state should implement incentives to attract and retain teachers in these high-need areas, including rural districts, hard-to-staff schools, and identified subject areas. For example, incentives could be provided to a rural district and its closest urban district to share staff. Or a teacher could be given an extra year of service credit for each year he/she continues teaching in a high-need district or hard-to-staff school. Other incentives could be considered as well, such as improvements in working conditions, opportunities for professional learning, additional pay (e.g., hiring bonuses), etc. By establishing these incentives at the *state level* (similar to the incentives offered to National Board Certified Teachers), the need to navigate unique collective bargaining agreements in local jurisdictions will be minimized.
- **Flexibility:** We also recommend that districts in very high need areas – particularly rural regions – be given increased flexibility with respect to credentialing requirements. We suggest that specifically identified districts be allowed to hire individuals they have identified as likely to achieve success in the classroom, but who may not have completed the requirements for a credential. These districts should then receive assistance to help these individuals earn their credential, potentially through flexible or creative processes. We recognize that the state may need to apply to the federal government for this increased flexibility in order to meet the highly qualified teacher provisions of NCLB.

### ➤ **Increase and Add Flexibility to Tenure Timing**

Our third area of recommendation concerns the length of the probationary period. It is important that before granting tenure, districts be confident of the ability of the staff member to succeed in the classroom. This is particularly important given that the removal of ineffective tenured staff is an extremely difficult and time consuming affair. Under current law this decision for all practical purposes needs to be made in one and a half years. This is simply too short a period of time for novice teachers to develop or demonstrate their skills. We therefore recommend the following:

- The expected probationary period for tenure should be increased to three years, on average. However, while we suggest three years as the norm, we also recognize that the particulars of specific tenure cases may vary. In some situations and for some particularly well-qualified individuals, two years may be sufficient time for a district to feel confident granting tenure. There may be times when a speedier tenure process may be necessary to keep a well-prepared and mobile teacher in the system. In contrast, there may also be cases in which even three years does not provide enough time for a

candidate to develop or demonstrate his or her potential as a qualified teacher. In these situations, the district may want to provide the candidate with an additional year to hone his/her skills before making the tenure ruling. For these reasons we are recommending a flexible window of 2-4 years in which the tenure decision would need to be made. In all cases tenure decisions should be based on sufficient evidence that the candidate is ready and qualified to teach independently within the system.

- This probation window and tenure clock should start after any internship period in which a teacher is not fully credentialed and *after* any temporary assignment period.

### ➤ **Provide Support for Professional Preparation and Growth**

Finally, we recommend the state take actions that will place a stronger emphasis on the value of continued professional growth for all members of the education profession.

High-Quality Pre-Service Training: To better align the pre-service training that teachers receive with the challenges and expectations they will meet in the classroom, we recommend the state provide incentives for higher education and school districts to work more closely together in the development and delivery of high-quality pre-service programs. While statewide credential requirements can ensure necessary training in key skill areas, individual districts can help local pre-service programs better prepare teachers to meet the needs of students in their area. For example, Long Beach Unified has partnered closely with CSU Long Beach to ensure students graduating from this program are well-prepared to meet the needs of the diverse Long Beach population. Many teaching candidates participate in internships in Long Beach Unified, and Long Beach Unified staff help to teach courses and inform program faculty of district needs. This has been a very effective partnership that has helped to increase the quality of teachers entering the system.

Additional Professional Development Days: We recommend that the length of the school year be expanded (for teachers) to provide at least ten days for professional development outside the 180-day school year. These days should not continue to be carved out of time necessary for direct teaching and learning. The use of these days should be determined locally, based on the instructional needs in the district. The provision of additional days will mean that districts and their external partners will be able to provide the breadth and depth required for the kind of professional development efforts which will be necessary to close the achievement gap. This also has the benefit of raising salaries so that we can attract and retain more quality people in the profession.

Leadership Training: We recommend that the state support and/or implement systems to develop high-quality leadership (at all levels) in the state. Specifically:

- The current administrative preparation system should include a stronger pre-service preparation program, such as that offered in a high-quality MBA program.
- Continued leadership development should be fostered through increased opportunities for professional growth and coaching. This could be accomplished through better leadership development partnerships between higher education and K-12 such as that which occurs with Central Valley school districts, CSU Fresno, and the Central Valley Education Leadership Institute or Long Beach Unified and CSU Long Beach. In addition, other models, such as the California School Leadership Academies (CSLA) or the California Subject Matters Projects (CSMP), that have been viewed positively in the past for their leadership development work, should be reinvigorated.

Strengthening the quality of leadership development through improved pre-service programs and continuing professional growth requirements will help improve the management of the systems that support education reform. Recognizing that development of our teacher, school, and district leaders is an important part of the

reform process, we recommend that the proposals be solicited for the development and operation of partnerships among higher education, third party organizations (e.g., reform support organizations, research groups, professional associations), and districts that develop leadership programs that equip our present and future leaders from in and outside education to provide the leadership required to raise achievement and close the achievement gap by making high-quality instructional practice the focus of everyone's work.

## Summary of Evidence Supporting Recommendations

Several of the *Getting Down to Facts* Studies addressed issues of teacher quality and teacher/leadership development. These studies corroborate the policy issues that are outlined in this brief, the implications of which we have directly experienced in our leadership roles. For example, Loeb and Miller (2007) point out that California is one of only 10 states that issues tenure after only two years, and that many principals reported that they viewed the current tenure laws "as a barrier to improving teaching in their schools." Survey responses from principals in Darling-Hammond and Orphanos's study of leadership development in California (2007) indicated that the leadership development efforts in California were weak compared to those in other states. The authors note the variation in quality among administrator preparation and credentialing programs and the few opportunities to participate in administrative internship or mentoring/coaching programs. Finally, Koski and Horng (2007) find in their research (which supports prior research in California) that schools with higher percentages of minority students and large and growing schools have fewer credentialed and experienced teachers than others. They report that their findings imply a need for incentives to attract teachers to difficult-to-staff schools.

One of the primary findings of Loeb and Miller (2007), however, is that few states have systematically evaluated their teacher policies, including preparation, certification, and tenure policies. Therefore, evidence of effective policies across the U.S. is limited, leaving California with few models to draw on for improving teacher quality. Given the limited research evidence, evidence from practice and the professional judgment of educators in California should be considered in making improvements to policies that affect teacher preparation, hiring, and professional growth.

We also cite the analysis of administrator development programs led by Levine (2005). This study was critical of the misalignment between current leadership development programs nationwide and the actual job demands placed on principals, superintendents, and other support personnel. The study called for institution of a preparation program similar to that offered in a high-quality MBA program.

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# Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening

Raising Student Achievement with AVID  
(Advancement Via Individual Determination)

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## **Problem Statement**

Closing the achievement gap and increasing the college-going rate for students from low income and minority families is a significant policy dilemma. Increasing their opportunities, participation, and success in courses of high rigor will better prepare them for post-secondary access and success. Seven percent of the class of 2007 did not pass both sections of the California High School Exit Exam. African American and Hispanic students' pass rates on the exam lag behind the state average. Additionally, for the same groups, the four-year dropout rate is higher than the state average.

With more restrictive state and federal mandates, coupled with the basic need to prepare students for post-secondary education or the workforce, schools and districts are pressed to find , cost effective academic supports that can be utilized broadly to reach more students.

## **Policy Recommendations**

California needs a policy that supports funding programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), which have a proven history of raising student achievement for all students, and in particular, students who are underrepresented and without a college going tradition. AVID, an integrated, systemic program, not only works with a core group of students, but reaches students schoolwide and districtwide as a comprehensive reform strategy.

## **Background**

The mission of AVID is to ensure that all students, especially least-served students in the middle: (1) will succeed in the most rigorous curriculum, (2) will succeed in a rigorous, college-preparatory path; (3) will enter mainstream activities of the school, (4) will

increase their enrollment in four-year colleges, and (5) will become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society. AVID's systematic approach is designed to support students and educators as they increase schoolwide/districtwide learning and performance. AVID's primary goal is to enhance equity on the path to college. To do this, AVID targets B, C, and even D students who want to go to college but are not achieving at the level needed to reach that goal. AVID places these students in college preparatory classes, and provides a scaffold of academic and social structures to help them succeed. AVID Center provides professional development for teachers to prepare and support them as they implement the academic and social structures that enhance student success and achievement.

AVID Center recently introduced the AVID Elementary program, which introduces the AVID academic and social support structures starting in Grade 4. AVID Center proposes to work with schools in districts throughout the state to expand their AVID implementation into the elementary level and demonstrate the effectiveness of providing consistent and coherent academic and social support structures throughout a student's educational experience. To expand the program, AVID Center will work with districts to implement the AVID program in grades 4-12 in a feeder pattern of schools that feed into one another (elementary to middle to high school) to demonstrate the effect of participation in AVID on long-term student success.

#### Need for System.

Disadvantaged students from low-income homes are more likely to drop out of school, less likely to take college preparatory and advanced courses, and less likely to enter colleges (especially four-year institutions) than are their more affluent peers. There are many reasons for this disparity. Too often, families and teachers of low-income and minority students, and even the students themselves, expect less of them than they do of white and more affluent students. The students' peer groups often do not value and may even denigrate academic achievement. Low-income and minority students may see few role models of people like themselves who have succeeded through education and do not perceive this as a realistic path. Even those students who express a wish to attend college often have little idea of what it takes to make that dream a reality, from what courses to take to how to apply to colleges. In addition, many minority and low-income students spend their high school years tracked into courses that do not meet the entry requirements for a four-year college or university, effectively blocking them from the opportunities that come with higher education.

AVID has proven to be one of the most effective ways to increase the likelihood that a young person who comes from a low-income family will graduate from high school and go on to enroll in, and complete, a four-year college degree program. AVID does not focus on making sure that these students do not fail. Instead, AVID focuses on making sure that these young people succeed – and on giving them the scaffold of strategies and support they need to achieve academically in high school and to persevere through college. This includes support for key transitions in their education, particularly from middle school to high school.



### Target Population.

AVID targets B, C and sometimes even D students in grades 4-12 who want to go to college but are not achieving at the level needed to reach that goal. AVID places these students in college preparatory classes (including honors and Advanced Placement classes), and then provides them a scaffold of social and academic structures to help them succeed. These structures include an AVID elective that teaches study skills and college preparation, tutoring to support achievement in rigorous academic classes, and curriculum and inquiry-based teaching methodologies that stress writing, reading and collaboration.

### AVID Goals

The overarching goal of the AVID program is to prepare students for college. To reach that, several benchmarks need to be achieved:

- Benchmark 1: Increase the number of teachers in each school who are highly trained to help disadvantaged students succeed in college preparatory, pre-AP and AP courses.
- Benchmark 2: Increase the number and percentage of disadvantaged students in each school who enroll in college preparatory, honors and pre-AP courses.
- Benchmark 3: Increase the percentage of disadvantaged students in each school who maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher in college preparation courses.
- Benchmark 4: Increase the number of disadvantaged students who successfully complete an honors or AP class.
- Benchmark 5: Increase the percentage of targeted students who score at or above proficient on the district assessments in reading and math.
- Benchmark 6: Increase the number and percentage of disadvantaged students in each school who graduate from high school.
- Benchmark 7: Increase the number and percentage of disadvantaged students in each school who enroll in college.

Ultimately, the result will be an increase in the percentage of disadvantaged students who graduate from high school, enter a college or university, complete a baccalaureate degree (or higher), and enter career paths that enable the individual to support his or her family and contribute to the community.

### AVID Program Components

Key components of the AVID program include:

- The AVID Academic Elective. Each participating student enrolls in an AVID elective course, which is a part of the student's regular schedule of credit bearing courses. The course meets daily (or less often for longer periods if the school is on an alternative schedule). Two of the five class periods per week are spent on academic training and college entry skills. On these days, students learn through inquiry. They learn study skills, notetaking, time management, critical reading, library research, test preparation, essay writing, test-taking strategies and how to write college entrance essays and prepare for entrance exams. Students spend another class period each week on career exploration, understanding the academic preparation required for career choices, and researching colleges. The final two class periods per week are spent in AVID tutorials. During these sessions of the AVID Elective course, trained college and peer tutors provide tutorial facilitation to the AVID students to support their success in their college preparation courses. Students participate in tutorial groups to help develop the habit of intense studying with classmates and gain deeper understanding of the course content.
- AVID Curriculum and Teaching Methodology. "AVID Methodology" is not about changing curriculum – it is about allowing almost all students access to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, and providing professional development to support vertical teams of teachers. The teaching methodologies most effective in this quest (WICR) include Writing as a tool for learning; emphasis on Inquiry; a Collaborative approach to learning; and Reading to learn. To provide teachers with the tools needed to support students in their academic achievement, the AVID program provides rigorous, sequential curriculum materials in three areas: (1) *The Student Success Path*, which provides curriculum focused on study skills, organization, test preparation, time management, goal setting, reading, oral language, and writing; (2) *The College Path* curriculum, which focuses on choosing a college, major, and career, and the process of entering college; and (3) *The Write Path*, which provides an integrated reading and writing program for content area classrooms, complete with carefully structured lesson plans for teachers, teacher resource guides, student guides, and reproducible activities. AVID also offers curriculum for English Language Development designed to support the teaching of critical reading and writing strategies to English language learners.
- AVID Professional Development for School Site Teams. Each participating school district forms a District AVID Team that coordinates the implementation of AVID across schools. Each participating school within the district forms an interdisciplinary team that includes the AVID elective teachers, content area teachers, counselors and academic administrators to lead the implementation of the AVID program at their site. Intensive professional development is provided to members of the school and district teams to prepare them to implement and expand the AVID program at their school. AVID professional development activities include training sessions at the school site that focus on using the AVID Path series curriculum, monthly site team meetings to reinforce the AVID training and develop the team's

leadership capacity, and the AVID Summer Institute, a weeklong intensive training event attended by the entire site team from each AVID school.

- Tutorial Program. Each participating school is required to provide tutors for AVID students (7 students per tutor). The participating schools are required to provide the funding needed to hire the tutors (in many areas, tutors receive work-study or college credit, so there is no cost to the school). The employment and supervision of tutors are part of the school's commitment to the AVID program; AVID trains members of the site team to train the tutors.

### Impact - The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

CAHSEE addresses state academic content standards in English-language Arts through grade 10 and mathematics through Algebra I. The graduating class of 2006 was the first class held accountable to the CAHSEE which required both sections of the exam be passed in addition to all other graduation requirements before a diploma could be conferred.

Newly released exit exam data spanning both Northern and Southern California school districts include a revelation that policymakers say is nothing short of extraordinary: AVID students are outperforming their non-AVID peers—not by a fraction, but substantially.

What is particularly noteworthy is that AVID students do not receive specific preparation for the exit exams. What then is at work here? Their success speaks to the philosophical underpinning of the AVID program: simply, students perform better when they're challenged with rigorous coursework and receive academic and peer support—a point that is substantiated by a large body of research.

As the *Sacramento Bee* pronounced in its Oct. 16, 2003 editorial: "But there's at least one student group within the Elk Grove district that is acing the exit exam. Are they from affluent families? Are they the white and Asian kids? Are they the children of doctors, lawyers and college professors? Not exactly. This group of high performers participates in something called Advancement Via Individual Determination, a program that provides tutoring, study skills, motivation and college counseling to poor teenagers whose parents have never been to college."

Similar outcomes should be expected from students who have been enrolled in the AVID elective for at least three years attending schools in districts that make AVID a priority program.

### Funding for AVID implementation

AVID is a cost-effective program. After three years, the cost averages approximately \$1.05 per student per day. That figure only includes the cost for students in the AVID

elective. Schools train content area teachers and are able to spread the program schoolwide, exposing the strategies and methodologies to all students.

The first year costs include Summer Institute, AVID Libraries, tutors, staff development, travel and lodging: approximately \$2.75 per student (30) per day (180 days).

Second year costs approximately \$1.17 per student (60) per day (180).

Third year costs approximately \$1.05 per student (90) per day (180).

### Summary of Key Data Points from AVID’s Third-Party Research

- Independent research indicated that 95 percent of AVID students reported enrolling in college, 77 percent of whom enrolled in four-year colleges (CREATE, 1999).
- Latino AVID graduates attend four-year colleges at almost two times the national average and the program’s African-American graduates at one-and-a-half times the national average.
- After two years, 89 percent of the AVID students in one four-year university were still enrolled and on track for graduation; this retention rate is far higher than the college average. (Mehan, 1996.)

### Summary of Key Data Points from AVID’s Annual Data Collection (2006):

- 98 percent of AVID students plan to enroll in a college or university.
- 76 percent of 2006 AVID graduates were accepted to a four-year college.
- AVID Students, who take many AP tests every year, show greater ethnic diversity than AP test-takers do overall. The proportion of Latinos taking AP exams is over five times higher among AVID students than among U.S. students overall.
- 89.3 percent of AVID students complete university entrance requirements.

### Data Snapshot: Ramona HS Pre- and Post-AVID

	1988-89 Pre-AVID	2002-03 Post-AVID
White	66%	34%
Hispanic	21%	53%
African American	9%	9%
Asian	4%	3%
Limited English Proficient	4.2%	11%
UC/CSU A-G Completion	17%	46%
# of AVID Students	0	452
# of AVID Sections	0	13
% taking SAT I exam	24%	54%
Avg. SAT I total score	849	918
# (%) of students in AP	28 (1.6)	265 (13.0)

## **GETTING BEYOND THE FACTS: REFORMING CALIFORNIA SCHOOL FINANCE**

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### **SUMMARY**

California's school finance system is long overdue for reform. We propose a new system that is more rational, more equitable, and, we believe, politically feasible. At its core, our proposal aims to link district revenue to student needs and regional costs, while ensuring that all districts are held harmless at current funding levels. To be sure, a reformed finance system is not a complete solution to the challenges of improving student achievement; changes in governance, incentives, and accountability are also required. But we believe a rational funding mechanism provides an essential backdrop for discussion of broader reform issues. In this brief, we discuss the background of the problems, the principles and concepts that guide our reform, and a simulation of how our reform might be put into practice.

### **BACKGROUND**

For our purposes, a good place to begin in reviewing the history of California school finance is 1970, when schools got their money primarily from local property taxes. California was then among the top ten states in per-pupil spending, but at the district level, spending varied considerably based on local property wealth. In 1971, the California Supreme Court held that the school finance system may not condition district revenue on local property wealth.<sup>1</sup>

The Legislature subsequently enacted a plan to limit the amount per pupil each school district could raise for general spending based on the amount it raised in 1972-73.<sup>2</sup> For each district, this is known as its "revenue limit." Revenue limits, today the largest component of the finance system, have been adjusted in complex ways over the past 35 years, most notably through equalization efforts. In response to a 1976 court ruling,<sup>3</sup> the Legislature in 1977 created a variable annual inflation adjustment that increased revenue limits for low-spending districts more rapidly than for high-spending districts.<sup>4</sup> This "squeeze formula" was

designed to equalize spending across districts over time. The equalization was only partial, however, because it applied only to general purpose spending from revenue limits, not to categorical aid or school construction.

In 1978, vigorous demand for property tax relief culminated in the passage of Proposition 13, which limits property taxes to 1% of assessed value and caps annual increases in assessed value to 2% or the rate of growth in the Consumer Price Index, whichever is less. In addition, under Proposition 13, non-ad valorem special purpose taxes such as parcel taxes require the approval of two-thirds of local voters.

The limits on local taxation in Proposition 13 eliminated over 50% of local school revenue, prompting the Legislature in 1979 to devise a permanent plan to compensate school districts with funds from the state budget.<sup>5</sup> This marked a major turning point, shifting primary responsibility for school finance from local districts to the state. The 1979 legislation retained the concept of revenue limits and continued the path toward equalization, and the California Supreme Court in 1983 held that the state had gone far enough in meeting its constitutional duty to equalize district general purpose spending.<sup>6</sup>

By this time, the state share accounted for nearly two-thirds of school funding, and education revenues became vulnerable to the state's volatile sales and income tax receipts. Meanwhile, California's per-pupil expenditure had fallen relative to other states in light of the stringent limits on local revenue-raising and other political factors. In 1988, California voters passed Proposition 98 to provide K-12 schools and community colleges with a guaranteed share of the state budget as the economy and enrollment grow each year.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, California education spending still ranks in the bottom half of states on a cost-adjusted basis.<sup>8</sup>

Layered on top of general purpose dollars from revenue limits are more than 100 state and federal categorical aid programs, each requiring the districts that receive the aid to spend it on a

designated purpose. The proliferation of state categorical programs began in the 1960s as state legislators signaled their lack of confidence in local educators to meet the needs of disadvantaged children. Over time, categorical programs have also become a vehicle to keep state aid increases from being largely absorbed into higher teacher salaries. State policy intervention through categorical programs has been a habit of Democratic and Republican governors alike, and each new program creates a constituency intent on preserving it. Currently, categorical aid accounts for one-third of total education revenue.

Although many categorical programs are motivated by salutary purposes, as a whole they create enormous complexity in the finance system. School districts bound by program restrictions are unable to shift available dollars to meet local needs; the channeling of state funds through dozens of separate programs exacerbates paperwork burdens; and the detailed specification of how funds are to be used—consuming hundreds of pages in the Education Code—produces a compliance mentality focused on accounting for inputs rather than delivery of outcomes. Indeed, categorical programs are rarely reviewed for their educational efficacy. Moreover, many categorical programs that purport to benefit disadvantaged children neither target their intended recipients nor distribute funds equitably based on actual needs.<sup>9</sup>

## PRINCIPLES FOR REFORM

In recent years, California has made important strides toward aligning instruction, assessment, and accountability to academic standards for student performance. But few if any aspects of the finance system are aligned to improving student achievement. As the history above suggests, and as the Getting Down to Facts (GDTF) studies examine in detail, there is no underlying set of principles guiding the school finance system. It is an historical accretion of policies that together lack simplicity, coherence, and fairness. It is overdue for a fundamental overhaul.

Because the problems with the system are complex and multifaceted, they are unlikely to be solved in one fell swoop. For this reason, we have chosen as our angle of incision a reform approach that is anchored in the following four principles.

**1. Revenue allocations should be guided by student needs.** School finance should be aligned with the overarching goal of enabling all students to meet state standards for academic achievement.

Because not all students come to school with the same individual, family, or neighborhood advantages, some need more resources than others to meet a given achievement standard. In allocating education dollars, the finance system should systematically account for differing student needs.

**2. Revenue allocations should be adjusted for regional cost differences.** California is a large state with tremendous diversity from region to region in the cost of living and labor market conditions. This variation directly affects the quality of education that schools can provide with each dollar; indeed, high-wage regions of the state tend to have higher student-teacher ratios. A rational school finance system should strive to ensure that education dollars have the same purchasing power from region to region, especially when it comes to hiring and retaining high-quality teachers.

**3. The system as a whole should be simple, transparent, and easily understood by legislators, school officials, and the public.** The complexity of the current system carries many costs: school officials must spend time on paperwork and bureaucracy that otherwise could be spent on improving instruction; legislators cannot explain to their constituents (much less defend) how education dollars are allocated; and the public cannot understand how additional revenue for education will affect their local schools. In order to foster public confidence and accountability, a rational system should be simple enough that all stakeholders can readily understand its essential elements and underlying principles, and can easily see how and why each district gets what it gets.

**4. Reforms should apply to new money going forward, without reducing any district's current allocation.** In reforming the existing system, we recognize the importance of ensuring a measure of stability and maximizing political feasibility. Thus we envision that a reformed allocation system would apply only to new money available after the year of enactment, thereby holding all districts harmless. Over time, the resulting allocations will increasingly approximate the ideal allocations in a fully reformed system.

To be sure, the problems with the finance system go beyond those addressed by the principles above. There are serious concerns, for example, about the volatility of education revenue from year to year, the lateness of the budgeting process, and the overall adequacy of education spending in California. We do not address those issues here—not because they are unimportant, but because we

believe the best starting point for considering those issues is a rational, fair, and transparent system of allocation. Indeed, one reason we believe the GDTF studies concluded that putting more money into the current education system is unlikely to improve student achievement is that the existing finance system does not allocate dollars in response to student needs and regional costs. Achieving a rational system of allocation will facilitate meaningful discussion on how and how much money should be spent.

The reforms we propose here address the allocation of dollars from the state to school districts. Yet we recognize the importance of how dollars are allocated *within* districts too. In particular, it is vital that school districts also allocate resources to schools based on student needs and that schools and districts spend money in ways that improve achievement, especially among students with the greatest needs. Implicit in our emphasis on simplifying the finance system is a decrease in regulation and an increase in local flexibility. The system we envision places less reliance on input controls and more reliance on outcome-based accountability. We have not examined the full range of incentives, supports, and accountability mechanisms needed to ensure that dollars allocated rationally from the state to local districts are in turn spent wisely by local districts especially on their neediest students and schools. At the moment, this is an issue we continue to grapple with.

## THE BASIC PROPOSAL

We propose a reformed finance system with four components: (1) base funding, (2) special education, (3) targeted funding for low-income students and English learners, and (4) regional cost adjustments. In this section, we sketch the conceptual basis for these components, and in the next section, we provide a simulation of how the system might work in practice.

**1. Base funding.** Conceptually, base funding is an amount per pupil to cover the basic costs of education. It provides general support to buy textbooks and materials, to maintain safe and clean facilities, and to employ qualified teachers and other school personnel. Because basic costs tend to be higher in secondary schools compared to elementary schools, the base amount for each district could be designed to vary according to the number of students in each of three grade spans (*e.g.*, K-5, 6-8, 9-12). Further, base funding would be adjusted for regional cost differences.

**2. Special education.** California allocates special education money to Special Education Local Planning Areas (SELPA) based on the ADA enrollment of regular students. The amount per regular student continues to vary across the state's 116 SELPAs. Accordingly, we propose a continuation of the special education funding equalization process begun in 1997<sup>10</sup> with the goal of allocating equal funding per regular student in each SELPA within five years. In addition, special education money, like base funding, would be adjusted for regional cost differences.

**3. Targeted funding.** Outside of special education, many students face disadvantages that call for additional educational resources if they are to meet the same academic standards as their more advantaged peers. We propose a single program of targeted funding based on an unduplicated count of low-income students and English learners, and on the concentration of such students in a given district. Targeted funding would also be adjusted for regional cost differences.

a. *Low-income students.* The negative relationship between poverty and achievement is one of the most well-documented findings in educational research. In California, the highest API scores of high-poverty schools tend to be lower than the lowest API scores of low-poverty schools. In other words, there is virtually no overlap between the performance distributions of high- versus low-poverty schools.<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, students in high-poverty schools face a double disadvantage arising not only from their own poverty but also from the poverty of their peers. Numerous studies suggest that, in high-poverty schools, a student's peers have less knowledge, vocabulary, and cultural capital, as well as lower aspirations, more negative attitudes toward achievement, and higher levels of disruption and mobility.<sup>12</sup> In addition, parents are less likely to be involved in the school, to hold teachers accountable, and to provide financial or other support. Thus poverty concentration is an important factor in allocating resources, as poor students in high-poverty schools face greater educational challenges than poor students in low-poverty schools.

b. *English learners.* In 2005-06, 25% of California's K-12 students were English learners, and nearly 30% of the nation's English learners went to school in California.<sup>13</sup> Large achievement gaps between EL and non-EL students are well-documented, and many studies show that EL students face special challenges in school, especially

a lack of teachers appropriately trained to teach EL students.<sup>14</sup> The special needs of EL students also include bilingual support personnel, appropriate materials for language development, and additional instructional time to learn English and subject-matter content. In light of these needs, the Legislative Analyst's Office has recommended that "the state adopt a clear strategy for funding EL students," including "an *explicit* weight at which EL students should be funded."<sup>15</sup>

Appropriate funding for EL students must take into account the fact that 85% of California's EL students are low-income. In their GDTF study, Gándara and Rumberger sought to identify the resources needs of English learners independent of their economic disadvantage. After reviewing various cost studies, they concluded:

[T]he evidence suggests that some needs of English Learners are indeed *different* from other students with similar socio-economic backgrounds and their needs cannot all be met with the same set of resources, however it is not clear to what extent—if at all—they require *more* resources than those of poor and low-income children.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, the authors observed that English learners who are not low-income also have special needs associated with language development. Indeed, English learners who are not poor start school with lower math and language skills than poor students who are not English learners.<sup>17</sup>

The available evidence indicates that English learners have different instructional needs than non-EL students who are low-income. But it is unclear whether meeting those needs requires a greater level of resources than what is needed to meet the needs of low-income students who are not English learners. For purposes of school finance, we believe a fair count of disadvantaged students requiring additional targeted resources is the unduplicated sum of low-income students and English learners. We note, however, that the differing needs of English learners and non-EL low-income students may call for different uses of targeted funds.

Finally, over half of California's elementary English learners attend schools where ELs comprise more than 50% of the student body. This linguistic isolation limits the exposure of English learners to native English speakers who can serve as language "role models."<sup>18</sup> As with poverty, EL status is an educational disadvantage whose sever-

ity varies by concentration, and the finance system should be responsive to this fact.

**4. Regional cost adjustment.** Education dollars do not have the same purchasing power throughout a state as large and diverse as California. The primary reason is that wages vary by region. As a result, the cost of hiring and recruiting the same teacher or other school personnel is different from place to place. These differences have important educational consequences. In particular, higher-wage regions tend to have fewer teachers per student.<sup>19</sup>

We propose adjusting 80% of the dollars (roughly the share of district budgets devoted to personnel) in each component of our proposal using a comparable wage index developed by Heather Rose and Ria Sengupta as part of the GDTF studies. The index divides California into 30 labor market regions based on U.S. Census Metropolitan Statistical Areas. Controlling for demographic and other labor market variables, the index captures for each region the relative wages of occupations requiring an education level similar to what teachers have. When applied to school funding, the index works to equalize labor purchasing power across districts. Index values vary from 0.79 to 1.22, with the highest wages in the Bay Area and Los Angeles and the lowest wages in the northern counties.

#### SIMULATING A REFORMED SYSTEM

Let us now turn to how these ideas might work in practice. We intend our reformed system to affect all revenues apart from federal money and local money besides property taxes. In other words, our proposal replaces the existing mechanisms for distributing the funds that comprise revenue limits, lottery funds, and state categorical programs. The sum of these funds was \$42.2 billion in 2004-05.

From this sum, we set aside money in categorical programs that currently target disadvantaged students. As a preliminary list, we include Economic Impact Aid, Targeted Instructional Improvement Grants, High Priority Schools Program, After School Education and Safety Program, and Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program. We fold these programs, totaling \$1.7 billion in 2004-05, into a new single stream of targeted funding, which we describe below.

That leaves \$40.5 billion for our proposed system of base funding and special education. In 2004-05, this figure provided roughly \$6,500 per



pupil, which we now conceptualize as a base grant of \$6,000 per pupil<sup>20</sup> plus an average special education grant of \$500 per pupil. Our proposal to complete the equalization of special education funding will require an additional \$300 million annually.

As explained above, the targeted funding in our proposal is based on an unduplicated count of low-income students and English learners. We define “low-income” as eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), which includes all students from households below 185% of the federal poverty line. Although FRPL eligibility covers a wider range of household income than the federal poverty line, we note that the threshold for FRPL eligibility in 2004-05 was \$34,873 for a family of four, which seems a reasonable marker of low-income or near-poor status. In any event, the choice of poverty measure is unlikely to alter the distribution of targeted funds very much because the percentage of students below poverty and the percentage of students eligible for FRPL are strongly correlated. At the district level as well as statewide, the FRPL percentage is roughly three times the percentage of students below poverty.<sup>21</sup>

What funding weight should be assigned to low-income or EL status? The empirical literature offers a variety of estimates, and we do not pretend that the issue can be definitively resolved free of political judgment. Nevertheless, in specifying a weight, we have the benefit of a recent California professional judgment study conducted as part of Getting Down to Facts.<sup>22</sup> The study surveyed over 500 randomly selected teachers, principals, and superintendents in California public schools, using budget simulations to elicit their judgments about the resources schools need to achieve the state’s academic achievement goals.

The study estimated that the cost of bringing a school up to a given API score increased by \$6,632 for every student in the school counted for the purpose of federal Title I funding. (Title I funding is based on the percentage of students in a district below the federal poverty line.) Given the three-to-one ratio between students who are FRPL-eligible and those below poverty, the \$6,632 figure is functionally equivalent to an allocation of \$2,211 for every student eligible for FRPL. Assuming a base funding level of \$6,000 per pupil, the study effectively assigns a weight of 0.37 to each low-income student.

We adopt this weight for FRPL-eligible students and apply it as well to English learners who

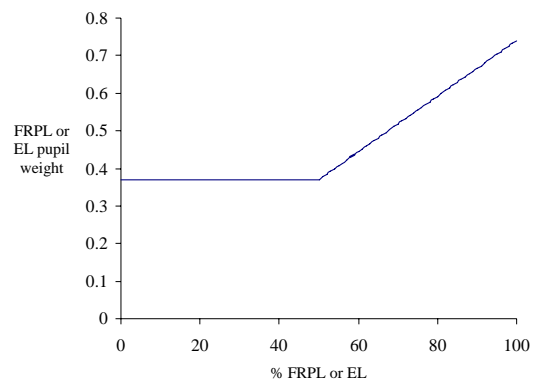
are not low-income. As with poverty weights, we acknowledge there is a lack of consensus on the appropriate weight for EL status independent of poverty. But a weight of 0.37 is nearly identical to the finding of one professional judgment panel in California<sup>23</sup> and reasonably approximates the findings of another professional judgment study in Arizona.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, we adjust this weight so that it increases with the concentration of students who are low-income or EL. There is some evidence that the peer effects of poverty begin to have substantial impact when FRPL-eligible students comprise more than 50% of school enrollment.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, until 2002, federal law allowed Title I funds to be spent on “schoolwide” programs in schools where 50% or more of the students were low-income, out of recognition that high poverty concentration has peer effects throughout a school.<sup>26</sup>

We propose a funding weight that (a) remains constant up to 50% concentration of low-income or EL students and (b) increases as the concentration of disadvantage increases above 50%. We define the weight as follows:

% FRPL or EL	FRPL or EL pupil weight
≤ 50%	0.37
> 50%	0.37 * [2 * (% FRPL or EL)]

The graph below shows how the weight varies according to the percentage of FRPL or EL students.



When this variable weight is applied to a base funding level of \$6,000 per pupil, we estimate the total amount flowing through the targeted program to be between \$8.9 billion and \$10.2 billion. With \$1.7 billion available from the five existing categorical programs folded into the targeted program,

the amount of new money required to fund our targeted program is \$7.2 billion and \$8.5 billion. Adding \$300 million more for our proposed equalization of special education, the total cost of our proposed reform is between \$7.5 billion and \$8.8 billion.

The table below shows the resulting pattern of allocations to districts based on their demographics. Note that these figures do not either reflect regional cost adjustments or the hold-harmless requirement. The figures are only intended to provide a rough approximation of the bottom-line results of our proposed reform. Our preliminary estimates suggest that regional cost adjustments and the hold-harmless requirement will increase the total cost of our reform slightly and will generally result in higher allocations for smaller districts than the figures below indicate.

% FRPL or EL	Base per pupil	Special ed per pupil	Targeted funds		Total revenue per pupil
			per FRPL or EL pupil	per pupil	
0	6,000	500	2,220	0	6,500
10	6,000	500	2,220	222	6,722
20	6,000	500	2,220	444	6,944
30	6,000	500	2,220	666	7,166
40	6,000	500	2,220	888	7,388
50	6,000	500	2,220	1,110	7,610
60	6,000	500	2,664	1,598	8,098
70	6,000	500	3,108	2,176	8,676
80	6,000	500	3,552	2,842	9,342
90	6,000	500	3,996	3,596	10,096
100	6,000	500	4,440	4,440	10,940

**NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Serrano v. Priest (1971).  
<sup>2</sup> SB 90 (1972).  
<sup>3</sup> Serrano v. Priest (1976).  
<sup>4</sup> AB 65 (1977).  
<sup>5</sup> AB 8 (1979).  
<sup>6</sup> Serrano v. Priest (1983).  
<sup>7</sup> Also Proposition 111 (1990).  
<sup>8</sup> GDTF; RAND study.

<sup>9</sup> Timar (1994, 2004, 2006); see also LAO (1993 and more recent reports).

<sup>10</sup> AB 602, Special Education Reform Act (1997).

<sup>11</sup> Sonstelie (2006).

<sup>12</sup> The research, though not uniform, is reviewed in Kahlenberg (2001), pp. 47-76. A recent study of the Moving to Opportunity program, which had a randomized experimental design, found minimal evidence of class-based peer effects, but the treatment was somewhat weak insofar as the treatment group, while attending lower-poverty schools than the control group, still attended schools with above-average levels of poverty. See Sanbonmatsu et al. (2006).

<sup>13</sup> LAO (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Gándara & Rumberger (2006); [additional cites].

<sup>15</sup> LAO (2007), p. E-133. The LAO’s recommendation preceded the release of Gándara and Rumberger’s GDTF study on the resource needs of EL students.

<sup>16</sup> Gándara & Rumberger (2006), p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Gándara & Rumberger (2006), p. 85 (California kindergarten class of 1998). In addition, there is emerging evidence that English learners continue to have special needs in academic English language development after they exit EL status. See Kornhaber (2007); Gándara; Hakuta. Note that the category of students in need of academic language development potentially encompasses not only students formerly classified as EL but also some native English speakers. See Gándara & Rumberger (2006), p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> Rumberger, Gándara, & Merino (2006).

<sup>19</sup> Rose & Sengupta (2006) (“[A]s external wage pressures grow, districts cut back on the number of teachers they hire and reduce the number of other certificated staff per student (e.g., counselors and nurses.)”).

<sup>20</sup> We have not yet examined how the base grant might be weighted according to grade span, although such weights have been proposed in recent legislation. See AB 2531 (2006).

<sup>21</sup> In 2004-05, nearly 50% of California schoolchildren qualified for FRPL while 17%, or roughly one-third, lived in families below the federal poverty line.

<sup>22</sup> Sonstelie (2007).

<sup>23</sup> Chambers, Levin, & Delancy (2006),

<sup>24</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures (2005).

<sup>25</sup> Kahlenberg (2000).

<sup>26</sup> Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994, § 1114. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act lowered the schoolwide threshold to 40% low-income. 20 U.S.C. § 6314.

## Getting from Facts to Policy

California's schools face tremendous challenges. While there is widespread agreement that education is critical to the state's future, California lags the nation with respect to student achievement as measured by a number of indicators. Moreover, the share of students from groups that have historically had lower levels of academic achievement is on the rise. Estimates suggest that by 2013-14, for example, 61 percent of California's school-age population will be Latino or black and a sizeable minority will be English language learners. Boosting the achievement of these students will require an infusion of resources and a commitment to rigorous evaluation to ensure that dollars are well-targeted and that resources – both human and financial – are put to their most effective and efficient use. Fulfilling this commitment will, in turn, require the state to develop and maintain state-of-the-art data systems and to invest in training so that educators, administrators, parents, and stakeholders understand how to use data to improve instruction and program effectiveness.

### Challenges Facing California's Schools

Demographic trends shape the challenges facing California's public schools. Specifically:

- Education provides a pathway to economic well-being. In 2006, the typical or median worker with less than a high school degree earned just over half (55.3 percent) of the median hourly wage earned by California workers as a whole and slightly more than one-third (38.7 percent) of the median hourly wage of workers with a bachelor's degree.<sup>1</sup> The 2006 median hourly wage earned by workers without a high school diploma is sufficiently low that full-time, year-round work translated into an income of \$20,051, less than the federal poverty line for a family of four.
- A persistent achievement gap means many of California's black and Latino students have lower levels of educational attainment at all grade levels than whites and Asians. For example, the summary results from the 2005 Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program – the standardized tests given to California students in

grades 2 through 11 – report that only 25 percent of Latinos and 27 percent of blacks scored at the “proficient and above level” in English, compared to 58 percent of whites and 62 percent of Asians.<sup>2</sup>

- Forecasts project that nearly three in 10 jobs added in California between 2004 and 2014 (29.8 percent) will require at least a bachelor's degree.<sup>3</sup> However, according to the California Department of Education, less than seven in 10 students who enrolled in ninth grade in 2002-03 graduated from high school in 2005-06.<sup>4</sup> Despite the projected growth in higher education enrollment, a recent study suggests that the demand for skilled labor, particularly college-educated labor, will outpace its supply.<sup>5</sup> This mismatch results, in part, because the population of groups with relatively lower levels of postsecondary educational attainment is growing faster than those with higher levels of educational attainment.

At the same time, California lags the nation with respect to investment in the state's schools by a number of measures.<sup>6</sup> In 2005-06 – the most recent year for which data are available – California's schools:

- Ranked 34<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states in K-12 spending per student, spending \$959 less per student than the US as a whole. To reach the US level of spending per student, California's schools would have had to spend an additional \$5.9 billion in 2005-06, an increase of 11.1 percent.
- Ranked 34<sup>th</sup> in education spending as a percentage of personal income – a measure that reflects the size of a state's economy and the resources available to support public services. To reach the national level, California would have had to spend an additional \$4.8 billion on education in 2005-06, an increase of 9.2 percent.
- Ranked 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation with respect to the number of students per teacher in the country in 2005-06. Only Arizona and Utah had more students per teacher. California averaged 19.1 students for each teacher, while the US as a whole averaged 14.7 students per teacher in 2005-06.

## Moving from Facts to Policy

### Ensuring That All Students Have Access to a Quality Education Will Require Additional Resources

The recent “Getting Down to Facts” (GDTF) studies document the need for a substantial increase in resources to support public education in order to meet high academic standards and ensure that all of California’s students have access to a quality education. Studies suggest that California would need to increase spending to a level that is 40 percent to 71 percent above recent levels to enable students to meet the state’s achievement standards.<sup>7</sup>

While additional dollars alone will not boost student achievement, California’s schools are unlikely to meet the state’s rigorous performance goals absent increased funding. Moreover, in the real world of politics additional resources will increase the odds of making much needed changes to funding formulas, governance structures, and other policies. Additional funding would enable policymakers to avoid “robbing Peter to pay Paul,” by using new resources to boost funding for low-wealth schools and to reflect the cost of educating students who may require more intensive services in order to meet academic goals and standards.

Securing adequate funding for California’s public schools will require tough policy choices. Forecasts suggest that California will continue to face structural budget shortfalls – an imbalance between the revenues raised by current tax policies and spending obligated by current policies adjusted for population growth and inflation – through the end of the decade and, potentially, beyond.<sup>8</sup> Education spending increases of the magnitude estimated by GDTF researchers are likely to face opposition from many lawmakers and, potentially, voters in the face of ongoing budget shortfalls on other pressing budgetary demands, such as health care and infrastructure. Researchers’ estimates provide a goal that policymakers can aspire to, but do not envision or outline a plan for phasing in progress over time. Additional research is needed to identify how best to allocate new resources as they become available. Research can also guide debate over whether to target resources at the state level on initiatives that show the most promise of success,

or whether local districts should be given the flexibility to select among a number of potential approaches.

### The Method of Allocating School Funding Needs Fundamental Change

Improving student performance will require not only additional resources, but also changes to the system for allocating resources to districts and, within districts, to school sites. The summary GDTF report concludes, “The current distribution of resources across schools and school districts is complex and irrational.”<sup>9</sup> GDTF research findings also document the need to target resources to schools that enroll disproportionate numbers of students that may require more intensive attention, including English language learners (ELLs) and students from low-income families.<sup>10</sup>

The Legislature currently allocates general purpose funding for schools based on enrollment and designated or “categorical” funding based on a variety of formulas that are often outdated and may not reflect the actual cost of providing specific services or achieving program goals. Current formulas represent decades of legislation that all too often have not responded to changes in the distribution of the state’s population, student demographics, or underlying cost structures.

The cost of providing a quality education varies based on student characteristics and labor market conditions. Current funding formulas fail to take these differences into account. The cost of housing and other necessities vary significantly around the state with direct implications for school operating costs and salary structures. Current funding formulas do not fully address these cost differentials. While potential changes should avoid exacerbating disparities between low- and high-wealth schools, they should also reflect the differing needs of individual districts and provide incentives for districts that successfully meet academic improvement goals and other standards.

### Boosting the Academic Achievement of English Language Learners Deserves Immediate Attention

Students from households where English is not the primary language spoken account for one of the largest segments of California’s school age population.<sup>11</sup> In the 2004-05 school year, 25 percent of California’s public school students were classified as ELLs.<sup>12</sup> These students lag their English only peers in academic performance. For example, 15 percent of ELL third graders and 4 percent of ELL tenth graders scored at the “proficient and above” level on the 2005 STAR English language arts test, compared to their English only peers who scored 47 percent and 43 percent, respectively.<sup>13</sup>

California lacks sufficient data to identify which strategies do, and do not, show the most promise of boosting performance of ELL students. Additional research is needed to understand where and how programs that address the needs of ELL students have succeeded and where and how they have failed so that educators and policymakers can learn from those practices that show promise of success. Recent research suggests that the state should re-evaluate policies that limit access to bilingual education, finding that use of bilingual educators may be a more cost-effective approach for teaching students with limited English language skills.<sup>14</sup> The same researchers suggest that meeting the needs of at least some ELL students may be a question of resource allocation, rather than the amount of resources available per se.<sup>15</sup> However, current research fails to disaggregate the compounding impacts of poverty and limited English proficiency and the specific program and resource demands posed by students with multiple barriers to academic success.

### Policy Debates Over the Source of “New Money” Should Take Equity into Account

Research shows that low-income Californians pay the largest share of their income in state and local taxes, while the highest-income households pay the smallest share of their income in state and local taxes.<sup>16</sup> With the exception of personal and corporate income taxes, the state’s major revenue sources – including the sales tax and various excise taxes – impose larger burdens, measured as a percentage of income, on lower-income households. Moreover, as noted by GDTF researchers, the need for additional resources is greatest in districts with large shares of low-income students. These districts generally have a more limited capacity to generate local resources. Resource disparities are compounded by the ability of higher-income parents and communities to supplement state and local dollars with donations of time and money.<sup>17</sup> Despite efforts to equalize funding disparities between high- and low-wealth school districts, significant

disparities remain. Ignoring the highest and lowest spending districts, GDTF researchers found disparities in excess of \$3,000 per student in total expenditures.<sup>18</sup> These findings point to the importance of a continued and potentially increased role for state dollars to level the playing field among communities with disparate resources.

### **California Lacks the Data Needed to Evaluate Student Performance Effectively**

California currently has multiple data systems that collect information ranging from demographic profiles of students and staff to student achievement and school district revenues and expenditure data. However, the state cannot track the progress of individual students over time, nor can it provide teachers with individual student histories and performance indicators.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, while the state provides access to a substantial amount of data on school revenues and expenditures, these data are available at the district, rather than school site, level and thus may mask significant disparities within districts. Moreover, complex of funding formulas, particularly those for so-called categorical programs, makes it difficult for policymakers and the public to understand and track the flow of funds from the state to the classroom and to link the allocation of resources to progress or lack of progress on measures of academic performance. Without better data systems, teachers, administrators, and policymakers will continue to lack information necessary to improve student performance and ensure accountability.

While large amounts of data are available, much of the information produced can be difficult to interpret and the multiplicity of data sources can be confusing to even sophisticated observers and data users. GDTF researchers note, "Policy makers, school and district administrators, and parents all lack the information they need to make informed decisions about education policies and practices."<sup>20</sup> California has failed to allocate resources to local districts to train staff with the goal of ensuring that data are accurately captured and reported to state accountability systems. Absent adequate funding for training, the state risks making a substantial investment in an infrastructure that fails to accurately capture critical information on student achievement

## **Recommendations**

Education is critical to the future of California and Californians in an increasingly global economy. Education will ensure that the state's future workers have the skills they need to succeed in California's technology-driven economy and the knowledge to participate fully in civil society. In order to face the challenges facing public education:

- The state must ensure that adequate resources are available to provide every California student with access to a quality education. While additional resources alone will not be sufficient to boost the performance of those students who lag furthest behind, significant improvement is unlikely absent adequate funding. New resources should be targeted to those students with lower levels of educational attainment, including those from low-income families.
- Policymakers should consider the equity implications of potential revenue sources for boosting education funding. The choice of new revenues should reflect the fact that low-income Californians pay a disproportionate share of their income in state and local taxes, as well as the limited revenue-raising capacity of districts with large numbers of students most in need of additional assistance. State dollars should be used to mitigate resource disparities between high- and low-wealth districts.
- California's system of allocating financial resources requires a comprehensive review and fundamental change. While a weighted student formula that allocates funding to schools based on the needs of individual students may be the best approach for ensuring that financial resources are matched to students based on need, additional study is needed. New approaches to resource allocation should be guided by need and should strive to provide flexibility within a context of accountability.
- California must move quickly to address the needs of English language learner students. Boosting the

academic achievement of English language learners is critical to the state's future and is fundamental to ensuring that all students have access to a quality education. Achieving this goal will require both additional resources and using existing resources more effectively.

- California's education data collection and analysis systems must be improved with the goal of informing education reform efforts and ensuring that any additional resources are well spent. Specifically, California should develop data systems that track individual student achievement from year to year and track resource allocation to the school site level. The state must also invest resources at the local level so that teachers and administrators at both the school site and district levels understand how to use data to inform instructional practices and program effectiveness. If data cannot be easily accessed and understood, teachers, parents, students, and staff will not use it, thereby compromising critical reform efforts.



## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> California Budget Project, *A Generation of Widening Inequality: The State of Working California, 1979-2006* (August 2007), pp. 17 and 23.
- <sup>2</sup> California Department of Education, *2005 Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program: Summary of Results*, downloaded from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr05/documents/star1.pdf> on August 18, 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> California Budget Project, *A Generation of Widening Inequality: The State of Working California, 1979-2006* (August 2007), p. 14-12.
- <sup>4</sup> California Department of Education data downloaded from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/CompletionRate/CompRate1.asp?cChoice=StGradRate&cYear=2005-06&level=State> on September 5, 2007.
- <sup>5</sup> Ellen Hanak and Mark Baldassare, eds., *California 2025: Taking on the Future* (Public Policy Institute of California: 2005), pp. 75-76.
- <sup>6</sup> California Budget Project, *How Does California Compare? Funding California's Public Schools* (October 2007).
- <sup>7</sup> Jon Sonstelie, *Aligning School Finance with Academic Standards: A Weighted-Student Formula Based on a Survey of Practitioners* (Public Policy Institute of California: March 2007), p. 112 and Jay Chambers et al., *Efficiency and Adequacy in California School Finance: A Professional Judgment Approach* (American Institutes for Research: December 2006), p. 44.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for example, Legislative Analyst's Office, *Major Features of the 2007 California Budget* (August 31, 2007).
- <sup>9</sup> Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk, and Eric Hanushek, *Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California* (Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice: March 2007), p. 5.
- <sup>10</sup> Jon Sonstelie, *Aligning School Finance with Academic Standards: A Weighted-Student Formula Based on a Survey of Practitioners* (Public Policy Institute of California: March 2007), p. 89 and Jay Chambers et al., *Efficiency and Adequacy in California School Finance: A Professional Judgment Approach* (American Institutes for Research: December 2006), pp. 31 and 56.
- <sup>11</sup> Patricia Gandara and Russell W. Rumberger, *Resource Needs for California's English Learners* (University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute: December 30, 2006), p. 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Patricia Gandara and Russell W. Rumberger, *Resource Needs for California's English Learners* (University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute: December 30, 2006), p. 4.
- <sup>13</sup> Legislative Analyst's Office, *Analysis of the 2007-08 Budget Bill* (February 21, 2007), p. E-128.
- <sup>14</sup> Patricia Gandara and Russell W. Rumberger, *Resource Needs for California's English Learners* (University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute: December 30, 2006), p. 18.
- <sup>15</sup> Patricia Gandara and Russell W. Rumberger, *Resource Needs for California's English Learners* (University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute: December 30, 2006), p. 31.
- <sup>16</sup> California Budget Project, *Who Pays Taxes in California?* (April 2007).
- <sup>17</sup> Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk, and Eric Hanushek, *Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California* (Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice: March 2007), p. 38.
- <sup>18</sup> Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk, and Eric Hanushek, *Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California* (Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice: March 2007), p. 37.
- <sup>19</sup> Janet S. Hansen, *Education Data in California: Availability and Transparency* (November 2006), p. 12, downloaded from [http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/15-Hansen/15-Hansen-\(3-07\).pdf](http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/15-Hansen/15-Hansen-(3-07).pdf) on September 5, 2007.
- <sup>20</sup> Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk, and Eric Hanushek, *Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California* (Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice: March 2007), p. 5.

*Jean Ross prepared this School Finance Facts with assistance from Jonathan Kaplan. Support for this School Finance Facts is provided by grants from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Walter and Elise Haas Fund. The California Budget Project (CBP) was founded in 1994 to provide Californians with a source of timely, objective, and accessible expertise on state fiscal and economic policy issues. The CBP engages in independent fiscal and policy analysis and public education with the goal of improving public policies affecting the economic and social well-being of low- and middle-income Californians. Please visit the CBP's website at [www.cbp.org](http://www.cbp.org).*

## **AB 490 IMPLEMENTATION: ENSURING SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR CALIFORNIA'S FOSTER YOUTH**

Submitted by the California Foster Youth Education Task Force

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In 2003 California passed Assembly Bill 490 (AB 490), landmark legislation to address the barriers to equal educational opportunities for California's foster children and youth. These laws apply to children who are declared dependents and wards<sup>1</sup> of the juvenile court and whose cases are supervised by child welfare or probation agencies<sup>2</sup>. Though progress has been made with the passage of this bill, there have been significant implementation challenges.

The **California Foster Youth Education Task Force** (CFYETF), a coalition of over 20 organizations working to implement practice and policy change to benefit educational outcomes for foster youth in California offer the following recommendations that will begin to close the achievement gap for our foster youth.

The Policy Brief that follows will introduce specific suggestions for AB 490 implementation in four critical areas: 1) Immediate enrollment in schools; 2) Transportation; 3) Partial credits; and 4) Least restrictive educational placements.

The intent of these recommendations is to draw attention to the urgency of foster youth education outcomes, provide policy makers with tools they need to address policy issues, and support implementation through action planning, resource sharing and support between local education agencies, social services, probation, foster youth, caregivers and other stakeholders.

Working together in new ways, will help the young people raised in our foster care system overcome the numerous daily challenges and obstacles they face in attaining an education and their dreams of lifelong happiness and success.

### **Background on Assembly Bill (AB) 490**

It is estimated that foster youth change placements about once every six months; moreover some research suggests that they lose an average of four to six months of educational attainment each time a residential move occurs with a change in school placement.<sup>3</sup> These educational disruptions and other obstacles lead to foster youth frequently falling behind in school. Graduation rates for foster youth are around 50% compared with 70% of their peers<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Under Welfare & Institutions Code (WIC) § 300, children who have been abused abandoned or neglected are subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile courts, which may declare them "**dependents**." Under WIC §602, children who have violated a law while under 18 years of age are subject to jurisdiction of the court, which may declare them "**wards**."

<sup>2</sup> Education Code (EC) § 48853.5 (a).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth, A Primer for Policymakers, Thomas R. Wolanin, The Institute for Higher Education Policy (December 2005), p. 29, available online at: <http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/fosteryouth.pdf> (last retrieved January 2, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> Id. at Executive Summary, p. v.

In 2004 a set of laws created by AB 490 took effect to address barriers to an equal educational opportunity for California's foster children and youth. These laws apply to children who are declared dependents and wards<sup>5</sup> of the juvenile court and whose cases are supervised by child welfare or probation agencies.<sup>6</sup>

The legislative intent of AB 490 was that "...educators, care providers, advocates, and the juvenile courts shall work together to maintain stable school placements and to ensure that each pupil is placed in the least-restrictive educational programs, and has access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all other pupils..."<sup>7</sup>

### **IMMEDIATE ENROLLMENT**

Lengthy delays in enrollment create an unnecessary obstacle. AB 490 addresses this by entitling foster youth to immediate enrollment in school, even if they do not have the documentation that is normally required. However, in spite of the passage of AB 490, foster youth continue to face obstacles to immediate enrollment and may not experience the seamless process envisioned by the statute. According to the "Foster Youth Services (FYS) 2006 Report to the Governor and the Legislature"<sup>8</sup>:

- "Resistance to immediate enrollment" was reported by 25% of FYS Countywide Programs as a "challenge."
- "Untimely transfer of health and education records" was reported by 33% of FYS Countywide Programs as a "challenge."
- "[M]any FYS coordinators report meeting resistance to the immediate enrollment of foster youths on the part of initial school contact staff
- "Untimely notification of placement changes" was reported by 27% of FYS Countywide Programs as a "challenge."

### **Possible Courses of Action:**

AB 490 could be included along with the 24 other programs that are monitored through the CDE's **Categorical Program Monitoring** (CPM) process. CPM, on-site reviews to verify compliance are conducted every year for one quarter of all local educational agencies by state consultants knowledgeable about these programs (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/cr/cc/>).

AB 490 provisions could be included in the **CDE's administrative complaints process** for the filing, investigation and resolution of complaints regarding alleged violations of federal or state law or regulations governing school districts.

**The Foster Youth Services' and CDE** websites could be enhanced in order to offer more information concerning AB 490 implementation. Links to model AB 490 enrollment-related policies, forms, etc. could also be posted on the FYS website.

Policies should be created to specify the training or qualifications that all **AB 490 liaisons** must have in order to fulfill that role.

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<sup>5</sup> Under Welfare & Institutions Code (WIC) § 300, children who have been abused, abandoned or neglected are subject to jurisdiction of the juvenile court, which may declare them "dependents." Under WIC § 602, children who have violated a law while under 18 are subject to jurisdiction of the court, which may declare them "wards."

<sup>6</sup> EC § 48853.5(a).

<sup>7</sup> EC § 48850(a).

<sup>8</sup> "Report to the Governor and the Legislature" Foster Youth Services Program (Education Code sections 42920-42925) Counseling, Student Support, and Service Learning Office, California Department of Education (February 15, 2006), <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/documents/fylegreport2005.pdf> .



**The California School Boards Association's (CSBA)** provides model policies on numerous Education Code requirements. (<http://www.csba.org/ps/index.cfm>.) It may be helpful for CSBA to make those policies widely available on their website. Additionally, CSBA could create accompanying materials to underscore their importance.

Educators, placing agencies, care providers, advocates, and professionals who work in the juvenile courts should receive training on the provisions of AB 490.

**California Department of Social Services** can issue an All-County Letter that addresses the need for social workers and probation officers who work with foster youth to fulfill their responsibilities under AB 490 and encourages county agencies to collaborate with their partners to fully implement the laws.

### **LEAST RESTRICTIVE EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENTS:**

Students in foster care are entitled to the “*least restrictive* educational programs” that can meet their needs (20 USC §1412(a) (5) (A); EC §§ 48853(g); 56031) and have “*access to the academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all pupils*” (EDUCATION CODE § 48850(a))

Students cannot be tracked into alternative educational placements based solely on their foster care status or academic performance. Students enrolled in alternative schools generally *do not* have access to the same academic resources that are available in regular comprehensive schools. These students should be given meaningful access to appropriate educational programs and supplemental services that are funded to ensure that school districts address the needs of *all* academically “at risk” students in the comprehensive school setting.

Legally, no student can be *involuntarily* placed in an alternative program without following the procedural protections mandated by the Education Code; however, foster youth remain to be involuntarily placed in such programs including but not limited to: continuation high schools, community schools, community day schools and independent study.

### **Possible Courses of Action:**

**Gather Enrollment Data** to adequately address this issue, it would be helpful for stakeholders to have more information on students in foster care who are enrolled in mainstream and alternative school programs. Legislation adopted in 2004 created the requirement that the California School Information Services system disaggregate data on students in foster care (EDUCATION CODE § 49085). It is imperative that this existing requirement be fulfilled, and that school districts also disaggregate enrollment data per school site and program for students in foster care so the state can adequately assess whether provisions of AB 490 are being followed.

**Foster Care Students – Alternative Program Enrollment Survey:** Until enrollment data is routinely disaggregated for foster youth, school districts can conduct their own surveys concerning the enrollment of students in foster care. They should gather at least the following information on enrollment in NPS, Juvenile Court schools, Continuation High Schools, Adult Schools, and other settings:

- The number of foster care students **not** currently enrolled in a regular school, with the type of alternative placement for each youth by school site and grade level;
- The race, ethnicity and type of out-of-home placement for these students;

For each student:

- How the student enrolled in the alternative school and whether the placement was handled properly;
- How long the student has been enrolled and if/when the student is scheduled to return to a comprehensive school site;
- Whether the student's needs can currently be met by a comprehensive school and if so, when a move is scheduled to occur;
- If one is offered, the specific barrier to enrollment in a regular school, e.g.:  
lack of credits (which may be exacerbated by failure to accept partial credits); need to serve out expulsion term; placement in a group home; or need to make up credits or graduation requirements.

The results of these surveys should be analyzed to identify whether students have been improperly placed in alternative programs. If such placements have occurred, steps should be taken to immediately facilitate enrollment in a comprehensive school.

School districts could be required by legislation to adopt policies, procedures and protocols governing enrollment of foster youth outside of mainstream schools and/or could be directed to conduct the alternative program enrollment survey described above.

If AB 490 is included in the **CDE's Categorical Program Monitoring (CPM)** process, the proper enrollment of foster youth in least restrictive environments should be included as a compliance item for review.

**The California Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division** can enforce the mandate that licensed children's institutions not require an IEP or attendance at a non-public school as a condition of placement for foster youth through its complaints and unannounced visits procedures.

### **PARTIAL CREDITS:**

The calculation and acceptance of partial credits is critical to ensure that foster youth are not academically penalized because they are often transferred between school districts. Under AB 490, school districts must accept partial credits for entering foster youth, and thus districts must be able to calculate partial credits for foster youth who are transferring. Eighty-one percent of FYS Countywide Programs reported challenges with partial credit calculation in the "Foster Youth Services Report"<sup>9</sup> and no uniform, statewide method has been established for calculating partial credits.

### **Possible Courses of Action:**

The **State Superintendent** and/or the **State Board** could establish methods on how to calculate partial credits.

Through the regulatory process, the State Board could direct school districts to comply with the law by adopting policies and procedures for the calculation and acceptance of partial credits. The State Board can also be directed by the Legislature to promulgate regulations to effectuate a specific Education Code provision to that effect (e.g. EDUCATION CODE § 221.1, regulations concerning discrimination; EDUCATION CODE § 60005, regulations concerning curriculum framework).

If AB 490 is included in the CDE's Categorical Program Monitoring (CPM) process, the acceptance and calculation of partial credits should be included as one of the monitoring items to be reviewed.

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<sup>9</sup> "Report to the Governor and the Legislature" Foster Youth Services Program (Education Code sections 42920-42925) Counseling, Student Support, and Service Learning Office, California Department of Education (February 15, 2006), <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/documents/fylegreport2005.pdf>

In the absence of the aforementioned strategies, **local school boards** could establish their own board policy outlining methods and procedures pertaining to calculating partial credits

**CSBA** could strengthen their recommendations for Board Policies that guide school districts on how to calculate, transfer and accept partial credits for students in foster care and made widely available on their website.

### **SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION:**

The “Foster Youth Services Report<sup>10</sup>” confirms that transportation, or the lack thereof, is a major obstacle to ensuring appropriate educational placement for foster youth. As it states, “[AB 490] did not specify who is responsible for transporting the foster youth to and from the school of origin, how transportation disputes to remain in the school of origin are to be resolved, or provide any funding for transportation . . . The unintended consequence is that school placement decisions are sometimes based on transportation time and cost factors rather than on the best interest of the student.”

AB 490 already provides foster youth with the right to remain in their school of origin for the remainder of the school year when a child welfare or probation agency moves them to a new placement (EDUCATION CODE § 48853.5(d) (1)). Students in foster care also have the right to remain in their school of origin if any dispute arises as to their school placement, pending the resolution of the dispute (EDUCATION CODE § 48853(c)). AB 490 also mandates that access to extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all students are also available to all foster youth. (EDUCATION CODE §§ 48850(a) & 48853(g)).

#### **School Transportation for Foster Youth: Education’s Responsibility:**

School districts have the discretion to provide home to school transportation for their students and they are allocated monies from the state for doing so. (See, EDUCATION CODE § 41850 *et seq.*). While districts are allowed to charge the parents or guardians of transported students a fee for such transportation, they must exempt indigent pupils from such a charge. EDUCATION CODE § 39807.5(d).

Although no bottom-line responsibility is delineated under AB 490 for the cost of transporting a youth to his or her school of origin, such provisions did exist when the bill was initially introduced. These provisions were amended out of the bill by the Senate Education Committee on the basis that they would likely “result in significant mandated costs to school districts.”

#### **Child Welfare’s Responsibility:**

The juvenile court places a child in foster care under the care and supervision of the child welfare agency and that agency is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the child receives the care to which she or he is entitled (e.g. WELFARE & INSTITUTIONS CODE §§ 16501-16501.1; CDSS Manual of Policies & Procedures (MPP) 31-405 *et seq.*, 31-320.1), thus responsible for placement of the child and ensuring that the child is transported to school. Transportation is a component of the foster care maintenance payment and is a federally reimbursable cost under Title IV-E, but the foster family home rate is not intended to cover the extraordinary expenses of long commutes to school.

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<sup>10</sup> “Report to the Governor and the Legislature” Foster Youth Services Program (Education Code sections 42920-42925) Counseling, Student Support, and Service Learning Office, California Department of Education (February 15, 2006), <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/fy/documents/fylegreport2005.pdf>

### **Possible Courses of Action:**

Child welfare agencies have low and no cost options to ensure that foster children are transported to their schools of origin. First and foremost the child welfare agency has an obligation to take into consideration the child's school placement and educational needs whenever making a placement decision (WELFARE & INSTITUTIONS CODE §§ 16010(a) & 16501.1(c); MPP 31-206.351). If a child cannot be placed near his or her school of origin, the agency can consider whether the caregiver should transport the child to school. (MPP 31-420; 22 Cal. Code Reg. §§ 84078(d) & 84079(a) (4)). If not, the agency may consider:

- whether there is a specialized care rate that may be paid to the caregiver to cover extraordinary transportation costs,
- whether county transportation workers or services are available to transport the child to school,
- whether mandated or discretionary educational funding is available for transportation (e.g. for foster youth who are awaiting placement and who benefit from federal McKinney -Vento laws or whose special education plans specify a need for transportation).

**Collaboration:** In the absence of statewide changes to the laws, local placing agencies (child welfare and probation), educational agencies and caregivers can and should work together to take advantage of funding available to each of them, and to forge agreements about how they can share the responsibility for foster youth's transportation needs. For instance, stakeholders could:

- Make agreements about which agencies will cover the cost of transportation for foster youth (e.g. this could include an agreement for reciprocity between neighboring school districts);
- Establish a process for promptly holding team meetings, which could include agencies, caregivers and other participants, when transportation questions need to be resolved (and perhaps agree about who will pay for transportation for the brief period until the meeting can be held); and/or
- Partner to create a "volunteer transportation team" made up of retired community members to provide transportation to and from school of origin across district lines. These volunteers could be supervised by one of the stakeholders in partnership with the child welfare agency.

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*Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*  
Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007, in Sacramento  
School Finance Issues – School Transportation  
The California State Legislature Rural Caucus  
Chair, Assemblymember Jean Fuller

The bipartisan, bicameral Rural Caucus was formed in January 2003, to address policy issues and concerns of rural areas and communities in the State of California. The members of the Rural Caucus include twenty-one Assemblymembers and thirteen Senators. The Rural Caucus serves as a voice for rural communities. The members of the Rural Caucus appreciate the opportunity to discuss the important issue of school transportation at this policy convening

Problem Statement:

We have decided to focus on one issue, school transportation funding, because it is a crucial issue for all our school districts. The current school transportation funding system is clearly broken. The recently released State Auditor report (March 2007 – Report 2006-109) recommended that the California Department of Education seek legislation to revise the current law so that 1) all school districts that provide transportation services could receive funds, and 2) ensure that all school districts are funded equitably for the Home-to-School Transportation program. Moreover, the recent adequacy studies coordinated by Stanford University found that “unreimbursed transportation costs can affect school finance adequacy in districts that have high unreimbursed transportation costs”. Those studies specifically identified the unequal and severe underfunding of California's home-to-school transportation program costs as a prime example of one of the “disequalizing effects of California's current school finance model”.

The next section of this paper will present the School Transportation Facts. Our conclusion is quite simple. Before the state creates any new categorical programs, or block grants any existing categorical programs, or changes the school finance system, the state needs to equitably fund school transportation costs. The state needs to change the existing program per the State Auditor's recommendations. We need to fix the inequities in our existing school finance house before we make any additions.

We would also like to acknowledge the work that current and past legislative members have done on this issue. The members that have carried school transportation equity legislation include Senators Cogdill and Florez, and Assemblymembers Liu, Bermudez, Benoit, Parra, and Wolk. We are grateful for their hard work and leadership.

#### School Transportation Facts – Rural Perspective:

Many states reimburse school districts for 100% of their cost of transporting students to and from school. School transportation cost varies depending on the geographic, student density, and demographic characteristics of the school district. It is a true variable cost program. School districts must file forms with the California Department of Education (CDE). CDE only 'approves' the cost of transporting students – regular and special education to and from schools. All other transportation costs such as athletic events and field trips are not 'state approved' for state reimbursement.

In California, school districts are only partially reimbursed for the state-approved cost of home-to-school transportation for regular and special education children. California severely under funds school transportation. The state reimbursement rate is less than 50%. That is the state pays for less than 50% of the approved state cost. The approved state cost for regular and special education transportation is over \$1.3 billion. The state share is \$630 million. The other \$600 million plus has to be paid for by the school districts. The funds have to come out of the classroom.

Table 1 shows the low reimbursement rates for the special education home-to-school transportation program for a group of school districts and county offices in the central valley. Table 2 shows similar information for the regular home-to-school program.

**Table 1**  
**Special Education Home-to-School Transportation Cost**  
**Central Valley School Districts and County Offices**  
**(These school districts must divert large amounts of local funds from the classroom to support school transportation)**

<u>School District and County office of Education</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Approved Cost</u>	<u>Percent of State Aid</u>	<u>Local Dollars</u>
Fresno Unified	Fresno	\$5,499,000	22%	\$4,289,220
Fresno County Office of Education	Fresno	\$2,639,174	25%	\$1,979,381
Kern County Office of Education	Kern	\$7,024,842	36%	\$4,495,899
Kern High	Kern	\$2,197,976	16%	\$1,846,300
Madera County Office of Education	Madera	\$1,302,483	27%	\$950,813

**Table 2**  
**Regular Home-to-School Transportation Cost**  
**Central Valley School Districts and County Offices**  
**(These school districts must divert large amounts of local funds from the classroom to support school transportation)**

<u>School District and County office of Education</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Approved Cost</u>	<u>Percent of State Aid</u>	<u>Local Dollars</u>
Burton Elementary	Tulare	\$837,254	4%	\$803,764
Tulare Elementary	Tulare	\$993,534	25%	\$745,151
Visalia Unified	Tulare	\$3,535,691	35%	\$2,298,199
Dinuba Unified	Tulare	\$1,177,034	23%	\$906,316
Selma Unified	Fresno	\$1,137,200	28%	\$818,784
Parlier Unified	Fresno	\$742,000	29%	\$526,820
Clovis Unified	Fresno	\$5,247,000	39%	\$3,200,670
Coalinga/Huron	Fresno	\$1,253,000	38%	\$776,860
Hanford High	Kings	\$845,906	27%	\$617,511
Bakersfield City Elementary	Kern	\$5,257,610	43%	\$2,996,838
Delano High	Kern	\$853,803	36%	\$546,434
Greenfield Elementary	Kern	\$1,170,381	27%	\$854,378
Kern High	Kern	\$7,484,674	28%	\$5,388,965
Mojave Unified	Kern	\$1,418,287	55%	\$638,229
Panama Buena Vista Elem	Kern	\$2,826,487	15%	\$2,402,514
Merced High	Merced	\$1,697,476	35%	\$1,103,359

The local cost of the school transportation program is extremely large for the school districts and county office of education in Table 1 and 2. They are forced to make large reductions in their classroom programs because of school transportation. For example, Bakersfield City Elementary, my former school district, must take almost \$3 million from their classroom funds to school transportation.

To make things worse, the transportation formulas are so outdated, that the program is extremely inequitable. The reimbursement rates can range from 4% to 100%. This program is especially unfair to rural school districts that serve a large number of poor children.

Because the formulas are so inequitable and inadequate, in May of 2004, the California State PTA adopted a resolution that stated:

*“RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support legislation that provides more equitable and adequate funding for home to school transportation and replacement of school buses that do not meet current safety standards.”*

California is last in the nation in terms of the percentage of children that ride school buses – 16%. The national average is 54%. In 1985, 23% of California students rode to school in school buses. Many communities simply shut down their school bus service, because it was too costly. Rural school districts simply cannot do this. They must provide transportation services to their students.

The clear facts are that the costs associated with transporting children to and from school are disproportionately high in rural school districts and counties that serve fewer students living in smaller, lower density and/or fast growing communities.

This problem is made worse by the fact that this funding deficit is an unequal burden that hits rural school districts much harder than more densely populated non-growth school districts.



In rural California counties, school districts must bus larger numbers of students longer distances:

- In Kern County, 32 percent of the students depend on school buses to get them to and from school each day....double the state average. Other rural counties must bus even higher percentages of students:
  - Nevada (49%), Inyo (54%), Trinity (57%), Mariposa (74%), Amador (77%)
- In 2005-06, Kern County schools spent \$33.8 million providing transportation services to students.
- Kern districts receive approximately \$14.3 million in funding from the state. The funding deficit of \$19.3 million came to \$124 per student or 25% more than the statewide average.

In the 29 most rural Kern County school districts (serving fewer than 10 students per square mile):

- Almost 50% of the students require transportation assistance in order to attend school.
- These rural districts, due to the longer distances traveled and the higher percentage of students in need of service, spend \$19.1 million on transportation.
- These same districts receive only \$8.3 million in funding. Their funding deficit of \$10.8 million comes to \$154 per every student in their district or 59% higher than the statewide average and 25% above the Kern County average.
- The overwhelming majority of over 300,000 migrant children whose families work in agriculture are served in these rural school districts.

California's home-to-school transportation program costs are a prime example of one of the disequalizing effects of California's current school finance model. Because school districts must dedicate a greater percentage of their discretionary funds to these costs, school districts have less funds available for other classroom purposes including instructional supplies and adequate teacher salaries for teacher recruitment and retention.

The transportation problem is magnified, however, when we consider the challenges faced by rural schools. Disproportionately high percentages students in rural California live in low-wealth communities and come from families that are substantially below state and national income averages.

This nexus of inadequate funding for transportation and rural poverty has resulted in a specific problem for school districts in rural communities that seek to offer quality remediation/summer school programs for students in need of supplemental instruction.

In 1999, Governor Davis signed legislation providing for the California High School Exit Exam, which requires all students to demonstrate subject matter mastery in core academic subjects in order to qualify for a California high school diploma.

Consistent with these increased accountability measures, state policymakers, appropriately, mandated that all school districts provide supplemental instructional services, in the summer months and during the regular school year, to students at risk of academic failure.

Unfortunately, the funding provided to schools to offer these summer school programs is based upon a "one size fits all" schedule that reimburses all school districts at the same per student amount; without consideration for transportation costs.

The "bottom line" is that rural schools must transport higher percentages of students, longer distances and are provided with no funding support. Rural schools are therefore required to encroach upon their general fund revenues even more to provide needed transportation services.

Many rural school districts are unable to provide transportation for summer school and regular remedial programs. In these instances, we find that large numbers of eligible needy students simply are unable to attend regular and summer school/supplemental instruction programs. Students at high risk of academic failure are not receiving the academic help they need.

#### Conclusion:

Our conclusion is simple. The state needs to equitably fund school transportation costs – the state approved cost of home-to-school transportation. The state needs to change the existing program per the State Auditor's and the PTA's recommendations. Fix our existing school finance house before you make any additions. This issue is extremely important to the children of our school districts. Thank You.

In this paper, CASBO examines the recent performance of California's state-driven public education efforts, and makes suggestions for operational and structural changes that need to be made to reach whatever educational goals are next established. This paper will identify key resources that must be *added* to the current system (such as a comprehensive data system and adequate funding), and will identify the current barriers to effective operation that must be *eliminated* (including outdated funding formulas, unnecessary accounting requirements, overly-prescriptive, one-size-fits-all state requirements for the delivery of educational services).

*The 4,000-plus members of California Association of School Business Officials are responsible for the operational management of the California's public schools, overseeing all areas of school business management and operations, including finance, accounting, payroll, human resources, risk management, transportation, school nutrition, maintenance and operations, information technology, purchasing, school safety and school facilities. CASBO believes that the public school system's highest priority is educational delivery, and also that the highest degree of academic success in California's K-14 schools is consistently found in the best-administered and most financially sound districts, county offices of education and community colleges.*

### **WHERE WE ARE TODAY**

California's recent track record of state-driven educational delivery has been inconsistent, unpredictable and destabilizing.

There was California's hasty decision to implement K-3 class-size reduction at virtually a moment's notice in 1996, despite the cautions of independent analysts engaged by the state Legislature who warned that CSR's results in other states were ambiguous, that California's proposed model was flawed, that the huge scale of the proposed rapid ramp-up was likely to lead to problems, and that the resources that would be committed to CSR would have more effective uses elsewhere. The warnings proved prescient. Six years after the frenzied debut of the K-3 CSR program, a multi-million dollar, multi-year, state-funded assessment of California's K-3 program found no measurable impact on student achievement and no effect on special education identification or placement, but did identify harmful effects on funding and facilities for other programs and services such as music and the arts, libraries, education technology and professional development. <sup>(1)</sup>

Despite that study, a decade later the state rushed in 2006 to commit \$2.7 billion in one-time dollars to expand class-size reduction to all grades in certain schools under the Quality Education Investment Act. The QEIA program was replete with flaws, including fiscal disincentives to implement at the neediest and most-overcrowded school sites. And despite the earlier study's recommendation to increase flexibility in the K-3 CSR model, the QEIA version was – and is – equally rigid. <sup>(2)</sup>

In addition to these high-profile cases, the past decade alone provides dozens of other, less publicized examples of state-driven reform efforts that were random in genesis, uncoordinated in delivery, unaccounted for in effectiveness, sporadic in continuity, uncertain in funding, and unsatisfactory in results.

The long menu of scattershot one-time or short-term, highly prescriptive, categorical programs that presumed to identify areas of local need and to dictate appropriate remedies has claimed billions of dollars in funding. These individual programs targeted, among other things, science laboratory equipment, elementary school classroom libraries, incentives to teachers and schools

for performance on state tests, block grants to low-performing schools, arts & music equipment block grants, digital and high-tech high schools, tolerance education, and even awards for schools whose students read a certain number of books. *None of these programs are still in place.* And while well-intentioned, the dollars could have been far better utilized under local control. The patchwork and highly prescriptive nature of these state initiatives usurped local efforts at developing coherent local programs, and the fact that many of these program dollars are still sitting, unused, in district budgets years later is hard evidence of the misguided nature of this approach.

At the same time that these new programs were being rolled out year after year only to be terminated after a short test flight, other programs that had proven their value were being hamstrung or abandoned altogether by lack of funding. Two of the supplemental/hourly programs that funded schools for offering additional instruction to students were either eliminated altogether (Elementary Intensive Reading) or deficit-funded to a drastic degree (Grade 2-6 Academically Deficient), leading schools to terminate their efforts just as they had learned to operate them and the programs were becoming effective. Home-to-school transportation, a critical first step in the education process, was being funded at less than 50 cents on the dollar for approved costs and the distribution of funding continued to be based on a snapshot from the late 1970s, meaning that many fast growing districts received only a fraction of the state average. Most categorical programs – even the politically popular class-size reduction programs – suffered from at least one year of deficits or unfunded Cost of Living Adjustments, or both, which are carried forward year-after-year, exacerbating the structural funding shortfalls that afflict most categorical programs.

The history above is not intended to argue against any state role in the California public education system, but rather as a reminder of the shortcomings that are always likely to result when education policy is driven top-down across the state, with great specificity, through a decision-making process that is above all else political.

The most effective state policies of recent years have been those that impose statewide standards and goals, that do so without specifying how local education agencies are to meet those goals, and that stick to the goals without scrambling the targets every few years.

The award-winning EdSource study “Similar Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?” noted last year, “We believe that the overarching message from the findings is that the state policymakers and local educators need to stay the course in terms of explicit expectations for student achievement and a process of accountability that keeps those efforts at the forefront of schools’ efforts.”<sup>(3)</sup>

General George S. Patton, who learned in the most unforgiving of classrooms – battlefields – once wrote, “Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.” CASBO concurs, believing that the optimal design for state guidance of the California’s public education system would be for the state to decide standards and goals for local education agencies to meet as they see fit.

But given the political nature of California’s public education system, and the post-*Serrano* reality that Sacramento is the source of any incremental increase in funding, it is unlikely that the state will ever step away completely from earmarking dollars for specific purposes and prescribing in detail how those dollars are to be utilized. Nor would it be realistic to expect the state to suddenly become unerring in choosing how to design its educational initiatives, or how to fund those efforts. For that reason, it is essential that California’s public education system support

a management system that can optimize policy decisions through effective execution, measurement and evaluation of performance, and continuous improvement based on that feedback.

Whatever policies are chosen at the state or local level, however, it is the role of California's school business officials to implement them – fiscally and operationally – as effectively and efficiently as possible. The rest of this paper will address CASBO's priorities for operational and structural changes that must be made in order to most effectively implement whatever policies are adopted and to meet whatever educational goals are established.

### **REFORM PRIORITY #1: DATA**

*CASBO recommends that the state's first and highest education priority be to invest in an integrated and comprehensive data system at both the local and state levels.*

In "Management," Peter Drucker's groundbreaking 1974 magnum opus, he noted that service institutions such as schools are "equally in need of management" as the private sector, although with different challenges, largely because they do not benefit from the market pressures that force private endeavors toward optimal performance. For that reason, since the absence of a "market test" does not impose an independent assessment of performance, it is particularly incumbent on service institutions to honestly and accurately measure their own performance.<sup>(4)</sup>

Service institutions, Drucker wrote, "need to derive *clear objectives and goals*, from their definition of function and mission. They then have to think through *priorities* of concentration which enable them to select targets, set standards of accomplishment and performance, that is, to define the minimum acceptable results.

"They need to define *measurements of performance*.

"They need to use these measurements to *feed back* on their efforts, that is, to build *self-control from results* into their system.

"Finally, they need an organized audit of *objectives and results*, so as to identify objectives that no longer serve a purpose or have proven unattainable. They need to identify unsatisfactory performance and activities that are either obsolete, or unproductive, or both, and they need a mechanism for *sloughing off* such activities rather than wasting their money and their energies where the results are unsatisfactory."<sup>(5)</sup>

Essential to each of these tasks enumerated by Drucker is the ability to collect and analyze data.

CASBO proposes that the first and highest priority for any major reform effort in public education be to invest in a comprehensive data system at both the local and state levels, to ensure local and state decision-makers, as well as local educators and consumers, access to an integrated system that includes data on a broad range of information including student performance, local and state expenditures on educational programs and practices, and personnel practices that may impact student achievement. This needs to be accomplished *prior* to embarking on yet another round of educational program reforms. Without data, we are likely to continue – as was delineated above – spending our limited resources on programs that may not produce optimal educational benefits to students.

The “Getting Down to Facts” studies clearly articulated California’s lack of appropriate student-level data for accurately determining how students are performing and which interventions work with what students. But we also lack the ability to track and integrate student level data with school fiscal and personnel practices, so any expansion of a statewide data system needs to:

- Be fully accessible to local agencies to better inform local decision making.
- Ensure full reporting and integration of all local data, including student-level data related to academic progress, business and financial data, and data systems that track personnel and hiring. Currently, those three separate data systems exist in many districts at a basic level. But the three systems are generally rudimentary in that they cannot talk to each other or integrate information to allow cross-cutting analyses of local and state decisions.
- Include a parallel investment in local data systems; without a significant investment in local data systems, we cannot have a robust state data system. <sup>(6)</sup>

## **REFORM PRIORITY #2: BUSINESS PRACTICES**

*CASBO recommends that the state reform a number of current business practices that increase costs and decrease operational efficiency for local school agencies, including:*

**MANDATES** – The current system for paying schools to perform mandated state activities is hopelessly broken, requiring significant school site staff time to over-document the performance of even the most minor activities, and requiring districts to perform new statutory duties for as long as five to seven years before knowing whether a new statutory activity is even reimbursable. Nor does the current system provide timely payment even after an activity is deemed reimbursable, while subjecting districts to after-the-fact audits based on parameters and guidelines that weren’t available to the district when they initially performed the activities, heightening the risk of audit findings and denial of funding.

**FUNDING TIMELINES** – Since the state’s fiscal crisis in 2003, the school apportionment schedule has not been followed and apportionments have not been timely. We recommend publishing a payment schedule and holding to it, thus allowing districts to better manage cash flow, borrowing, and investing, thereby freeing up resources that should be going to educational programs. As an example, multiple new programs included in the 2006-07 state budget were not apportioned until the fourth quarter of that fiscal year.

**CATEGORICAL FLEXIBILITY** – It is absurd to think that the state knows exactly the right funding mix for categorical programs, and that this mix is equally appropriate for all 1,000-plus LEAs. The state should expand current transfer flexibility provisions between categorical programs to help meet local needs while maintaining some accountability for the intent of the original funding source. Additionally, the state should expand the practice of freeing up categorical funding once specific appropriate benchmarks are met, such as is the case currently with the Instructional Materials Funding Realignment Program, which allows for a significant increase in flexibility once core textbooks have been provided for all students.

**PERSONNEL PRACTICES** – The current statutory March 15 deadline for layoff notices to certificated school employees is too early to make informed staffing decisions, given the state’s budget cycle. As a result, in the interests of fiscal prudence, LEAs must currently issue initial layoff notices that later prove to be unnecessary, at a devastating cost to staff and school morale while driving away potential new teacher candidates.

CLASS SIZES – Given the state’s increasingly mobile student population, school districts must be able to accommodate changes in student population all year long. The current overly strict constraints and penalties for both regular and CSR classes limit schools’ ability to make mid-year placement decisions in the best interests of student education. And as was noted above, increasing flexibility was one of the key recommendations of the CSR Research Consortiums Capstone Report.

ATTENDANCE ACCOUNTING – The state should switch to a funding model based on enrollment, not attendance. The current ADA reporting process requires significant personnel, tracking, and monitoring, and is no longer necessary given academic accountability requirements which now give districts incentive to ensure students are in school and achieving. Using a system of “average monthly enrollment” would significantly reduce local reporting and accounting while still ensuring that schools are paid only for those students actually being served.

STATE SCHOOL FACILITIES PROGRAM – Like the mandate reimbursement system, this state program should be thoroughly reviewed to eliminate state-mandated requirements that are excessive, impose significant delays, and drive up local school construction costs. Key concerns include:

- Insufficient funding to meet school construction requirements.
- Complex state requirements for building and modernizing schools that defy rationality and common sense, while driving up costs.
- The annual addition of new school construction requirements that are insufficiently funded, and add to the time it takes to complete facility projects, further driving up costs.
- A school construction oversight and monitoring process that is shared by multiple state agencies, several divisions within some of these agencies, and local government agencies. The sheer weight of these multiple layers of government oversight is a significant factor in increasing the costs of school construction.

### **REFORM PRIORITY #3: FINANCE**

*CASBO recommends that the state establish a state and local system of funding education that recognizes the real costs of, and sufficiently funds, the world class academic standards adopted by the state in a straightforward and equitable manner.*

Efficiency can only go so far; there comes a time when additional resources need to be provided, and that time is long overdue. California public schools, by any measure, are underfunded given the performance expectations and the system’s challenges. In addressing this underfunding, it is essential that:

- Schools are “held harmless” – that is, the new funding model levels up current funding, as opposed to “Robin Hood” models that merely redistribute dollars between LEAs.
- The base is made whole – that is, that the core programs be fully funded for their real costs and that prior deficits be addressed.

### **REFORM PRIORITY #4: GOVERNANCE**

*CASBO recommends that the state’s role in school governance be redefined to move more control to the local level.*

California needs to move away from what has become a costly system of state micromanagement of school practices and procedures that asks schools to focus not on the overarching goal of raising student achievement, but on compliance with required state inputs. CASBO recommends the state's role in education be redefined to include only the following:

- Setting the student achievement goals districts must achieve.
- Ensuring funding sources are available and sufficient to meet those goals.
- Developing, discovering and disseminating best educational and fiscal practices.
- Establishing state sanctions and rewards that give districts incentives to meet state education goals, rather than tying sanctions and rewards to meeting state mandated inputs.

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**POLICY BRIEF**  
***Closing Achievement Gaps at All Grade Levels:  
The Next Phase for Improving California's Public Schools***

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Interventions  
Personnel

# POLICY BRIEF

## ***Closing Achievement Gaps at All Grade Levels: The Next Phase for Improving California's Public Schools***

### **Problem Statement**

Over the past decade, California has taken some basic but important steps to improve its public schools. By establishing world class standards for learning, measuring progress to make sure goals are met, and beginning to hold schools accountable for results, California is creating real change in schools throughout the state. California's business community has been a leading voice in support of this common sense plan for school improvement; however, more work thoughtfully developed and supported over the long term is needed if students and California's public schools are to both succeed and improve on that success.

This work will take strong, well defined leadership from the Governor, the Legislature and the Superintendent of Public Instruction as well as local superintendents, principals, teachers, parents and business leaders. Increased focus on standards, assessments, and accountability must be the foundation of building a world-class education system. Data must become an indispensable tool used to drive better decisions about student academic achievement. A more robust reporting system needs to be in place to reward performance, identify and rectify problems and establish clear consequences for failure.

Accountability must serve as the basic foundation for what is expected and achieved in California's public schools. Yet, the State has no real system that holds schools accountable for getting all students to grade-level in reading, writing and mathematics – a system that should demand swift and profound interventions for chronically low-performing schools and real incentives for schools that show steady and sustained improvement in student academic achievement and closing achievement gaps.

The Governor and other education policy leaders have proclaimed 2008 as the year of education in California. Many are stating publicly that the persistent achievement gap in our public schools must be closed. The business community could not agree more. However, the overt *expectations gap* in our state capitol that trickles down and throughout the education system translates directly into real and measurable *achievement gaps* in our public schools.

## **Willingness to Set Expectations**

Preparing students for success in college and the workforce of the future requires that we close the achievement gaps, particularly among ethnic minorities, socio-economically disadvantaged students and English language learners, who comprise nearly two thirds of California's current K-12 student population and who represent our future workforce. Closing achievement gaps among these student populations requires not just leadership at the state level stating that it is important, but a willingness and clear direction to the education system that the achievement gap can be closed and that it is already happening in many schools across the state. California will never achieve the potential of a standards-based accountability system if our state education leaders continue to say that it is unrealistic for all students to reach grade level every year. Expectations gaps equal achievement gaps.

We must drive the debate beyond the usual questions of "if" we should have standards or accountability or "where" those standards should be set to instead demonstrate that standards can and are being met. Attention should be focused on improvement and giving a voice to those that are raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps. High academic achievement is happening across all ethnic and socioeconomic lines in every corner of the state. Schools that are achieving this success start with clear, non-negotiable expectations that at minimum all students will reach grade-level proficiency.

## **Agreement on the Goal**

California's education leaders, starting at the top, must agree on the purpose of the K-12 enterprise – that students must leave our K-12 system with the academic skills to be ready for college and ready for work. The metrics to reach this end goal cannot simply be small and inflated growth on artificial measures of progress, but a clear focus on getting all students to a minimum of grade-level proficiency every year in English Language Arts, Math and Science. Too often leaders at all levels of the education system either negotiate this goal down to a lower level or worse confuse the purpose of the K-12 enterprise with so many ancillary goals that nothing measurable is accomplished -- all at the expense of academic achievement.

California should require that all state academic performance reporting is based on "grade level" proficiency as a minimum benchmark. Current California-specific reporting, using only the Academic Performance Index (API), is misleading and confusing because it focuses on school-wide growth with no reporting of whether or not a student is at grade level, thus being prepared to succeed in the next grade. The state API growth target is calculated in such a way that in many cases it will take students an unacceptable 44 to 84 years to reach grade level proficiency at the rate of growth acceptable under the California API system. Most alarmingly, this "growth" is very often at the expense of ethnic subgroups whose achievement gaps based upon reaching grade-level may be actually increasing over time.

## **Accountability Drives Improvement**

California has some basic foundations of a functioning accountability system. High academic standards for each grade and subject, along with a quality standards based test that provides an accurate, consistent measure of progress towards students meeting the standards have created a structure from which all schools can and should improve. However, California still lacks a clear system of consequences and mandated corrective interventions for schools that are chronic poor performers.

The basic question we must ask of our state education accountability system is: What happens to a school that does not meet its growth targets (including subgroup growth targets)?

If the answer to this question is nothing, than we do not have an accountability system. This is the case as it currently stands in California.

In 2005 the Department of Education instituted its first announced “sanctions” on six schools for their lack of growth on the API under state funded intervention programs. Not only were these six schools not the lowest performing schools (many had hundreds of schools in the state intervention programs that were performing at lower levels), but the mandated interventions consisted merely of assigning a new School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT) provider and the development of a new plan. Meanwhile these and hundreds of other chronically low-performing schools continued to receive millions of dollars of intervention money with no discernable improvement because that is all we asked of them for the billions of dollars of investment by the state.

The next phase for California’s public schools is to establish an accountability system that is clear, specific and that serves as a tool that drives improvement in academic achievement. In other words data and accountability is not a “gotcha” but rather an accepted and committed way of doing business in our schools and across the system. High performing schools that have sustained increases in student academic achievement have already established an observable culture of high expectations and a system of using assessments, data and accountability at all levels. This same system must be embraced and consistently implemented across the education enterprise.

The API measure as the basis for accountability is neither clear, specific and certainly does not do anything to drive improvement – that was never the intention when it was created. It is not easily understandable, not measurable over time and sets a target that teachers and administrators have no clear idea of how to achieve. Worse, the benchmark for growth, and ultimately success is well below grade-level proficiency and by design will take far too long to get all students to this minimum but important goal.

### **Incentives and Interventions**

Under federal law, for which California has set its own yearly proficiency benchmarks, there are currently 595 schools that are in the fifth year or more of Program Improvement. These are the schools that have not met the minimum proficiency targets for all sub-groups of students year after year – currently set at about one quarter of the students reaching grade-level. While some of these schools are improving, a vast majority of them are continuing to produce the same unacceptable results for their students.

We must have an aggressive intervention program of meaningful corrective actions. In some cases this may mean closing schools; in others it may mean reconstituting the staff or re-opening the school in another form. It can no longer simply mean creating a new plan with another SAIT provider. The students trapped in these schools, students who are falling farther and farther behind, deserve decisive action today.

At the same time we must reward performance -- every other successful enterprise on the planet does. This not only means substantial monetary awards to the top performing schools, particularly with at-risk students, but a change away from the reverse incentives of our state intervention programs (II/USP, HPSGP, QEIA) that fund low-performing schools. Currently schools lose funding when they improve academic achievement, even at very low levels, but can continue to receive funding if they do not improve. Funding should scale up as more student academic achievement is attained.

Rewarding performance must also include increased pay for teachers based upon their proven ability to increase the number of their students reaching grade-level proficiency and beyond. If this is to be the clear and specific goal of our education system, then increased performance must be rewarded. In addition, California must create financial incentives for teachers and principals to fill high need, high challenge positions and based upon their ability to raise student academic achievement.

### **Replicating Best Practices**

The good news is that there are hundreds of high performing schools across the state that are overcoming real or perceived barriers to student academic achievement and that are on track to get all students to grade-level proficiency. California needs a systemic and systematic way of highlighting these high performing schools, giving them an organized and collective voice and sharing their best practices with all schools in the state. These best practices should be the basis for all mandated interventions and corrective actions based upon poor performance. All schools in Program Improvement status should be assigned a look-a-like high performing school team to serve as their coach for implementation of what has been proven to work.

By highlighting schools that are overcoming common challenges and barriers in raising achievement, California can get these successful strategies into the hands of teachers and principals who would benefit the most. This process of school improvement through replication of best practices and benchmarking should serve as one of the most important benefits of our state's public school accountability system.

### **Supporting Research**

1. James S. Lanich, Ph.D., Lance T. Izumi, and Xiaochin C. Yan, "Failing our Future: The Holes in California's School Accountability System and How to Fix Them" (San Francisco, CA: Pacific Research Institute, 2006).
2. National Center for Educational Accountability, "Best Practice Study and Framework" (Austin, TX).
3. California Business for Education Excellence, "Closing Achievement Gaps at All Grade Levels: The Next Phase in Improving California's Public Schools (Sacramento, CA, 2005).
4. Focus group research with CBEE/Just for the Kids-California Honor Roll school principals and teachers (San Francisco, Sacramento and Long Beach, 2007).
5. Survey Results on Education Among California Business Leaders (Statewide internet survey of 1,342 business executives: California Foundation for Commerce and Education, March 2007).

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**California County Superintendents Educational Services Association**  
**Briefing Paper for**  
***Getting from Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening***  
October 19, 2007

**Submitted By:** California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA)

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**Topics covered:** school finance (resource generation and allocation), governance, personnel and leadership and state data systems.

## **Introduction**

The studies released as part of the *Getting Down to Facts* research project<sup>1</sup> clearly demonstrate the severe problem of underfunding California's public schools relative to the funding provided per pupil in other states across the nation. The studies further report on the extraordinarily diverse student population served in California schools, and the need to increase resources to help English learners, students with disabilities, and students from families in poverty meet the state's high academic standards.

The challenge now is to design a system that purposefully provides the resources necessary to meet California's high expectations for its students and schools. A meaningful investment must help students meet the high academic standards and goals we have set. We recommend a comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, approach that incorporates the recent years of reforms, such as implementation of standards-based instruction and accountability, and that is responsive to the geographic variety and population diversity of California.

We recommend a comprehensive system with improvements in the following areas – a governance structure suited to the diversity of California; incentives to attract and retain the best teachers; professional development for teachers and education leaders in all core curricular areas and in effective leadership; assessment and accountability aligned to a comprehensive curriculum and featuring data-driven decision making to continuously improve education practice; and kindergarten readiness programs to assure all students are prepared to succeed in school.

## **A Structure that Supports the Diversity of Our State**

Because of the diversity of California, a strongly centralized school system cannot best meet the needs of all students. California has over 1,000 school districts and more than 9,000 schools serving 6.3 million students. Public school students are 48% Hispanic, 30% White, 8% African American, 8% Asian and 6% from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Nearly 1.6 million students are English learners. Our 20 smallest school districts serve from 2 to 22 students, while our 20 largest school districts serve 36,000 to 727,000 students. Enrollment in the remaining school districts is distributed broadly across this wide continuum.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fact Book 2007: Handbook of Education Information; California Department of Education

A review of the governance and operational structure of K-12 education in California should include consideration of the optimal size of school districts, and the design of incentives that promote school districts that can both be responsive to the unique needs of local communities and that can avoid the limitations on local capacity that may result from a low number of enrolled students. In short, we need to provide incentives for school districts to organize in a way that allows them to function most effectively.

Also, the diversity of this state means that county offices of education are critical to providing effective services and to assuring equitable access for all students. A regional infrastructure at the county level is both a cost-effective and flexible structure for implementing coordinated statewide services, providing direct support for small school districts, and delivering services for special needs and at-risk students.

*Investment Needed<sup>ii</sup>*: \$2 billion to bring funding to appropriate levels for services to low-incident populations such as alternative and special education students; \$50 million for incentives to consolidate services for small school districts; expanded opportunities to access capital funding for facilities housing county and regionally-based programs.

### **Attracting the Best Teachers**

The staff-per-pupil ratios in California schools trail the nation across the board. In total staff-per-pupil California ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in the country; we are 49<sup>th</sup> in teachers-per-pupil, 50<sup>th</sup> in guidance counselors, and 51<sup>st</sup> in librarians.<sup>2</sup> To meet the needs of a diverse student population the school funding system must provide the resources necessary to recruit and retain high quality staff and to improve the ratio of staff to students. For California school children to benefit from a pupil-teacher ratio similar to the average state would require 90,000 more teachers at a cost of more than \$7 billion.

Schools with high concentrations of students in poverty and English learners need safe, clean and well maintained facilities; up-to-date technology; and high-quality preschool and afterschool programs to ensure an environment that can attract the best teachers and provide a rich educational experience for all students.

We must provide incentives for teachers to come into and stay in the profession. For example, in the past the state has supported regional teacher recruitment centers and provided grants to low-performing schools specifically for use in recruiting and retaining the most qualified teachers, and the state has supported programs to increase beginning teacher salaries. We recommend that these programs be restored.

*Investment Needed<sup>iii</sup>*: \$8.5 billion

### **Teacher Quality and Professional Development**

In 1996 we started down the road of a standards and outcome-based education system. However, our progress has been quite limited and the state has fallen significantly short in

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<sup>2</sup> "Comparing California", Ed-Data Partnership, March 6, 2007. [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us).



providing the support necessary to develop educators and leaders able to implement and work within such a system. The state currently funds standards-aligned professional development in only two subject areas – reading and mathematics and limited leadership development activities focused on leaders in low performing schools.

To ensure a comprehensive education for all of California’s students led by a highly skilled teacher and administrator workforce, we must provide high quality training, mentoring and on-going professional development for school staff in all core curricular areas, including science, history-social science and the visual and performing arts. Moreover, professional development needs to be tied to the standards-aligned instructional materials being used in classrooms.

We have many of the components needed to support high quality professional development now. As of 2005, more than 75,000 out of approximately 300,000 teachers statewide have participated in state-supported professional development opportunities in reading and mathematics (AB 466, 2001). Approximately 86 percent completed professional development in reading and 14 percent completed professional development in mathematics<sup>3</sup>. We recommend that all teachers have ongoing access to standards-aligned professional development in the subjects they are teaching.

*Investment Needed<sup>iv</sup>*: \$250 million

## **Education Leadership**

California ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in administrators per pupil among the states, with an average of 4 administrators per 10,000 students. The national average is more than 3 times higher, with Texas and Illinois having nearly five times as many administrators per pupil. Education leadership and administrative support for our public schools is stretched way too thin to provide the kind of leadership necessary to meet the high benchmarks for achievement that we have set.

Professional development, coaching and support for principals and site leaders is vital to achieving our goals of raising student academic performance and closing the achievement gap. The principal training program, established by AB 75 (2001), has enrolled or trained nearly 9,000 of approximately 30,000 school site principals and vice principals in California schools, with seventy percent of school districts participating<sup>4</sup>. We need to continue and expand this training.

A culture of ongoing coaching has been shown to dramatically strengthen the capacity for effective leadership among principals and district / county level administrators, yet the state provides no support for this strategy. This effective practice needs adequate, ongoing state support.

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<sup>3</sup> June 2005 report to the Legislature

<sup>4</sup> June 2005 report on AB 75 to the Legislature.

Finally, training for business and administrative staff is critical, yet this year the state eliminated the small level of funding that had previously been available for chief business officer training programs. We demand strong fiscal accountability from our schools and yet we fail to support the development, recruitment and retention of our chief business officers.

We recommend substantive ongoing investments in leadership professional development.

*Investment Needed<sup>v</sup>*: \$800 million for staffing at the national average per pupil ratio for administrators; \$40 million for professional development.

## **Assessment, Accountability and a Comprehensive Data System**

A robust accountability system that includes all parts of the education system is an important tool in assuring that all students are well prepared. This includes holding the state accountable for adequate funding. Each level of service provider within the K-12 education system must receive resources and decision-making authority commensurate with its responsibilities, with a system of testing that provides information that can effectively support improvement at each level.

We have a state accountability system that sets very high bars for educational achievement. We have standards and curriculum frameworks for a variety of subject areas – including visual and performing arts – that are not included in the assessment system. Yet, we expect these subjects to be taught to meet standards consistent with our frameworks. Completing this system to add additional assessments in subject areas currently taught, but not tested, in the state Academic Performance Index (API) will serve students better and provide parents and communities with a more comprehensive view of student accomplishment.

As we look at improving our state system, we must assure that it: (1) includes formative assessments that provide data which can inform instructional practices at the classroom level, and a system that supports the effective use of information for teachers and school leaders to identify and promote best practices; (2) makes key data regarding school resources and activities available and understandable to parents and community members; and (3) contains multiple accountability measures that are outcome based and reflect student performance, especially for students enrolled in alternative education programs such as county community schools and community day schools.

The state must invest the resources needed to establish and sustain an education data system that is trusted, reliable, robust and accessible, with independent oversight by a group of key stakeholders to support a high quality data and information system. Moreover, as an integral part of the accountability system we must ensure that students and schools not meeting outcomes receive effective, targeted support and assistance.

*Investment Needed<sup>vi</sup>*: \$50 million annually to develop and implement a comprehensive assessment and education data system; \$20 million to support effective assistance to schools and districts in improving student achievement.

## Early Education to Improve Student Achievement and Narrow the Achievement Gap

Our education system should support high quality, voluntary prekindergarten programs that articulate with K–12 classrooms throughout California to help close the achievement gap. Short- and long-term studies<sup>vii</sup> demonstrate that children who participate in high-quality preschool programs have better language, early literacy, and early math skills. They are less likely to repeat a grade, need special education or remedial services, to drop out of school or get into trouble with the law, and are more likely to attend college. The most significant benefits are shown for low-income, Hispanic and African-American children, and for those whose parents have low education levels or are immigrants; these same demographic groups are of concern in closing California’s achievement gap.

Therefore, California’s early education reforms should be based on research-based principles and practices, provide adequate fiscal support for implementation, improve teacher training and compensation, and provide for the facilities needed. High-quality prekindergarten programs enable all children to have a fair chance for school readiness and for success in school and in life. California’s education system should develop a pre-K to Grade 3 continuum that facilitates a child’s transition to kindergarten by:

- Providing high-quality pre-kindergarten to improve education outcomes for all children and to reduce the academic achievement gap for all language, economic, and racial/cultural groups.
- Supporting the development and use of research-based, developmentally appropriate pre-kindergarten learning foundations and curriculum that link with the kindergarten to 3rd grade standards and curriculum.
- Connecting pre-service and in-service professional development for pre-kindergarten teachers to the professional development requirements, supports, and resources for kindergarten and early elementary teachers.
- Funding pre-kindergarten programs that meet quality criteria at the same level as the early elementary education system. This expansion would build on the current quality requirements for state preschool programs, prioritize state funding for pre-kindergarten programs that employ a Bachelor level and/or credentialed teacher with specialized training in early childhood education, encourage participation by diverse program providers, and include pre-kindergarten appropriately in the state accountability system.
- Strengthening connections to: 1) federal and state early childhood programs, such as the Head Start Program and child development and care programs, 2) family involvement programs, 3) family literacy and education programs, such as Even Start and adult education programs, and 4) health and support services.

*Investment Needed*<sup>viii</sup>: \$2.3 billion

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you some key policy recommendations from the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, provided on behalf of the 58 county superintendents serving public education in California.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The research project was requested in 2005 by the President Pro Tem of the Senate Don Perata, Speaker of the Assembly Fabian Núñez, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell, Secretary of Education Alan Bersin, and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Committee on Education Excellence. The project was conducted with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The Stuart Foundation.

<sup>ii</sup> Estimate for services to special education and alternative school students assumes the state provides full support for the unfunded portion of special education costs, including comparable cost-of-living adjustments and student enrollment growth for these programs, and adjusting the per pupil allocation for alternative schools to reflect the higher incidence of special needs students in these programs. The estimate of incentives for small district services consolidation assumes up to \$100 per student for the 10 percent of the K-12 student enrollment served by the smallest school districts.

<sup>iii</sup> Improving teacher staffing ratios to the national average estimated at \$7.2 billion for 90,000 additional teachers compensated at approximately \$80,000 each in salary and benefits; staffing counselors, nurses and librarians at the national average will cost approximately \$1 billion. Facilities maintenance funding targeted to schools serving the most challenged students could benefit from an increase of \$100 million. Expanded opportunities for before and after school programs are estimated at \$200 million per year.

<sup>iv</sup> Estimate based on annually providing a professional development stipend of \$1,250 per teacher to participate in 40 hours of subject specific standards-aligned training for up to 200,000.

<sup>v</sup> Improving district and schoolsite leader staffing ratios to the national average estimated at \$800 billion for 8,000 additional principals, vice-principals, and district-level administrators compensated at approximately \$100,000 average annual salary and benefits. Additional support for principal and administrator leadership training estimated at \$3,000 per participant annually for 10,000 site and district leaders; support for administrator coaching estimated at \$5,000 per year for a two-year program, with cohorts of 1,000 participants phased-in over two years, for a total of 2,000 participating in any single year.

<sup>vi</sup> The estimate for district assistance and support assumes 100 school districts at an average allocation of \$200,000 per year per district, based on extending the average per district cost for the participation of fourteen school districts in the District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) pilot program to school districts designated as in Program Improvement and expected to be required to implement one of several sanctions determined by the State Board of Education.

<sup>vii</sup> Research documenting the effects of participation in pre-kindergarten programs include the following studies:

- Ackerman, D., Barnett, S; (2006). *Increasing the Effectiveness of Preschool Programs*. Preschool Policy Brief. National Institute for Early Education Research. Available at: <http://nieer.org> under Publications – Policy Briefs.
- Graves, B. (2006). *PK-3: What Is It and How Do We Know It Works?* Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief (No. 4). Available at: <http://www.fcd-us.org> in Resource Library.
- Lamy, C., Barnett, S., Jung, K.; (2005). *The Effects of Oklahoma's Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program on Young Children's School Readiness*. National Institute for Early Education Research. Available at: <http://nieer.org> – under Research.
- Olson, L., and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2005). *Early Childhood Education: Investing in Quality Makes Sense*. American Educational Research Association. Available at: <http://www.aera.net> under Publications – Research Points.
- Russo, A. (2007). *The Key to NCLB Success: Getting It Right from the Start*. Issue Brief #5: Early Education Initiative. New America Foundation. Available at: <http://www.fcd-us.org>.
- Sadowski, M., (2006). *The School Readiness Gap*. Harvard Education Letter. Available at: <http://www.edletter.org/current/readinessgap.shtml>

<sup>viii</sup> The Economic Policy Institute's "Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation" cites a ratio of total benefits to costs of a universal, high quality pre-K program for 4 year-old children of 8.4 to 1, with an approximate annual cost of \$2.3 billion. Future benefits for this investment of would be valued at nearly \$20 billion annually in current dollars.

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American Federation of  
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# Getting From Facts to Policy

## Problem Statement

California education is facing an uncertain future. California must build its capacity to educate students and improve their achievement. The education system is not adequately funded. Meaningful new funding must be introduced into the system if we are to have the tools for the improvement of public schools. Ample funding is needed to recruit and retain quality teachers, administrators, and support staff. Increased funding is needed to provide quality training, mentoring, and professional development for all education personnel. Administrators' leadership skills must be improved, as they are an essential part of the teaching and learning conditions in a school. Districts have difficulty recruiting and retaining quality teachers. There are many qualified teachers in California, but many do not wish to teach in our schools. Teaching and learning conditions are a problem, especially in our hard-to-staff schools. Our system needs the best teachers and leaders. Where are we going to get them and how can we keep them in the profession? Education is not the only entity involved in supporting student achievement. The responsibility for improving student learning does not begin and end at the schoolhouse door. Other problems such as poverty, inadequate housing, lack of health care and quality early childhood care and education contribute to many students' lack of success. Society must also be accountable.

## Policy Issues and Recommendations

### Funding

Money does matter. California school districts spend significantly less and receive less revenue than do districts in other states. California has fewer teachers per student and fewer administrators per student than in other states (Loeb, Grissom, and Strunk, 2007). School districts cannot be expected to meet performance standards without sufficient funding. The current system is unfair in that districts that serve the poor and English language learners do not receive enough funds to successfully educate their students. This situation is worsened in districts that are in high-wage labor markets (Duncome and Yinger, 2007). The current system of school finance appreciably under funds districts with the highest needs. To improve student outcomes could require as much as \$1.5 trillion (Imazeki, 2007). To meet the rigorous California standards, instruction should differ from its current form. Class sizes should be reduced, time should be used more strategically, more specialists should work with small groups, and more quality professional development should be available. All this takes a great increase in spending (Chambers, Levin, and DeLancy (2007). California needs to increase school funding by at least 40 percent to help all students reach high academic standards. This funding needs to be adequate and equitable and any changes to the school finance system must ensure that no student or school loses current resources.

### Leadership

California administrators are not as well prepared as those in other states. Many have not participated in internships or had access to mentoring or coaching, nor have they participated with teachers in professional development. California school leaders are less likely to regularly engage in

evaluating and supporting teachers. California needs to reinstitute the discontinued nationally recognized California School Leadership Academy (CSLA). CSLA offered training for beginning and veteran principals, teacher leaders, and school leadership teams. Principals need mentoring and coaching opportunities. If we truly want to raise student achievement we need to make investments in leadership development (Darling-Hammond and Orphanos, 2007). It is the principal who is in a position to ensure good teaching and learning in a school. Principals are seen as central to supporting powerful teaching and learning for all students. But current leadership training does not prepare principals for their job in schools. Leadership development should be a major reform strategy. The many responsibilities of principals can distract them from their most important task, assuring quality instruction. The implementation of quality leader preparation programs and professional development is complex and costly, but necessary to produce skilled education leadership (Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen, 2007). A substantial relationship exists between leadership and student achievement. There are more than 20 specific leadership responsibilities correlated with student achievement, including culture, order, discipline, resources, visibility, communication, input, relationship, and flexibility (Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003). We need to start to think of leadership as teaching. Both good teaching and leadership require moving to where the learner is, listening to the learner and engaging with the learner (Barkely, 2005). The best leadership programs recruit candidates that are known to be strong teacher leaders, has a coherent curriculum that is based in practice, and focuses on improving student learning. There are many field-based experiences for the candidates that are integrated into the coursework. Principals need added support during their first few years. These programs are expensive but the cost is a good investment in the quest to improve student achievement (Olson, 2007). Leadership is at the core of improving working conditions in schools. States should examine the preparation, induction, and continuous support of school leaders and ensure that all principals understand the important role of teacher working conditions and have the knowledge and skills to make their schools places where all teachers want to work and students can learn. States should also consider the possibility of making teacher working conditions measures part of the evaluation process for school leadership across the state. (Emerick, Hirsch, and Berry, 2005)

## Personnel

Teacher quality is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement. The quality of teaching is determined by the environment in which teachers work. Policies aimed at attracting and retaining effective teachers need to both recruit capable people into the profession and provide support and incentives. Teachers are motivated by working with students, helping them learn, and making a contribution to society, and systems must be in place to support them in these tasks (OECD, 2005). Improved teacher working conditions make the job “doable” by ensuring adequate resource staff; manageable class sizes; and a safe, supportive environment. Basic working conditions in high-poverty, low-performing schools are often far worse than any professional should be asked to tolerate, and it is hardly surprising that such conditions are a major cause of high teacher turnover in many schools. State investments in class-size reduction efforts, reductions in teaching load (particularly for new teachers), time for planning, and time to work collaboratively all seem logical places to start (Emerick, Hirsch, Berry, 2005). Supportive working conditions encourage the retention of teachers. Positive and supportive leadership by principals is important to teachers. Principals should recognize teacher accomplishments and support teachers as experts in instruction and learning. Teachers need to be involved in determining the structure and content of professional development. Districts and schools

should ensure that teachers have the material resources to implement standards-based curriculum. When teachers are given adequate time to prepare, are respected as professionals, and are properly supported, they are more likely to stay in the profession (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2007).

The idea that we can improve teaching quality by increasing the supply of new teachers is misreading the problem. The problem is not finding enough teachers to do the job; the problem is keeping them in our schools. The costs of high teacher turnover are both financial and human. At-risk schools spend scarce resources on teacher turnover. A better investment would be in teacher retention programs (Barnes, Crowe, and Schaefer, 2007). As teacher quality is key to student success, there is an issue as to whether teacher pay is sufficient to attract and retain quality teachers. Teachers earn significantly less than comparable workers and the wage disadvantage has grown substantially of the last ten years. The decline in teacher pay seems to coincide with trends in teacher quality (Allegretto, Corcoran, and Mishel, 2004). Compensation packages, although less cost effective than professional programs, are an important component of teacher retention. Teachers in districts with higher salaries are less likely to leave public school teaching or to transfer between districts. BTSA has enjoyed positive results, but funding for Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) has been drastically reduced. Because of the cost effectiveness of these programs, policymakers should allocate additional funding for PAR and BTSA (Reed, Rueben, and Barbour, 2006). PAR programs have the potential to transform probation into a period of professional induction in which novices continue to learn their craft. As a result of PAR, new teachers, who receive concentrated support, are more likely to remain in the profession long-term. There is generally strong support for these types of programs. Teachers and principals can now focus more intensely on multiple aspects of teaching, make better and more consistent use of data, and make clearer connections between teaching and student achievement (Koppich, 2004). Critics of unions often overstate their obstruction or misplace the blame. In many districts principals have substantial discretion in hiring and assigning teachers. Union presidents usually defend teachers only when their due process rights have been abridged. Local unions have undertaken programs to improve teacher quality. A considerable number provide PAR or PAR-like programs (Johnson, Donaldson, Munger, Papay, and Qazilbash, 2007).

In high-achieving countries teacher preparation and induction is fully subsidized and salaries are competitive with other professions. We need an aggressive national policy on teacher quality and supply like the Marshall Plan. The federal government should establish service scholarships for undergraduate and graduate programs of teacher preparation. Recruitment incentives are needed to attract and retain qualified, experienced teachers in hard-to-staff schools. There should be support for improved teacher preparation. Mentoring for all beginning teachers should be provided. In California BTSA has been successful, but needs to be upgraded to support our better-prepared teachers. Continuing recruitment efforts without the support of new and experienced teachers are like pouring water into a leaky bucket. A Marshall Plan for Teaching could help ensure that the US could place well-qualified teachers in high-need schools and give all students an opportunity to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Districts should review existing policies to make sure they do not impede the transfer of accomplished teachers to hard-to-staff schools. Targeted incentives and options should be developed for individuals and groups of teachers interested in moving to hard-to-staff schools. Teachers unions have successfully negotiated contract language, incentives and supports to guarantee that teachers with proven records of student success are able to teach in schools district-wide. Teaching and learning can thrive only in schools where safety is guaranteed, trust developed and the stage properly set for learning. When the necessary resources are in place and implemented properly, and when staff are trained to move forward



with instruction to assist students in achieving at their highest levels, recruiting and retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools will be much less difficult (AFT, 2007). By building a career ladder for classroom teachers, schools can deliver what the new teachers want—both a supportive work environment while they are new and opportunities to grow once they have more experience. With career ladders that formalize roles such as mentors, master teachers, curriculum developers, or professional development planners, schools can be organized so that novices have a well-integrated support system with many colleagues to turn to, and veterans have options that will challenge them without removing them from the classroom completely. Ideally, school districts and teacher unions will collaborate to create these career ladders and help schools become supportive workplaces that foster new teachers' success. Such schools have dramatically less attrition among new teachers (Johnson, 2006).

Special education teachers are most likely to leave special education because of inadequate system supports as well as an all-too-often hostile teaching environment created by parents and student advocates. They also leave because of too little time for the complex and constantly changing IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) they are required to write. Many leave because of dysfunctional professional relationships with their colleagues in general education. The specific challenges of the retention of special education teachers must be assessed and addressed by reducing the burdens of IEPs and other paperwork, cultivating better collegial supports for special educators, and the expansion of programs that support novice special educators. Teaching conditions for all teachers must be assessed locally and regularly. Student funding should be elevated to at least adequate levels. School bureaucracy must support rather than impede teaching. School leadership must be focused on instructional quality and high-quality teaching and learning conditions. Statewide standards should be established for school teaching and learning conditions (Futernick, 2007). In 2002, CDE's Professional Development Task Force put forward ten recommendations. Few of them have been implemented. Quality education depends on a quality staff of educators, administrators, and support personnel. To make teaching and school administration attractive careers salaries must be increased, there should be multiple pathways into teaching and school leadership, and schools with high-need students should be enabled to attract and keep well-qualified teachers and administrators. To provide teachers and leaders with the skills they need to improve student learning a statewide infrastructure for career-long professional development that supports educator learning and school improvement must be built, this high-quality professional development must reach teachers and administrators in high-need communities, and the preparation, induction, and ongoing support of school leaders should be improved. To create the conditions that allow teachers and school leaders to succeed, site leadership must be reconfigured to enable the principal to serve as an instructional leader and the development of teacher leaders who can coach and mentor others has to be supported, and schools should be redesigned so that they can focus on student and teacher learning. Transforming an array of policies and practices into an increasingly coherent system will take time. While policymakers must take immediate action on priority issues, their actions must be part of a long-term strategy. Evaluation and refinement of existing policies, together with bold progress in new areas, will be needed (California Department of Education, 2002).

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## **California Policy Brief**

### **CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: THE CLEAR CASE FOR DATA SYSTEMS REDESIGN**

Primary Contact: Brad Strong, Education Director, bstrong@childrennow.org

#### **PROBLEM:**

**California's many data collection efforts on children's education are not integrated or unified**

California currently uses many disparate systems to collect and analyze data pertaining to children's education. The California Department of Education alone has over 125 data collection efforts going in this area, capturing data from student demographics and attendance to expulsion rates and testing scores. Additional databases that track children's education are also maintained by the University of California, the California State University, the California Community Colleges, the state Employment Development Department, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Justice and California Youth Authority (CYA), among others. Moreover, at least four other teacher data systems are separately maintained by the California Teachers' Retirement System and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. However, very few of these data systems are integrated to enable data standardization, sharing and enhancement. As a result:

- ✓ *No clear standard for data collection and analysis exists;*
- ✓ *We lack clear information on quality of programs;*
- ✓ *Data are not centralized and accessible;*
- ✓ *State and local decision making suffers;*
- ✓ *Individual students needs go unaddressed;*
- ✓ *Continuous improvement efforts are sporadic and lack state support.*

#### **EVIDENCE BASE:**

**A strong body of research documents the need for the creation of an integrated, longitudinal data system for children's education**

In the past few years, much research has demonstrated the need for the creation of an integrated, longitudinal data system. In 2007, the *Getting Down to Facts* determined that:

***"California is lagging most other states in developing education data systems capable of helping policymakers and others understand how schools are doing and how resources can be deployed most effectively to increase student learning."***

The established recognition of this need is not new. In May of 2002, EdSource highlighted the seriousness of California's need to address its education data issues, stating:

***"The current lack of longitudinally linked data in California has important implications for policymakers seeking to understand which schools and which programs are effective; for parents, teachers, and administrators who want to know how well students are progressing; and for anyone who is interested in understanding the status of public education."***

Similar conclusions have been drawn by the Data Quality Campaign, the Public Forum on School Accountability, the Alliance for Excellent Education and others.



## **California Policy Brief**

### **CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: THE CLEAR CASE FOR DATA SYSTEMS REDESIGN**

Primary Contact: Brad Strong, Education Director, bstrong@childrennow.org

#### **ISSUES:**

#### **The data system redesign efforts already underway are insufficient**

While California has begun to make progress toward data systems redesign with the creation of the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) and the California Longitudinal Teacher Data System (CALTIDES), it has become increasingly clear that these systems alone are insufficient to support the analyses necessary to fundamentally improve education and student achievement in California.

However, these two systems will undoubtedly provide critical data, including answering important questions about graduation rates, student achievement, teacher qualifications and credentialing programs and can serve as the backbone of the more comprehensive system that is required.

Absent linkages with other data however, these systems will not be very useful in determining which schools or programs are most effective at truly preparing students for success in college or gainful employment – outcomes being the only real test of college and career readiness. Nor will they be useful in helping to evaluate the cost-benefit of programs like preschool, after school, Healthy Families and others targeting at-risk youth (i.e. foster care, teen pregnancy, etc.). Consequently, they alone will not provide the immediate answers that teachers, principals and counselors need to best serve students.

It is also troubling that we do not even have the most basic information related to program participation when it comes to many of our early childhood programs. This has to be included in any comprehensive effort.

For teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers and researchers to make better decisions that lead to improved student outcomes, a clear understanding of student characteristics and program participation is critical. For educators, real time access to this information is particularly important. As one example, an understanding of the offenses and parole stipulations of juvenile offenders (currently housed within a CYA database) could provide meaningful resources and information for school counselors (both academic and mental health). Similarly, academic records would be valuable for CYA educators to develop age- and achievement-appropriate curricula for offenders.

Unfortunately, these systems are not easily integrated, and paper records can sometimes take up to six months to retrieve – too late to be of much use to the teachers, counselors and principals in the trenches seeking to meet the needs of these at-risk students.

#### **SOLUTION:**

#### **A new data system for California's children**

*Only by developing the ability to ascertain what works and what does not will the State be able to make clear progress in regards to academic achievement. For California to regain its position at the top of our nation's academic and economic indices, the state will need to develop a comprehensive, integrated, longitudinal data system that allows for continuous improvement on the part of students, teachers, administrators and policymakers alike.*



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*Specifically, the system must provide useful information to those working directly with students and to policymakers (state and local) so that they may make well-informed decisions about educational investments that yield the best outcomes.*

As a first step in the creation of a comprehensive student-centered information system, the effort must be informed by research and by an awareness of the efforts underway in other states. The Data Quality Campaign has carefully analyzed what states have done and has identified a set of best practices for others to follow. At a minimum, we need to generate consensus around the belief that California's information system must include these best practices and become a model for the nation.

#### Data Quality Campaign

Goals: Answering Six Priority Questions:

1. *Which schools produce the strongest academic growth for their students?*
2. *What achievement levels in middle school indicate that a student is on track to succeed in rigorous courses in high school?*
3. *What is each school's graduation rate, according to the 2005 National Governors Association graduation compact?*
4. *What high school performance indicators (e.g., enrollment in rigorous courses or performance on state tests) are the best predictors of students' success in college or the workplace?*
5. *What percentage of high school graduates who go on to college take remedial courses?*
6. *Which teacher preparation programs produce the graduates whose students have the strongest academic growth?*

Data: Ten Essential Elements

1. *A unique statewide student identifier that connects student data across key databases across years*
2. *Student-level enrollment, demographic and program participation information*
3. *The ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth*
4. *Information on untested students and the reasons they were not tested*
5. *A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students*
6. *Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned*
7. *Student-level college readiness test scores*
8. *Student-level graduation and dropout data*
9. *The ability to match student records between the P-12 and higher education systems*
10. *A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity and reliability*

If we intend to effectively address the needs of all children, then we must also generate the political will to establish a comprehensive information system capable of highlighting the most effective policy decisions and providing insight into the most cost-efficient and appropriate services for our children.

## Overarching Themes & Specific Recommendations

Children Now believes that any comprehensive, child-centered, educational information redesign should be guided by the following key themes:

- The state's role in data collection, use and practice must be clearly identified and should foster an environment of continuous improvement. Fundamental to this issue is the ability to identify what the most appropriate and effective role is for the State (versus school districts) in fostering a system-wide culture of using and sharing data beyond compliance-oriented activities (i.e., standards-based diagnostics, benchmarking, and best practice sharing/improvements to curriculum and instruction).
- A comprehensive, interconnected information system must be the goal. It is critical that the system being developed is able to communicate with and manipulate information from other related databases, including (but not limited to) those pertaining to: 1) preschool and child care; 2) higher education; 3) teachers, administrators and other certificated employees; 4) child welfare services; 5) workforce development; 6) social services; and 7) juvenile justice.
- Access to the data is critical and must be provided to policymakers, researchers, and local educators in ways that best foster intelligent policy, rich and useful datasets for analysis, and that help inform classroom instruction and assist teachers and administrators in identifying and addressing individual student needs.

In order to achieve the goals that Children Now has advanced, the following recommendations are offered as the most important elements to include in any effort to dramatically improve educational information systems in the state of California.

1. **Establish a Data Oversight Commission:** California currently lacks any formal governance structure dedicated to providing policy guidance related to the creation and ongoing implementation of educational information systems and related data. The Commission would be the formal governance umbrella charged with overseeing, consolidating, and standardizing data from the various silos. The Commission should also be tasked with establishing access procedures and security protocols while ensuring that policymakers, researchers and local education agencies have access to useful data that is directly pertinent to their unique roles in our efforts to improve student achievement.
2. **Centralize Data Collections – Warehouse Data:** The various data collections efforts need to be combined into a centralized repository with sufficient staff dedicated to both ensuring the quality of the data, and creating stock reports and information that will aid local educators and state policymakers alike in establishing and supporting a culture of continuous improvement in our schools. In addition to stock reports, dedicated staff would respond to specific requests from policymakers, educators and researchers, while ensuring that all privacy, access and security protocols are strictly adhered to.



3. **Important Collections:** The data contained in the centralized repository should be inclusive of educational records from preschool through college in addition to data related to child welfare, social services, juvenile justice and the workforce. This type of rich information system will allow for more comprehensive analyses of our educational system, thereby fostering a better understanding of what happens to our children as they traverse California's education system and enter the workforce. In addition, it will provide teachers, counselors, principals and even social workers with information about the needs of at-risk students who may also be part of the juvenile justice or foster care systems.
4. **Invest for Success – Major Ongoing Commitment:** To achieve the goal of continuous improvement through the use of data, we will need to make a substantial commitment of both one-time and ongoing funding. All districts need to have student information systems that are up-to-date and dedicated staff that are trained and knowledgeable about the collection and management of data. These frontline staff are central to the reliability of the data and are responsible for generating and maintaining student identifiers, as well as following coding protocols to ensure that categories like dropouts and transfers are reported consistently throughout the state.
5. **Increase Transparency – School Accountability Report Card (SARC):** Throughout the years, the SARC has become the one tool by which policymakers can collect and display data without incurring many costs. This has resulted in the SARC becoming completely unwieldy, and has also led to the unfortunate consequence that we now have no way to centralize about 25 percent of the data collected. Making matters worse, once complete, principals and schools districts post SARCs on local websites with no centralized location to find them. We should require SARC data to be added via a web form with a backend database so that the State may also secure the data. A single state-run website should also be created to provide access to every SARC.
6. **Missed Opportunities – Major Initiatives and No Data:** One of the biggest obstacles to securing data is the mandated cost associated with its collection. All too often, substantial funds are dedicated to major education initiatives and large categorical programs without any way to evaluate their effectiveness or any data to help assess their outcomes. For example, last year Governor Schwarzenegger and Legislature dedicated \$2.9 billion to the Quality Education Investment Act to help schools that are serving higher percentages of low income, minority, and English learners to close the achievement gap. Because the implementation plans were largely local, this historic opportunity could have provided substantial insight into how site level resources are used. Future commitments should be coupled with reasonable requests for data to allow for effective program evaluation.

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Topic Covered:

Use of academic rigor to close the achievement gap with emphasis on equity and advocacy.

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## Defining College Readiness

The future prosperity of California is inextricably linked to its capacity for providing the highest quality education for all its students. There is a clear need for a strong education agenda that works toward these goals: increasing high school graduation rates by cutting the state's dropout rate, making significant progress toward closing the achievement gap, and boosting college enrollment and success. It is increasingly recognized that the core skills deemed essential for college readiness are similar to the skills necessary for career readiness. As noted in a recent WestEd study (*Rethinking High School*, 2005) "Should every student pursue higher education? Not necessarily. Should every student be prepared for and have the choice to attend college or pursue other types of post-high-school education? Absolutely." The College Board fully supports the goal of college readiness and its definition underscores the need to offer all students the skills needed for college and career success—regardless of the paths they choose after high school graduation. Further, the College Board has developed a "College Readiness System." Beginning in middle school and continuing through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the System is aimed at putting all students on the path to college enrollment and success. This report focuses on the Board's definition of college success and then highlights a key element of the Board's College Readiness System, the Advanced Placement Program.

### A Definition of College Readiness

Students are "college ready" when they have the **knowledge, skills, and behaviors** to complete a college course of study successfully, without remediation.

College readiness can be identified through multiple measures:

- 1. Academic knowledge and skills evidenced by successful completion of a rigorous high school core curriculum** (4 years of mathematics, including algebra II; 4 years of English language arts; 3 or more years of science; 3 or more years of social sciences/history)
- 2. Success in college-prep and college-level courses taken in high school that require in-depth subject-area knowledge, higher-order thinking skills, and strong study and research skills**, e.g., as evidenced by achievement of a grade of 3 or higher on at least one AP examination.
- 3. Advanced academic skills, such as reasoning, problem solving, analysis, and writing abilities**, e.g., as demonstrated by successful performance on the SAT (a score of 1020 in critical reading and mathematical reasoning corresponds to a 90% probability of a Freshman GPA of C or higher and a 50% probability of a B or higher).
- 4. College planning skills, as demonstrated by an understanding of college and career options and the college admissions and financing process.**

The College Board believes school districts and states can take specific steps to ensure that significantly more students are “college ready” upon graduation from California high schools.

**1. Establish a statewide curriculum based on college readiness standards**

- Align the state’s curriculum to college readiness standards;
- Vertically align grades 6-12 curriculum across schools, engaging students in rigorous coursework early in middle school; and
- Offer multiple college prep and college-level courses in all high schools in the state.

**2. Ensure participation in rigorous academic courses in every high school**

- Proactively place students in college prep and college-level courses;
  - Connect under-represented students to challenging courses and provide the support they need to succeed; and
- Elevate teachers’ knowledge and skill level through training and coaching.

**3. Monitor student progress**

- Offer in-class formative and benchmark assessments to diagnose strengths and weaknesses and improve instruction; and
- Administer national, standardized exams to assess student progress using a common objective measure.

**4. Facilitate college, career and financial planning**

- Increase students’ college awareness and provide college planning tools;
- Support scholarship and admissions opportunities; and
- Ensure that counselors and teachers guide all students to follow a college readiness path.

The College Board has developed its own College Readiness System to help states, districts and schools ensure that more students are college ready. The components of the System are comprised of the following programs and services—categorized under the four broad activities outlined above.

• **Establish a curriculum based on college readiness standards**

- *The College Board Standards for College Success*: A detailed document describing the array of knowledge, skills and abilities required for college readiness;
- *SpringBoard*: A program of curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development for grades 6-12 English language arts and mathematics aligned to college success standards; provides preparation for success in AP; and
- *Advanced Placement Program*: 37 rigorous college-level courses and examinations in 22 subject areas.

• **Ensure participation in rigorous academic courses in every high school**

- *AP Potential*: a research-based tool that uses PSAT/NMSQT scores to help teachers and administrators identify students with the potential for success in AP courses
- *SAT Readiness Program*: helps broaden access to SAT preparation for all students with unlimited practice from any location
- *Teacher professional development*: a suite of face-to-face and online interactive opportunities designed to educate, support, and invigorate new and experienced teachers

• **Monitor student progress**

- *PSAT/NMQST*: National, standardized tests that measure student progress toward college readiness in critical reading, mathematical reasoning, and writing;
- *SAT*: National, standardized test that measures critical reading, mathematical reasoning and writing skills that students need to be successful in college; and
- *SAT Subject Tests*: National, standardized tests that measure high school students’ knowledge and skills in 15 subject areas.

• **Facilitate college, career, and financial planning**

- *College Awareness and Planning Tools*: A suite of courses and comprehensive online tools and information to help students, plan for, apply to, and finance college, including:
  - *CollegeEd*: academic, college, and career planning courses students in grades 7-12 and their families;
  - *My College QuickStart and MyRoad*: Online, personalized college planners and exploration tools that connect student to majors, careers, and colleges; and
  - *Financial Aid EasyPlanner Tools*: includes Scholarship Search, Financial Aid Calculators, and the PROFILE financial aid application.

The College Board believes that the Advanced Placement Program can be a significant driver to promote college readiness in all of California's high schools. AP is a national standard for academic rigor and college readiness, providing millions of students with the opportunity to experience college-level learning and to earn college credit and/or advanced placement during high school. California is among the leaders in AP participation and success, but much more needs to be done to ensure that all students—especially those in the state's urban and rural communities—have access to AP courses and have access to the preparation and support needed to succeed in these challenging courses.

The following are some key data points in relation to AP, illustrating current participation in the program, the benefits of participation in terms of college completion, and the potential for hundreds of thousands of additional California students to enroll and succeed in AP.

- This year more than 1.5 million students will take more than 2.5 million AP Exams; more than two-thirds of the nation's high schools offer AP, but too many urban and rural schools lack the qualified teachers to offer these rigorous courses to their students.
- There are more than 120,000 AP teachers nationwide whose experience and high quality training benefit all students- in both AP and non-AP classes.
- More than 3,000 colleges and universities accept qualifying AP exam grades for credit or placement, thereby giving students and their parents the opportunity to save \$5,000-\$30,000 on college tuition.
- In California last year, more than 38,500 students achieved a 3, 4, or 5 score on AP Calculus and AP English Literature Exams, but data show that more than 72,600 additional students would have a high likelihood of succeeding on those same exams, if given the chance to take the courses.
- For each investment of \$1 million in AP professional development, California could train more than 3,000 AP and pre-AP teachers who could reach 140,000 prospective AP students.

### **Advanced Placement Performance and College Completion**

Students scoring 3 or higher on AP Exams are experiencing much higher college graduation rates than comparable non-AP students.

Increase in Probability of College Completion: AP Students with Scores 3+ as Compared to Non AP Students	
Student Demographic	AP Score of 3 or Higher
African American	21% higher
Hispanic	27% higher
White	19% higher
Low Income	32% higher

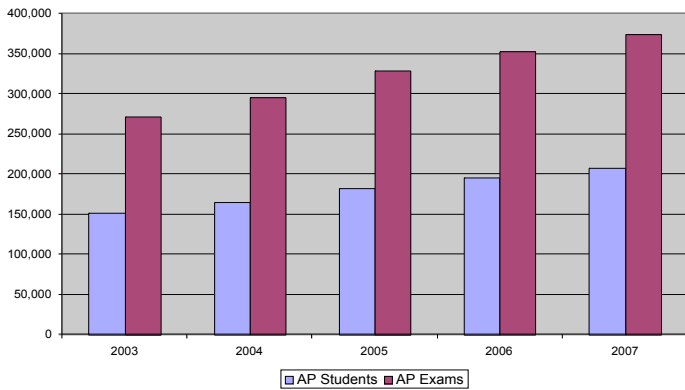
Source: Dougherty, Mellor, and Jian. The Relationship between Advanced Placement and College Graduation, NCEA, 2006

## California and the Advanced Placement Program

### AP Participation and Growth

In 2007, AP provided more than 200,000 California students with the opportunity to experience rigorous college-level learning, an increase of 36% vs. 2003.

California Public School AP Participation: Students and Exams  
2003-2007

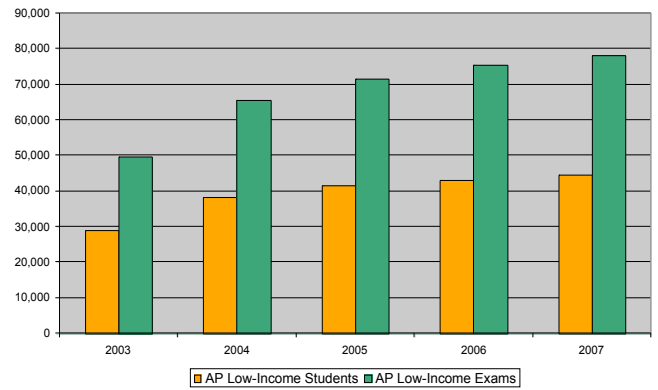


Source: The College Board 2007

### AP Increases for Low Income Students

Each year, a growing number of low-income students participate in the AP Program. In California last year, 44,644 low-income students took more than 78,000 AP Exams, an increase of more than 50% compared to 2003.

California Public School AP Low-Income Participation: Students and Exams  
2003-2007



### Record Numbers of Students Achieve

Over the last five years, 562,475 students in California earned scores of 3 or higher on 924,851 AP Exams, giving them the opportunity to qualify for college credit and/or placement, with

the potential to save thousands in tuition and fees. In 2007, 57% of all AP Exams in California were scored 3 or higher.

California Public Schools: AP Performance		
Year	AP Students 3+	AP Exams 3+
2003	96,275	156,220
2004	104,952	169,57
2005	112,474	184,204
2006	121,723	200,850
2007	127,051	213,990
2003-07	562,475	924,851

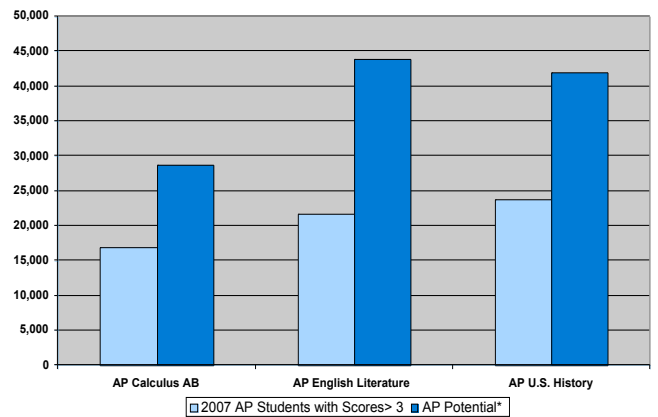
### AP Potential for More Students to Succeed

There is potential for an even greater number of California students to succeed in AP courses and exams.

For example, 23,719 students in California earned a score of 3 or above on AP U.S. History last year, however, AP Potential identified an additional 41,880 students who may have the same likelihood of success, if given access to AP.

The AP Potential diagnostic tool is based on research that shows correlations between PSAT/NMSQT scores and AP Exam results. More students are identified who have the potential to succeed in AP, if given the chance.

California Public Schools: AP Potential 2007



\* Based on student PSAT/NMSQT score range with > 60% probability of scoring 3+

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## **Opportunities to Train More AP Teachers and Reach More Students**

Teachers are critical to preparing all students for college success. Teachers who participate in AP and pre-AP professional development receive the highest quality, most rigorous training offered to middle school and high school teachers—all their students (both AP and non-AP) benefit from their improved teaching skills.

With an investment of \$350,000, California could train 1,000 educators for AP and pre-AP with the potential to reach 47,000 AP students.

Educator Training and Professional Development			
Educators Trained/Professional Development*	Investment		
	\$350,000	\$500,000	\$1,000,000
AP Teachers	400	600	1,200
Pre-AP Teachers	400	600	1,200
Guidance Counselors	100	150	300
Principals/Administrators	100	150	300
Total Educators	1,000	1,500	3,000
Potential Students Reached	47,000	70,500	140,100

\* AP and Pre-AP workshops, Summer Institutes, Counselor workshops, Leadership

## **The College Board Work with States to Achieve Education Goals**

The College Board has been assisting states in developing comprehensive programs to increase curriculum rigor, raise student achievement, and create a college-going culture for *all* students. States that invest in AP and Pre-AP professional development and require all high schools to offer AP courses have made significant progress toward closing the achievement gap and increasing the number of students, particularly underrepresented minority groups, to successfully enroll and graduate from college. Highlights of these successes in other states include:

### **The College Board Florida Partnership**

Through a far-reaching set of initiatives embodied in the College Board Florida Partnership for Minority and Underrepresented Student Achievement, the state of Florida has dramatically expanded AP participation and performance among African American and Hispanic students, such that the percentage of AP students who are Hispanic exceeds the percentage of non-AP students who are Hispanic. The legislation codifying the Partnership in statute has been hailed as exemplary by both the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Southern Regional Education Board. The Partnership has been in existence since 2000. The Partnership's mission is to increase academic achievement, particularly for underrepresented and disadvantaged students.

Key features of the Florida Partnership are:

- AP Program expansion;
- AP and pre-AP professional development for teachers and counselors: Florida has allocated \$3.2 million for AP and pre-AP teacher training;
- Aligned, sequential middle school curricula leading to rigorous college-level courses, like AP;
- PSAT/NMSQT for all students in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade to evaluate student achievement and help students to begin thinking about college; staff training to use the data from the assessment;
- SAT awareness classes; and
- Expanded opportunity grants for community outreach.

### **Florida AP Students Continue to Excel**

The College Board Florida Partnership has been an unqualified success, with strong achievement and dramatic improvements, especially for underrepresented students.

- From 2001 to 2006, Florida high school graduation rates have increased among all ethnic groups. Community college and university graduation rates for minority students are rising.
- Since 1999, the number of AP Exam takers in Florida public schools has increased 199%. More than half (54%) of Florida AP students took and passed AP Exams.
- For five years in a row, Florida has led the nation in the numbers of African American students taking AP Exams and receiving scores of 3 or higher on those exams.
  - From 1999-2007, the numbers of African American exam takers increased by more than 200%.
- Florida is the national leader in Hispanic AP participation and performance, with large increases in the number of AP students, exams and exams with scores of 3 or higher.
  - Since 1999, the number of Hispanic students in Florida public schools that participate in the AP Program increased 271%.
  - Florida has the greatest number of exams scores of 3 or higher received by Hispanic students compared to all other states.

### **Examples of Other Successful State Policies to Increase College Going and Graduation Rates**

#### **Include Advanced Placement courses in Dual Enrollment Options**

- Ohio and Michigan include AP in their definition of dual enrollment options.

#### **Require AP courses to be offered in every high school**

- Indiana requires each high school to provide at least two AP courses to qualified students; each district must provide math and science AP courses.
- Arkansas requires that all districts offer AP courses in each of the four core areas.
- In Minnesota schools are reimbursed for offering new AP courses. Funds are used for books, lab equipment and materials.

#### **Provide funding for AP and Pre-AP Professional Development**

- Ohio has committed \$750,000 for AP and pre-AP professional development.
- Illinois has \$1.5 million in funding for AP and pre-AP professional development.
- Texas reimburses AP teachers for training costs and provides grants for schools based on the number of students who earn passing scores on AP exams.

#### **Use AP Potential to identify prospective AP students**

- Indiana, Georgia, Rhode Island, Maine, and New Mexico pay for students to take the PSAT/NMSQT.

#### **Provide funds for AP exam fees for low-income students**

- In addition to the Federal AP Test Fee Program, eight states contribute state funds to subsidize all or a portion of AP Exam fees.
- Texas uses state funds to pay a portion of AP Exam fees for eligible students.
- California provides State subsidies for AP Exam fees for low-income students.
- Florida, Arkansas, and South Carolina pay for all AP Exams in the state

The College Board is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) membership association whose mission is to connect students to academic success and opportunity. The College Board's programs and services are designed to prepare students for lifelong learning. The College Board is eager to support California's goal to strengthen the linkage between high school preparation and college and workforce readiness. The College Board looks forward to continuing its efforts with California schools and districts to help advance the concept of a culture of high achievement and college-going in all of the state's middle and high schools.

# Multiple Pathways to Success: PREPARING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

## SUBMITTED BY:

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## TOPICS COVERED:

Personnel and leadership, School finance and governance,  
State data systems

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

California's high schools are not succeeding in preparing large numbers of young people for lasting success in further education, careers, and the civic affairs of the state. The evidence is increasingly compelling not only to educators, but also to policymakers and the public. In 2006, California graduated only 67 percent of students who started 9<sup>th</sup> grade four years earlier.<sup>1</sup> In 2005, adults without a high school diploma earned an average of about \$19,000—or approximately \$10,000 less than what graduates earned.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, high school dropouts are more likely to be non-voters, on welfare, and in the criminal justice system.<sup>3</sup> In California, the 2006 dropouts may cost the state more than \$36 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

Dropouts are not the only ones who are struggling. Of the two-thirds of students who graduate from high school, only half enroll directly in college upon high school graduation—and just over half of those then receive a degree within 150 percent of the time estimated to earn it (three years for an associate's degree or six years for a bachelor's degree).<sup>5</sup> Many enrolling in college also find that they are underprepared. Placement test results show that they must complete remedial coursework before starting credit-bearing college-level classes.

To compound matters, many predict that more jobs will *require* some postsecondary education in the future. Employers prefer to hire more highly educated workers and given growth in the number of college-educated candidates worldwide, they are in a good position to insist on this credential. A recent survey of 431 human resources officers reported that, over the next five years, 28 percent of employers intend to hire fewer entry-level workers holding only a high school diploma. Almost 50 percent of employers expect to hire more two-year college graduates, 60 percent to hire more college graduates, and 42 percent to hire more postgraduates.<sup>6</sup> Employers want to hire college graduates because high school graduates often have not yet learned “soft skills,” such as teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, and effective communication.<sup>7</sup> In fact, 70 percent of surveyed employers find the applied skills of new high school graduates to be deficient.<sup>8</sup>

Why are high schools ineffective in keeping students engaged in school and fully preparing them for postsecondary and employment options? Many point to the curriculum, which lacks both rigor and relevance in many high schools. Students need not only rigorous material to stay engaged, but also an understanding of why the material is relevant to the real world. Without these factors, they feel unchallenged and disengaged because they do not understand why they need to learn abstract principles outlined in textbooks. In a survey of 10,000 students ages 16–18 (which includes those currently or formerly enrolled), students confirmed their high school courses' lack of rigor with approximately one-third saying high school has been easy.

Two-thirds said they would work harder if high school offered more demanding and interesting courses.<sup>9</sup> They also stated the need for a curriculum connected to the real world. Approximately 60 percent agreed that taking courses that

matter later in life, receiving practical information on college, and taking courses that count for college credit would make the senior year more meaningful.<sup>10</sup> In a separate survey and interviews with 467 dropouts, 81 percent reported that more opportunities for experience-based, career-related learning would have made the connection between getting an education and getting a good job more transparent to them. The top reason they identified for dropping out was that classes were not interesting.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, it is time for a change. A new approach for improving high schools and corresponding policy changes to support it are needed.

## DISCUSSION OF POLICY ISSUES, OPTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Across the state, there is growing agreement that the development and expansion of “multiple pathways” is a promising strategy for improving student achievement in high schools. A “pathway” is a multi-year program of academic and technical study organized around a broad industry theme that prepares high school students for a full range of postsecondary options. “Multiple pathways” give students access to a variety of industry-themed programs of study in such fields as business and finance, biomedical and health science, building and environmental design, engineering, and arts, media, and entertainment, to name just a few. These pathways share four key components:

1. **Rigorous academic core:** all students take the academic courses meeting entrance requirements for four-year universities in California and other states, as well as reducing the need for remediation in community colleges, apprenticeship programs, and other postsecondary options. These academic courses focus on an industry sector to show students the relevance of what they are learning and integrate academic lessons with technical courses to help students understand how abstract concepts and real-world scenarios are related.
2. **Technical core:** all students take a cluster or sequence of technical courses focused on the same industry sector as their academic courses. Lessons incorporate academic principles to show students how concepts are applied.
3. **Work-based learning:** students participate in learning activities outside the classroom that connect coursework to real-world applications. Students might start with job shadowing and mentoring in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and progress to an internship or a school-based enterprise in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
4. **Support services:** students have access to academic support services that help them succeed in a demanding program of study, as well as career counseling services that help them map out how to meet self-defined secondary and postsecondary goals.

Multiple pathways can take many different forms, such as career academies, themed small schools, and others. Whatever the particular features of each pathway, however, they all share some central guiding principles.

1. By design, **pathways prepare students for both postsecondary education *and* careers**, not just one or the other. If there ever was a time when high schools could be content to prepare some students just for college and others just for work, that day is past. The probability of making a living wage in today’s economy (let alone the economy of tomorrow) without some form of postsecondary education is low and continuing to diminish. Increasingly, career success depends on postsecondary education and completion of a formal credential—certificate, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, or higher.
2. **Pathways integrate challenging academics with demanding career and technical curriculum** to help students better understand how academic concepts apply in the real world. Pathways alter *how* core academic subjects are taught; they do not lower expectations about *what* is taught. Pathways expect students to achieve to high levels in mathematics, science, English, social studies, and foreign language, and they promote mastery



through the power of real-world application to authentic problems and situations that are part of the modern workplace.

3. **Pathways prepare students for the full range of postsecondary opportunities**—two- and four-year college, apprenticeship, the military, and formal employment training. The broad industry focus of each pathway provides a framework that can appeal to any student, regardless of postsecondary aspirations or prior academic achievement. Pathways, well designed and implemented, eliminate sorting and tracking high school students in ways that limit options after high school.
4. **Pathways produce** high levels of academic and technical achievement, high school completion, postsecondary transition, and attainment of a formal postsecondary credential. They also contribute—in ways that most conventional academic and CTE curriculum do not—to students' becoming more proficient in critical thinking, problem solving, media and information literacy, and collaboration. Finally, pathways contribute directly to higher earnings immediately after high school by giving students a leg up in the labor market while they pursue postsecondary education.

Currently, comprehensive pathways are available to only about five percent of California high school students through various school and program designs. Changes to state policy can help expand this approach to more schools so that more students can gain access to it. While policy changes in curriculum and instruction, student support services, and postsecondary articulation and other areas would facilitate implementation of this approach, this paper focuses on policies related to personnel and leadership, school finance and governance, and state data systems.

### Personnel and Leadership

Building a cadre of teachers who understand the benefits of integrating academic and technical curriculum and have mastered the instructional approaches needed to do so is critical to the implementation of a multiple pathways approach. While technical teachers often have more experience in project-based learning, they often lack expertise in identifying, reinforcing, and supplementing key academic concepts in particular disciplines. Academic teachers, while proficient in a particular discipline, often have limited knowledge of technical fields and in helping students apply academic content to practical industry problems. And both academic and technical teachers have little training in how to integrate academics and technical content. Teacher preparation programs, and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) standards that regulate them, need to be modified to promote better preparation of teachers, academic and technical, who can successfully deliver pathways that integrate challenging academic content with demanding technical knowledge and skill.

Both new and veteran teachers—through teacher preparation and professional development programs, respectively—should receive guidance in teaching in a multiple pathways program. Elements might include curriculum integration, joint planning, project- or problem-based learning, work-based learning, authentic assessment, and other essential aspects of instructional practice directly related to effective delivery of pathway programs. Team teaching also can help bridge the gap between the training and experiences of academic and technical teachers. For example, automotive technology and physics teachers could team teach to help students understand the physics embedded in the technology of the modern automobile including propulsion systems, fuel efficiency, deceleration and braking, ergonomics, safety, and environmental protection.

In addition to teachers, pathways make additional demands of school guidance counselors. Specifically, they need to be able (and have time) to guide students in exploring career options and mapping the education, training, and work-related experiences that will help them achieve their career aspirations and goals.

Finally, school principals, superintendents, and state leaders must be able to articulate the vision of multiple pathways and manage the development and continuous improvement of a system of pathway options for California high school students.

### ***Policy Recommendations:***

- Invest in professional development that helps academic and career and technical teachers share expertise to develop integrated curriculum and improved instructional approaches.
- Evaluate the need to, and, as appropriate, modify teacher preparation programs to incorporate appropriate strategies for integrating academic and technical curriculum, incorporating project- and problem-based learning, and connecting classroom instruction to structured work-based learning opportunities.
- Invest in increasing the supply of counselors, particularly in high-poverty schools, and, through training, increase the capacity of counselors to help students explore the full range of postsecondary and career options with an eye toward long-term career planning.
- Provide administrators with professional development on managing change, securing resources, engaging industry and community partners, using flexible scheduling options, understanding legal responsibilities related to work-based learning, recruiting uniquely qualified teachers, and understanding and advocating for teacher and counselor professional development needs.

### **Finance and Governance**

For nearly 100 years, U.S. educational policy and funding have separated vocational (now career and technical) education from mainstream education policies and funding. In California, this separation has led to dual, and often dueling, systems of education, with some advocating for career and technical education (CTE) while others lobby exclusively for college preparatory curriculum. This division extends throughout the system—from teacher credential requirements, standards, facilities, funding, data collection and reporting, and program administration. Ultimately, it is a counter-productive separation, as students need these systems to work together to optimize resources and opportunities that will prepare them for college and career, both objectives and not just one or the other.

Some educators have led efforts to bridge the gap between CTE and college preparatory emphases—overcoming regulatory barriers, using funds creatively, tapping into community resources, seeking outside funding, requesting state waivers, and exercising other means to ensure students gain access to pathways. To offer pathways to an increasing number of high school students, some finance and governance structures need modification.

### ***Policy Recommendations:***

#### **FINANCE**

- Allocate funds based on the cost of implementing pathway programs, considering that many advanced technical courses require more funding for reduced class size, equipment, and special facilities.
- Develop policies promoting more flexible and shared use of categorical funds for those adopting multiple pathways to allow schools and districts to address programmatic needs (e.g., flexible scheduling, work-based learning opportunities, supplemental support services, etc.).
- Enable more flexible and shared use of facilities (those in school districts, ROPs, colleges, and community and industry) to maximize use of facilities funding.

## GOVERNANCE

- Designate one or more state-level leaders to spearhead the multiple pathways approach and provide the necessary resources to do so.
- Align state policies affecting the implementation and outcomes of multiple pathways, such that secondary and postsecondary as well as academic and technical programs reinforce each other's work in the adoption of multiple pathways and that they are likewise aligned with industry and business' needs.

### State Education Data Systems

To better assess the effectiveness of high school programs in preparing students for *both* postsecondary education and employment, policy makers need appropriate indicators and data systems to collect the appropriate data. The indicators should be able to track students from high school to further education, training options, and employment. Specific indicators might include high school graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment (including public and private two- and four-year colleges, apprenticeship programs, military, and formal employment training), postsecondary remediation rates, postsecondary persistence and completion rates, certificates and degrees earned, employment rates, earnings, and other factors.

#### *Policy Recommendations:*

- Determine which measures the state will use as success indicators for high schools generally and multiple pathways in particular.
- Modify current data systems to effectively monitor these outcomes; fund further data system development to ensure appropriate information can be monitored.
- Determine which indicators the state should incorporate into state accountability systems and when changes should take effect.

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH / EVIDENCE SUPPORTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Studies examining multiple pathways or separate elements of the approach (such as context-based learning, an integrated curriculum, or programs offering a blend of academic and technical courses) have found increased achievement, graduation rates, and wages for participants. Following are a few examples:

**An integrated academic and technical curriculum may lead to higher test scores if implemented well.** In a particularly rigorous and prominent study, CTE teachers were paired with math teachers who identified the mathematical content embedded in the CTE teachers' subjects—agriculture, auto technology, business and marketing, health, and information technology—and then developed lesson plans to teach the math within the occupational context. The 57 CTE teachers who helped develop the math-enhanced lessons were randomly assigned to classrooms and delivered the curriculum for one year for about 10 percent of class time; 74 CTE teachers not participating in such development taught other classrooms with traditional instruction. The almost 3,000 students participating were given math pre-tests and were tested again a year later. Students taught the curriculum developed by the integrated teacher teams significantly outscored the control group on two tests of math ability.<sup>12</sup>

**Integrated curriculum combined with work-based learning and career guidance leads to higher wages after high school.** An MDRC study, employing experimental design and random assignment, examined the outcomes of 1,700 students enrolled in career academies, which offer the multiple pathways approach, serving predominantly minority students. The study showed that five years after graduation from high school, compared with similar students, career academy graduates were earning more. While this was true for both males and females, it was statistically significant for academy males—who earned 18 percent or \$10,000 more over the four-year period after high school.<sup>13</sup>

**Students may be more likely to complete the a-g requirements needed for eligibility to the UC and CSU systems when participating in multiple pathways.** A ConnectEd study of 33,000 California Partnership Academy students found that 50 percent of graduating seniors had completed the a-g requirements compared with only 35 percent of graduates statewide. Graduation rates were also better with 96% of academy seniors graduating while only 87 percent did so statewide.<sup>14</sup> (Data was unavailable for the study to calculate graduation rates from entry in 9<sup>th</sup> grade to graduation.) While it is possible that selection effects—that students enrolled in the academies were more motivated or better prepared to begin with—account for some of the outcome, it seems unlikely that it could explain such a large difference.

**Even without an integrated curriculum, students simply taking both academic and technical courses may have lower dropout rates and better achievement gains than comparison groups of students.** A study of California's Regional Occupational Centers and Programs, the state's largest CTE program which serves high school students and adults, found in examining data on more than 4,000 students that those in the ROCPs improved their grade point averages more than comparison students not enrolled. They were as likely to enroll in postsecondary education and to earn higher wages. Significantly, these students were lower achieving and of lower socioeconomic status than the comparison group.<sup>15</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

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**Targeted Reform and Revenue to Improve Student Achievement**

A Policy Brief Prepared for  
*Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*

Submitted by  
Dr. Kathleen Kinley, President

October 19, 2007

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## **Problem Statement**

California schools lack the core resources to raise student achievement for all students to the levels expected and desirable based on the state's Academic Content Standards. Further, the prescriptive and unpredictable manner in which resources are currently allocated to districts prevents local communities from making decisions about educational programs and support services that will best meet the unique needs of the students they are serving. In order to make those effective policy and instructional decisions, greater support is also needed in the collection and analysis of data at all levels of the education system – from the classroom to the state.

The extent to which California schools are underfunded has been well documented. California ranks 44<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states in per pupil spending. This means that California schools have 25 percent fewer personnel available to serve students than the national average. California is ranked 47<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states for its pupil/teacher ratio. Compared to the national average, California has 37 percent fewer counselors and 26 percent fewer teachers. And, the average school in the nation has 60 percent more school site administrators per pupil than in California. With unprecedented expectations for all students, this lack of resources limits the education system's ability to keep its promise to students. As examples, school districts need resources to increase instructional time, provide students the high quality teachers they need, provide counseling and support services for students, and provide ongoing and effective professional development at all levels of the school system. Districts are stymied, however, by the limitation of funds available and by the restrictions placed on existing funds.

The "Getting Down to Facts" research commissioned by the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice at Stanford University concluded that California has "excessive regulation...[that] places substantial restrictions on schools' and districts' use of resources, which impose meaningful compliance costs and make it difficult for local actors to respond to incentives embedded in the accountability system." The research further concludes that "[i]nstead of encouraging flexibility and innovation at the local level, many of California's state policies constrain local actors into implementing very similar policies regardless of what may be their most pressing local needs. Moreover, the constraints in California have only increased over time."

Currently, data gaps persist in critical areas, including the inability to track student performance over time; link student performance to specific programs, instructional materials or teacher professional development; and determine how resources are allocated to schools. Without solid data available to all levels of the system, it will be difficult to ensure that policy and practice are targeted to increase student achievement. The state's continual failure to invest in a meaningful data system will have significant consequences in moving student achievement for all students forward.

## **Policy Issues, Options and Recommendations**

### **1. Increase resources for public education**

California's charge to ensure all students are successful in a rigorous standards-based curriculum that will prepare them for entry into the state's California State University and University of California systems sets a goal the scope of which has never been attempted in this nation. References to the Golden Days of public education belie the fact that in those "Golden Days," ethnic and language minority students as well

as students in poverty often were not served. A brief review of U.S. Census Data illustrates the point. In 1940, nationally, only 7.7 percent of African Americans completed high school; by 2006, 81 percent had completed high school. For all races, in 1940, 74 percent of the population age 25 or older failed to finish four years of high school. By 1981, only 25 percent had not completed four years of high school. In 2005, the data had again improved. In California, only 20 percent of the population had not received a high school diploma. And while this data reflects a dramatic improvement over the past 65 years, clearly much more needs to be done and progress needs to be made more rapidly than it has over the past 65 years.

In order to be successful, schools must be equipped with the resources to address all of the unique learning needs of their student populations. Excellent teaching, strong leadership and adequate time are all critical elements to improving student achievement. But they do not come without a price. This means that professional development, effective recruitment and retention incentives, and professional accountability, must all be considered and funded. Further, students must be given adequate time to master rigorous content. Research clearly indicates that either a longer school day or school year can have significant impacts on student learning. However, this additional time does not come without a price. According to data collected by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), an additional day for California's schools would cost almost \$300 million dollars. Therefore, increasing from a 180 day calendar to a 200 day calendar could cost \$6 billion. However, the investment is critical. In the ECS's Prisoners of Time report, reissued in 2005, it concluded "Our time-bound mentality has fooled us all into believing that schools can educate all of the people all of the time in a school year of 180 six-hour days. The consequence of our self-deceptions has been to ask the impossible of our students. We expect them to learn as much as their counterparts abroad in only half the time."

California must also be able to drive its own accountability system. Federal Title I dollars account for roughly \$3 billion in aid to California public schools – slightly more than 5 percent of the overall education dollars in California. However, because of the requirements conditioned upon receipt of those funds, efforts for California to drive its own priorities and accountability system have been quashed. As the state examines its revenue needs, it should also take into account the ability of California to chart its own destiny. With the current federal constraints, all school districts will be subject to state control within the decade, irrespective of their improvement.

To address the needs of the state's students, funding for California's schools must be increased by 40 percent. This increase was found to be necessary to achieve the state's target on the Academic Performance Index based on a professional judgment model commissioned by the "Getting Down to Facts" research. It is important to note that when California voters passed Proposition 98 in 1988, the initiative stipulated that the goal for school funding was to place California in the top 10 in the nation, at which time, Proposition 98 would cease to be operative. Today, California would need a 38 percent increase to be in the top 10 in the nation – right on target with the empirical data found in the "Getting Down to Facts" work. Ironically, in the 1960s, California was in the top 10 in the nation and expectations were not as high as they are today, with many students – special education, students in poverty and ethnic minorities – often falling through the cracks. To achieve that goal today, all tax revenue options must be explored, including local taxing authority, in order to ensure the will of the people is met.

## **2. Allocate dollars to school districts with limited restrictions and maximum predictability**

California is on the verge of implementing a pure standards-based accountability system. The state has developed rigorous academic content standards in all core subjects and has aligned an assessment system with four of those core subjects: English/language Arts, Math, History/Social science and Science. It has, through the Academic Performance Index (API), a way to measure school and district progress in

helping students achieve the academic content standards. Finally, it has developed a system of interventions, first through the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program and now through the High Priority Schools Grant Program, for schools that are not making targets on the API. However, where California has fallen terribly short in a standards-based accountability system is that the state continues to prescribe not only expected outcomes but also processes for achieving those outcomes with funding tied to those prescribed processes. If the processes that the state has prescribed are flawed or inappropriate for the local circumstance, local schools and districts are still held accountable for the results. This is an untenable situation.

The manner in which resources are allocated to school districts makes it difficult, if not impossible, for local districts to tailor programs to meet the needs of their students. The state maintains nearly 100 separate categorical programs, some targeting specific student needs. Each of these categorical programs comes with its own set of rules, regulations and restrictions that create administrative burdens and distractions in districts. Additionally, many of those categorical programs are not funded at a level to cover the cost of the program. Class size reduction is a good example. Many districts have had to eliminate or reduce their class size reduction programs because the state funding has been too low to avoid significant encroachment on district general funds. Separate and apart from categorical programs, but equally problematic, are the significant unfunded mandates imposed on districts.

In addition to the aforementioned, the manner in which schools are funded leads to a lack of transparency and gives the public the sense that the current system is incoherent and inequitable. Funding is also unpredictable from year to year – with districts unable to plan for the short term or the long term. There must be a long term commitment to consistent and stable funding from year to year.

It is appropriate and necessary for the state to provide additional support for students with specific needs, e.g., English learners, special education students, students in poverty, etc. However, in providing those additional resources, the state needs to provide maximum flexibility in how those resources can be utilized to meet student needs. Then the state can hold districts accountable for results. It is critical that these resources be sent to school districts for their distribution to school sites. This will ensure that programs can be implemented in the most effective and efficient manner possible. For instance, a district may have a school with only a handful of English learners and another school that is overwhelmingly English learner (EL). In order to ensure the same level of service and quality of program for the EL students at both of those sites, it will be necessary for the school with the smaller number of EL students to have a greater site allocation than their few numbers would generate. In short, if there are only two EL students at that site, they alone would not generate enough revenue to provide any depth of service or support to meet their needs. Districts must be able to make those types of resource determinations amongst their schools. What is critical is that those allocations be transparent so that local districts are held accountable by their communities for ensuring that students who are in need of additional support are, in fact, receiving that support.

The Legislature is also likely to continue providing resources in a targeted manner for specific programs as well, e.g., professional development, instructional materials, etc. It is critical, however, that the encumbrances on how to spend the dollars within those categories are lifted. The majority of states in the nation allow local districts to adopt instructional materials. In California, with clearly articulated state standards, this flexibility must also be provided to its districts. Districts know best which types of pedagogical strategies will work with their student population and be most effectively delivered by their teachers. The State Board of Education's monopoly of K-8 instructional materials has forced a pedagogical strategy on all schools and students that may not always be appropriate.



As long as there is agreement about expectations, then flexibility should and must be provided. In defining those expectations and intervention or support strategies, it is critical to keep in mind the work of Richard Elmore and Elizabeth City: “[M]ost of the learning that schools do occurs during the periods of flat performance, *not* during periods when performance is visibly improving. Periods of visible improvements in performance usually occur as a consequence of earlier investments in knowledge and school....As schools gain experience with cycles of improvement and stasis (or decline), they recognize that the process of school improvement is the process of uncovering and solving progressively more difficult and challenging problems of student learning, which in turn demand new learning from adults.”

### **3. Empower local communities, through effective local school boards, to create instructional programs to meet the unique needs of their communities**

School boards provide the critical link between the community and its values and expectations for students and the educational leadership of the district. Too often, our education system undervalues the importance of effective local board governance in improving and sustaining high levels of student achievement. The state must create a culture that encourages and supports local board members in receiving ongoing education in their governance role. A multi-year study called the Lighthouse Inquiry, initiated in 1998 and commissioned by the Iowa School Boards Foundation, has found that there are effective governance principles that have had a meaningful impact on improved student achievement. School boards must be supported in their efforts to engage in training that will support effective governance in their districts. Any professional development dollars that are provided to districts must provide flexibility for governance teams to obtain essential professional development in their role and responsibilities.

The Lighthouse Inquiry has identified seven unique conditions of highly effective boards. In summary, they those board can: 1) give specific examples of how district initiatives resulted in success; 2) describe structures in place to support connections and communication within the district and can describe evidence of regularly learning together as a board; 3) give specific examples of how staff showed commitment to goals of the district; 4) describe the link between teacher training and board/district goals for students; 5) receive information from many sources and used data to determine student needs as the focus for decision-making; 6) connect with the community; and, 7) describe what is happening in the classrooms with instruction.

The California School Boards Association has long recognized that effective governance is integral to ensuring alignment of policy and practice to enhance student learning. The conditions identified by the Lighthouse Inquiry have been integrated into governance training provided by the California School Boards Association. These trainings focus on the board’s core five responsibilities: 1) set the direction for the district, 2) establish the structure, 3) provide support, 4) hold the system accountable, and 5) engage with and lead the community. While the need for teacher and administrator training has been well recognized, there must be a similar commitment to supporting boards in this work as well.

### **4. Invest in and implement the data system the state needs**

The Getting Down to Facts report makes explicit the need for investment in a statewide data system. The only barrier to implementing such a system is political will on the part of state leadership. The state’s data system must be comprehensive enough to improve teaching and learning in the classroom, as well as local and state policy and resource allocations. It will be critical not only to capture the linkages between the programs provided to students and their impact on student achievement, but also to inform policymakers about the progress of students as they move beyond high school. Such linkages to higher education and employment can help K-12 revise and strengthen its support for students as part of an ongoing commitment to continuous learning and improvement. A comprehensive data system should

also provide direction to institutions of higher education about the quality of their teacher development programs.

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**Submitted By:** Eric Premack, Co-Director  
**Topics Addressed:** finance, governance, personnel, data

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## Is California Ready for Real Reform? *Lessons Learned from the Chartered Schools Sector*

Since 1993, California has experienced the emergence of a small but interesting policy experiment in the form of chartered schools. While the scope of California's chartered schools sector remains modest, California's chartered schools sector has documented that it is possible to implement reforms to address key challenges identified in the *Getting Down to Facts* research. California's chartered schools' experience to date indicates that some such strategies may pay substantial dividends with relatively little risk. Experience also shows, however, that California's willingness to actually implement and sustain such reforms is extremely limited and erodes sharply over time—as has that of the federal government.

The result is very limited instructional innovation within the chartered schools sector—and the traditional public schools. This comes at a time when we desperately need to consider and employ radically different instructional strategies and technology to engage and motivate students. Those who advocate for charter-like changes within the non-charter public schools sector should anticipate these challenges and explore “legislature-proof” and “bureaucrat proof” policy solutions—and should be prepared to vigorously defend them over the long term. Such changes should be focused on engaging and motivating students rather than the failed strategies of manipulation, punishment, and control. Revising and reauthorizing California's chartered schools statutes may provide a most promising vehicle to both address the powerful forces aligned against change as well as provide a vehicle for implementing it.

### Are We There Yet?

After more than a decade of substantial reform efforts, California's public schools, both charter and non-charter, have little in the way of documented progress to show.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the evidence regarding the effectiveness of California's efforts to establish academic content standards and link them to a high-stakes assessment and intervention system is

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<sup>1</sup> Crane, E., Edwards, B., et. al., *California's Charter Schools: Measuring Their Performance*, EdSource, 2006, p. 22, and Zimmer, Ron, et. al., *Charter School Operations and Performance: Evidence From California*, RAND Corporation, 2003, p. xxii.

sobering. As the *Getting Down to Facts* summary report notes, despite a decade of intensive efforts to establish state standards and align instruction with them, “California continues to lag behind other states in achievement scores. The problem is substantial.”<sup>2</sup> To make matters worse, California cannot, according to the report, blame its poor performance on its traditionally low-performing demographics. “Some suggest that California’s position simply reflects the large minority populations in the state, but the facts on achievement belie this. California schools do not do well for any group . . .”

### **Charters Demonstrate Major Reforms Are Possible**

In response to the limited progress identified above, the *Getting Down to Facts* researchers identify key finance and governance problems in need of fixing, in particular targeting the following:

- The highly prescriptive finance and governance system;
- Ineffective teacher education and professional development requirements;
- Complex and irrational resource allocation systems; and,
- The lack of information needed to inform parents, administrators, and policy makers.

As outlined below, California’s chartered schools sector has demonstrated that it is possible to enact policies that directly implement the sorts of changes needed to address three of these four challenges.

#### ***Simple, Rational School Finance Systems***

California’s charter schools are funded through a system of grants that is relatively simple and transparent. Charter schools receive the vast majority of their funding through a two-part grant system. First, the General-Purpose grant provides schools with an amount of funding per unit of average daily attendance (ADA) that is equal to statewide average funding rates provided to school districts. Where every school district in California is funded at a unique and unequal level, all charter schools receive the same rate of general-purpose funding. The level of funding does vary by grade level, based on the statewide average variation in general-purpose funding for elementary, unified (K-12), and high school districts.

Second, charter schools receive a flat, per-ADA Charter Categorical Block Grant, currently pegged at \$500 per ADA, in lieu of funding from a list of dozens of state-funded categorical funding programs. In addition, the Categorical Block Grant is augmented by so-called “In Lieu Economic Impact Aid” funding based on the numbers of economically disadvantaged and English learner students attending the school. Unlike

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<sup>2</sup> Loeb, Susanna et. al., “Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California,” Stanford University, March 2007, page 1.

traditional categorical funding programs, the categorical block grant funds come with “no strings attached” and may be used for any purpose in furtherance of the school’s mission.

This two-part general purpose and categorical block grant system has proven simple and utterly transparent. Maintaining this simplicity and transparency has proven an ongoing challenge. Achieving equitable funding is also a challenge.

Though the original intent of the charter laws was to block grant all categorical funds and eliminate all red tape, chartered schools, like their district counterparts, fight an ongoing battle against “regulatory creep.” The laws that established the original charter funding system were vague and proved vulnerable to resistance by bureaucratic staff charged with administering them. The laws were later and partially clarified, but continue to face an ongoing challenge to whittle-down the block grant.

As a result, charter schools must separately apply for and comply with the restrictions that govern a growing list of state categorical funding programs that are outside of the block grant system. These programs include the large K-3 Class Size Reduction program, secondary school counseling, Special Education, and others. Charter schools may also separately apply for federal funding (e.g., Title I, etc.), but here too must wade through the thicket of paperwork and compliance requirements if they accept the funds. In many cases, charter schools opt not to apply for federal funds because the funds are not worth the associated costs and risks.

### ***Governance Reform with Real Local Control***

California’s charter school laws also provide charter schools with considerable leeway to design and operate their governance systems and practices. Though the original charter laws were vague, they have been partially clarified to explicitly authorize chartered schools to form as or be operated by nonprofit corporations. In practice, the most chartered schools are incorporated and enjoy a high degree of legal and institutional autonomy.

Each charter school’s governing structure is unique and can be modified to suit the evolving needs of the school. Some are started and governed by larger, pre-existing nonprofit community or social service organizations. Others are managed by large-scale education management organizations (EMOs) that attempt to achieve economies of scale. Most are free-standing nonprofit corporations governed by boards made up of stakeholders (e.g., teachers and parents) and community members.

Here too, charter schools are suffering from efforts to impose restrictive laws that would end many innovative governing practices. Charter schools have, however, demonstrated that effective and responsive governing arrangements are possible and it is not essential to rely on the traditional locally-elected school board model to govern public schools.

### ***Teacher and Professional Development Flexibility***

Under California's original charter law, chartered schools were largely free to establish their own staff qualifications and were exempt from all teacher credentialing laws. This flexibility is now considerably eroded. Starting in 1998, state laws were amended to impose a teacher credentialing requirement that included vaguely-worded provision to provide a degree of flexibility. These restrictive amendments were imposed despite the apparent absence of any credible concerns regarding the competence of charter school staff—and despite the fact that many chartered schools were able to hire non-traditional yet high-quality staff. Subsequently, federal laws have further eroded the flexibility by imposing detailed and so-called “highly qualified” teacher requirements.

Though charter schools do enjoy a modest degree of flexibility with respect to teaching credentials in non-core and non-college preparatory classes, and a high degree with respect to administrative credentials, the original broad staffing flexibility has been decimated. The result is that chartered schools must now limit the bulk of their teacher hiring to those who have undergone traditional teacher preparation programs and possess credentials. Many charter schools have lost valuable and highly-qualified staff and must now work much harder to recruit capable staff from the limited pool of formally trained and credentialed staff.

Charter schools have lost similar flexibility with respect to a broad range of key operational and instructional matters, including new restrictions on the use of instructional time, limits on the use of technology and instruction outside of traditional classroom settings, provision of special education and related services, facilities, etc.

### **Should We Care About Flexibility and Autonomy?**

As noted above, it is increasingly clear that conventional standards- and assessment-based reform strategies have largely failed—or have at best produced modest gains. If what is desired is a major leap forward in terms of student achievement, instructional practices must be entirely re-designed with the express intent of *motivating and engaging* students and teachers. This is a sharp contrast to current strategies that seek to control and manipulate them.

Though rarely the subject of formal research, the need for new strategies for motivating and engaging students should be abundantly apparent to even the most casual observer of how children now relate to the world around them, how they gather information, and how they gain knowledge and understanding. If we hope to engage students, our instructional practices must both borrow from and compete with X-Boxes, Gameboys, iPods, and high-definition flat-panel displays.

Most of our current, mainstream instructional strategies instead rely on stultifying textbooks that are increasingly designed to “teach to the test rather” than inspire or engage. The absurd breadth of the state's adopted academic content standards simultaneously demands that most schools use instructional methods that “cover” the required content without regard to depth or understanding.

If California is serious about meeting this challenge, it will need to be willing to authorize and implement instructional practices that are radically different from ones currently in use. Current state law, however, buries such practices in layers of red tape and paperwork, or bans them outright.

### **Radical Reforms to Achieve Real Results**

Authorizing and supporting radical instructional improvement is likely to require the following sorts of changes:

- **Re-writing state academic content standards from the ground-up**, focusing them narrowly on those knowledge and skills that are absolutely essential and discarding the many that are merely desirable and/or valued by narrow-minded content experts.
- **Creating a new and much more sophisticated state assessment system** aligned with the re-focused standards. The system should be designed to provide useful diagnostic information to schools as well as summative academic performance data. It should also be aligned with a reliable system for tracking individual student performance data over time. The assessment system should also be adaptable to permit schools to assess locally-identified instructional priorities in alignment with individual schools' missions.
- **Sunset the vast majority of laws in the Education Code**, including but not limited to eliminating laws restricting school district governance, instructional time, staff qualifications and credentials, staff tenure and compensation, required courses of study, statewide textbook adoptions, and the like.
- **Implement the charter school funding system statewide**. The system should be extended to govern virtually all funds (including facilities-related funds) on a per-student block grant basis and base any variance in funding solely on student need rather than historical funding rates or other factors not related to need.
- **Erase school districts' boundaries and charter them to operate as regional or statewide public education authorities**. School districts should be required to divest themselves of ownership of physical facilities, spin the facilities assets off onto newly-created local or regional education facility authorities, and be authorized to offer educational services statewide. These reformulated public education authorities would compete with one-another for student enrollment and could be closed or de-authorized for failure to perform at acceptable levels.
- **Advocate for similar reforms of restrictive and burdensome federal laws**. California education reform advocates should press their large congressional delegation to implement major changes in federal law to align with the changes outlined above, including block-granting of federal funds, elimination of burdensome

teacher qualification requirements and the like. If such changes are not enacted soon, California's State Board should carefully consider declining federal funding.

### **Radical Reform Requires Radical Practitioners**

Radical reforms such as those outlined above are difficult to achieve in California's current legislative climate. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that these changes would actually lead to instructional innovation. As Clayton Christensen documents in his book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, large scale institutions generally shun radical change. Such "disruptive technologies, writes Christensen, typically come from upstart organizations that cut into the dominant organizations' market share and later displace them.

To achieve strong and rapid implementation of innovative instructional practices, California needs a vital chartered schools sector. It should consider re-authorizing and revitalizing its landmark charter school law. First, California should amend its charter laws in alignment with the concepts suggested in the prior section. Such changes would align California's charter laws more closely with the original chartered school concept. Second, California should authorize the creation (chartering) of new, special-purpose charter school authorizing and oversight agencies that would specialize solely in the granting of charters and monitoring their performance. California has learned the hard way that most school districts and county offices of education lack the capacity to serve as charter-granting agencies.<sup>3</sup> Chartering new agencies to do so is one way to build this vital capacity and address inevitable problems that arise when implementing radical change.

The reforms outlined in the prior section are quite radical and perhaps politically unpalatable. If so, such reforms could be implemented in a more focused and palatable fashion exclusively within the chartered schools sector. Because the California legislature, governors, and bureaucracies have a strong propensity to re-regulate, drafters of reform legislation may need to pursue amendments to the California Constitution that curtail the legislature's plenary authority over school districts.

Pursuing radical changes such as those outlined above could set the stage for implementation of engaging and motivating instructional practices that are as varied as the students who need them and meet their widely varying needs and interests. They might also set the stage to ensure that California has a work force that is motivated and engaged to continue learning well beyond the confines of the traditional instructional day and classroom and into the community and adulthood.

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<sup>3</sup> Zimmer et. al., p. 78.



***Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening***  
**Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007, in Sacramento**

**Submitted by:**  
The California Science Education Initiative

**Policy Recommendation on School Governance:**

**Improving student outcomes in science classrooms through definition of minimum required levels of instructional equipment and materials.**

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**Problem Statement:** While all subjects benefit from hands on activities, science is unique in the core academic subject areas in the extent to which it involves doing hands-on labs and projects involving specialized tools and equipment. A significant body of research has shown that regular hands-on activities in science which are linked to the academic course work are a necessary part of successful science programs<sup>1</sup>. Science laboratory activities stimulate student interest in the field and provide vital skills for future success in our increasingly technology based work environment. Thus any definition of instructional materials for science classrooms which fails to address minimum levels of equipment/materials is incomplete. Group size has been shown to be an important factor in student laboratory achievement and must be addressed in defining minimum acceptable levels of supply<sup>2</sup>. Class sizes are a major factor in safety and achievement with the NSTA recommending maximum class sizes of 24 for laboratory science.

Despite the Williams Settlement<sup>3</sup> significant equity issues remain in California's science classrooms. In the settlement no minimum level of laboratory experience, equipment or materials is established. While every student has been guaranteed a textbook for at home use, there is no guarantee that they will work with modern science equipment or in fact any laboratory equipment at all. It is left to the individual school district to provide certification that there are sufficient instructional materials to teach laboratory science. The state has not provided guidance as to what equipment or materials should be used to provide the hands-on learning experiences that have been shown to be a vital part of science education. Thus a district can "certify" that they are providing sufficient science instructional materials when in fact their students are provided with a clearly inferior science education. Students receiving an inferior science education are less likely to believe they can succeed in rigorous science and engineering programs that lead to high paying careers.

**Policy Issues and Recommendations:** Is lack of science materials a real problem? Consider two public high schools within 15 miles of our state capital. These schools are emblematic of the stark differences which led to the original decision in the Williams case. Data from the case indicated up to 49% of public school science teachers reported having inadequate equipment and materials to teach standards-based classes<sup>4</sup>.

The first school is less than 10 years old. At this school in a suburban area students work in state-of-the-art science classrooms. Students perform labs using modern equipment of the same type as is used in industry and university labs. Students have sufficient materials and equipment that they work in groups of two. Labs are performed on a weekly basis and tied directly to the state framework for the topic areas. The science department budget at this school is more than \$10/student/year.

The second school is on a campus 40 years old. Due to student population growth and shifts in program emphasis, many science students attend classrooms used in the past for home economics or standard academic classes. These classrooms lack lab benches, sinks and other materials normally found in science classrooms. The science equipment that does exist in these classrooms is of various ages and in poor condition. Students often must perform “paper” labs (due to equipment/material shortages) that posit a set of conditions and ask them to predict the outcome of an experiment they are unable to perform. When the students are able to do actual labs they are forced to work in groups of 4-6. This school had a science department budget of \$0/student last year.

Students at the first school are being introduced to science as it is practiced both in industry and at college. Students from this school are likely to find science interesting and enter university science and engineering programs fully prepared to be successful. Students graduating from the second school have received a substandard education in science. The second group of students is less likely to be prepared for, or even elect to enter a program in science or engineering at the university level.

Under the Williams settlement both school boards have certified that “students in science classes have laboratory equipment available”<sup>5</sup>. Clearly there are flaws in our system if these two circumstances are considered equal. In reviewing the California Department of Education and State Board of Education definitions of instructional materials it becomes clear that there is no guidance provided on how to offer labs or what equipment/materials should be available to the students. The Williams review forms provided to county offices by CDE to use in the classroom review carry the statement, “...science laboratory equipment is made available to all students enrolled in these 9-12 science courses.”<sup>6</sup>. On the basis of the wording in the CDE-suggested board certification and the Instructional Materials Survey document, a single microscope in a classroom would be grounds for acceptable compliance results!

Beyond providing some minimal level of materials there is a profound need to train teachers of science on the incorporation of hands-on activities into the classroom. Numerous researchers have performed studies on the role of teacher preparation on student achievement in science which support the need to provide meaningful training specifically addressing laboratory activities<sup>7</sup>. Studies have shown that the least experienced teachers are most likely to be located

at those schools with student performance deficits<sup>8</sup>. There is a need to link the application of resources for equipment/materials to the training in how to use the tools in boosting student achievement. Further, the lack of experience in teaching hands-on science speaks directly to the need to provide guidance on equipment/materials needed and their use.

### **Policy Proposals**

- 1) Create minimum acceptable instructional equipment/materials lists. These recommendations should be based on the experience of California's science classroom teachers and must be subject specific. An independent professional organization such as the CSTA might be well positioned to put study teams of science teachers together to accomplish this. Any recommendation should provide for the use of modern technologies and meet best practices guidelines from science education organizations<sup>10</sup>.
- 2) Survey all science classrooms in the state to establish compliance with minimum levels established for the teaching of hands-on science. The survey instrument must be detailed enough to quantify the type and number of student-use items. A good model for this survey would be the CTAP instrument which most teachers in California answer on a yearly basis<sup>11</sup>.
- 3) Provide meaningful professional development to science teachers<sup>9</sup>. Many science teachers have never been given the opportunity to incorporate modern hands-on science activities. These teachers must be assisted in their transition into the modern, well equipped science classroom. Any training offered should be subject specific, teaching physics labs is very different from biology and the methods and skills needed cannot be taught in a general one size fits all session.

### **A Start in Addressing Larger Issues**

In "Rising Above, The Gathering Storm" an eminent group of business, education and governmental leaders discussed the crisis in talent the US faces in science and engineering. The US graduates fewer engineers today than in 1985. Fewer entering freshman choose engineering and of those that do, there is a higher attrition rate than in the past<sup>12</sup>. There is substantial evidence that improved science education at the K-12 years leads more entering college freshmen to chose science and engineering majors and improves their overall performance<sup>13</sup>.

The policy recommendations made above are a small first step in improving California's science education system. While these steps are linked to an understanding that the Williams case decision has to include equity in science equipment/materials they are by no means the only changes needed to improve science outcomes in California. In the longer term improved science education in California will help to address societal equity issues and labor and workforce issues.

## **Science an Undervalued Subject**

From the house you live in with running pure water, air conditioning, healthy foods, heating and electricity to the roads you drive, to the entertainment you chose, almost all aspects of your life are improved or made possible by science and engineering. It is interesting then that science is such an undervalued topic in our K-12 school system.

### **K-6 Science (Missing in the API)**

In our K-6 system, science is only tested in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. As such it comprises between 3 and 5% of an elementary schools API<sup>14</sup>. Given this fact it is not surprising that science has virtually disappeared from many elementary school classrooms. What isn't tested is undervalued in our system where success is defined as a higher API.

One recent study indicates that many children form their impressions about science and a belief that they don't like it, during these early years when it is increasingly relegated to second class status, taught from a book or ignored<sup>15</sup>. Many children learn to read because they want to learn about dinosaurs or bats or rockets and the minimization of science in the early years removes interesting subjects from our student's lives. Science is an exciting subject (when powerfully taught) that integrates math and literacy in the context of their use.

Many elementary teachers feel under-prepared to teach science. In an environment where reading/language arts and mathematics take precedence science is easily pushed aside. Elementary teachers deserve the consideration on professional development in the teaching of science. The addition of science specialists on elementary campuses would also help to jump start powerful science teaching in the early grades.

### **7-12 Science (Under Developed, Under Funded)**

In grades 7-12 science teachers are routinely given professional development on teaching reading or writing across the curriculum. In order to become better at teaching science these teachers should be working with their subject matter peers exploring powerful methods of teaching hands-on science. Professional development for a science teacher should be about science.

In these same 7-12 classrooms there is often insufficient funding. Science powerfully taught is more expensive than a standard academic subject. Modern science incorporates electronic sensing elements, data-logging and computer analysis on top of the beakers, chemicals, pendulums and frogs that were typical 25 years ago. While the science standards speak to the need to incorporate modern technology into the curriculum there are seldom sufficient funds to do so. Science is expensive to teach but creates the wealth of our society and is worth the investment.

### **Science Key to Tomorrow**

Science is increasingly the standard by which we will be measured as a society. Between climate change and global competition California can only hope to remain a leader if we are successful in creating a population of scientifically literate and upwardly mobile people. We must innovate, invent and create our way into future prosperity. These are the processes carried out by scientists and engineers who are, only sometimes, being nurtured in K-12 science classrooms today.

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***Getting from Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening***

**School Finance Issues**

**A Policy Brief Submitted by the California Teachers Association**

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## **School Finance: Recommendations from the California Teachers Association**

We want to thank the key political leaders that requested the “*Getting Down to Facts*” (GDTF) Research Project,<sup>i</sup> and the foundations that funded the project.<sup>ii</sup> Most importantly, CTA wants to thank all the staff who have worked hard to organize the project and to compile the numerous and valuable background papers. The papers provide an understanding of school finance in California. Finally, we want to thank EdSource for organizing and hosting this convening.

It is important to remember that while the research papers point to areas in which new policies might be beneficial, the research “evidence produced by the *Getting Down to Facts Project* does not identify the specific policies that would be most beneficial for California to implement.”<sup>iii</sup>

CTA concurs with many of the findings of the school finance studies. For example, we agree with the following:

- California’s K-12 expenditures are below the national average (30% below).<sup>iv</sup>
- Our school finance system is too complex.
- Our school finance system is irrational and inequitable.<sup>v</sup>
- California’s student/teacher ratio is above the national average (37% above).<sup>vi</sup>
- California’s student/administrator ratio is above the national average (57% above).<sup>vii</sup>
- Efforts are needed to support the recruitment and development of teachers.
- New investments are especially needed for those schools serving a high proportion of students in poverty, students with special needs and English Language Learners.

We do have serious concerns that the reports did not examine or reflect the recent major increase in academic achievement in California or note in sufficient depth the major personnel resource disadvantages California schools face compared to the average school in the nation. These omissions disparage the excellent work of hard working teachers and other school staff, and, to be kind, provide at best an incomplete and distorted picture of California’s K-12 schools and our 6 million students.

We would have noted the following:

- The average school in California has 30% fewer teachers, 50% fewer site administrators and 90% fewer counselors and librarians than the average school in America.
- The increase in academic achievement over the recent years has been quite dramatic. In 2006, the average Academic Performance Index for our lowest scoring elementary schools was higher than the average school achievement in 1999.
- The number of students taking high end math and science courses in secondary schools and scoring proficient and advanced has increased by more than 50% in the past 4 years.



- The percent of traditionally underperforming students scoring proficient and above on Standards tests has increased by more than 40% in the past four years. This is nearly twice the rate of all students.

Our teachers are well aware of the needs of our students. They have made great strides in increasing instructional quality especially given that they work under conditions that would be unthinkable in the majority of states and schools in America.

There is no question that we can and must improve the current school finance system. While the project reports conclude that “there is no silver bullet in School Finance,” providing fully-qualified school staff at a level of the average school in America would be a very good first step.

### Proposition 98

Proposition 98 was created to set a minimum level of school funding. It was not intended to nor does it provide fully appropriate funding for our K-12 schools or Community Colleges. This Constitutional protection stopped the major funding reductions for the public schools that began in 1972 and continued almost unabated until 1988. This minimum funding base must be maintained.

- ✎ Recommendation 1: There should be no diminution of Proposition 98, all past debts owed under Proposition 98 must be honored, and Proposition 98 must be treated as a floor not a ceiling.

### School Finance

Simplification of our complex school finance system is a worthy goal. Care must be taken as we progress towards simplification so that essential rights and needs of all students are protected. California is a complex state and needs of students and costs of programs vary greatly.

We suggest the following criteria may be useful. The finance system should:

- Provide flexibility but with essential protections for students and accountability that assures funds are spent in the intended schools.
  - Account for the special needs and costs of all students and districts.
  - Be aligned with current academic content standards.
  - Be stable and have long range consistent targets.
- ✎ Recommendation 2: Real dollar investments must be made above those required to pay for the cost of living, enrollment growth and payment of mandates. Phase one must get California to no less than the national average adjusted for cost differentials. Phase two should move California to no less than the average funding for the top ten states in our nation.
  - ✎ Recommendation 3: Basic funding should be based on student enrollment not Average Daily Attendance. Separate funding levels (revenue limits) should be established for grade spans as is currently the model for Charter Schools.
  - ✎ Recommendation 4: Current K-12 Categorical Funding needs to be reformed with some programs continued where evidence of achievement and/or logic for cost

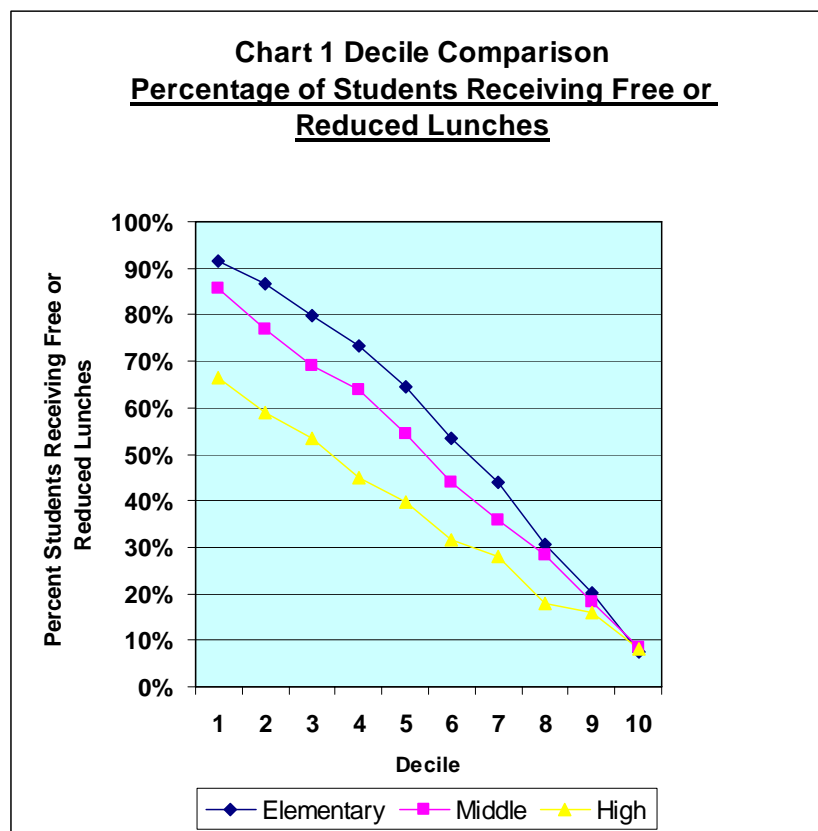
differentials are found (eg, AVID, BTSA, Peer Review for achievement and Home to School Transportation and ROC/ROP for logic of costs).

- Recommendation 5: We should be very cautious of categorical block grant proposals. We need to maintain the integrity of supporting those special programs helping students with special needs. We need first to evaluate our existing reforms under AB 825 (Firebaugh) to determine their success before proceeding with further assaults on viable categorical programs. Remember, in 2004 it took a court settlement of *Williams v. California* to ensure that the children in our neediest schools had a textbook that they could take home and a fully qualified teacher.

### High Poverty Schools - Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA – SB 1133 (Torlakson))

We were pleased to see that there was recognition by the *Getting Down to Facts Project* of substantial differences across schools and across districts in educational needs largely driven by “differences in poverty, special needs students, and the cost of teachers.”<sup>viii</sup> The study also points out that the challenges of educating the students in schools with a high proportion of students in poverty are so great that current approaches cannot bring their performance up to state standards. The Project realizes that these schools require additional resources.

We concur completely. CTA has been a leader in obtaining additional funds for these schools. Chart 1 shows that API Decile 1 and 2 schools contain the largest number of students in poverty.

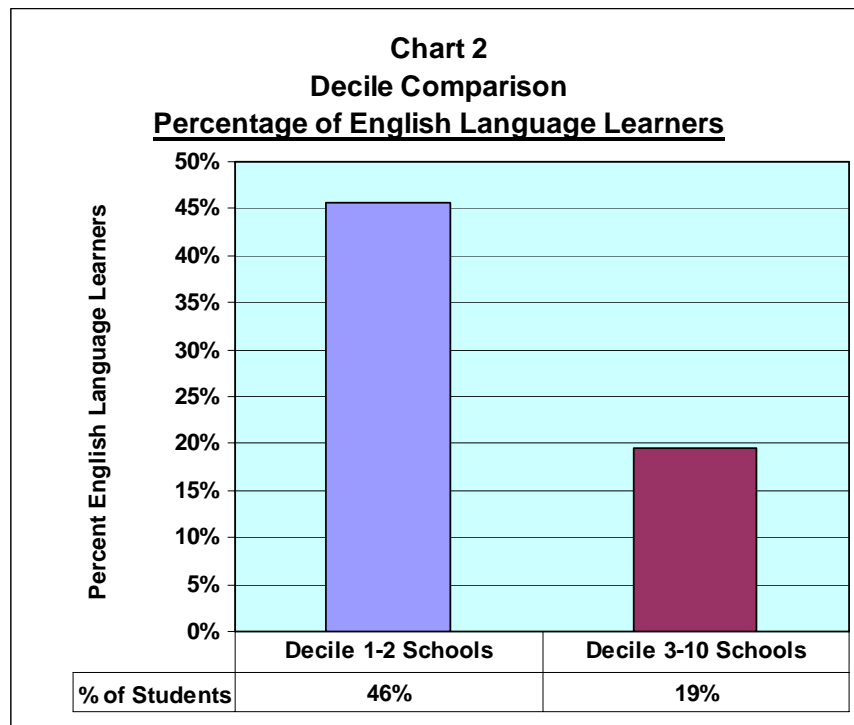


The percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch is one of the best indicators of poverty. The high school figures are always low because many students are too ashamed

to admit that they qualify for free or reduced lunch. Decile 1 and 2 schools are the lowest 20% of the schools in terms of API scores. Eighty-nine percent of the children in decile 1 and 2 elementary schools are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The number is 82% for middle schools and 63% for high schools. There are 98% more children that are eligible for free or reduced lunches in decile 1 and 2 schools than in the other schools in the state – decile 3 through 10 schools.

Chart 2 on the top of the next page shows that these same schools contain the largest number of English learners. Forty-six percent of the students in Decile 1 and 2 schools are English learners – 134% more than the other schools in the state. Only 88% of the teachers in these schools are fully credentialed teachers. There are 270% more students attending year-round schools in these schools than the other schools in the state. Forty-three percent of the parents in these schools did not graduate from high school. The ethnic make-up of these schools is 74% Latino, 11% African-American, and 8% white.

The Quality Education Investment Act is the result of a lawsuit filed by CTA and the Superintendent of Public Instruction against the state for failing to fund Proposition 98 in 2004-05. In the settlement, CTA, the Governor, and the Legislature agreed to allocate \$2.7 billion to 40% of the Decile 1 and 2 schools over a seven-year period. The annual state cost is \$400 million. These schools will be able to reduce class size, hire new staff and counselors, and provide training for principals and teachers.



When the program is fully implemented in the year 2008-09, the funds will be distributed based on \$500 per pupil for grades K-3, \$900 per pupil for grades 4-8, and \$1,000 per pupil for grades 9-12. The program will fund 488 schools with 478,900 students.

Given the challenges and the importance of the children in the schools with the highest proportion of students in poverty, we would recommend the following:

- 👉 Recommendation 6: The funding for the QEIA program should be increased so that all Decile 1 and 2 schools can participate and current QEIA schools should not sunset after seven years provided they meet required achievement targets.

## **Conclusion**

California has the most rigorous Academic Content Standards in the nation.

- We invest less of our wealth in our schools than most states in our nation.
- We have more special needs students than most states in the nation.
- We provide our students with substantially fewer teachers, administrators, counselors, and librarians than nearly all states in the nation.
- Recent surges in academic performance provide excellent evidence that we can and are improving, and that real investments in our students will bring great dividends.

We envision a school finance reform system that:

- 1) Takes care to ensure all students are provided with not less than the personnel and services provided to students in the average state in the nation.
- 2) Provides sufficient additional resources for students and schools with the greatest number of poor, disadvantaged, and English Learner students.
- 3) Provides for unique cost differentials across our diverse and complex state.
- 4) Is based on student enrollment and the actual cost of providing services across grade levels, and
- 5) Reflects California's commitment to high quality Academic Content Standards and each student's progress towards these lofty heights.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The Research Project was requested by the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence, former Secretary of Education Alan Bersin, the President pro Tem of the California State Senate Don Perata, the Speaker of the California Assembly Fabian Nuñez, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell.

<sup>ii</sup> The Research Project and this convening were commissioned and funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and The Stuart Foundation.

<sup>iii</sup> Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk, and Eric Hanushek. "Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California," *Institute for Research on Education Policy & Practice*, Stanford University: March 2007, p. 6.

<sup>iv</sup> When adjusting for cost differences, "Texas spends 12 percent more than California; Florida, 18 percent; New York, 75 percent, and the rest of the country, 30 percent." (Loeb, et al., "School Finance", p. 36)

<sup>v</sup> It is particularly disturbing that "the difference in total expenditures in a district at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of spending and a district at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of student-weighted spending is more than \$3,000 per student. Even limiting ourselves to a much more restrictive accounting that does not include capital spending, the difference between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of student-weighted spending is more than \$1,000 per student (Loeb, Grissom and Strunk, 2007/GDTF)." (Loeb, et al., "School Finance," p. 37) The study by Jennifer Imazeki concludes that the current variations in per-pupil spending in California school districts are not strongly connected to variations in the cost of education. These inequities need to be further examined.

<sup>vi</sup> Loeb, et al., "School Finance," p. 19, Figure 2. California is 55% above NY, 44% above TX, 19% above FL, and 37% above all other states. (Susanna Loeb, Jason Grissom, and Katharine Strunk. "District Dollars: Painting a Picture of Revenues and Expenditures in California's School Districts," *Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice*, Stanford University: March 2007, p. 5.

<sup>vii</sup> Loeb, et al., *School Finance*, p. 19, Figure 2. California is 29% above NY, 224% above TX, 29% above FL, and 57% above all other states. Loeb, et al., "District Dollars," p. 5.

<sup>viii</sup> Loeb, et al., *School Finance*, p. 46.



**Promoting Teacher Quality:  
Recommendations from the California Teachers Association**

A Policy Brief Submitted by the California Teachers Association

for

*Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening  
(Personnel and Leadership)*

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## **Promoting Teacher Quality:** **Recommendations from the California Teachers Association**

As the organization representing 340,000 California educators, the California Teachers Association has a special interest in promoting teacher quality and quality teaching. CTA has concluded that teacher quality is a result of the relationship among several factors, three of which are addressed here: pre-service preparation, professional development, and the occupational environment in which teaching occurs.

Over the last 15 years, research has consistently identified the inextricable links between the quality of teachers, the quality of teaching, and the achievement of students (Darling-Hammond, 2005). And for years, much of the district and state-sponsored training for teachers has been inadequate, piecemeal and unrelated to the instructional work teachers do in their classrooms. Although California students are improving on measures of achievement, in order to increase this trajectory it is time for California policymakers to seriously address and remove the barriers not only to opportunities to learn, but also to opportunities to teach.

CTA believes meaningful pre-service preparation and professional development are essential to help all educators more ably address the learning needs of every student. Every effort should be made to identify and support research-based strategies to improve student learning. These strategies must be carried out in schools that have established conditions for teaching and learning that allow teacher and student success to flourish. Therefore, the California Teachers Association recommends:

### **Pre-Service Teacher Preparation**

- California's current battery of tests should be streamlined and revised to focus on evaluating the skills that candidates need to apply content knowledge to teach students with varying needs.
- Teacher preparation programs should include a supervised teaching component that more appropriately supports teacher collaboration.
- Standards for preparation program approval and continuing accreditation should require closer cooperation between university-based programs and K-12 systems, especially in the transition and placement of new teachers in appropriate teaching assignments.

### **Professional Development**

- Professional development and teacher learning programs should be aligned to state standards and the work teachers do in their classrooms. They must also meet locally determined needs.
- California should invest in a professional practice model that builds school based teacher learning communities and teacher leadership. Teacher leadership includes traditional roles such as mentoring and coaching and should be expanded to increase teacher authority in other areas of professional practice. Funding must be provided for teacher-directed professional development that occurs during the workday and addresses the challenges of practice within the teachers' classrooms.
- California should fully fund professional development that spans the spectrum of a teacher's career, beginning with mentoring support for new teachers (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment [BTSA]) and continuing through a comprehensive Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program.

### **Teaching Conditions**

- Teaching effectiveness should be recognized as more than the efforts and attributes of an individual teacher. Teachers are only as effective as the systems in which they work.
- California should invest sufficient resources to provide the teachers the facilities, tools, and resources necessary for effective instruction.

## ***Pre-service Teacher Preparation***

California's standards for becoming a certificated teacher are among the highest in the nation. In addition to course-based examinations, California requires high stakes certification tests including a basic skills test and the California Subjects Examination for Teachers (CSET), a test of subject-matter knowledge. These tests focus on a candidate's knowledge acquisition and retention; the tests do not help the credential candidate understand how to use that knowledge to teach students in effective ways. Although a teacher's knowledge is important, having the knowledge does not guarantee the teacher can use the knowledge appropriately or choose effective teaching strategies to improve student comprehension (Ball, 2007).

Supervised field experience (student teaching) focuses on the development of teacher candidates into effective teachers. Ideally, the supervised field experience allows teacher candidates to observe and analyze complex instructional skills and the tacit professional behaviors needed to be effective teachers (Barth, 2001). It is often assumed that teacher candidates learn from effective teachers by observing the skill set and training they bring to the classroom and by recognizing the processes and methods uniformly implemented that impact student development and achievement. Clift and Brady (2005) stress that teacher candidate beliefs and actions are not so easily changed. Teacher preparation programs are beginning to recognize that more intensive collaboration over extended periods of time is necessary to move teacher candidates beyond traditional ideas about teaching that they formed as students.

Ferguson and Brink (2004) demonstrated that when the supervising teacher is more collaborative, teacher candidates find ways to implement the instructional strategies they have learned. In addition, when teacher candidates are allowed to develop their own teaching style and repertoire of techniques, the students, the supervising teacher, and the teacher candidate are all likely to benefit. In other words, the potential for collaboration in a supervised teaching program develops effective teachers who learn how to integrate their knowledge with the skill to help students learn, comprehend, and use new information.

No one should be surprised by the fact that teacher candidates are often assigned to schools where the beliefs and instructional strategies differ from coursework in the teacher preparation program. Within this complex environment, Fullan (2001) would assert the university supervisor and the classroom teacher must collaborate even more closely to help the teacher candidate develop knowledge about the culture and the social organization of schooling and school change. Today, university programs are in a unique position to mediate the differences in teaching philosophies and school priorities. If teacher preparation programs focus training on the theory-to-practice connection, the success of the teacher candidates will improve along with the achievement of the students they teach over time (Neapolitan & Harper, 2001).

## ***Professional Development***

The link between high quality, sustained professional development for teachers and greater student learning is well known. Nonetheless, existing professional development policy and practice continue to promote fragmented activities only weakly connected to the challenges of teaching and learning as experienced by practitioners in high-need schools (Warren-Little, 2007). This type of professional development is unlikely to change teacher behavior or result in improved student achievement (Snow-Rennner & Lauer, 2005).

The model of professional development as something performed upon instructional staff by an external expert has so permeated public and professional perception that Fullan (2007) identifies the use of the term *professional development* as a "major obstacle to progress in teacher learning"

(p. 35). CTA believes that both the language and the substance of teacher learning must be redefined so that opportunities for authentic development of professional expertise are supported by policy and practice. Therefore, CTA supports the concept of a *professional practice model*. This approach promotes the type of teacher learning which leads to improved instruction and improved outcomes in student achievement, within the structural and contextual supports necessary to sustain it.

The foundation of the professional practice model is a community of adult learners who engage in continuous inquiry to improve their collective and individual professional knowledge and capacity. Teachers are the connection between the community of adults and the enactment of new classroom practice resulting from refined professional knowledge, skills, and abilities, all of which should be aligned to the goal of assisting students in meeting state content standards.

The professional practice model is a collaborative, job-embedded learning approach. It is neither discrete nor separated in time or place from the work of classroom instruction, and in this way is anchored in locally determined needs. Its description as a professional practice model is accordingly appropriate. The content of the inquiry is specific to the students at the school. Sonstelie's (2007) contribution to the *Getting Down To Facts* project underscored the desire of teachers to engage with their colleagues in this effort. This finding aligns with previous studies, several of which are specific to California (Futernick, 2007; Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). Such a professional practice model looks very different from current policy. Current policy provides three professional development days funded through the Instructional Time and Staff Development Reform program (ITSDR). Scavenging time for a monthly "teacher collaboration" meeting as envisioned by California's Essential Program Components has not been consistent, efficient, or effective in implementing an inquiry-based collaborative teacher learning enterprise.

A professional practice model cannot exist without the structural supports necessary to sustain it. Along with sufficient collaboration time provided within the teacher workday, a professional practice model requires a new definition of teacher leadership. Teacher leadership in this setting must be both collaborative and distributive. Because pedagogical expertise resides primarily in teachers, logic dictates that leadership of the community rests in their hands.

A recent benchmarking study on professional development (APQC, 2007) highlights the importance of teacher leadership in professional learning initiatives. Of the 15 reported findings, one stands out as particularly relevant to the intersection of leadership and learning communities. Districts with strong professional development practices that lead to student learning gains are far more likely to involve school level instructional staff (teachers, principals, and support staff) in the design of learning opportunities. This practice engenders a culture of ownership that is qualitatively different from other schools with lower student achievement outcomes. In districts identified as "best-practice districts" teachers are more likely to be involved in the design of school-based professional development for the site administrators and other school-based instructional support staff.

Fully funded BTSA and PAR programs provide robust professional learning opportunities for new and veteran teachers. The Peer Assistance and Review Program, created through legislation in 1999, developed into a cooperative effort by school districts and teachers to assist classroom teachers for the purpose of improving instruction and student performance. PAR is a major step in expanding the authority of teachers in managing the profession by utilizing their expertise to provide collegial support, assistance, and review; however, state funding cuts curtailed the program before its full effect could be realized. Conversely, the success of BTSA induction programs are well known and provide concrete evidence that teacher collaboration enables program goals to be reached. According to 2006-07 data released by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 87% of new teachers who participate in BTSA remain in the classroom after four years compared to 50% of new teachers nationwide.



## *Teaching Conditions*

It makes sense that teachers will be more or less effective in meeting the goals of student achievement to the degree that they have the necessary tools, resources, and inspiration available to them in their workplace. Harris and Rutledge (2007) assert that most empirical research on teacher effectiveness has focused on the individual teacher as the unit of analysis at the expense of the organizational context of the school in which teaching occurs. Research indicates that teaching conditions have both direct and indirect effects on student performance.

For example, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) has identified five conditions that are instrumental in effective instruction: time, quality school leadership, teacher empowerment, professional development, and adequate facilities and resources. In North Carolina, a state which studies teacher working conditions, school leadership was the single greatest predictor of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status at the middle school level. For every one point increase in measures of quality leadership, schools were nearly seven times more likely to have made AYP. While leadership is not confined to the principal, the presence of an effective principal is central to an effective school. “Effective principals build instructional capacity, enable their teachers to become more effective, and ...increase the likelihood that their teachers will remain committed to schools in which they are teaching” (Futernick, 2007, p. 63).

A mechanism that appears to play a critical role in student achievement is the relationship between teaching conditions and a teacher’s commitment to student learning, mediated by the teacher’s sense of self-efficacy (Jerald, 2007). Jerald suggests that collective efficacy of a teaching staff may be even more powerful in supporting student achievement than teachers’ individual perceptions of efficacy, further bolstering the importance of teacher collaboration in every aspect of a school’s endeavors.

The conditions that contribute to increased student achievement are also the same conditions that promote teacher recruitment and retention, a major goal of California’s K-12 system. An aging California teaching force is a reality; nearly one-third of California’s teachers are older than 50 and half of those are over the age of 55. California will need to recruit over 100,000 new teachers in the next 10 years just to keep up with retirements and attrition. (Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning [CFTL], 2005). There are solutions to the teacher labor shortage. “The good news...is that if teachers get what they want and what they need to be truly effective in the classroom, and if these satisfied teachers stay, then we will discover that California has far more good teachers than we thought” (Futernick, 2007, p. 7).

Because teacher shortages and teacher turnover disproportionately affect schools of greatest need, improving teaching conditions is a key lever in attracting and retaining qualified teachers to hard-to-staff schools. The state must live up to its obligation to ensure that supportive teaching and learning conditions are fully present in all California public schools.

Teachers are vested by the public with a trust and responsibility requiring the highest standards for professional service. Improving the conditions of teaching and learning means teachers must be supported in their efforts to focus on student learning. Every effort should be made to identify and support research-based and teacher-student friendly strategies to improve programs, schools, and the professional practice of teaching. Effective professional development must be consistent with current research and based on the needs of students and school programs. There must therefore be continued, systematic and coherent attention to the needs of both individual educators and the schools in which they work.

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California Policy Brief

Topic: State Data Systems

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### **Statement of the Problem**

California collects and reports a good amount of useful education data and its data collection efforts are improving. We know now, more than ever before, which schools and groups of students are meeting state standards and which are furthest behind. We know which groups of students and schools have access to certified and experienced teachers, and rigorous college and work preparatory courses, and which ones don't.

These kinds of data have been critical to *motivating* reform, as the State Chief Jack O'Connell's recent commitment to close California's achievement gap makes clear. Yet *achieving* big changes and sustainable reform requires data that is simultaneously more detailed and broader than is currently available. Effective change requires a deep and comprehensive understanding of what works in educating students and what doesn't, and why.

Today though we treat education as a black box: what goes on inside the schoolhouse or the classroom door is not subject to measurement and comparison, and all that we can do is assess outcomes *post hoc*. This is not fair to anyone in the system. It is unfair to teachers, who could use much more detailed information about their students and their own effective practices. It is unfair to administrators, who lack the tools to support continuous improvement in their schools. It is unfair to state and local policymakers, who are forced to allocate funds without information about which programs work and why. And it is most certainly unfair to students who are the victims of seemingly endless experiments intended to transform their schooling experience with little assurance or evidence of what actually works.

Currently, California's education data system barely merits the name: it is a confusing assembly of collection vehicles, aggregated at different levels, reported at different times, housed in a multitude of different databases and only linked manually according to the ever-increasing demands of federal and state reporting—work that is complicated by the absence of a central repository for student-level information. In addition, sharing data between school districts, like data on transferring students, is inefficient and sometimes doesn't happen at all.

Fortunately, some of this will soon change. Within the next three years, California should have new longitudinal systems to house student data (CALPADS) and teacher data (CALTIDES). But a wide gulf lies between what the new data sets should and could tell us, and what they will actually have the capacity to do. Even with the building of CALPADS and CALTIDES, answering some key fundamental questions -- for example, linking achievement levels in middle school to success in particular high school courses, or connecting high school performance to workplace success -- will remain out of reach.

For all the talk of increasing data-driven decision-making and conducting rigorous evaluations of educational programs and investments, California's data system as currently planned is likely to remain merely a means of producing required federal and state accountability reports. As CALPADS and CALTIDES are developed, the biggest risk is that the focus on cleaning up the current situation will trump the more important aim: incorporating data into decisions at every level of the system and building a world class education system that continuously learns and

improves. CALPADS and CALTIDES represent a significant improvement from current data collection and reporting, indeed. But while they will make some data use in decision-making *possible*, they cannot make it standard practice in and of themselves, CALPADS and CALTIDES don't reveal enough.

The biggest problem of the past seems to be that no real plan led the design of the current system – and if there was one, it was merely to comply with federal reporting and accountability requirements. A succession of tacked-on requirements added a series of data collection vehicles to the mix, and so we built a data system. Now California has an opportunity to design an integrated data system that is designed and used for continuous improvement at state and local levels. The state should seize this chance to consider how to best integrate data into education policy and practice—to evaluate trends and programs, predict the outcomes of future investments, and explore the interaction between various factors in student, teacher, and school success—rather than simply use it to describe the way things are. For brevity, we'll refer to this comprehensive information system as a “smart system” —one that bridges the education information gap and provides information to make smart education choices in real time.

### **Policy Issues, Options, and Recommendations**

If conducting analyses and employing data in decisions are truly the goals of the state, California's longitudinal systems must be more thoughtfully designed into a deep K-24 data system and must sit at the center of a broader movement toward information use and continuously improving education systems. California could take some immediate steps to help make this happen.

Step 1: Build the Political Will to Get Good Data and Information: It's been said by researchers and policymakers alike that there is no constituency loudly calling for a good data system. That's true. In part that's because many people assume policymakers rely on good information as they make policy. Indeed, parents are shocked when we explain how little the state really knows about its public education system. And although policymakers and educators say they want good information, because decisions are being made everyday as if they already have it, there is little political will to develop a worthwhile system.

Stakeholders absolutely want good data, but the process to get from here (decent data, but not enough) to there (the smart system) needs some explaining to a lay audience. For starters, the word “data” should be replaced with the word “information.” “Data” emphasizes the work of collecting and storing unitary records. Instead what we should be talking about is “information” because it focuses on the purpose – helping people to inform themselves about what is happening inside and outside of schools. There might not be a constituency calling for good data systems, but surely we can build one calling for much needed information. Indeed, communities throughout the state organized and pushed for the reporting of restricted and unrestricted funds by source on the School Accountability Report Cards (SARC)—and they won in SB 687. As an immediate next step the state should centralize all of the SARC data and create a web based application to allow easy access and analysis.

Equally important, there must be a sea-change in how data and information are perceived by educators. There is a climate of fear that somehow data will be used against them, for punishment rather than as an aid for continuous improvement. Some incentives described below could go far to show how longitudinal information can be used to help—not hurt—the teaching profession.

Step 2: Think Big: The Smart System Should Link to a Multitude of Data Sets: A smart data system must house much more than data about K-12 education. When developed, CALTIDES and CALPADS need to link to data sets about higher education, including 2- and 4- year university data and postsecondary vocational participation data. The system should also link to employment data; military service; incarceration; and health and human services to get a clear portrait of what happens to students as they journey from our schools into adulthood.

Linking together data systems that were built as separate silos will require coordinating the efforts of various state agencies outside of the California Department of Education. As an immediate step to move passed the climate of distrust between state agencies the state create an independent data oversight commission, we describe this more fully below.

Step 3: Collect more data elements: Done right, California's smart system can drive critical decisions from the classroom to the Capitol building. But this will take more than tracking annual test scores and meeting reporting requirements. A few additions to the data items schools and districts collect could dramatically increase the number and scope of questions the system is able to answer.

Under the current plan, though a few data fields will be added, almost all of the data elements CALPADS will include are already collected in the systems it will replace. More collection is necessary. However, the California Department of Finance rigorously enforces the constitutional prohibition on unfunded mandates—which includes asking districts to collect more data without funding them. It's unlikely the CDE could ask districts to gather more data elements without statutory backup. Additionally, CDE will need extra staff to meet the new demands.

As an immediate step, and to build in the ability to conduct program evaluations with CALPADS data, legislators should specify a few additional elements for collection and allocate funds for districts to do so. These elements are currently collected by some agency but will not otherwise be available in CALPADS. The must-have elements include: student attendance records; student end-of-course grades; student scores on college ready assessments (AP, SAT and ACT), and teacher scores on each administration of exams required to receive a credential (the CBEST, CSET, and RICA).

Next, we should go further. For example, if we are to evaluate teacher and administrator training programs or curricula and intervention programs in which students are enrolled, we must know which students, teachers, schools, and districts are participating in them. In truth, any program that the state would wish to evaluate on an on-going basis should be included in the system at the level of the institution, personnel, and student.

We understand the CDE is developing a web-based application where schools will be able to maintain their school-level characteristics online, potentially including things like instructional material inventory, curriculum choices, and reform packages. Either such a system should be linked to CALPADS or data fields should be added in order to evaluate the effects of those school-level characteristics on student achievement.

Of course, these gross measures alone cannot tell us the whole story of a particular program. Duration and implementation can vary widely. And though this list is by no means exhaustive, these new data could hint at effectiveness and trigger more rigorous investigation.

Time is of the essence. According to the CALPADS RFP, it takes about two years to implement a new data requirement. Better, then, to implement changes during the design and phase-in of the new system so California analysts can begin to conduct the kind of rigorous evaluation necessary to inform decisions.

Step 4: Provide Better Access: Data cannot become evidence to support decision-making unless it's accessible to the researchers who can conduct important and provocative analyses. Currently, California is generous with its collected data. Because it includes no student-level information, the CDE can make much of it publicly available with no qualms about violating privacy laws.

A longitudinal system though, while it represents a much higher-quality and more powerful tool for data analysis, could perversely limit access to and use of that data. Without clear standards and policies—which do not currently exist—many stakeholders could fail to realize any benefit of the new, higher-capacity system. If California is to reap the full benefits of a more powerful education data system, it is vital that the CDE lawyers don't interpret privacy laws in an overly restrictive way, and that access procedures are in place in advance, lest access protocols become a bottleneck in data's translation into information for decision-making.

Additionally, CDE can build capacity to satisfy researchers' needs internally. They'll need to staff up fast though. With the implementation of unique student identifiers, data requests have already been growing. This demand will only increase once CALPADS is in place. The more strict the department's interpretation of privacy laws, namely FERPA (The Family Educational Rights Privacy Act), the greater the burden will be on its own staff to produce data for researchers that has already been analyzed and aggregated to mask student-level information.

Step 5: Fund and Provide Incentives for Data Accuracy and Strengthen Reporting: Increasing the quality of data in CALPADS requires additional funding and incentives for districts to report accurate information. While planned changes in the new system—like state verification of district data and the capacity to continually update submissions—will help, many districts will still lack the resources and the incentives to check data accuracy in a number of areas. To improve the quality of data, districts need both money and motive.

The question of money to districts has been recognized in budget process and proposed legislation, and attempts to address it have failed. Advocates will need to try again. On-going money will help districts build the new capacity, help aid clean and standardized input of new data elements, and maintain local systems.

The question of motive is more complex. As one district data administrator recently told us, districts do an excellent job of accurately reporting the enrollment and attendance information that determines annual per pupil funding, but there is no such incentive to ensure the accuracy of other data elements.

One way to offer districts a worthwhile exchange for accurate data would entail assisting them in making high-value use of the data they submit. Data-rich states, like Florida, have found that providing reports and detailed analyses to the entities that feed their comprehensive system is a good way of ensuring that the data input is accurate and valid. In California however, schools and districts must submit a good deal of data but get little back themselves other than student test scores and a general look at their comparative performance.

Moving forward future reports could contain descriptive information that might be otherwise complicated for schools and districts to obtain. For example, these reports could show trends over time and trace teacher and student mobility. The state could help districts obtain and fairly use value added analyses of programs, teachers and interventions. Another example might include offering teacher preparation programs reports on their teachers' students outcomes and a web-tool that allows them to conduct their own investigations.

Lastly, when implemented, CALPADS will include a robust ad-hoc query system for at least CDE staff. This should be expanded into a query tool that would allow agencies that link to the new system to pose their own questions and explore interactions themselves. District and school officials themselves should have access to a query system that allows them to learn about their own students, teachers, and schools using the data they feed into to the system. Indeed, local educators are far more likely to trust conclusions that they draw themselves rather than something provided by external agents.

The point is, although California has done an admirable job of data reporting with the current system, failing to expand that reporting and evaluation to exploit the power of an integrated, longitudinal system would represent a huge missed opportunity. Seizing this opportunity would garner much needed educator and public buy-in for the further development of the comprehensive smart system itself.

Step 6: Build Local Capacity for Data Analysis and Use: California may be designing a new state-level system, but it should not ignore the potential power of increased data use at the local level. Most decisions around education practice are still made by schools and districts, and promoting data use must involve teachers, administrators, and district staff as more than mere collectors of data. While the state system itself may not be sufficient to guide micro-level decisions, the state can do much to build districts' capacity as part of a broader commitment to data use in education.

For example, California could follow the example of other states and develop a web interface for teachers. Such a system could allow teachers to submit student test scores and receive feedback from the state system on how their students' performance measures up to state benchmarks and school, district and state averages. It could also become a repository for lesson plans and college prep high school course syllabi, instructional and classroom management tools, assessment items aligned with individual standards, and professional development opportunities—all tailored to teachers' individual needs.

Tools for local practitioners to access data are important, but what makes them truly useful is high-quality professional development. As an immediate step, the state should provide comprehensive and meaningful training in use of CALPADS and its integration with local systems where they exist. Knowledge of and confidence in the state system will help integrate the data it contains into local decision-making.

Step 7 (And Do This First): Establish an Education Data Oversight Commission: California is stuck. We've come a long way with CALPADS and CALTIDES, but we've not gone far enough. Getting any of the above recommendations in place is going to require a new player. Because the truth is, the primary obstacles to a comprehensive data system in California are about organizational territory and politics. Therefore, the first step in developing a smart system is to create an oversight commission to guide the development of the smart system.

An Education Data Oversight Commission should bring together the puzzle pieces for a more complete picture of California's data landscape. For example, linking existing data systems together—to answer questions about the relation between high school performance and workforce success—requires in practical terms coordinated effort on the part of several different state agencies. Mandating and managing this coordinated effort is a challenge that no existing agency is well-suited to taking on, precisely because they are already occupied in the details of managing their own data systems.



An Education Data Oversight Commission could determine how data should be linked, the terms under which access should be granted, and the priorities for building a comprehensive system. Indeed, these questions should be handled outside of the particular interests of any particular component of the system. Such a commission would include representatives of the various stakeholders in the system, including state agencies, researchers, and practitioners. It would be empowered to draw on resources within existing agencies to implement linkages between existing data systems, and would manage the legal and privacy issues involved in granting access to linked data.

Additionally and perhaps most importantly, the Education Data Oversight Commission should have an arm that acts as a data warehouse – a repository of different data sets and the producers of state issued annual reports. The Commission could also determine what the proper supports are that need to be in place to make sure the data collected make the transition from numbers in a warehouse to contextualized information, and from data to information that supports high quality decisions about education policy and practice. The Commission could be and perhaps should be a public/private partnership – endowed with promised support to ensure maintenance and continuity.

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# Fostering Local Innovation in Differentiated Compensation of Teachers and School Leaders

Time to move the “Alt Comp Dialogue” toward action

## Summary

For the last year, Full Circle Fund has facilitated discussions between leaders of school districts and leaders of local teacher unions in Northern California. This project, known as the Alt Comp Dialogue,<sup>1</sup> explores alternative approaches to compensating educators using examples from around the country, including Denver, Minneapolis, the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), Toledo and others.

Based on this work, we are confident that districts and local bargaining units, working together, can develop innovative ways to align educators’ pay with shared goals for student learning and teacher excellence. California lags in this trend toward collaborative innovation. It is time to catch up.

Specifically, California should provide incremental, ongoing, incentive grant funding of about \$600 per student per year to districts to support differentiated compensation of educators and school leaders. To be eligible for this funding, districts and teacher unions should collaboratively develop local plans that meet several requirements including: a strategy to integrate compensation with professional development; readiness of local data and personnel systems; and clear evidence of employee support.

## Problem Statement

**Excellence in teaching is of paramount importance.** There is no greater influence over a student’s learning than his or her teachers. Policies that foster teaching excellence, therefore, are squarely aligned with the goal of advancing student learning.

**Today’s pay systems do not support excellence.** Today, teachers in California are almost universally paid according to salary schedules that generally reward just two things: staying on the job and taking college courses. Unfortunately, as recently pointed out by Susanna Loeb in the *Getting Down To Facts* research, “there is little evidence that very experienced teachers are more effective than moderately experienced teachers,” and “teachers with master’s degrees do not appear to be more effective at promoting student learning.” [GDTF Loeb/Miller, p.3]

Participants in Alt Comp Dialogue discussions cite additional shortcomings of the single salary schedule:

- *It is disrespectful of great teachers.* Wonderful, dedicated teachers who achieve extraordinary results with children earn just as much, or as little, as those whose students fall behind.
- *It provides no help to high-need schools.* Teachers who achieve great results in a difficult setting earn no more than those who achieve mediocre results in a comfortable school.

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<sup>1</sup> Full Circle Fund is an engaged philanthropy organization based in the Bay Area that cultivates community leadership through projects to drive lasting social change. The Alt Comp Dialogue project is supported by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The project receives advice and counsel from Dr. Julia Koppich, as well as from an advisory board that includes members from ACSA, AFT, CSBA, CTA, the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, New Leaders for New Schools, the New Teacher Center, and the Teachers Union Reform Network.

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- *It is indifferent to scarce talent.* Some schools struggle to find strong math and science teachers because teacher pay is not competitive for individuals with strong skills in these areas.
- *It doesn't help foster collaboration.* Teachers and principals who bring out the best in others earn the same as those who contribute to negative working conditions.
- *It is out of step with taxpayer expectations.* Seniority-based pay is no longer typical of professional pay systems for highly educated workers. Voters in Denver proved that the public will support taxes for higher salaries within a differentiated compensation structure.

California can do better, especially if districts and teachers define solutions together, locally.

## ***Policy Issues and Options***

Salaries are by far the biggest component of our investment in public education. Changing the way that educators are paid can provide a powerful support lever to teachers and school leaders in their efforts to improve student learning and teacher working conditions. Of course, changes must be strategically sound, well-executed and accompanied by other work to support effective teaching and learning.

### **What should be the components of “Alt Comp”?**

Though the details vary, most discussions of alternative approaches to compensation for educators focus on a few key themes, summarized below in three parts: 1) Performance-based compensation; 2) Skill-based compensation; and 3) Job-based compensation.

These themes, which are not mutually exclusive, have emerged not only through the Alt Comp Dialogue, but also in implementations throughout the nation and in the findings of expert panels such as the TeacherSolutions group of the Center for Teaching Quality and the Working Group on Teacher Quality.<sup>2</sup>

We believe that districts and teachers should develop strategies to utilize all three approaches. Specific recommendations for state policy are presented toward the end of this document. We now turn to the context for these recommendations and definition of terms.

**1) Performance-Based Compensation.** It is relatively easy to agree that there should be a connection between pay and results. But which results should matter? How should outcomes be measured? In what way should incentives be constructed? Should incentives apply to individuals or to groups?

Clearly, student learning is the core concern of educators. A serious discussion about student learning must include straight talk about assessment, including standardized testing.

This topic evokes incredible passion, especially from teachers. One participant compared the early part of this discussion in a local dialogue to lighting a torch: “more heat than light.” In recent years, standardized testing has consumed increasing amounts of class time. It has reduced teachers’ discretion regarding how best to teach students. Focus on improving test results has contributed to a narrowing of the curriculum, reducing the time committed to art, music, and other important subjects. On top of this,

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<sup>2</sup> The report of the Working Group on Teacher Quality was a partnership of ten organizations: the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching; The Association of American Educators; the National Council on Teacher Quality; Augenblick, Palaich and Associates; the Center for American Progress; the New Teacher Center; the Community Training and Assistance Center; the New Teacher Project; Full Circle Fund; Resources for Indispensable Schools and Educators; and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. The project was funded by the Joyce Foundation. See [www.talentedteachers.org/center.taf](http://www.talentedteachers.org/center.taf).

The Center for Teacher Quality report can be found at <http://www.teachingquality.org/pdfs/TSreport.pdf>.

teachers have seen scores interpreted in very simplistic ways, casting schools as failing even when their students make strong learning gains. It is sensible for teachers to wonder under what circumstances a test-score-based component of a new pay system would label *them* as failing.

When district leaders and teachers persist in collaborative discussion, however, they can move beyond these concerns. It helps to focus on question of what “performance” ought to mean for real people in real classrooms. As the conversation becomes more specific about job goals, it tends to become more interesting, and far more constructive. Student test results make sense as a part of an evaluation strategy for teachers when there is a clear plan to interpret the results in a contextually appropriate manner.

Leading innovators in alternative compensation are finding that a core part of getting the context right is this: test scores can inform an evaluation of a teacher’s work, but the analysis must be based directly on relevant progress made by the students in that teacher’s scope of influence. Teachers help students “beat the odds” all the time, but a year’s worth of learning growth is more difficult to achieve in some contexts than in others. A pay plan that pretends otherwise will fail. This approach to individually-based analysis of learning growth in context is often referred to as “value added” assessment.

It is also critical to remember that schools are about far more than tests, and that teachers can influence the trajectory of a student’s life far beyond a year of assessed results. To take stock of this value, leading innovators in alternative compensation incorporate qualitative elements in their evaluation of individual performance, informed by peer feedback and expert observation. This approach is discussed below, under “Skill-Based Compensation.”

Because success often occurs in clusters, it makes sense for pay incentives to promote teamwork and teacher collaboration. Many of the pioneers of alternative compensation have made use of group-based performance incentives to drive shared focus on particular goals, for example. Such incentives must be crafted with great care to avoid unintended consequences. In practice, the work associated with achieving a goal is rarely evenly shared.

**2) Skill-Based Compensation.** Innovators emphasize that a new pay plan creates an opportunity to rethink professional development as a core element of the plan, not an afterthought.

Because there is little or no broad evidence that postgraduate study has an influence on student learning, some innovators have narrowed “column” incentives in existing salary schedules to focus on continuing education related directly to the teacher’s area of specialty or the district’s area of need.

Many districts that implement alternative compensation plans invest in programs for “master” and “mentor” teachers. These experts work on either a full-time or part-time basis to observe, evaluate and support other teachers. These mentors are selected on the basis of their excellent instructional skills, and may receive additional compensation. (See Job-Based Compensation, below.)

There are many innovative options for assessing teachers’ skills and performance qualitatively. Rubrics (such as BEST, TEC, or the Danielson framework) enable teachers to benefit from consistent feedback from multiple observers. Minneapolis has pioneered teacher-driven “action research” to document effective practices. Denver has emphasized teacher-based definition of individual review goals. Some prominent thinkers in the area of alternative compensation, such as Allan Odden, have proposed that seniority-based raises beyond the first few years of instruction should be conditional on satisfactory advancement of demonstrated skills in specific areas.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Allan Odden and Marc Wallace, “Rewarding Teacher Excellence” Feb. 2007: [http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/cpre/publications/TComp%20Handbook%20Feb%2028%2007%20Final%20\(3.05.07\).pdf](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/cpre/publications/TComp%20Handbook%20Feb%2028%2007%20Final%20(3.05.07).pdf)

All of these are promising practices. There is no hard evidence to choose among them, and it is likely that local innovations, if developed collaboratively, will uncover important new ideas.

**3) Job-based Compensation.** When businesses struggle to fill a position with a qualified person, they raise the salary offered. California's schools, by contrast, rarely vary compensation by position.

Discussions of alternative compensation frequently highlight the following jobs as potentially appropriate for higher pay: advanced math and science, mentor teachers, teaching positions in high-needs schools, special education, and English language instruction.

Schools' needs vary enormously based on local context. For example, not every district struggles to find good math teachers – some suburban districts happily recruit teachers away from neighboring urban districts. Growing districts can fill skill gaps in their workforce by adding new teachers; shrinking ones must focus on training existing faculty.

Compensation experts emphasize that job-based compensation should be configured in a way that attaches incentives to target positions, rather than to the individuals that fill them. Furthermore, there should be a clearly defined performance aspect to incentives associated with these jobs – the objective, after all, is not merely to fill the positions, but to raise the effectiveness of the outcome.

## ***Recommendations***

Below, we make three recommendations: 1) The state should provide money to districts for alternative compensation programs; 2) The State Board of Education should set requirements for districts to qualify for this support; and 3) Planning grants should be authorized swiftly to set the wheels in motion.

**1) Allocate state funds to support alternative compensation.** Based on implementations in other states, we recommend funding alternative compensation at about \$600 per student. In order for a new pay system to work, bonuses or other pay incentives must be large enough to be “worth it.” The lion's share of this money should go directly toward differentiated compensation, but some of it should be used for supporting investments such as targeted professional development and collaboration, mentorship programs, and implementation support. We recommend the following:

- a) *Require local educator buy-in.* The available examples make it clear that collaborative development of the pay plan is a critical success factor. This collaboration also maximizes the opportunity to improve teaching and learning conditions beyond pay. Proposals should be developed locally through a process that strongly involves teachers, including use of the collective bargaining process where available.
- b) *State structure with local flexibility.* Locally-developed proposals should be reviewed by the State Board of Education (SBE), which should be empowered to rule individually on whether each plan will be funded. This review is important for two reasons: It will encourage realistic thinking about implementation challenges; and it will help to ensure that new compensation plans are importantly different from the status quo. Change is hard, and districts will face the temptation to simply put incremental dollars into a “more of the same” plan. SBE review will serve as a check to ensure that plans are truly different. (See recommendation #2 for details.)
- c) *Protect STRS from salary spikes.* In order to head off a possible “tragedy of the commons” dilemma that could destabilize the STRS system, we recommend that applicability of these incentives toward pensions be delayed for a specified period (for example 10 years) until the risks can be better assessed in the context of other market and demographic developments.

**2) Set clear state guidance for local planning.** Beginning immediately, the SBE should draft guidelines for locally developed alternative compensation plans. These guidelines will provide important

direction to local planning. These guidelines must strike a fine balance, challenging districts to innovate without stifling them in detailed requirements. We recommend the following:

- a) *Clearly differentiated use of incremental state funding.* The locally-developed plan shall clearly delineate the basis for differentiation of pay and forecast how the money will be used.
- b) *Require local match.* The plan should include at least \$200 per student in reallocated local funds. This will help ensure that the plan more than simply an add-on to existing practices.
- c) *Evidence of teacher support.* Utilize the collective bargaining process where available.
- d) *Performance incentives.* The locally developed plan shall include a substantial performance-based component based on multiple measures of performance. Incentives for individuals must be relevant to the work they actually do, appropriate to their scope of influence, and based on clearly expressed criteria. Assessment of student learning growth shall be included among the measures. Group incentives, if any, should match the scope of influence of the identified group.
- e) *No quotas.* The alternative pay system shall have no quotas or pre-determined limits to the number of employees who may qualify for extra compensation. The plan shall include, at minimum, both teachers and principals.
- f) *Financial plan.* The local financial plan shall include a mechanism to manage and safeguard unused/unearned performance-related funds in a program reserve. This helps to avoid use-it-or-lose-it pressures that interfere with a quota-free design.
- g) *Professional development and mentorship plan.* Professional development shall be integrated with the pay plan. In order to integrate professional development with classroom practice, the collective bargaining agreement shall include at least a specified minimum amount of time for teacher collaboration.
- h) *Pay for position.* The state can play a strong role in setting the stage for teacher pay to become more responsive to market needs, but should refrain from taking a very prescriptive approach due to the large differences in local needs. Plans shall include a mechanism for differentiating pay for locally specified positions, contingent on employee performance in these positions.
- i) *Implementation plan.* The local plan shall include a specific implementation plan regarding roles, responsibilities, tools, milestones, planned training and the like. This plan shall clearly spell out planned changes in human resources and payroll functions in order to address the increased sophistication of a differential pay system.
- j) *Governance, evaluation and modification.* The plan shall specify program evaluation mechanisms, dispute resolution processes and so forth.

**3) Allocate funds swiftly for planning grants to get the ball rolling.** Planning is relatively cheap, and will significantly increase the odds that implementation will be smooth. In the 2008 budget the state should fund small competitive grants for districts and local teachers unions to encourage collaborative development of local plans. When SB1209 (Scott) was enacted in 2006, the state created the mechanism to support this planning process. We recommend the state allocate \$2 million to this purpose in 2008. A portion of these funds should be used to create a state capacity for program evaluation. The point is to get a small number of districts moving strongly toward thoughtful implementation, and act proactively to increase knowledge of best practices.

## ***Conclusion***

Pay is by far the largest part of the investment California makes in education. Today, this investment is formula-driven, and weakly connected with the goals of teachers, families, and the public interest.

Implementation makes or breaks this reform. Experiences in other states suggest that the best chance for effective implementation will be to engage local leadership in the planning process from the outset, leaving real room for local innovation and differences.

This investment will provide change-minded districts and teacher leaders with an extraordinary opportunity to reinvent the purposefulness of public education in a very pervasive way. Some districts will use this opportunity to achieve breakthroughs in student learning through steady advancement in teaching excellence. Their achievements will show the way forward.

## RESOURCES FOR ENGLISH LEARNER EDUCATION

**Patricia Gándara, UCLA  
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**Policy Brief  
for  
*Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*  
Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007, in Sacramento**

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NOTE: This brief is based on the deliberations from two all day meetings held with a group of professional educators, researchers, and policymakers held on August 27 and September 24, 2007 in Sacramento. We wish to acknowledge their contribution to these ideas. It proposes policy ideas in several areas that are consistent with the areas of critical resource needs outlined in our study commissioned for the GDTF project.<sup>1</sup>

### TEACHERS

There is little debate that highly qualified teachers are students' most critical resource and that EL students are the least likely to have qualified teachers –by any definition (whether with appropriate credentials, experience, or skills in teaching these students). There is no single greater resource need, and we make this argument in our Getting Down to Facts paper.

The dire teacher shortages and large numbers of under-prepared teachers of the recent past have abated. Currently only 18,000 of the state's teachers lack a preliminary teaching credential compared to four years ago when 42,000 of California's 307,000 teachers did not have this basic authorization. Nonetheless, poor and minority students continue to have a disproportionate share of these teachers and of novice teachers who are not yet as effective as those with more experience. Moreover, with the aging of the teacher workforce, veteran teachers are retiring in record numbers so that a return to teacher shortages could well be on the horizon (CFTL, 2006).

There is evidence that many teachers who have completed a full complement of teacher preparation courses (CSU Office of the Chancellor, 2003; CFTL, 2005) do not feel competent to teach EL students and even teachers with experience indicate feeling unprepared to meet the needs of English Learners (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll, 2005). Studies of professional development (Pérez, et al., 2004) and teacher preparation show that there is not deep capacity to help teachers acquire these skills. Induction is supposed to provide the experience and support but too often there aren't teaching staff available to provide a good induction experience. There is a growing body of evidence that apprenticeship models may be effective means by which to bring teachers to a high skill level. But we need to learn (1) what is essential for teachers to know and be able to do; (2) how different EL students' needs differ; and (3) how to best provide these skills and knowledge to California's current and future teaching force. Centers of Excellence would be designed to help answer these questions. The centers would marshal existing resources from many partners with only minor additional support from the state to leverage the partnerships. They would bring practice and research together in one setting to both answer questions and apply the knowledge. And they would consolidate state resources where they can be more systematically disseminated.

### **(1) Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for EL Students.**

Centers of Excellence that serve as incubators for teacher preparation and professional development could be sited at several campuses across the state. Such sites could be established using the expertise and resources from UC, CSU, and private colleges and institutions combined with some clustering of federal Title III funds, state help, and assistance from foundations. The most knowledgeable faculty, experts, and researchers would be assigned as “in residence” for a period of time. Research on critical issues that can be applied to teaching, and teacher preparation would occur simultaneously with prospective teachers participating in preparation through an apprenticeship model. The Centers would have a role in (1) discovering new knowledge about effective EL practices, (2) preparing new EL teachers, and (3) developing skills for teaching ELs in existing teachers. Teachers might apprentice for 6 months working in an affiliate school and in the center alongside highly skilled mentors. The Centers’ would also train professional developers who would share the Center-developed knowledge with other teacher training institutions, districts, and schools.

The Centers would focus on English Learners but the knowledge base built would improve learning for all students. In developing these centers we would draw on the work previously done by others with regard to collaborations between universities and actual schools and districts such as the professional development schools (e.g., Lieberman, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Finally, the Centers could serve as sites for developing additional means for increasing the capacity of schools to meet the needs of English Learners. Examples include development of the advanced authorization for teachers of EL students and the enhanced bilingual teacher role discussed below and ways to develop a larger corps of teachers from the students’ communities.

These Centers could help fill the current gaps in research with regard to English Learner education. Some key questions to which we need answers are:

- When is the appropriate time is to reclassify students, and what are the appropriate criteria?;
- Is possible for EL students to meet standards in the same time frame that English speakers are expected to, and if not, what is the appropriate time frame?;
- What should the content of instruction for academic literacy in a range of subjects be and how should instruction be organized at the various grade levels?

### **(2) ELD/ESL Specialist Credential For Secondary Instruction**

Currently in California there is a significant shortage of teachers at the secondary level who have skills in teaching English Learners. Moreover, teachers at this level say that they want more expertise in teaching these students (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005). We will recommend the design and adoption of a single subject specialist certification for teachers in grades 7-12. The content of this certification would be established by a group of experts in the field with input from teachers and administrators statewide through an online survey.

Several other states New York, Maryland, North Carolina, Florida, Oklahoma and Arizona, offer English Language Development (ELD)/English as a Second Language (ESL) single subject credentials for high school teachers. In order to change credentialing policy, legislation is needed to add additional authorizations to change education code and for the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to create the standards for this type of credential.

### **(3) Enhanced Role for Bilingual Teachers**

Bilingual teachers are currently overburdened with duties outside of their own classrooms. Their specialized expertise in the instruction of English Learner (EL) students, their ability to



communicate with parents and students, and to informally assess EL students place them in high demand in schools regardless of the program being provided at the school. Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) struggles to provide appropriately trained mentors for induction of new teachers who will be teaching EL students, because there are so few teachers with the full range of skills to serve EL students. Bilingual teachers are critically needed in this capacity. Moreover, research shows that “the teacher next door” is often a more effective change agent than an educational consultant who is not as familiar with the school and its population. But all of these duties run the risk of burning out the bilingual teacher. The purpose of this recommendation is to acknowledge the advanced skills of these teachers, to allow them opportunities to support their colleagues without having to do so at cost to their own time, and to provide an enhanced role that would be both challenging and rewarding. This could reduce the turnover of these teachers and encourage more to join their ranks. We therefore recommend that:

- (1) Bilingual resource teacher positions be funded at attractive levels and that they be offered at every school with EL students.
- (2) The APEL (forgivable loan) awards to increased for credentialed bilingual teachers from \$11,000 to \$18,000—the level of awards for special education, math, and science teachers.

## **ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

Valid and reliable assessment is another critical resource need of EL students. Although this is complex and expensive and will require time to develop truly valid and reliable instruments, some interim steps are more accessible. We can begin by reporting currently available student assessment information in a way that is easily accessible and allows policymakers to make decisions about how to best use it. The following proposals are low cost steps toward developing more accurate testing of ELs.

- (1) Reporting California English Language Development Test (CELDT\_ scores cross tabulated with the California Standards Test (CST) scores would allow policymakers and practitioners to evaluate to what extent CELDT is aligned with or predicts, CST performance. This information would help people to make better decisions about how to use these instruments.
- (2) Reporting reclassification criteria for each district on the web would make it is possible to track the performance and existence of EL and Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (R-FEP) students in districts and see the relationship between the criteria and student progress.
- (3) Initiating pilots of alternative measures, such as primary language tests, portfolios, and performance tests would start to develop the necessary foundation for the eventual introduction of such measures on a wider scale. The pilots would be funded by state and federal funds (possibly a clustering of Title III monies), or new No Child Left Behind (NCLB) funds as they become available.

## **CURRICULUM STRATEGIES**

### **MATERIALS**

While there is considerable debate in California about the specific curriculum needs of EL students, a significant body of research indicates that materials that are designed specifically for students who are learning English can enhance education effectiveness for English Learners (Bailey & Butler, 2003; Short et al, 2007). However, the majority of adopted programs are not based on research on English Learners and therefore do not address the specific needs of these students. Moreover, there is great diversity in the EL population (e.g., age at entry in California schools,

language background and first language skills and competencies, home language, socio-economic status) all of which affect in different ways their English and academic learning needs. Teachers and principals indicate that they need these materials in their schools (Pérez, et al, 2004) in order to have a full complement of tools to address the varied education needs of English Learners. This was strongly reiterated by administrators and experts at our meetings who work with numerous schools and districts around the state.

Currently there are very few commercially available materials designed for English Learners. This is largely because state policy provides funding overwhelmingly for adopted materials, so publishers have no financial incentive to develop other materials. Most of what does exist takes the form of add-ons to the currently adopted materials for English fluent students. Many experienced teachers of EL students report that these materials are not well-designed for the needs of their English Learners. A frequent comment from teachers in focus groups that we conducted as part of a larger teacher study (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005) was that EL students are an “afterthought” in curricular packages and that these include a few pages in the teacher’s manual with very limited suggestions for use with EL students. Moreover, this curricular limitation with regard to English Learners has a “trickle down” effect on professional development since so much teacher staff development is based on and administered by the publishers of these packages.

We propose a zone of choice where schools and teachers, in conjunction with researchers and outside providers could target the development of materials and instructional strategies for specific students. The development of new materials could also take place in the centers of excellence described in (1) above. For example, they could target the most recent immigrants, those who are in the lowest achieving schools, or those who are proficient on the CELDT but can't move beyond this because they need academic language. Such materials would be developed and used on a pilot basis with careful evaluation of their usefulness and ability to boost student learning. One specific instance where such materials might be piloted is with regard to texts that focus on the needs of English Learners to attain academic vocabulary, genres, and usage. Some work on developing the appropriate content of such materials for ELs in science has already been done under the auspices of the California Department of Education and thus could be built upon. Moreover, the guidelines established by the state curriculum commission in 2006 include an option that calls for 60 minutes of ELD per day for English Learners. This option would clearly call for appropriate materials that might be developed specifically for schools that follow this recommendation.

### **Zones of Choice**

Currently districts that get into Program Improvement (PI) status advised to implement the programs that they have not been successful with more rigorously. They are not given the option to re-consider these programs and try something that might be more effective with their students. It appears to that not many schools are coming off of PI status, suggesting that "doing the same thing only more" appears not to be working. Our proposal would give flexibility to schools whose EL students are not thriving, to try something else through an ideas we have called "choice zones". This approach would provide for some Program Improvement (PI) and underperforming schools to come to the state with a plan for improvement that allows flexibility and adopts curriculum that has been proven in other contexts. These schools would be required to develop a plan with an outside provider who is expert in the field for instructional improvement. Such a plan would have the additional requirement of including research-based practices for ELs, such as those being developed currently by the CDE or those encompassed in the National Literacy Panel recommendations. The PI program already has significant funding so this idea would not require new resources. Once these schools met existing PI requirements they would be free to choose how to address the needs of their students. These schools would have to have a comprehensive educational and evaluation plan

including a strategy for how they will partner with experts, and would have to show results based on carefully collected data to remain in operation. This has been done in other states. In fact, some of New York City's schools that have the greatest success with English Learners including International High School and Central Park East, grew out of a similar effort begun 23 years ago to address failing schools.

## **EDUCATION LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES**

In our work and that of others, the importance of the role of administrators as instructional leaders for schools with English Learners is evident. However, many administrators lack the skills needed to provide support and guidance for teachers and programs for English Learners. The words of one teacher we interviewed in 2005 echoed the view of many of her colleagues,

*You talk to your principal ... and there's an assumption that your administrator... understands about the whole picture of what a comprehensive EL program is, and this isn't always the case. And, I don't even know if it's on anybody's horizon at the state.*

Without developing this capacity among administrators we are ignoring a very important means for improving EL education. In order to begin to address this, we propose the following ideas for building this capacity.

The first step must be to define what we believe to be the necessary skills and knowledge for administrators with regard to English Learner education. There are existing organizations that can be of great help in developing guidelines in this area. The California Latino Superintendents Association (CALSA), for example has an extensive administrator mentoring program and The California School Boards Association (CSBA) has a Latino school board member organization that has attends to these issues. These guidelines for necessary skills and knowledge would not only be for school administrators but for school board members and superintendents as well.

Initially we propose that the guidelines developed through this process be included in a voluntary authorization rather than a credential. Incentives that would attract applicants might be offered such as paying costs of professional development through a grant or other means and providing a small stipend. Once the skills and knowledge were established the actual training might be done through organizations such as the ones mentioned above. There are also existing programs that might serve as partial models and/or would provide guidance in the development of such certification. These include the PROMISE Initiative leadership strand, the California Tomorrow ELL secondary leadership program, and the work that West Ed has done on educational leadership through its Quality Teaching for English Learners program. Some County Offices of Education are also developing programs to support administrators of schools with large EL populations.

The choice zones discussed above could be part of this effort—exploring how to build administrator capacity as part of the overall school an district infrastructure necessary to supporting effective EL programs. Our previously discussed idea of Centers of Excellence would also explore this area. In fact, we envision that the apprenticeship model would also include principals. One idea is that there would be different phases of apprenticeship with leadership woven in later.

Finally, we need to find the ways to include some of these skills and knowledge in principal preservice and inservice, for those administrators who don't seek this extra certification. We recommend that the Principal Leadership programs being conducted in California adopt the content of the certification for all principals in training.

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<sup>1</sup>See Gándara & Rumberger, *Resource needs for California's English Learners*, At: [www.lmri.ucsb.edu/publication/jointpubs.php](http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/publication/jointpubs.php)

## *Getting from Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*

Hosted by EDSOURCE

Deadline to Submit: October 1, 2007

### HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICTS ASSOCIATION (HSDA) POLICY BRIEF AND OPTIONS

#### 1. REQUIRED INFORMATION

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Topics Covered in this Policy Brief include: School Finance and Student Achievement.

#### 2. INTRODUCTION

The High School District Association (HSDA) would like to take this opportunity to provide input at this education policy convening, as we look forward to finding solutions that will help bring significant education reform in 2008 and beyond.

Specifically, HSDA would like to:

(1) provide input on the major issues faced in high schools,

(2) identify key issues from the compilation of *Getting Down to Facts Research*, also known as the "Adequacy" studies, recently released by the Institute for Research on Education Policy & Practice at Stanford University which HSDA believes should be addressed by the Governor and the Legislature, and,

(3) perhaps most significantly, suggest solutions to the issues that HSDA would like to see the Governor and the Legislature support.

Prior to a discussion of issues and potential legislative solutions, we believe a brief description of HSDA is critical to provide context. In California, there are 1,165 high schools statewide, which enroll approximately 1.8 million students. Currently, there are 88 high school districts in California enrolling over 621,000 students. The High School Districts Association (HSDA) is a group of approximately 30 high

school districts dedicated to improving the achievement levels of high school students. (Please note that some high school districts also include middle school grades of 7 and 8).

HSDA would like to thank EdSource, and any other collaborative partners in this effort, for hosting this important education policy convening. The issues discussed in this Policy Brief are critical for California.

In addition, HSDA applauds the Governor for his commitment to education and for proclaiming next year, 2008, as "The Year of Education Reform". HSDA wants to ensure that our high schools have the resources to implement additional efforts and much needed education reforms that will help all students succeed.

### 3. BRIEF PROBLEM STATEMENT

HSDA believes that it is possible to determine the adequacy of the current school funding levels for high schools and high school districts. Our high schools and high school districts have been severely squeezed by over 20% in the last 20 years when compared to elementary schools and elementary school districts. We refer to this as the "High School Funding Gap", and later in this briefing paper, we will describe how the gap has occurred. Recent data has shown that for the average high school district, this gap represents a reduction of approximately \$1,000 per student. It is one of the major reasons why our high schools are struggling today. High schools have had to make extremely difficult balancing decisions affecting teachers, class size, support services and equipment needs. Concurrently, more and more demands have been placed on high schools increasingly over time.

This paper will present a brief history of the High School Funding Gap, followed by a brief discussion of why high schools cost more than elementary schools, and will conclude by offering a wide variety of policy recommendations and much needed educational reforms that will help our high school students succeed.

#### California's High School Funding Gap

Prior to 1973-74, state aid to all school districts was based on separate funding levels for elementary and high school students. The school finance system recognized that high school districts cost about 40 percent more than elementary districts. Unified districts received funding that was a blended average of the high school and elementary districts. In addition, the unified districts were given a special "unification bonus" of \$20 per student. Then, by inadvertent policy, over a period of ten years the state reduced the high school and unified funding compared to elementary districts. While this policy of cutting high school funding was eliminated in 1983, its lingering effects explain a great deal why California high schools are struggling today.

In 1973-74, the average base revenue for high school districts was 40% higher than the base revenue limit for elementary districts. Today, that percentage has dropped to 19%, a difference of 21%. We would have to augment each high school district by an average of approximately \$1,069 per student to fully restore the 1973-74 ratio. For high school districts that could cost the state \$662 million. That figure is an indication of the severity of the problem.

#### How Did This Funding Gap Occur?

During most of the 1970s and the early 1980s, California tried to reduce the disparity in per student funding by giving additional funding to those school districts receiving below average levels of support and "squeezing" the funding for those districts that were above average. Unfortunately for high schools, this squeeze was applied without regard to the different costs of educating students at various grade levels. As a result, for ten years, high school districts received disproportionately reduced amounts of inflation funds.

In 1983 the landmark school finance reform legislation, SB 813 by Gary Hart, eliminated this unintended penalty against high school districts. Funding is now equalized according to the average for each type of district. Although SB 813 ended the annual penalty against high school districts, it did not restore programs and services eliminated during the decade when high schools were inappropriately reduced.

## Why Do High Schools Cost More?

The higher costs of high schools are primarily a result of the fact that most students attend class six periods per day, while teachers teach five periods. Teachers have one period per day committed to preparation, which includes reviewing extensive amounts of homework, grading assignments, contacting parents regarding student behavior and grades, attending staff development and often supervising to ensure a safe campus environment. These added duties result in a 20% difference between the cost of salaries and benefits in a typical high school district compared to an elementary school district. However, as an additional point of reference, the 1999-2000 revenue limit funding for high schools was only 19% higher than funding for elementary students. This 19% is not enough to pay for high school teachers' preparation period, let alone cover the following additional costs that are not found in elementary programs:

- ✎ The California high school exit exam, which all students are required to pass in order to graduate.
- ✎ The new state accountability system for schools.
- ✎ Time-consuming and labor-intensive attendance accounting procedures because high school students are not in the same class or program each day.
- ✎ Maintenance of academic records for transcripts.
- ✎ Custodial and maintenance costs for the high school physical plant including labs, gyms, athletic fields, etc.
- ✎ Guidance counselors and support staff to address complex discipline and social issues, attendance, and college matriculation.
- ✎ Costs of specialized instructional materials, supplies, and equipment for classes such as science labs, vocational course and performing arts.
- ✎ Costs of utilities and maintenance of science laboratory equipment and computers.
- ✎ Extensive student activity programs and interscholastic activities
- ✎ Complex and expensive library materials required by high school students.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF POLICY ISSUES, OPTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

High schools throughout California are greatly challenged by the lack of adequate and flexible funding to meet the needs of our very diverse student body and to ensure that all students have access to a well-rounded, college-preparatory, or career-oriented curriculum. Lack of access to additional funds earmarked specifically for significant high school reform efforts has been a major obstacle for many years. These types of reforms may include, but are not limited to, expanding 'A-G' and advanced placement programs, increasing instructional time, time for teacher collaboration and professional development, and promoting implementation of best practices models and programs that have proven successful (like the Advancement Via Individual Determination Program, otherwise known as AVID).

As we try to move forward and continue to engage in future policy and budget deliberations, HSDA urges the Governor and the Legislature, and other education stakeholders, to consider the following policy recommendations and educational reforms:

### ➤ Funding

As reported in the *"Getting Down to Facts"* report submitted to the California Legislature in March 2007, major attention must be directed to the area of funding. Significantly greater resources and flexibility are imperative for high schools throughout the state to address the needs of our diverse student body and to help students achieve at greater levels than ever before.

Lastly, HSDA does recognize that the state is not in the financial position to fully restore the funding gap that exists between unified and high school districts, which would amount to approximately \$1,069 per student. That restoration would cost the state over \$662 million for high school districts. However, the amount alone is a good indicator of the magnitude of the problem.

One consideration HSDA would like to offer is to modify the school finance system so that funding allocations are based by grade level and student needs. In the past, we based state aid on the

separate needs of elementary students and high school students. Currently, we give the same fixed dollar inflation increase to every student in the state. Does that make sense? Are the needs exactly the same? Are our current levels of funding adequate for our elementary, middle, and high schools? The Governor and/or the Legislature may want to consider convening hearings or additional studies to fully understand the discrepancies and tradeoffs between the different levels of funding for elementary, middle, and high schools.

We must also rethink and revise the methods and timeline by which districts receive revenues. The funding allocation system, with complicated and often excessive regulations, is a major obstacle and many times a moving target. In any given year, schools and school districts are working on three different fiscal years and budget cycles. When allocating state funds on statewide average cost, we need to distinguish between average costs for high school districts, elementary districts, and unified districts. It is important to also recognize that today's high schools have a different scope of responsibilities when making comparisons to high schools during the 1970's, 80's, or 90's.

The State continues to hold districts accountable for academic achievement while tying our hands with limited resources. Districts must be allowed more flexibility in meeting achievement goals with students with such diverse academic needs -- what works for more affluent districts does not always work for other districts. We must remember to try to resist the temptation to support bills or piece-meal efforts that require high schools to do more with existing resources. High schools are not able to absorb additional mandates within their existing budgets. Unfortunately, resources have already been stretched to the limit. If policy makers want high schools to do more, they should try to provide sufficient resources to support the added mandates or new requirements.

For the above reasons, HSDA strongly cautions that one-time money cannot be used to sustain effective long-standing programs or services that are needed over extended or indefinite periods of time. As such, the state should set aside and invest more on-going and/or unrestricted dollars for high school programs, if and when, funds are available. For example, a restoration of one percent would cost just \$111 million but would mean a major boost of \$62 per student for high schools. These funds would be used for a number of purposes such as preparing our students for the high school exit exam, retaining and recruitment of qualified teachers and administrators, reducing class size, and maintaining and upgrading facilities.

Lastly, HSDA supports specific efforts or legislation aimed at protecting school districts against declining enrollments or dramatic funding drops due to enrollment fluctuations that can cause disruptions to critical student programs and services (e.g., ensuring that funding reductions are made on a limited scale over time and especially not in the middle of the fiscal year or budget cycle, as it poses additional problems and constraints for school districts).

#### ➤ Achievement Gap

In most school districts throughout the State, high schools face a persistent academic achievement gap between Latino (and other students of color) and White students, and between English-Learner and English-only students. Additionally, less than one-third of the state's graduating seniors meet A-G requirements to be UC/CSU eligible.

Currently, districts do not receive sufficient funds to pay for the full cost of many critical student services and materials. The encroachments of special education, textbooks, and student transportation, along with a string of other under-funded or unfunded mandates, into the districts' general funds means less resources directed at reforms that could narrow the achievement gap.

Another fundamental component used to find ways to improve student achievement is through the availability of current and accurate data. The state should provide adequate funding for a statewide data collection and management systems to support our effort to focus on individual student academic improvement, such as the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) as soon as possible. This database will allow CDE to accurately track key demographic



trends such as student mobility, graduation and drop-out rates, and to better measure student performance over time.

➤ English Learners

California is unique in the nation in that more than half of its public school students speak a language other than English at home. Notwithstanding this unique and critical challenge of addressing the needs of English Learners (ELs), the State spends less on its students than most other states in the nation.

HSDA believes that it is imperative to address the issues raised in the EL Adequacy Study. Addressing the educational needs of English Learners is critical to our District's success and nation's future. Educational reforms aimed at helping English Learners achieve both English proficiency and academic success, may include: funding for appropriately tailored professional development, bilingual personnel, appropriate materials/technology and appropriate student assessments, as well as increased instructional time (longer school day and/or year), and an improved statewide accountability system so that it is based on valid and reliable testing (including primary language assessments where appropriate and feasible) and on the performance of these students over time.

➤ Special Education

California has set high requirements for its special education students. HSDA members are dedicated to working with parents to develop a plan for their children to help them achieve their academic potential. Even with these individualized measures, however, there is some abuse of the special education appeals system, which costs districts hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Reform of the appeals system would save thousands of dollars which can instead be used in the classroom. HSDA members also request adequate funding so that special education costs do not encroach on school districts' general budgets.

➤ Home-to-School Transportation

HSDA supports full funding of all legislative mandates and also recommends that the legislature re-examine the outdated funding cap for student transportation. A new formula for student transportation should be developed that is better tied to the current reality regarding the number of students that need to ride buses. Alongside special education, student transportation is one of the biggest encroachments on the general fund. As an example, the Kern Union High School District (KUHSD) spends approximately \$7 million on student transportation but receives only about \$1.6 million in State funding to apply to this expense. The majority of the KUHSD's \$7 million transportation cost (approximately \$3.6 million) is spent on the transportation of special education students.

➤ AYP Scores

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires all demographic subgroups in a school to increase their AYP scores by 11 points each year. High schools are disadvantaged by this current rating system because it does not take into account the amount of growth achieved by the students on a year-to-year basis.

The current model presumes that all students who enter ninth grade are at grade level and does not account for California's rigorous academic standards, the high number of English learners and the change in student population during the year. Even if a school has shown substantial growth and has succeeded in accelerating students several grade levels in one year, they are deemed low-achieving if they do not meet this rigorous standard. HSDA superintendents urge that a growth model be incorporated into the AYP rating system which reflects the achievement of low-performing students.

In addition, high schools have a particularly difficult time meeting the 95% participation rate. It would be helpful if high schools were given the same 60 days to meet this requirement as elementary schools currently enjoy.

➤ Career Technical and Vocational Education Classes

The Governor has expressed a strong interest in this subject area and his Administration has already begun to explore this issue further. It is clear that career and technical education classes must combine computer and other technical skills with academic rigor. Several polls and studies show that businesses are seeking a higher quality of education from prospective employees and that employers are demanding that students must exit high school with a higher level of skills. Now, more than ever, there is greater need to develop public and private partnerships with community organizations and businesses. In essence, finding ways of better preparing our students to enter the workforce is a top priority under the Governor's vision for high school reform.

➤ A-G Requirements

It is anticipated that over the course of the next few years, there will be continuous efforts to establish 'a-g' requirements for all high school students. HSDA superintendents support rigorous standards for all students but not necessarily the 'a-g' requirements for all students. If the 'a-g' classes are required for all students, however, HSDA wants to ensure that:

- The process for certifying which classes meet the 'a-g' requirements is consistent.
- Classes that meet 'a-g' requirements must also reinforce the adopted state standards.
- There is adequate remedial support for students who are behind grade level when they enter high school.
- Career Technical and Vocational Education classes must be able to qualify for certification if they can prove academic rigor.

➤ Funding for Additional Instructional Time

Additional funding would allow high school districts to increase the number of instructional minutes beyond what is currently funded and/or offered. This additional funding can be used innovatively by schools and/or districts to provide students, especially those students who need it the most, additional time in the classroom and supplementary or extra learning opportunities. This can take the form of any, or a combination, of the following: a seventh period, a longer school day and/or year, non-traditional or block scheduling, or an extended summer school program. This would allow students, not only to be able to meet course requirements necessary for graduation, but also to enroll and participate in other meaningful courses offered at their high school. These course offerings may include, but are not limited to:

- 1- Remedial intensive instruction in core academic subjects such as English and Math.
- 2- Additional instruction or enrichment courses that would prepare and assist students to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and other assessments.
- 3- Additional instructional academic course offerings, such as Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses, Foreign Language courses, or any of the 'a-g' courses required for college entrance.
- 4- Additional instructional elective course offerings, such as Arts, Music, Physical Education, or any of a variety of courses focusing on career, technical, or vocational education.
- 5- An AVID elective course (Advancement Via Individual Determination Program)
- 6- Partnership Academies
- 7- Regional Occupation Centers and Programs (ROC/P)

➤ Increase the Number of Professional Development Days

With higher standards and increased accountability, professional development needs for both staff, and administrators, are greater than ever. Teachers need to be certified as "highly qualified" for NCLB, be able to teach AP classes and need to know how to use test assessment data to help their students. HSDA requests funding for five to six days of professional development funding rather than the one single day that is currently funded. HSDA also requests additional funding for professional development and training for administrators to become "highly qualified".

**The Education Bill of Rights:  
Ensuring All California Students a High Quality Education**

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*As policymakers explore new ideas for reforming California's public schools, they would do well to reconsider a bold piece of legislation proposed in 2002. Assemblymember Judy Chu introduced the "California Educational Bill of Rights and Responsibilities" to formalize the legislature's commitment to a high quality education for all. The legislation aimed to accomplish three goals. First, it sought to instantiate the principle of reciprocal accountability: state and local officials should be responsible for ensuring quality learning conditions and students and parents should be responsible for investing the effort and commitment required to promote educational achievement. Second, it aimed to specify exactly what students and parents should expect from their schools. Third, it attempted to create an information system through which educational shortcomings could be identified, publicized, and (ultimately) addressed.*

*Five years ago, the California Educational Bill of Rights and Responsibilities" was derailed by the Appropriations Committee before the full Legislature could debate its merits. For 2008 to be the "year of education," policy makers and the public will need to grapple with questions posed by this Bill: What does California owe to students in its public schools? What do students and parents owe in return? What—specifically—should California's public schools provide to each student? How do we know when these conditions are not met? Who is responsible for remedying shortcomings?*

*The text of the Bill copied below provides a set of answers to these questions. We offer this text not so much to highlight these particular responses (though we find them generally compelling), but rather to encourage a broad and robust public conversation around these fundamental questions.*



BILL NUMBER: AB 2236

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 11, 2002

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares the following:

(a) In furtherance of the fundamental right of every California pupil to an elementary and secondary education, it is the intent of the State of California to develop and operate a public education system that will insure that every pupil has a reasonable opportunity to graduate from high school qualified to enter a four-year state university, to obtain a living wage job, and to actively participate in civic life.

(b) Pupils, parents or guardians, and members of the community at large have a right to know what they may expect of California's system of public education in providing for each pupil in California, and the degree to which those objectives are currently being met.

(c) To improve public education it is necessary that more specific goals for public education be established, and that the public education system make available to pupils, parents or guardians, and the public better information regarding the degree to which those goals are being met.

(d) It is further necessary that pupils, parents or guardians, and the public be informed of the identity of those officials responsible for insuring that specific goals are met, and, if necessary, that these officials provide an explanation of why these goals have not been achieved. SEC. 2. Article 4 (commencing with Section 40) is added to Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Education Code, to read:

#### Article 4. California Educational Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

40. It shall be the goal of California It is the intent of the Legislature to develop and operate a system of public schools that provides the high quality educational opportunities necessary for all pupils throughout the state to acquire the proficiencies specified in the content standards adopted pursuant to Section 60605. These opportunities for learning shall include all of the following:

(a) Fully qualified and adequately trained teachers and counselors, as specified in subdivision (a) of Section 41.

(b) Adequate textbooks and other learning materials and resources, as specified in subdivision (b) of Section 41.

(c) A suitable learning environment and school classrooms and facilities that promote learning and health, as specified in subdivision (c) of Section 41.

(d) A supportive learning environment free from harassment and violence, as specified in subdivision (d) of Section 41.

(e) A clear statement of academic standards that define what each pupil is expected to know at each grade level and the conditions for learning necessary to achieve these standards, as specified in subdivision (e) of Section 41.

(f) A course of instruction and supplementary academic services that provide every pupil the opportunity to compete for admission to California's public universities and to enter the workforce adequately prepared for gainful employment, as specified in subdivision (f) of Section 41.

(g) A course of instruction that incorporates the home language of the pupil to the degree necessary to access curriculum and meet grade level expectations, as specified in subdivision (g) of Section 41.

(h) Fair and authentic assessment of pupil achievement, as specified in subdivision (h) of Section 41.

(i) Access by pupils and parents or guardians to timely and accurate information regarding the degree to which individual pupils have been provided learning opportunities necessary to high achievement, as specified in subdivision (i) of Section 41.

(j) Access by pupils, parents or guardians, and members of the public at large to information essential to assessing the performance of schools, school districts, and the state system of public education, including information regarding the identities of those public employees charged with the responsibility of insuring the delivery of those educational opportunities referred to in this section, as specified in subdivision (j) of Section 41.

41. The It is the intent of the Legislature that the educational opportunities described in Section 40 shall include the following:

(a) High-quality teachers and counselors, including all of the following:

(1) Teachers adequately trained in the subject matter taught.

(2) Teachers who receive ongoing professional development and training.

(3) Teachers who have sufficient time to devote to each pupil's development and who teach classes of reasonable size.

(4) Counselors available to meet with pupils at regular intervals to advise pupils regarding educational requirements and choices

(b) Adequate learning materials and resources, including all of the following:

(1) Materials necessary to support the instructional program at each level recommended or required by the content standards adopted pursuant to Section 60605.

(2) Individual textbooks, workbooks, and other instructional materials for use in and out of the classroom.

(3) Access to reasonably current information technology and the Internet.

(4) Necessary equipment for rigorous science and mathematics instruction.

(5) Suitable chairs, desks, and other classroom equipment.

(c) A suitable learning environment and school classrooms, buildings, and facilities that enable learning and health, including all of the following:

(1) School facilities located within a reasonable commuting distance of a pupil's home.

(2) Clean, uncrowded, well-lit classrooms and other instructional spaces with adequate ventilation and necessary heating and air-conditioning, reasonably maintained and free of vermin, mold, and other health hazards.

(3) Adequate laboratories and studios for pupils to complete rigorous work in science and the arts.

(4) Bathrooms and sanitary facilities that are unlocked, accessible, well-stocked, and maintained in decent, safe, and sanitary condition.

(5) Outdoor space sufficient for exercise and sports.

(6) Adequate school nursing services.

(d) A safe and supportive school environment, including all of the following:

(1) Protection from harassment or abuse of any kind from any person.

(2) A fair and nondiscriminatory disciplinary system.

(e) A clear statement of the academic standards that both define what pupils are expected to know and accomplish at every educational level and specify the basic conditions for learning that pupils and families have a right to expect from the public education system.

(f) A course of instruction that will enable all pupils to compete for admission to any public university in the state, to compete for a high-quality job, and to participate actively in California's civic life, including all of the following:

(1) Access to challenging curriculum in elementary and middle school that prepares pupils to succeed in college preparatory curriculum.

(2) Access to any sequence or combination of courses required for entry into the state's public universities.

(3) Access to advanced placement courses or other courses that offer some advantage to applicants seeking admission to the state's public universities.

(4) Access to the full array of curricular and extracurricular options offered across the entire school calendar, such that no pupil is denied access to any program offered in school because of their assignment to a particular track in a year-round school.

(5) Access to essential supplementary academic services that provide pupils with a meaningful opportunity to learn the curriculum and progress towards their academic goals.

(g) Instruction that allows pupils with differing language capabilities to access the curriculum and to maintain proficiency in their native language.

(h) A fair and accurate assessment system used to measure and improve the quality of education and supplementary educational services that respond to identified pupil needs, including all of the following:

(1) Measures that are sensitive to the diversity of pupils and of school communities.

(2) Multiple measures that allow pupils to demonstrate their competence accurately for the purpose of graduation, state scholarship funds, and college eligibility.

(3) Measures that enable teachers to guide pupils and design further learning opportunities and that provide parents or guardians and pupils with accurate information regarding the pupil's progress toward being prepared to compete for entry into a public university and for entry into the workforce.

(4) Full disclosure of the uses to which pupil assessment information will be made.

(i) Easily understood, current, and reliable information provided to parents or guardians and pupils regarding individual pupil achievement and the performance of the pupil's school in providing each of the learning opportunities enumerated in this section, including the individual pupil's preparation for, and completion of, requirements for college eligibility and preparation to enter the workforce.

(j) Easily understood, current, and reliable information provided to parents or guardians, pupils, and the public regarding the performance of each school, each school district, and the state, in providing those learning opportunities specified in this section.

This information shall be provided both in the aggregate and as to any statistically significant subgroups, defined as any racial or ethnic group comprising more than 15 percent of a school's pupils and by socioeconomic status, to the extent that this information is already known to the school, and including all of the following information:

(1) The quality of services provided to pupils, including the degree to which pupils are prepared for and have completed requirements for college eligibility.

(2) Disciplinary actions taken by the school, including suspensions and expulsions.

(3) Accurate information regarding pupils who have dropped out or withdrawn from the school and not enrolled in any other school in the state.

(k) Nothing in this article shall be construed to create any new right of any pupil, parent, guardian, or other person to sue any public official or employee for failure to provide any learning opportunities specified in this article. Nothing in this article shall be construed as limiting any other right or remedy of any pupil, parent, guardian, or other person under the California Constitution and other laws of the state.

42. To maximize the opportunities that the state is required to provide, each pupil and the parent, guardian, or other person charged with the care and supervision of each minor pupil shall be responsible to ensure that:

(a) The pupil attends school regularly.

(b) The pupil follows the reasonable educational instructions of his or her teachers.

(c) The pupil adheres to those administrative and behavioral rules established for the school.

(d) The pupil gives his or her best effort at taking advantage of those opportunities provided.

(e) The pupil treats his or her fellow pupils with respect.

(f) The parent, guardian, or other adult responsible for the care and supervision of each minor pupil is informed of the educational instructions of the pupils teachers and the administrative and behavioral rules established for that school.

(g) The parent, guardian, or other adult responsible for the care and supervision of each minor pupil provides, to the maximum degree feasible, further guidance and supervision to promote educational success.

43. In order to provide better information to pupils, parents or guardians, and the public as specified in subdivisions (i) and (j) of Section 40, and to increase the accountability of public officials for providing, to the maximum feasible extent, those opportunities for learning specified in subdivisions (a) to (h), inclusive, of Section 40 the following activities shall be conducted:

(a) The principal or other person primarily responsible for the administration of each school shall identify the employee primarily responsible for insuring the provision of each such learning opportunity to pupils in the school.

(b) In each school district, the superintendent or other person principally responsible for the administration of the school district shall identify the school district employee primarily responsible for insuring the provision of each such learning opportunity to pupils in the schools within the district.

(c) The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall identify the state official primarily responsible for insuring the provision of each such learning opportunity to pupils in the schools within the state.

(d) As used in this section, "identify" means to provide the name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the official. The directory information shall allow the individual to receive information regarding the learning conditions for which he or she is responsible.

44. (a) In each school, the principal or other person responsible for the administration of each school shall ensure that a copy of Sections 40, 41 and 42, together with the name, business address, telephone number, and e-mail address of each person identified pursuant to Section 43 is posted in a prominent location within each classroom in the school.

(b) In each school, the principal or other person principally responsible for the administration of each school shall ensure that on an annual basis, the parents or legal guardian of each pupil is provided with a copy of Sections 40, 41 and 42 in the primary language of that parent or guardian, as specified in subdivision (c).

(c) The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall ensure the public availability, via the Internet or otherwise, of translations of Sections 40, 41 and 42, in the language that is the primary language of any group comprising more than 100,000 residents of California.

45. (a) In each school, the principal or other person responsible for the administration of the school shall transmit to the superintendent of the district, no less than annually, a report including the following:

(1) A summary of those complaints received by school personnel regarding the failure of the school to deliver any of those learning opportunities listed in Sections 40 and 41.

(2) A summary of those complaints that have been or can be remedied at the school level without additional assistance or resources from the district.

(3) A summary of those complaints that have not or cannot be remedied at the school level without additional assistance or resources from the district.

(4) A statement summarizing the progress the school has made during the preceding year in providing high quality educational opportunities to all pupils as specified in Section 41.

(b) In each school district, the superintendent or other person principally responsible for the administration of the school district shall transmit, on an annual basis, to the governing board of the school district a report including the following:

(1) A summary of those complaints received from school principals regarding the failure of the schools within the district to deliver any of those learning opportunities enumerated in Sections 40 and 41.

(2) A summary of those complaints that have been or can be remedied at the district level without additional assistance or resources from the state.

(3) A summary of those complaints that have not or cannot be remedied at the district level without additional assistance or resources from the state.

(4) A statement summarizing the progress the district has made during the preceding year in providing high quality educational opportunities to all pupils as specified in Section 41.

(c) In each school district, the governing board of the school district shall transmit, on an annual basis, to the Superintendent of Public Instruction a report including the following:

(1) A summary of those complaints received by the board regarding the failure of the schools within the district to deliver any of those learning opportunities listed in Sections 40 and 41.

(2) A summary of those complaints that have been or can be remedied at the district level without additional assistance or resources from the state.

(3) A summary of those complaints that have not or cannot be remedied at the district level without additional assistance or resources from the state.

(4) A statement summarizing the progress the district has made during the preceding year in providing high quality educational opportunities to all pupils as specified in Section 41.

(d) The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall transmit, on an annual basis, a report to the Governor and Legislature including the following:

(1) A summary of information received by Superintendent of Public Instruction regarding the failure of the schools within the state to deliver any of those learning opportunities listed in Sections 40 and 41.

(2) A summary of those deficiencies in the schools within the state that can, in the opinion of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, be remedied without further action by the Legislature, the Governor, or the people.

(3) A summary of those deficiencies in the schools within the state that have not or cannot be remedied without further action by the Legislature, the Governor, or the people.

46. Not later than \_\_\_\_\_, the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall report to the Legislature on the feasibility and anticipated cost of conducting an audit of the public schools, to include all of the following:

(a) The number and geographical location of pupils who are being deprived of those rights set forth in Section 40 and 41, or as those rights may be carried out by regulation.

(b) An inventory of school district facilities, together with a projected cost estimate of compliance with subdivision (c) of Section 40 and subdivision (c) of Section 41, or as they may be further carried out by regulation.

(c) An inventory of available teaching resources and their distribution by school, together with an estimate of the current shortage of teachers and teacher training necessary to comply with subdivision (a) of Section 40, if any.

(d) An assessment of the availability of textbooks and instructional materials with an estimate of the shortage of textbooks and instructional materials necessary to comply with subdivision (b) of Section 40, if any.



# BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: INVESTING IN AN IMPROVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

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## Brief Problem Statement

This policy brief suggests a new conceptualization for the structuring and financing of the state's school systems to support their continuous improvement. It presents a fundamentally different way of understanding and responding to the challenges of improving student achievement. The policy shift that is suggested in this brief is not aimed at any particular domain such as pre-service, curriculum, or assessment, nor does it draw on a specific research study or set of data. Rather, this brief is conceptual in nature, but it is also grounded in our experience of studying hundreds of educational improvement projects.

One can ask why schools don't do a better job of educating students. But it is equally important to ask why districts and schools don't do a better job of improving the education they offer their students. This policy brief argues that the reason California schools are not showing more improvement is that they lack the capacities needed to do the work required to improve themselves. They don't get better because they can't get better. And they can't get better because the whole approach to funding improvement efforts has been misconceptualized.

To understand why improvement efforts need improving, it is very important to distinguish between the task of operating an educational system and the task of improving it. The two tasks present highly related challenges, but they are not the same. Operation and improvement require different kinds of work, expertise, strategies, and resources. Confounding the two challenges, as often happens, can lead to difficulties in addressing both.

*What I would like to see happen is for the political system to recognize -- and for the American people to recognize -- that investment isn't the same as simple expenditures. Infrastructure requires investment which, over the years, will provide a return, but investing in infrastructure isn't the same as spending money on day-to-day expenditures.*

Felix Rohatyn ... Speaking on the Jim Lehrer Newshour on a recent report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies: **Guiding Principles for Strengthening America's Infrastructure**

It is important to distinguish between investment and expenditure<sup>i</sup>. Expenditures are one-time allocations of funds for services or products; expenditures pay for things that are consumed. By contrast, investments are intended to create enduring assets that will bring future returns; they produce capital that can be used in the production of other goods and services. The ability to make smart expenditures is key to operating an efficient enterprise; the ability to invest wisely in the creation of capital is critical to the continuous improvement of that enterprise.

To date the improvement of education has largely been conceptualized as an expenditure and not as an investment. As a result, the whole process of improving schools and instruction has been under-capitalized. Funding levels for improvement are almost certainly too low. More important, funding for improvement is too often short-term, episodic, and unreliable, resulting in a profusion of uncoordinated

improvement programs that do not build continuously toward improved instruction and student achievement. There are too few mechanisms (or even intentions) to use public educational funds to invest in the development of what might be called educational improvement capital<sup>iii</sup>. Just as capital investments are critical to the long-term health of industry, investments made in educational improvement capital are essential to create the foundational capacities needed to improve educational instruction and achievement.

The current level of public funding dedicated to educational improvement is quite low compared to the expenditures used to operate the system. The educational system is unwilling or unable to devote funds to the creation of educational improvement capital, and therefore the system is incapable of investing in its own future. This inevitably leads to a chronically depleted and under-nourished system. By contrast, other industries and corporations have ample resources, structures, and incentives for self-investment for continuous improvement. Microsoft, for example, spends 16% of its revenues on R&D and product innovation; pharmaceutical companies spend up to 50% of revenues on R&D.

Low levels of funding are only one aspect of the problem. A unidimensional and short-sighted approach to supporting improvement efforts is another. The expenditures in educational improvement to date have largely focused on short-term programs and projects which are aimed at ameliorating a particular problem (e.g., large class sizes, new teacher orientation); strengthening a particular dimension or domain (e.g., professional development for language arts and mathematics teachers), or pursuing a particular strategy toward system improvement (e.g., school restructuring; increased accountability). Underlying these strategies for improvement are several assumptions. One is that the problem being addressed somehow reflects a temporary situation and can be “fixed” in a relatively short time with the infusion of extra funds. Second, there is an assumption that the improvement effort, and the results that it yields, will somehow be sustained and perhaps even replicated. Third, there is often an assumption that funding alone is sufficient—that the capacity to do the funded work of improvement (e.g., provide high-quality professional development, implement challenging curriculum, mentor new teachers) already exists. In our experience of studying hundreds of programs and projects we have rarely found these assumptions to be true.

Over many years and in multiple studies our research group has analyzed and documented the capacities necessary to successfully undertake systemic improvement efforts. They include people, knowledge, structures, and tools—all working together and focused on the work of instructional improvement. Strong leadership is critical. By leadership we are speaking specifically about leadership for improvement—that is, about administrators and teachers who not only are skilled in doing their jobs, but also have the expertise, propensity, mandate and time to engage in the improvement of administration and teaching. Vision and knowledge are also critical. The vision of good teaching and learning, and the knowledge of how to orchestrate systemic change toward that vision are both essential. Similarly, it is important to evolve structures (e.g., mentors and coaches) and special tools (e.g., lesson study) that empower the work of instructional improvement.

Few school systems currently have the capacities described above. They lack the staff, knowledge, structures or tools to carry out continuous improvement efforts. They also lack the key resources of money and time to devote to improvement efforts; many districts are under extreme pressure simply to operate their systems. From time to time districts may have special funding that allows for the support of leadership positions, the creation of a shared vision, or the implementation of special programs. But once the project funding is over, these components rarely are sustained as a part of the permanent system. The educational improvement capital that is generated is temporary at best. Consequently, most districts lack most of the capacities needed to work on the dimensions of the system that most influence the nature and quality of instruction.

## **Discussion of Policy Issues, Options, and Recommendations**

### ***Introducing the Concept of the Improvement Infrastructure***

Educational improvement capital refers to the capacities necessary to generate and sustain high quality improvement activities. The constellation of those capacities, interwoven and working together, can be thought of as an “improvement infrastructure”. The improvement infrastructure concept was invented by Doug Engelbart<sup>iii</sup>, a professor emeritus at Stanford and a visionary who thinks about organizations and the improvement of organizations<sup>iv</sup>. Doug Engelbart pointed out that every organization has a capability infrastructure—that is, it has a set of supports that help people do their work. For example, in aviation the

capability infrastructure includes the airline terminals, the runways, the computer systems, and air traffic control. In education the capability infrastructure includes buildings, buses, textbooks, desks, administrators, janitors—all of which are meant to support teachers in their job of teaching students.

What Englebart recognized was that organizations also need *an improvement infrastructure*. The improvement infrastructure underlies and supports the ongoing improvement of the capability infrastructure. By constantly working to make the capability infrastructure stronger, the improvement infrastructure is critical to the quality and long-term health of an enterprise. In aviation there is a large improvement infrastructure—whole inter-connected industries that focus on basic research, new designs, maintenance and safety. In public schooling, by contrast, there is at best a weak and disconnected improvement infrastructure.

Schooling is ongoing work. Hence, the capability infrastructure that supports schooling also needs to be ongoing. But the need for continuity and for an underlying infrastructure is equally true for the work that is involved in the improvement of schooling. It is highly unrealistic and inefficient to continue to fund short-term intermittent projects with the hope that the system will be fixed “once and for all”. If schools are to be on-going enterprises, then the need for improving them will also be continuous and ongoing. And just as the work of schools requires an underlying capability infrastructure, the work of improving schools similarly needs the support of an underlying improvement infrastructure.

### ***The Essential Features of An Educational Improvement Infrastructure***

Investing in the educational improvement infrastructure is different than funding educational programs, even large statewide programs. Infrastructure has its own unique features and characteristics. Well-designed infrastructure of any kind empowers a wide range of other activities. Unlike short-term projects, infrastructure is more or less permanent, and its capacity increases over time. To be useful infrastructure has to be stable, robust and trusted. Infrastructure works on a large scale and is scalable up or down as needed. Public infrastructure is cost-effective, and it is usually funded by multiple sources, all of whom count on and value the services offered by the infrastructure. Good infrastructure is accessible to many different users on an equitable basis.

The infrastructure that provides electrical power across the United States is made up of connected functional components that all work together in a mutually supportive fashion (e.g., generators, transmission lines, transformers, and outlets). In the same way the educational improvement infrastructure has to be made of connected functional components that all work together as a system. In this case rather than supply electricity, the improvement infrastructure is intended to initiate, implement and sustain improvements in the key dimensions of the educational system that support instruction. For example, the improvement infrastructure for education includes the capacities needed to design and implement high quality professional development, curricular improvements, assessment procedures, policy reforms, etc.

The key features that distinguish investments in infrastructure from the funding of short-term projects are listed in the chart below:

<b><i>Funding Projects</i></b>	<b><i>Investing in Improvement Infrastructures</i></b>
Finite short lifetime	Ongoing operation
Finite funding from a single source	Ongoing funding from multiple sources
Static capacity	Ever-growing capacity
Focused on achieving short-term improvement goals	Focused on building capacity and providing ongoing support services
Often focused on single dimension of system	Often focused on multiple dimensions of system
Focuses on the activities involved in improvement	Focuses on building capacities needed to carry out improvement activities
Tries to achieve leverage through replication, sustainability, etc.	Tries to achieve leverage through learning, stability and cumulative growth

## *Creating Educational Improvement Infrastructures*

There are different ways to create improvement infrastructures. One way is to design and develop them from scratch. Probably the best example in education of the *creation de novo* of a coherent improvement infrastructure is the National Writing Project (NWP)<sup>v</sup>. For over thirty years the NWP has grown itself, establishing nearly 200 professional development sites at universities across the country. With stable and shared funding coming from the federal government, states, universities, local districts and teachers the NWP has been able to develop hundreds of expert site leaders and thousands of teacher consultants who are now serving over 100,000 teachers each year. Because it is ongoing, the NWP is cumulative in terms of building its own capacity, developing the range of services it offers, and improving its own work. Our group at Inverness Research has studied the project for many years<sup>vi</sup> and found that the NWP meets many of the key criteria that define successful infrastructure investments in terms of quantity, quality, cost effectiveness, scalability, and accessibility and equity. The fact that the structure was constant, the funding stable, the work cumulative—all these attributes make the NWP a strong improvement infrastructure for the teaching of writing across the country.

Another approach to creating improvement infrastructures is to identify and weave together existing resources so that they can operate in a mutually supportive and coherent fashion. A good example of this strategy is currently taking place at a regional level in the Bay Area in the domain of elementary science education. A consortium, initially funded by four private Foundations, is now connecting 17 science rich educational institutions (e.g., museums, universities, labs, etc.) with 9 Bay Area Counties and 148 schools districts. The idea is to create an ongoing entity that can help to build the collective capacity of the region to provide professional development and support the implementation of high-quality curriculum in elementary science. The important idea here is that this consortium is conceived as an ongoing infrastructure, not a short term project, with funding coming from multiple sources

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) We recommend that the state reconceptualize its approach to financing educational improvement. The state needs to explicitly identify the need to invest in educational improvement infrastructures at the state, county and district levels.
- 2) The state should recognize that such infrastructures are complementary to and supportive of short-term projects and initiatives. State funding for improving education should not be construed or structured solely as a series of short-term expenditures. Rather the state needs to find ways to invest in interlinked and nested improvement infrastructures that will become an integral ongoing part of the educational system.
- 3) These improvement infrastructures must include institutions and people who reside both inside and outside the system. Universities, labs, museums and other community agencies can provide a range of supports for the work needed to improve instruction.<sup>vii</sup> But it is equally important that counties, districts and schools develop their own organizations that house and develop local improvement infrastructures<sup>viii</sup>. The combination of inside and outside organizations working together in an interconnected and mutually supportive way are critically important in making the improvement of education robust, stable and “investable”.
- 4) It is not possible or desirable to completely separate the work of developing infrastructure from the funding of the work it supports. The National Writing Project was developed by funding its work with teachers, but also by simultaneously investing in its own capacity building<sup>ix</sup>. Funding for educational improvement should thus be long-term with the dual focus of doing good work, while at the same time very deliberately building sustainable capacities.
- 5) The state should set aside on the order of 5% of all state education funding to be invested in the development of state, county and district improvement infrastructures. These funds should be separate and distinct from operating funds.
- 6) At all levels the improvement infrastructure should include institutions, agencies, and individuals who are expert in the improvement of professional development, curriculum and materials, the setting and changing of policies, the design and use of assessments, and the acquisition and use of financial resources. Ultimately, the state should develop and support strong “improvement communities”—i. e., individuals around the state who are expert at and engaged in the challenges of improving the state’s educational system.

- 7) The state must develop its own capacity to design, develop and manage the investments it makes in state and local improvement infrastructures.
- 8) The investments made in state and district infrastructures should be evaluated by independent third parties using criteria that are appropriate for evaluating investments in infrastructure<sup>x</sup>.

## **Summary**

The GDTF summary report states: "No one program or intervention will fix the system. California has tried over and over the approach of introducing separate program and disjointed new policies." The report also states: "For schools in high-poverty communities to reach California's high student achievement goals it will likely require new approaches and a system that supports continuous improvement." For these reasons we believe that the challenge of raising student achievement can never be adequately addressed without creating the capacity to continuously improve the quality of classroom instruction. And in the current budget climate, long-term investments in capacity can never compete with operational needs that are more salient and more apparently urgent. Since the passage of Proposition 13 there has been a slow steady erosion of both state and district improvement capacities. The pressures of No Child Left Behind have exacerbated the tendencies to fund the immediate in lieu of investing in the future. What is needed now is the foresight and courage to invest in educational improvement capital and create strong ongoing improvement infrastructures that can do the steady long-term work needed to improve instruction. Our work with many different initiatives over the years suggests that a steady annual investment on the order of 5% of the total educational budget could create a strong set of nested improvement infrastructures that would bring returns for years to come.

## References and Notes

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<sup>i</sup> For more on the need to invest in infrastructure see Guiding Principles for Strengthening America's Infrastructure, [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/060327\\_infrastructure\\_principles.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/060327_infrastructure_principles.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Educational improvement capital is a slightly different, but very related notion to the concept of "educational capital" discussed in the book, Reconnecting Education and Foundations, Turning Good Intentions into Educational Capital, Bachetti, R. and Ehrlich, T., 2006, Josey-Bass.

<sup>iii</sup> For more about Doug Engelbart, see <http://www.bootstrap.org/>.

<sup>iv</sup> Doug Engelbart is interested in ways to augment human knowledge and improve operations of individuals and institutions. He is perhaps most famous for inventing the mouse which is used on almost all computers today.

<sup>v</sup> For more on the NWP see [www.nwp.org](http://www.nwp.org).

<sup>vi</sup> For more on the way the NWP serves as an improvement infrastructure see multiple reports on our website ([http://www.inverness-research.org/nwp\\_portal.html](http://www.inverness-research.org/nwp_portal.html)).

<sup>vii</sup> For a good study of the role of different organizations involved in improving education, see The Ecology of School Improvement: Notes on the School Improvement Industry in the United States in The Journal for Educational Change, Volume 3, 2002 (<http://www.springerlink.com/content/pqt02j272kl6/?p=c88b572b2cfa40118e0280d03fbf276f&pi=0>)

<sup>viii</sup> A good example of the development of district-based improvement infrastructures can be found in the work of the NSF Local Systemic Change initiative and the NSF Urban Systemic Initiative. In cities across the country NSF support over five years led districts to develop strong internal discipline based "improvement departments" that were capable of supporting instructional improvement in a continuing fashion. For examples see a study of San Diego, CA ([http://www.inverness-research.org/reports/ab2007-04\\_Rpt\\_SanDiegoLL.htm](http://www.inverness-research.org/reports/ab2007-04_Rpt_SanDiegoLL.htm)) and Gilbert, AZ ([http://www.inverness-research.org/reports/ab2006-11\\_gilbert\\_infrastructure.htm](http://www.inverness-research.org/reports/ab2006-11_gilbert_infrastructure.htm)).

<sup>ix</sup> Today approximately one-half of the NWP annual budget goes toward supporting the national network of sites and the development of leadership; the other half funds the activities and services offered by the project sites.

<sup>x</sup> For approaches to evaluating investments in infrastructure see *Measuring the Interim Performance of the Regional Educational Laboratory in the Educational Research Development and Dissemination Infrastructure -- What Are The Benchmarks And Indicators Of Success? A Concept Paper* ([http://www.inverness-research.org/reports/ab1998-11\\_Rpt\\_DOE\\_RegionalEducLab.htm](http://www.inverness-research.org/reports/ab1998-11_Rpt_DOE_RegionalEducLab.htm)).

**Policy Brief**  
*Policy Lessons from Schools Where Low-Income Students of Color Thrive*

**Required information**

**Organizations submitting this brief:** Justice Matters and the School Redesign Network at Stanford University

**Topics covered:** personnel and leadership, school finance

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**Problem Statement**

Public high schools that provide low-income students of color with an education that enables them to thrive are possible. A considerable body of research has shown that these schools provide students with an education that is academically rigorous while also relevant, responsive and connected to students' cultures. The practices of such schools as well as their structure and organization have been documented many times so that other schools may follow in their footsteps. However, the number of such high schools remains extremely low.

The good intentions and dedication of people working in schools and the body of knowledge about best equitable practices are just not enough to withstand a policy environment that undermines these practices at every turn. Our research study, *High Schools for Equity: Policy Supports for Student Learning in Communities of Color*, identifies policy areas that have major influences on the ability of high schools to carry out the practices that enable our most underserved students to succeed. Among these areas are: personnel and leadership and school finance.

Current policies in these areas are either inadequate or sorely lacking, specifically in terms of policies that:

- ensure a supply of teachers and leaders with the skill set needed to carry out the practices in question,
- provide the flexibility and support for schools to supply ongoing learning opportunities and support for teachers to enable the kinds of pedagogical strategies and personalized student attention identified by the research as crucial for low-income students of color,
- provide school leaders with the professional learning opportunities and support to develop the skills of instructional leadership and organizational change,
- provide sufficient funding with the flexibility to be allocated to the resources most strategic to providing a high quality rigorous, relevant, and responsive learning environment, and
- provide the resources that students will need in order to have true access to higher education.

## **Personnel and Leadership**

Policies must strengthen and build the human capital of teachers and principals.

### Teacher Preparation

We found that the schools that are successfully providing a rigorous, relevant and responsive education work hard to recruit the limited supply of teachers with the knowledge and skill base necessary to provide this type of education. Teachers need deep knowledge of the content they teach, understanding of how students learn as individuals and as members of cultural groups and communities, the capacity to develop strong relationships with students and parents, knowledge of practices for providing a range of supports to students who are struggling, and methods for teaching English learners. While some pre-service programs provide a strong start on these skills, many prospective teachers do not have access to these programs because of cost and availability. California has periodically enacted programs to subsidize the preparation of teachers for high-need schools; however, most of these programs have been cancelled or reduced in scale over recent years.

### *Policy Recommendations:*

- Provide financial support for high quality pre-service preparation for candidates who will teach in high-need schools.
- Provide support for improving the quality of teacher education programs and their capacity to provide a foundation in the skills that teachers most need to provide rigorous, relevant, and responsive education to low-income students of color.

### Professional Development and Support

Once teachers are working in schools, they need ongoing high quality professional development. High quality professional development includes multiple layers of support for new teachers as well as ongoing support for experienced teachers including opportunities to collaborate, plan and reflect on practice as well as observe each other teach, methods for reflecting on one's practice with administrators or outstanding teachers, and frequent feedback and support from administrators and outstanding teachers.

Currently, school schedules do not provide sufficient time for collaboration or professional development. And school principals do not have the knowledge or time to act as instructional leaders. The state program to support new teachers, Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA), operates through providers who often do not have a strong knowledge base about the teaching skills most important for low-income students of color.

The schools that are successfully creating rigorous, relevant, and responsive learning environments do so in part through raising additional funds to provide the time and professional learning experiences not supported through state or district policies. They also have the autonomy to develop professional learning opportunities that correspond to their instructional mission and program. Other schools need similar opportunities. In addition, state sponsorship of high quality professional development on many of the



topics most needed by teachers is urgent in a context where schools and districts lack the resources to otherwise access such training. California already has an infrastructure for providing some of the professional development that is needed—its high quality system of professional development focused on the academic content areas called the Subject Matter Projects. Unfortunately, funding for the Subject Matter Projects has been greatly reduced.

*Policy Recommendations:*

- Provide support for at least 10 days of professional development time each year. Schools and districts should have the flexibility to determine when in the year this time is used and whether several days or grouped together or partial days are spread throughout the year.
- Provide more time for teacher planning and collaboration.
- Provide more direction to the training of providers of the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) to make sure that they are covering the skills discussed above that are most important for strong learning environments for low-income students of color.
- Provide high quality professional development on key topics by increasing support for the Subject Matter Projects as well as sponsoring high quality professional development for teaching English language learners.

School leadership

Principals are strong instructional leaders in the schools that are successfully providing rigorous, relevant, and responsive learning experiences. They need not only to model strong instructional practice, but they also need to know how to plan professional development, re-design school organizations, and manage a change process. They need to know how to reorganize their schools to focus resources on core academic instruction—for example, how to organize staffing and teacher time to reduce class size, create teams, develop systems of support for each student, and provide time for collaboration and professional learning opportunities. There has been little investment in development of school leaders in California over recent years. Leadership preparation programs that exist generally provide little guidance for principals with regard to leading schools that are organized differently from traditional schools so as to better enable learning environments that can combine rigor, relevance, and responsiveness. Most programs also do not provide funded internships, a very important component of effective principal preparation.

After the preparation phase, California’s principals are much less likely than principals in other states to have access to mentoring, coaching, and high quality professional development. For twenty years, California did have an infrastructure for principal professional development through the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA). CSLA was nationally recognized and served as a model for other states. CSLA was cut from the budget in 2003. Finally, there is not a statewide system for developing the pipeline of future principals that have the right capacities for the job and who are from demographic backgrounds that reflect the diversity of their students.

### *Policy Recommendations:*

- Restore the California School Leadership Academy. The Academy's offerings should include mentoring and coaching specific to beginning principals and training about the specific learning needs of students of color and English learners.
- Provide support for systematically improving principal preparation programs, specifically providing funded internships and content that prepare principals to lead in schools that are organized very differently from traditional schools.
- Aggressively recruit teachers into the principal pipeline who reflect students' demographic backgrounds and have strong instructional and leadership capacities.

### **School Finance**

California public schools that successfully provide a rigorous, relevant, and responsive education to low-income students of color can only do so by raising additional funds. Not only do schools not have enough funds to provide what they know their students need, but they also lack flexibility in using the funds that they do have to direct the resources so as to best serve their students.

#### Level of Funding for Schools

The schools in our study raise considerable additional funds (\$500-\$1,200 per student) to increase staffing, so they can lower class size and support professional learning and collaboration time. Strong, experienced teachers are given reduced teaching loads, so they can work with new teachers. More staffing also enables teachers to provide responsive support to each student in the context of caring relationships; additional staff translate into smaller class sizes and time for teachers to teach classes such as advisory that are designed to provide students with individualized academic and emotional support. Furthermore, additional staff make it possible for principals to distribute some of their duties and free up time, so that they can be in classrooms and provide instructional leadership. Raised funds also provide lead teachers with time and/or stipends to engage in an annual analysis of student data and student work to set instructional goals for the subsequent year, and to develop curriculum.

Additional funds also enable each school to carry out its unique vision that makes learning come alive for its students. A clear vision that is widely held by the school community has been found in study after study to be one of the key factors in providing a high quality and equitable education. But lack of funds often prevents schools from effectively actualizing their vision. A school with a construction focus uses funds to buy building materials. Another school hires a staff person to develop high quality service learning internships. These funds do not go to frills or extras, but to features that are integral to the school's work.

Finally, there is one item that schools successfully providing a rigorous, relevant, and responsive education rarely pay for, but this resource must be funded if the work of such schools is to be sustainable or widespread. Staffing that eases the crushing workload of serving students well. Teachers and administrators at exemplary schools have a work week that far exceeds that of the great majority of the workforce. There is so much to do

to make sure that no student falls through the cracks. These schools show what activities and practices need to be carried out, but increased funding is necessary to enable normal hardworking, dedicated educators to carry out these activities, or these will never become the norm.

*Policy Recommendation:*

- Increase resources going to schools so that they are sufficient to pay for the most important resources for enabling schools to provide a rigorous, relevant, and responsive education for all students. The level of resources should factor in the costs of staffing necessary for professional development and collaboration time, teacher mentoring, small class sizes, manageable workloads, and materials and activities specific to school focus and vision.
- Use a weighted student formula to achieve this leveling-up of resources. In a weighted student formula, funds follow the child, and additional funding is allocated to populations of students that schools have a poor track record of supporting. This approach ensures that new funds are distributed equitably.

Funding Streams

A number of the schools in our study have more flexibility in the ability to use their funds than most California schools, either because they are charter schools or because they have other unique situations. These schools use this flexibility to provide better quality support to students by allocating resources to reduce pupil load and class sizes and instituting an advisory program and strong counseling support so that support can be based on strong continuous relationships between teachers and students and personalized to meet the individual needs of the student. However, in spite of more flexibility than most schools, the schools in the study are still hindered in their work by the state's fragmented funding streams. This fragmentation gets in the way of schools carrying out their vision and in turn creates a fragmented experience for students with less access to supports. They struggle to overcome hurdles to giving all students access to important experiences during the school day because the funding stream for the activity in question requires it be offered only before or after school. Or, funding is only available if instruction is delivered in a school classroom, but the school wants to cover the content through an internship or a community college class. The schools in the study that are not charter schools have additional problems such as finding themselves forced to pay for textbooks that do not correspond to their pedagogical approach.

*Policy Recommendations:*

- Aside from major categorical programs intended to address specific population needs (e.g., special education, English language learner funding), reduce the number of small categorical programs and roll funds into core funding through a weighted student formula, so that schools have more flexibility to align funding to their instructional mission.

Funding for System Infrastructure and Higher Education

Beyond funds that go directly to schools, funding is needed in a number of areas that support an overall system of rigorous, relevant, and responsive schools. As was

described in the Personnel and Leadership section, there must be support for preparation programs that consistently produce teachers and principals that can carry out the practices of rigorous, relevant, and responsive schools. Subsidies are needed so the best candidates, often from students' communities, are able to participate in these programs. And funding is needed for a state-level infrastructure that supports the quality of teacher induction, professional development, and evaluation that are needed for rigorous, relevant, and responsive schools to flourish.

Once students graduate from a rigorous, relevant, and responsive school system, they are of course ready for college. But too often, higher education is not ready for them. Tuitions have been rising while state support for college has been declining in real dollar terms. Even less funds are available for scholarships, and the Dream Act, which would provide aid for undocumented students, was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger last year, forcing undocumented students to pay out-of-state tuition. Many students in the schools in the study who qualify for the California State and University system, have to attend the community college system because of a lack of financial resources.

*Policy Recommendation:*

- Provide the funding necessary to carry out the recommendations described in the Personnel and Leadership section.
- Pass the Dream Act, increase financial aid, and reinvest in higher education to keep it affordable as well as supportive and high-quality.

**Summary of Research Supporting Recommendations**

The School Redesign Network at Stanford University (SRN LEADS) and Justice Matters recently completed a study that draws policy lessons from exemplary schools. This contribution to the current California policy conversation looks at policy from the vantage point of schools that are successfully doing what all California public schools should do.

The study — *High Schools for Equity: Policy Supports for Student Learning in Communities of Color* — draws on cases of five California public high schools that serve students of color, low-income students, and English learners. These schools successfully provide students with an education that is academically rigorous, relevant, responsive, and connected to students' cultures.

The five high schools in the study — all urban, public, non-selective schools serving predominantly low income, African American and Latino student populations — are located across California, in Sacramento, San Francisco, Inglewood and San Diego.

The questions that the study takes up are: How do district and state policies support the practices of these schools? How do district and state policies hinder the practices of these schools? What policies would be needed to enable all California schools to carry out the practices of the schools in the study? The study's findings in the areas of personnel and leadership and school finance are summarized in this brief.

***Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening***  
**Hosted by EdSource - October 19, 2007 - Sacramento**

**Proposal submitted by:**

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**Focus Area:** State Data Systems

**Problem Statement:**

The formal policies and agreements that establish the rules, roles, and rights governing teachers have important consequences for what schools can and cannot do. Despite their importance, the process by which collective bargaining agreements and personnel policies are negotiated between school districts and teachers too often escapes public scrutiny. Even in districts where there is no collective bargaining, the process by which school boards establish personnel rules is shielded from public view.

**Policy Option:**

Now there is a central database enabling an entirely new area of research and opening up a new era of transparency to this critical component of how our schools operate. This research, which once would have taken months or even years for a single person to complete, is available at the touch of a button. The database, *Teacher Rules, Roles and Rights*, seeks to bring greater transparency to the rules that govern teachers and schools. By making collective bargaining agreements and personnel handbooks easily accessible and searchable on our website, we better equip academics, policymakers, teachers, administrators and parents to explore the factors that define the professional roles and standards of teachers, particularly in the most economically and racially diverse districts in the country.

In January 2007, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) launched *Teacher Rules, Roles and Rights*—a website that gives the public free, unprecedented access to the content of collective bargaining agreements and employee handbooks from all over the country. NCTQ sorted through mountains of text to create a new online interface giving users the opportunity to compare and contrast over 300 distinct provisions in agreements on a full range of topics, including information on teacher salary and benefits, evaluation, grievance and transfer policies and much, much more. These policies and agreements establish the rules, roles and rights governing teachers and have important consequences for what schools can and cannot do.

The Teacher Rules, Roles and Rights database includes collective bargaining agreements, board policies, and teacher handbooks from the nation's 50 largest school districts, with

50 more scheduled to be added by year's end. Currently, four of California's largest school districts are in the database, with four more to be added this fall. The first of its kind, this portal opens up an entirely new area of research and empowers anyone to analyze and compare the day-to-day operations of teachers and schools. *Teacher Rules, Roles and Rights* can be used to identify trends across districts, answer single questions of interest, and generate reports without wading through lengthy documents. One also has access to all of the documents that NCTQ researchers used to develop the site. Users can download the full text of a teacher contract, just the salary schedule, district calendar, benefits guides and even the evaluation instrument.

**How Presentation Will Engage Audience:**

In this session, the National Council on Teacher Quality speaker will show how this on-line database is a valuable a tool for state policy makers, school board members, teachers and administrators. Anyone looking to compare school districts' contracts, looking for answers to specific questions, or looking at the strengths and weaknesses of *contracts through the lens of whether the rules governing adults are really in the best interests of students*, will find this database extremely helpful.

Presenter will walk the audience through the site's functionality by preparing custom reports based on audience questions. The presenter will also take relevant stories from recent newspaper articles to show how the database addresses certain issues and how it can be used to gauge national trends, support or debunk arguments.

**Data Summary:**

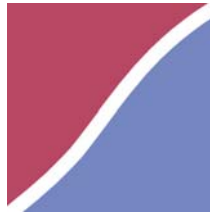
Currently, the NCTQ *Teacher Rules, Roles and Rights* database contains information from California's 4 largest school districts: Fresno, Los Angeles, San Diego and Long Beach. By year's end, San Francisco, San Bernardino, Santa Ana and Elk Grove will be included. The database contains information compiled from district collective bargaining agreements, school board policies, salary schedules, benefits plans, teacher evaluation plans, and school calendars.

From these documents, we have analyzed over 300 distinct provisions governing the day-to-day operations of schools and teachers. Other easily accessible data includes policies on differential pay, teacher transfer and assignment, dismissal policies, grievances, leave, professional development, tuition reimbursement and working conditions.

We have also created an interactive feature allowing users to see the laws in each state and the District of Columbia that determine what districts can and cannot bargain. States with more limited scopes of bargaining allow districts and unions only to negotiate on bread and butter issues like wages and hours of employment. The scope of bargaining as outlined in state policy greatly determines the local union's role with the school district. This is an important component to understand when looking at what happens at the district level.

# **Reshaping Personnel Policies to Improve Student Achievement**

**Julia E. Koppich and Amy Gerstein  
Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)**



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## **Reshaping Personnel Policies To Improve Student Achievement**

**Julia E. Koppich and Amy Gerstein**

The “Getting Down to Facts” (GDTF) studies released in March 2007 offered a clear diagnosis of the issues facing California’s education system. Now, as California moves beyond the facts and begins the search for ways to improve the performance of California schools and students, the state faces a critical policy dilemma. On the one hand, the evidence presented in GDTF made it clear that simply putting more resources into California’s present education system is unlikely to produce the large gains in performance that Californians expect from their schools. On the other hand, the GDTF studies made it equally clear that bringing about significant improvements in educational performance may require a substantial increase in the resources that the state spends on education, along with increased autonomy and flexibility for local educators to decide how these resources should be used. The policy dilemma that the state faces is how to ensure that local actors use new resources in the best possible ways, without increasing the regulatory burden on schools and school districts or adding to the profusion of categorical funding streams.

In PACE’s view, the solution to this dilemma has two key elements. First, the state needs to focus its reform efforts on creating a system that fosters innovation and learns from experience to support continuous improvement toward the goal of academic success for all students. The critical first step toward this goal is to accelerate current efforts to build a strong and comprehensive data system based on the collection and analysis of longitudinal data on individual students and teachers. Second, the state needs to make significant investments in human capital and capacity building at all levels of the education system. Personnel policies must ensure that California educators have the time, knowledge, and skill they need to improve the performance of their schools and students, and incentives within the education system should be aligned to encourage the development and adoption of new and more effective practices.

The first of these elements—creating a robust and comprehensive data system—is addressed in another PACE policy brief.<sup>1</sup> The second—building a policy framework that supports educators in their efforts to bring about continuous improvement in the performance of schools and students—is addressed here. We argue that achieving the challenging goals that Californians have set for the state’s students will require educators at all levels to take advantage of increased autonomy and flexibility to find new and better programs and practices. Increased autonomy and flexibility will only lead to improvement if there is capacity at the local level to use new freedoms and resources effectively however, and this capacity is in short supply in California. To support continuous improvement, the state needs to develop incentives to make educators’ careers more flexible and attract more educators into leadership roles, and also fund policies that provide educators with the knowledge, skill, and time they will need to improve their own performance.

### **ISSUES, OPTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **I. Differentiated Professional Roles and Compensation**

To support continuous improvement in California’s education system, the Legislature should encourage local efforts to strengthen the capacity of educators by supporting investments in their knowledge and skill and also by increasing and diversifying the number of adults working in the education system. Policies to strengthen capacity might entail the employment of specialized

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<sup>1</sup> “Continuous Improvement in California Education: Data Systems and Policy Learning,” by Susanna Loeb and David N. Plank.



personnel to address specific tasks (e.g., program evaluation, data analysis); the employment of additional personnel to allow current educators to take on new responsibilities (e.g., mentoring, peer evaluation); and the development of career options and incentives to reward educators who take on leadership roles.

***Recommendation #1: The state should encourage districts to employ creative approaches to shared leadership and to reduce principals' regulatory and reporting burdens.***

The job of principal, as currently constructed, is nearly impossible to do effectively. Management responsibilities, including state-imposed regulatory and reporting burdens, often swamp efforts to support effective instruction. The state should consider ways to encourage districts to separate management from instructional leadership responsibilities (perhaps through the introduction of additional school-based administrative staff), reduce administrators' regulatory and reporting burdens, and support districts to develop systems of shared leadership in the form of teacher-administrator collaborative teams.

***Recommendation #2: The state should encourage and support district-based systems of differentiated professional roles for teachers.***

Teaching is currently a static career with few differentiated responsibilities based on experience, interest, or skill. Expanding opportunities for teachers to use their instructional and leadership skills (for example, as mentors, professional development providers, Peer Assistance and Review consulting teachers, coaches, and members of school leadership teams) both distributes school-based leadership responsibilities and provides career pathways that encourage able teachers to remain in teaching. The state should make available resources to enable districts and their local unions to develop expanded professional opportunities for teachers through career ladders and lattices with accompanying differentiated compensation.

In addition, teachers who are interested in becoming administrators should be encouraged to do so. To further this end, districts can provide opportunities for teacher leaders to "try out" administrative roles in order to help them determine if such positions reflect the kinds of career moves they want to make.

***Recommendation #3: The state should provide support for districts to develop alternative forms of teacher compensation.***

The salary schedule operating in most school districts awards pay increases to teachers on the basis of years of experience and coursework (units). Emerging compensation systems in districts around the country are changing the standard teacher pay calculation to offer salary increases on the basis of one or more of the following options: pay for knowledge and skills targeted to increased student learning; pay for market incentives (added compensation for hard-to-staff schools and subjects); pay for professional evaluation results; and, pay for student growth (typically using a value-added calculation).

While research on this topic is not yet sufficiently mature to indicate what forms of teacher pay might produce particular results, emerging evidence points in promising directions. Thus, the state should provide information about developing findings regarding teacher compensation and resources to enable districts and their local unions to design and implement alternative forms of compensation in an effort to create financial incentives for continuous professional improvement and student learning.

***Recommendation #4: The state should strive to boost the compensation differential between administrators and veteran teachers.***

The job of an administrator is extremely challenging. Long hours, a long work year, and highly visible public accountability often make these jobs less than appealing. Moreover, the current differential between a veteran teacher's and a principal's compensation typically is insufficient to warrant a career move. Given the critical importance of effective leadership, the state should provide financial incentives designed to increase teacher-administrator salary differentials in order to encourage talented educators to assume these challenging positions.

## **II. Evaluation and Accountability**

Excellent classroom instruction is the key to higher levels of student learning. The Legislature should seek to ensure that teachers and site administrators focus on the core practices of schooling by supporting training and professional development programs that emphasize teaching and learning, and by encouraging the implementation of evaluation policies that hold educators accountable for the effectiveness of their practices and the improvement of their performance.

***Recommendation #5: The state should require that the study of effective classroom practice be central to principal preparation and professional development.***

Currently, just 10-20 percent of the curriculum of administrator preparation programs focuses on classroom instruction. Yet, if the goal is for principals to serve as instructional leaders, they must know how to recognize effective (and ineffective) instruction and support teachers who need to improve their practice. At the heart of strong instructional leadership is a set of skills and knowledge related to teacher supervision and evaluation (which requires a deep understanding of effective classroom practice), coaching and professional development, and using data to inform instruction and school-wide decisions. Acquiring and honing these skills should be at the core of administrator preparation and professional development.

***Recommendation #6: The state should support continuous improvement of teaching knowledge and practice by investing in research-based teacher professional development.***

Research is clear about what constitutes effective teacher profession development. It is standards- and content-based and aligned with the work teachers do in their schools and classrooms. Good professional development is designed to improve teaching practice.

Research further suggests that professional development provided through coursework offered by colleges and universities is of limited utility in improving teaching knowledge or practice. Effective professional development tends to be teacher-provided and job-embedded. Districts should, therefore, be encouraged to seek out a range of providers as well as look internally to teachers and other district employees who might offer this service.

In addition, teacher practice is improved when teachers have time to collaborate with one another, to plan instruction and teacher-developed (formative) assessments, and review student work and achievement data. The state should provide support so that districts can create this collaborative time through the addition of in-school specialists, or by extending the salaried work day or work year, or a combination of these.

***Recommendation #7: Districts should be encouraged and supported by the state to develop rigorous, standards-based systems of professional evaluation for teachers and administrators.***

Effective evaluation is based on recognized professional standards, and aligned with school and classroom learning objectives. It identifies areas of strength and areas of needed improvement. The state should encourage districts to experiment with new, more rigorous, standards-based systems of evaluation for administrators and teachers.

Principal evaluations, for example, should include an appraisal of the extent to which site administrators establish clear expectations for teachers and students, use data to inform decision-making, create collaborative school cultures, support effective classroom instruction, and demonstrate success in improving school and student performance.

For teachers, the state should consider a system of “tiered” evaluation in which longer serving teachers who are generally acknowledged as effective in the classroom are evaluated less frequently than are their novice colleagues. Such a system of administratively driven evaluations will require better training of principals and others charged with evaluation responsibilities, and sufficient time for them to take this responsibility seriously.

In addition, the state should consider amending the current Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) statute so that PAR encompasses both beginning teachers and under-performing experienced teachers. In districts that have long-standing PAR programs (e.g., Poway; Toledo; Cincinnati; Columbus; Montgomery County, Maryland; and Rochester, New York), teachers who are subject to peer assistance and review at the outset of their careers gain a faster and deeper understanding of effective teaching, or find themselves out of the classroom.

### **III. MAKING SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES VISIBLE**

***Recommendation #8: The state should conduct regular evaluations of state-funded policies and programs.***

California has a wealth of education policies. Too often, however, the state simply enacts new policies on top of old ones, resulting in a kind of “policy pile-on.”

The state should conduct regular program and policy evaluations of its efforts to improve teaching and educational leadership. These evaluations should be designed to track progress of improvement efforts so that those that show promise and positive effects can be sustained and those that fail on these dimensions can be discontinued. Results of these evaluations should be made available through a state analog to the federal What Works Clearinghouse.

***Recommendation #9: The state should develop a network that enables districts to share successful programs and practices.***

Developing and implementing successful educational programs is important district work. Sharing the results of these efforts with colleagues may be equally important.

To be sure, program effectiveness is often dependent on district context. What is successful in one district may simply not work in another. That being said, however, much can be learned from sharing program challenges and successes.

The state should facilitate a network of inter-district communication about programs and policy implementation to give principals and teachers structured opportunities for discussion and review.

## **CONCLUSION**

This policy brief has presented a set of recommendations designed to improve teaching and educational leadership. In evaluating these recommendations it is important to recall that spending on personnel is by far the largest category of expenditure in California's education system. Policies that aim to enhance human capital and build capacity in the system are therefore likely to require significant investments on the part of policy-makers and taxpayers. In addition to direct investments in the knowledge and skill of current educators, an education system capable of continuous improvement may also require new and different kinds of personnel, including those with specialized skills in data analysis, policy evaluation, professional development, and training. Unless these investments are made and effectively monitored, however, California's schools are unlikely to achieve the high expectation that the state has placed upon them.

## **RESEARCH AND ADDITIOAL RESOURCES**

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is a non-partisan policy research center based at the University of California – Berkeley and Stanford University. PACE seeks to increase the impact of academic research in educational policy debates in California. The policy recommendations included in this brief are based on the research reported in "Getting Down to Facts," and on continuing research at PACE and elsewhere on personnel policies in education and the conditions required for continuous improvement in educational systems. PACE will publish two additional policy briefs on personnel issues and continuous improvement in California's education system in Fall 2007.

# **Continuous Improvement In California Education: Data Systems and Policy Learning**

**Susanna Loeb and David N. Plank**  
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## **Continuous Improvement In California Education: Data Systems and Policy Learning**

The “Getting Down to Facts” (GDTF) studies released in March 2007 offered a clear diagnosis of the issues facing California’s education system. Now, as California moves beyond the facts and begins the search for ways to improve the performance of California schools and students, the state faces a critical policy dilemma. On the one hand, the evidence presented in GDTF made it clear that simply putting more resources into California’s present education system is unlikely to produce the large gains in performance that Californians expect from their schools. On the other hand, the GDTF studies made it equally clear that bringing about significant improvements in educational performance may require a substantial increase in the resources that the state spends on education, along with increased autonomy and flexibility for local educators to decide how these resources should be used. The policy dilemma that the state faces is how to ensure that local actors use new resources in the best possible ways, without increasing the regulatory burden on schools and school districts or adding to the profusion of categorical funding streams.

In PACE’s view, the solution to this dilemma has two key elements. First, the state needs to focus its reform efforts on creating a system that fosters innovation and learns from experience to support continuous improvement toward the goal of academic success for all students. The critical first step toward this goal is to accelerate current efforts to build a strong and comprehensive data system based on the collection and analysis of longitudinal data on individual students and teachers. Second, the state needs to make significant investments in human capital and capacity building at all levels of the education system. Personnel policies must ensure that California educators have the time, knowledge, and skill they need to improve the performance of their schools and students, and incentives within the education system should be aligned to encourage the development and adoption of new and more effective practices.

We address the first of these two elements in this policy brief.<sup>1</sup> We argue that a robust data system is the essential foundation for an education system that is capable of continuous improvement in school and student performance. Great data by themselves will not lead to continuous improvement in the educational performance, however. Policies must also be designed and implemented in ways that support careful evaluation and the production of new knowledge about effective programs and practices. In addition, the state must support the creation of institutions to disseminate new knowledge and encourage the adoption of best practices at all levels of the education system, from the classroom to the California Department of Education (CDE).

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<sup>1</sup> We address the second element in another PACE policy brief, “Reshaping Personnel Policies to Improve Student Achievement,” by Julia E. Koppich and Amy Gerstein.

## I. Data Collection

A strong data system that produces rich and timely data on students, classrooms, and schools is a necessary condition for the creation of a continuously improving education system. The availability of reliable data is essential to the accurate measurement of performance at all levels of the system, and to the identification of practices, programs, and policies that are effective in improving the performance of schools and students. Timely and reliable data can support teachers as they make decisions about the students in their classrooms, and principals as they make decisions about the allocation of resources in their schools. District and state officials need comprehensive data to inform their decisions about policy and funding. Taxpayers and voters need far more information than they currently have on what's working and what's not in California's education system so that they can make informed decisions about how best to support California's students and secure the state's economic future. In the absence of timely and reliable data, California's education system is literally flying blind.

California's education data system lags far behind data systems in other states and other countries, generally failing to provide the kinds of information that teachers, principals, parents, and others need to support continuous improvement in the performance of schools and students.

The Legislature should:

- ∞ Move immediately to accelerate the implementation of CALPADS and CALTIDES, including sufficient funds for districts to support the training and infrastructure necessary to ensure that data collection is both timely and reliable.
- ∞ Expand the scope of data collection under CALPADS and CALTIDES to focus on identifying policies and programs that enhance learning outcomes, and not simply on compliance with federal mandates. The marginal cost of collecting additional information while the system is under development is low; expanding the scope of data collection later could prove costly.
- ∞ Ensure that data on individual teachers and students can be linked, to identify what teaching practices and strategies are working and to target support to students and teachers who need it.
- ∞ Support the development of a data system in which education data can be linked to data from other sectors, including but not limited to higher education, pre-K education, social services, health care, corrections, and employment, in order to understand how factors outside of schools affect student performance and also to track the impact of educational policies and programs into students' adult lives. Student learning is affected by multiple factors inside and outside the school, and it is important for California's education data system to be able to account for as many of these factors as possible.
- ∞ Consider basing unique student and teacher identifiers on social security numbers, w/ appropriate safeguards, as is already done in other states, in order to make linkages across data systems possible.

## II. Data Use

Funding alone may not be enough to gain the buy-in at the local level needed to ensure the quality of data collection. School and district personnel must also see how their investments in the data system support their own efforts to improve the performance of local schools and students. Too often, educators perceive data as a threat, widely used to stigmatize and punish them and rarely used to support them or expand their opportunities for success. The perception that data are dangerous is a powerful disincentive to the creation of a strong and effective data system, because those responsible for collecting and using the data may have an interest in seeing the system fail. Changing this perception will require the state to return the data that it collects to teachers, parents, schools, and school districts on timelines and in formats that support their efforts to improve learning outcomes for the students under their care. In addition to quality and timeliness, the state must also provide infrastructure and training to support data analysis and use at all levels of the education system.

The Legislature should:

- ∞ Support efforts by CDE and school districts to develop timely and informative “report cards” on the performance of individual schools. Parents need information on the schools where their children are enrolled not in the middle of the year, when their children are already deeply enmeshed in relationships and activities, but before the school year begins when they are still in a position to make decisions about the schools they would like their children to attend.
- ∞ Support efforts by CDE and school districts to make data on student performance available to teachers at times when they can use it. Teachers need data on the performance of the students in their classes not at the end of the year—when these students are about to become someone else’s responsibility—but at the beginning of the year when information about students’ strengths and weaknesses might enable teachers to adapt their instruction to students’ needs.
- ∞ Invest in capacity-building to support data collection, data analysis, and informed decision-making at all levels of the system. Investments in capacity building will have to include the employment of specialized personnel, training and professional development for educators, and increased time for educators to make use of the data available to them.
- ∞ Support the creation of state-level institutions for the accumulation and validation of information on “best practices,” including the development of effective mechanisms for making knowledge about effective programs and practices available to teachers, school leaders, and district officials. At present lessons learned in one school or district typically remain the exclusive property of those directly involved, because there are few channels through which new knowledge can be validated or diffused. The Legislature should seek to ensure that learning that occurs in one part of the system (e.g., one school district, or one teacher’s classroom) is made available to others within the system.



### **III. Continuous Improvement**

Policy implementation concerns are not separate from the data system. Even with great data and access, it will be difficult for Californians to learn which policies and programs are working unless those policies and programs are implemented in ways that facilitate evaluation. The data system is needed in order to provide the information necessary to evaluate programs, but deliberate implementation is also needed in order to ensure the availability of informative data. The state must also invest resources in evaluation to learn which policies and practices are effective in improving performance and which are not.

The Legislature should:

- ∞ Design and implement policies in ways that support organizational learning. This might often involve the design and implementation of quasi-experiments, in which new policies and practices are adopted in a carefully selected sample of schools and classrooms, in order to identify whether and under what circumstances new approaches result in better outcomes for students, before they are put into practice in all schools.
- ∞ At the state level, commit resources to rigorous, independent policy evaluation, to identify programs and practices that improve the performance of California schools and students. It is not sufficient to encourage innovation and experimentation in the education system. It is also necessary to evaluate carefully and systematically how new policies and practices affect (or not) academic performance. Without careful evaluation, the opportunities for learning afforded by new flexibility are likely to be squandered.
- ∞ At the district and school level, provide resources (time, training, and specialized personnel) to increase capacity to support data analysis, data use, and organizational learning. Educators at all levels of the system need time and support to reflect on their work, to consider different ways of organizing and carrying out their responsibilities, and to provide support and guidance for others. For example, teachers not only need timely data on the past and current performance of their students; they also need training to be able to interpret the data and determine what the data have to tell them about which practices will be most effective with which students.

### **IV. Measuring Improvement**

Judging the success or failure of schools solely on whether their students meet the California grade-level standards now ensures that most schools that enroll large numbers of poor students will be labeled as failures. As longitudinal data on students and teachers become available California will therefore need to develop additional “value-added” measures that can fairly and accurately assess the progress that schools are making toward the goal of proficiency for all of their students, in order to take fair account of the different challenges faced by different schools.

- ∞ Valid measures of student progress are not supported by California’s current data system, but they will become increasingly feasible with the full implementation of CALPADS and CALTIDES. Agreement on the nature of these measures and how they should be incorporated into California’s accountability system should be a priority for policy-makers.
- ∞ Psychometricians in California and across the country are currently at work on the development of valid indicators of student progress, which will allow policy-makers and officials to measure the “value added” by different instructional programs and strategies. The Legislature can support this work by providing incentives to school districts and union locals that are willing to experiment with these new technologies by putting them to work to support continuous improvement in the performance of schools, teachers, and students.

## **V. Conclusion**

California has set very high goals for the performance of our state’s education system, and the current performance of the system is a long way from meeting those goals. As we challenge our state’s educators and students to do better, though, it is essential to recognize that the goal we seek—a system that educates all students, including the most disadvantaged, to very high standards—far exceeds what any education system in the U.S. currently achieves. Learning how to accomplish this goal is not simply a matter of learning what other states are doing and imitating high performers; it requires learning how to educate students in new and better ways. To accomplish California’s ambitious educational goals, the state’s education system will have to be reorganized to support innovation and to learn from experience.

California does not currently have the capacity to use information well. In order to do so, the state must systematically and consistently collect data on students, teachers, classrooms, schools and districts. The data that the state collects must be synthesized and distributed in ways that make them useful to stakeholders, and made available for independent evaluations. In addition, the state should begin to implement policies and programs in ways that support evaluation and organizational learning. Without strong support for data collection, data use, and policy learning in the education system the goals that we have set for our state’s schools and students will remain out of reach.

## **VI. Research and Additional Resources**

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) is a non-partisan policy research center based at the University of California – Berkeley and Stanford University. PACE seeks to increase the impact of academic research in educational policy debates in California. The policy recommendations included in this brief are based on the research reported in “Getting Down to Facts,” and on continuing research at PACE and elsewhere on data systems and the conditions required for continuous improvement in educational systems. PACE will publish two additional policy briefs on data systems and continuous improvement in California’s education system in Fall 2007.

A collaboration of:



**Californians  
for Justice**



**PUBLIC ADVOCATES**

***Now That We Have the Facts***

*A report on a statewide survey of 5600 parents, students, and community members from low- and moderate-income communities throughout the state.*

The survey report details the concerns and priorities for California schools of 5600 parents, students, and community members throughout the state. Topics covered include the areas of school finance (resource generation and allocation), governance, personnel and leadership, and data systems.

**Presented by:**

**Parents and Students for Great Schools**

*A collaborative of: California ACORN, Californians for Justice, PICO California, and Public Advocates*

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*Full reports are available at each the Web sites of the participating organizations.*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**his report highlights the findings from a unique community-based study, providing *for the first time* insight into the views and priorities of parents, students and community members throughout the state on the pressing challenges facing public education in California.

The concerns and priorities of study participants are clear and unequivocal. They have high expectations for public education in California, with the overwhelming majority believing that students should graduate from high school prepared for college and a skilled job, whichever path they choose. Those surveyed support additional funding for schools. They also believe that existing funds should be used more efficiently and that the system should be more accountable. The majority expressed a willingness to pay more taxes to improve schools, especially if higher tax rates are accompanied by greater accountability and community involvement in how funds are spent.

This statewide study adds a critical dimension to the important conversation about school finance and governance reform in California.

### Context

In March 2007, Stanford University released the findings of 22 studies of California's school finance and governance systems, collectively called *Getting Down to Facts*. The goal of these studies was to generate a comprehensive base of knowledge about the key challenges facing California's schools and, in particular, to understand the inadequacies and

inefficiencies in the system from the perspectives of educators, policy experts, and researchers.

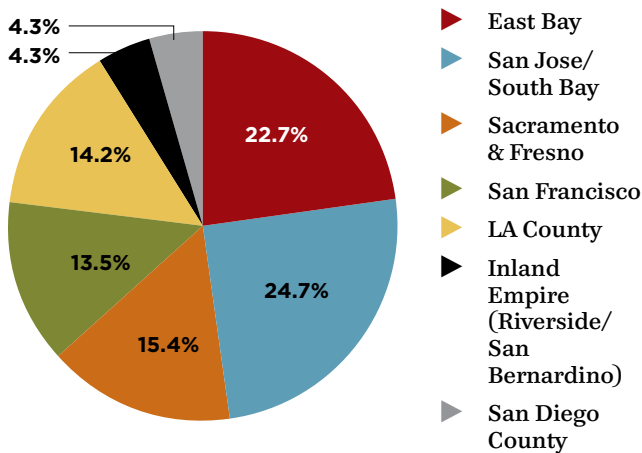
In a parallel effort, Parents and Students for Great Schools, a collaboration of California ACORN, Californians for Justice (CFJ), PICO California and Public Advocates, spent the second half of the 2006-2007 school year conducting their own study of the educational priorities of students, parents and other residents of California's low- and moderate-income communities. Their study was supported by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and with research assistance from UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA).

### Parent, Student and Community Voices

The 5,600 adults and young people who responded to the survey represented 446 ZIP codes in 25 counties up and down the state—from Butte, Sutter and Yolo counties in the North to San Diego County in the South.

The average survey respondent lived in a ZIP code where household incomes fall below the state median and where the poverty rate is high. Approximately two thirds of respondents came

## GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



from large urban communities where the schools perform well below the state’s standards.

The participant group was racially diverse. Reflecting the demographics of California’s low-income communities, half (53 percent) of the respondents were Latino, and Asians, African Americans and Whites comprised 13 percent, 13 percent and 11 percent, respectively. Twenty-eight percent of the participants responded to the survey in Spanish.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, members of the grassroots organizations administered a survey to 5,600 individuals throughout California. The vast majority (79 percent) of survey respondents were parents and students from low- and moderate-income communities throughout the state, representing the first large-scale effort to solicit the opinions and priorities of these two key groups. An additional 22 percent of respondents were community members, also from low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in California.

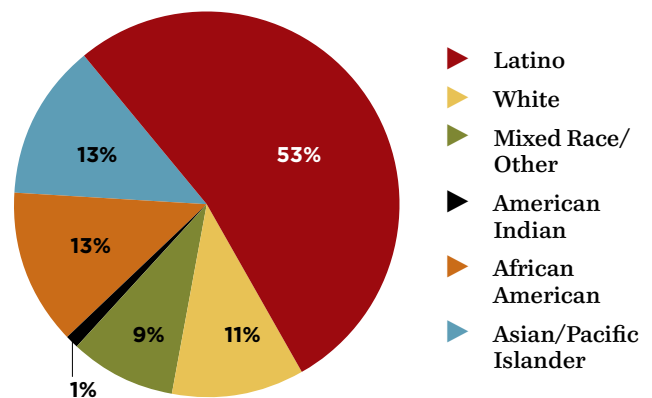
Members of participating organizations administered surveys in a variety of venues, including churches,

synagogues and mosques after religious services, community and youth group meetings, high school classrooms and adult classes for recent immigrants and those preparing for citizenship. Data was also collected through neighborhood “door-to-door” campaigns and at a variety of community locations.

The survey asked respondents to share their concerns about the challenges facing California’s public education system and to articulate their goals for that system. Respondents were asked about their expectations for policymaker action, their preferences regarding school funding and their willingness to pay increased taxes for better schools.

In the second phase of the study, leaders of the four organizations convened Town Hall meetings in Oakland and Los Angeles. Approximately 500 parents, students and community members participated in these events. The Town Hall discussions focused on specific ways to improve schools, such as raising principal and teacher quality, adding programs to boost student achievement and improve college attendance rates, implementing statewide student and teacher data systems and making the education system more transparent and accountable.

## RACIAL/ETHNIC MAKEUP OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Throughout the report, some percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

# KEY FINDINGS

## ACT NOW TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS FOR ALL STUDENTS

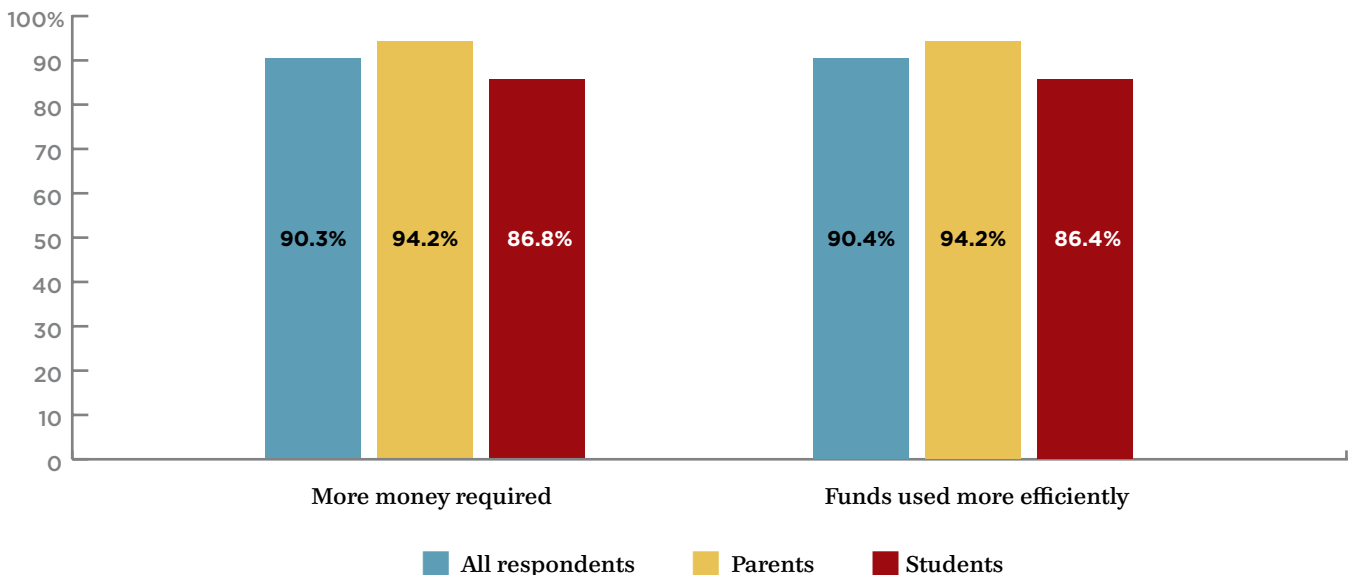
Both the surveys and the Town Hall discussions revealed that parents, students and community members expect policymakers to take action. All three groups support increased funding for schools as well as making current spending more efficient at solving schooling problems and improving student outcomes. In supporting these changes, they echo the Stanford *Getting Down to Facts* studies. Most parents, students and community members are also willing to pay more to get the

improvements the schools need. Notably, they are far more willing to pay increased taxes to support public education if the system becomes transparent and accountable and gives local communities more authority. Parents, students and other community members also want a more equitably funded system. They hold very high expectations for the schools in their communities, and they have deep concerns about the challenges their schools currently face.

### Expect Elected Officials to Act

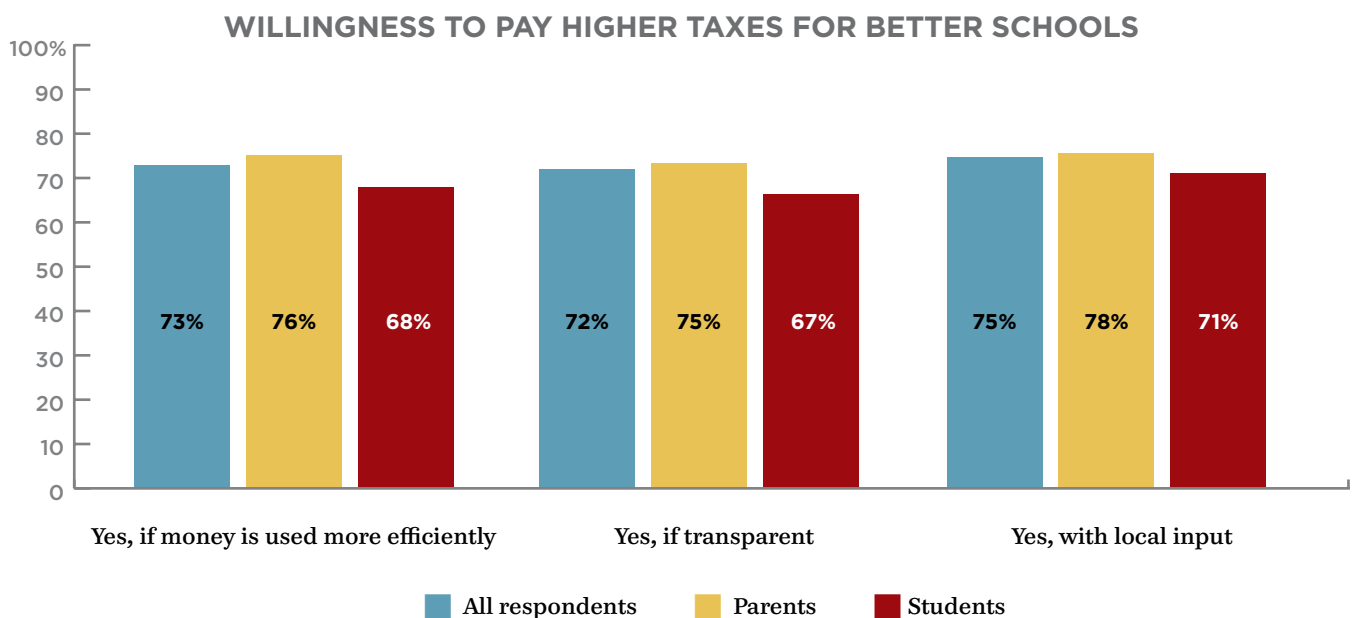
Nearly all survey respondents (90 percent) want elected officials to take action to improve the school finance and governance systems in California. When asked, 94 percent of parents and 86 percent of students said they would expect elected officials to respond to research studies demonstrating that California's education system needs increased funding and more efficient use of existing and future funds.

**WANT ELECTED OFFICIALS TO TAKE ACTION IF RESEARCH SAYS MORE MONEY IS REQUIRED AND IF FUNDS CAN BE USED MORE EFFICIENTLY**



## Willing to Pay Higher Taxes

Taking all of the responses together, a remarkable 86 percent of survey respondents are willing to pay higher taxes to improve schools. Specifically, they are willing to pay more taxes if at least one of the following conditions are met: the increased funding leads to concrete changes and improves student achievement; public school funds are used more efficiently; there is more transparency about how funds are used; local communities have more say in how school money is spent. Seventy-three percent of all respondents, including 76 percent of parents and 68 percent of students, would be willing to pay more taxes if they knew that education funds were better spent. Seventy-two percent of respondents, including 75 percent of parents and 67 percent of students, would pay more taxes if they felt they would be told exactly *how* those funds were spent. And 75 percent of all respondents, including 78 percent of parents and 71 percent of students, would pay more in taxes if they felt their community would have a say in how education funds were spent.



Large majorities of the participants want policy-maker action and increased spending to lead to concrete results. Priorities favored by the majority of respondents include:

- > **Developing more equitable school finance policies.** Only 6 percent of survey participants considered acceptable those finance policies that allow wealthy communities to raise and spend more on their children's schooling.
- > **Directing new investments to areas that will improve student achievement most.** Survey

participants placed highest priority on ensuring that every student has an effective and fully prepared teacher (59 percent) and providing additional supports (such as counseling and tutoring) for students (42 percent).

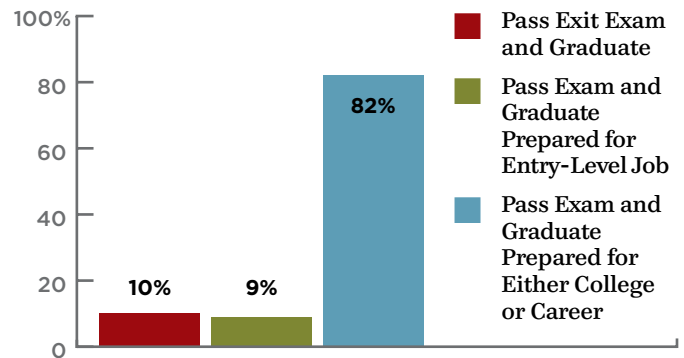
- > **Ensuring that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and career.** Simply passing the high school exit exam and graduating is too low a bar, according to a large majority (83 percent of parents and 82 percent of students).



## Believe All Students Should Graduate Prepared for College and Career

Parents, high school students and community members all have very high expectations for ideal outcomes of the K-12 education system. Only 10 percent felt that passing the California High School Exit Exam and graduating was a sufficient outcome. In comparison, 82 percent believe that all students should graduate from high school prepared for either college or a skilled job.

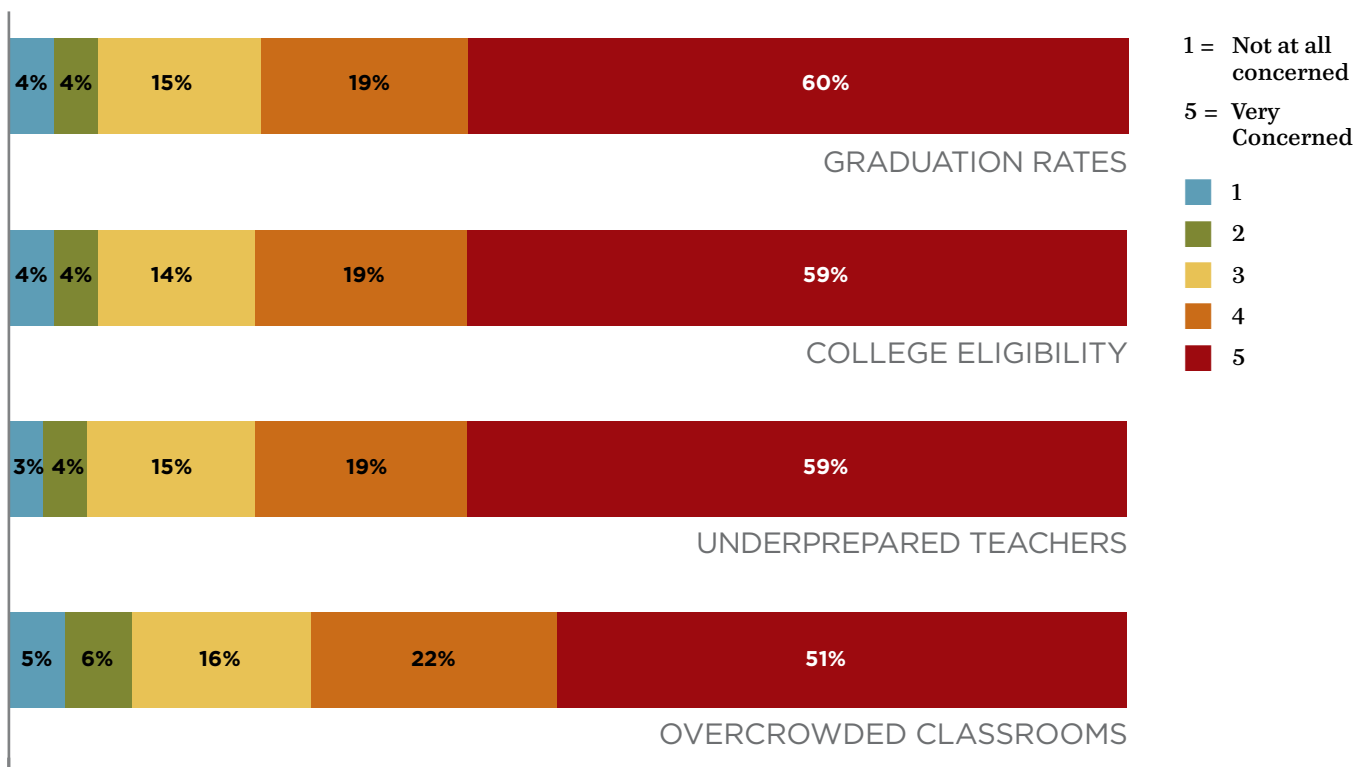
### GOALS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM



## Concerned about Current Problems

Over 90 percent of survey respondents expressed concern about the current system's high dropout rates and the limited opportunities in many of California high schools for low-income students and students of color to take the courses necessary to be eligible and prepared for college. A full 90 percent of parents and 62 percent of students were concerned or very concerned about high dropout rates for low-income students and students of color; 90 percent of parents and 63 percent of students were concerned or very concerned about low rates of college preparation among those students.

### LEVEL OF CONCERN ABOUT SCHOOL CONDITIONS, ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5





## GETTING DOWN TO FACTS: NOW WHAT?

Lawrence O. Picus  
USC Rossier School of Education  
October 19, 2007

### Introduction

In March 2007, amidst much public attention, the Getting Down to Facts project released the findings from 22 separate studies assessing the status of California's school funding system. The result of over a year of work by some of the most prominent school finance experts in the United States, this compendium of studies is almost unprecedented for its depth of analysis. The need for studies of this sort is immense. California's K-12 public schools serve approximately six million children in nearly 9,000 schools. The California Department of Finance (2007) estimates that by the year 2050 there will be almost 11 million children ages 5-18 in California, nearly doubling the demands on our educational system. At the same time, the California Legislative Analyst (2007) continues to warn lawmakers about the structural deficit in the state's budget – a condition where the natural growth in current expenditures exceeds the projected growth of revenues.

As stated on the project's web site, Getting Down to Facts "was not designed to recommend specific policies. Rather it aims to provide a common ground of understanding about the current state of California school finance and governance in order to facilitate the serious and substantive conversations necessary for meaningful reform to ensue." (IREPP, 2007). Unfortunately, the lack of any specific policy recommendations makes it difficult to interpret the findings from the studies. As a result, discussion of the studies has been disjointed, focusing on the governance structure for California's school system, cost estimates that range from an additional \$1.5 million to an additional \$1.5 billion for schools, the need to make it easier to fire "bad teachers," and the

importance of a data system so we can better understand how our schools spend the more than \$60 billion of state, local and Federal money that will be available to them in the current fiscal year to educate the state's school children. While there was some discussion about the poor performance of students on standardized tests, the focus of the studies was on "adult" issues and not on policies that directly impact children and learning.

This policy brief is submitted to EdSource as part of the *Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening* on October 19, 2007. The specific issues it covers relate to **school finance and governance**.

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The opinions expressed in this policy brief are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Southern California or the Rossier School of Education.

Losing the momentum Getting Down to Facts has generated would be a loss for California. The purpose of this policy brief is to suggest ways that the efforts of the Getting Down to Facts studies can be used to further policy discussions about education and education finance in California. Space limitations prevent an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the studies, so this analysis begins with a discussion of the steps California needs to take to design schools for high performance. It then

suggests that once we know what these high performing schools look like, it will be possible to estimate the resources they require, and develop finance, governance and accountability systems to support those schools. The paper concludes by suggesting we already know a great deal about how to improve our schools and what we need is the collective will to make it happen.

### **Determining What is Needed and Organizing Schools for Success**

The fundamental building block for developing an adequate education system is the design of what successful schools will look like. We need to understand what happens – and what should happen – every day in each of the 9,000 schools across the state. Until we have a common understanding of what a school needs to do to help all children learn to our state’s standards, and the resources required to enable them to undertake those tasks, it will be impossible to “fix” the myriad of complex and contradictory finance, governance and accountability systems currently in place. One approach to estimating the school, district and system-wide resources needed is the Evidence-Based method. This approach has been used in several other states and offers estimates of the resources – and their costs – needed to make dramatic improvements in student learning in a relatively short period of time.

Some school improvement themes emerge from the 22 Getting Down to Facts studies. For example, many of the authors appear to suggest that California needs a system that sets high standards (which we arguably already have) and relies on local flexibility to create and then widely implement programs that work. The state would hold schools accountable for student performance through the use of a comprehensive data system and a coordinated approach to governance. There are also suggestions throughout the study, and in current discussions about next steps, that a “weighted pupil” approach to funding our schools would solve many of the problems facing California education finance today. Below, the Evidence-Based method is briefly described, followed by

discussion of the issues of flexibility and weighted pupil funding systems.

### *The Evidence-Based Approach to School Finance Adequacy*

Past review of the evidence has uncovered individual educational strategies that work, and has informed an evidence-based funding model that that has been used successfully in a number of states, and that currently is the basis of funding systems in two of those states, Wyoming and Arkansas. These strategies include class sizes of 15 in grades K-3, school-based instructional coaches as part of ongoing professional development, individual and small-group tutoring as the first intervention for students struggling to meet academic standards, summer school and extended day programs and other successful practices.

There is evidence that the strategies outlined in the Evidence-Based model work. A recently concluded analysis in the state of Washington assessed 31 schools in nine districts that had made dramatic improvements in student performance (Fermanich, et. al. 2006). Many of them relied on the same strategies identified in the evidence based model as being successful. Other researchers have also identified successful schools and districts. A review of their work suggests the schools they studied also implemented strategies remarkably similar to those in the Evidence-Based model (See for example Supovitz, 2006; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Snipes, Doolittle & Herlihy, 2002; Massell and Goertz, 2002; Hightower, 2002; and Elmore & Burney, 1999).

The Evidence-Based approach to school finance adequacy offers a fresh look at estimating the resources needs of California’s public schools.

### *Flexibility*

While more flexibility is needed in many schools, it is not clear that simply allowing each school to create its own curriculum and educational strategy absent any guidance from school districts and/or the state will result in more students meeting our proficiency

standards. Although many argue that the current system has become so burdensome with regulations and requirements that it is impossible to provide a good education, the California Education Code (EC 33050 and following) provides that schools and school districts may seek waivers from almost all of the requirements of the education code. Exceptions include health and safety issues, collective bargaining and the provision of special education services, but in general, waivers are available. In fact, under the California Education Code, if the State Board of Education does not act on a waiver request, it is automatically approved – so there is the potential for plenty of flexibility – if school leaders ask.

The question is why don't schools seek more flexibility? Maybe they like the security of rules and regulations to protect them? Maybe they don't have better ideas about how to improve their schools? Maybe there is another reason? But if they ask, they can probably get a waiver to regulations that some argue are holding them back. Thus, it seems unlikely less regulation will suddenly result in hundreds of new ideas sprouting up across the state – schools with ideas to dramatically improve student learning can implement those ideas today.

More likely, what school leaders need is access to better information about programs that work, and more time to think about how to implement them in their own schools. The Evidence-Based approach to school finance offers a research-based school-level design that has led to improved student performance in many schools across the United States. Work in a number of states has estimated the costs of an Evidence-Based model (see for example, Odden, et. al., 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2005; 2004; 2003a; 2003b). Over time estimates derived using this model have grown beyond school level instructional programs to include research based estimates of the resources needed for school site and central office administration, utilities, maintenance and operations, and other costs associated with the operation of a school system.

Once we know what a successful school should look like, it is possible to develop a state-level finance, governance and data system to support schools organized along those lines, and to hold the schools accountable for student performance. Also once the resources for these schools and the related services have been identified; it is possible to estimate the costs of providing those resources. A recent analysis by Odden, Goetz and Picus (2007) suggests that at a national level, these evidence based strategies can be implemented at slightly more than the national average cost per pupil – although in California with its large class size, limited number of administrators and support personnel, and relatively high salaries, the costs are likely to be substantial.

### *Weighted Pupils*

One recommendation that appears to be garnering interest is to reform our state's school finance system by using a weighted pupil approach. Under this system, students with greater needs are counted as more than one student and thus generate additional funding to meet their specific needs. Weighted pupil models are in use in a number of states and it is certainly an approach that offers promise in California, but it is not a solution in and of itself.

Before a weighted pupil model can be implemented, it is essential to know what the base funding level would be, and to have accurate estimates of appropriate weights for student characteristics. Thus the first step is, as described above, determining the resources needed to ensure an adequate education for all children. Once that is established, estimation of pupil weights remains a complex process. The weights need to be sensitive to the wide variety of student needs, yet the system needs to be simple enough to be transparent and easily understood by education officials and the public. There is no reason to believe that weights established in other states would be appropriate for the unique needs of California's children.

Those who argue pupil weights will solve our schools' financial problems without first doing a careful analysis and evaluation are wrong. We

must first determine the additional funding needed for an adequate education system. Simply instituting pupil weights into existing funding levels and organizational structures – if that is even possible – would do no more than redistribute funds among school districts in unpredictable and possibly politically unacceptable ways. Until we know what is needed for our children, pupil weights in the existing system and at existing funding levels are meaningless and have the potential to exacerbate current problems, not solve them.

A better approach might be to replace the state's overly complex and very confusing collection of categorical programs with a small set of categoricals designed to direct funding toward programs that research shows have been successful. For example, there is considerable evidence that strong, targeted and persistent professional development, particularly the use of instructional coaches at the school level, can lead to better teaching and improved student learning. Similarly, strategies to catch struggling students early, provide them intensive help from certificated teachers in the existing curriculum, with the goal of returning them to the regular program as quickly as possible, have also been successful. Categorical grants that focus resources into programs like these – along with accountability systems to be sure the money does not get lost in the adult issues so clearly outlined in the Getting Down to Facts studies – can dramatically improve student performance.

Like other approaches to school finance adequacy, it is likely that an Evidence-Based analysis for California would result in the recommendation of substantial new resources for our schools. What it would do is provide a clear picture of what those resources would be used to accomplish.

The difficulty of raising additional funds for government services in California is immense – and schools are not immune from this problem. Thus a two pronged strategy is needed. First those programs that are the most cost effective to implement – enhanced professional development, strategies to support struggling

students, and comprehensive ten day summer institutes for teachers (fully paid for as part of their contracts) should be implemented initially, with other programs funded in the future, and only if they are needed to fully meet the state's standards for students. Second, a coordinated effort to find the additional funds necessary to provide the state's schools with all of the resources they need has to be mounted. In a state with relatively high taxes, and a low tolerance for more taxation, this may be the greatest challenge of all – sadly, Getting Down to Facts was silent on this topic.

## **Conclusion**

Getting Down to Facts represents an incredible opportunity for the state of California. It identifies the tremendous challenge and need facing the state if it is to provide a world class education for all of its students. Unfortunately, it does not identify how to meet that challenge, or how to fund the likely additional costs.

To date, four states have been able to implement adequacy based school funding systems. Maryland established a five year funding goal in response to a number of professional judgment based adequacy studies and is currently entering its sixth year of sustained effort to provide each district in the state with the level of funding agreed upon as a result of those studies. Kansas made substantial increases in school funding in response to a court order. The state relied mostly on a cost function analysis of funding needs, and then established a three year time frame for funding the model's funding level.

Two states have used an Evidence Based approach to successfully implement school finance reform. In Wyoming, the Evidence-Based approach was used to recalibrate and fund schools beginning in the 2006-07 school year. In Arkansas, the state used the Evidence-Based model to estimate and fund adequate school costs for the 2004-05 school year and to recalibrate that system for the 2007-08 school year. In May 2007 the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled that the Legislature's efforts met the constitutional standard and ended that states long running *Lake View* case.

What all four of these states have in common is a long serious discussion about the school funding system *by the State Legislature*. It appears that one essential component of their success was the early and continued involvement of Legislative committees in the process. Once agreement on the components of a system was reached and the costs estimated, the support of the Legislative committee made it possible to pass Legislation implementing the recommendations and adequately fund them over time.

What does all this mean for California? We need a multi-year strategic plan that shows how schools will be organized, governed and held accountable, and provides adequate funding for all schools to establish programs that research shows will work to dramatically improve the performance of all children. Armed with that information, California's education community can begin the arduous task of seeking the funding to make the plan come about.

What happens next is critical to the success of Getting Down to Facts in helping the state's policy makers. Until the findings from these 22 studies – along with a detailed discussion of what California schools need to succeed – are considered by the Legislature, it is unlikely that anything will come of this excellent work. The fact is, we know what needs to be done, we just need the will to do it.

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**Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening**  
*Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007, in Sacramento*

## **Policy Brief by Preschool California**

**Catherine Atkin, President**

**Scott Moore, Senior Policy Advisor, (510) 271-0075, ext. 302**

### **Education Reform Starts with Effective Pre-K**

#### **Statement of Problem**

*Assuming an ultimate objective of improved student achievement, please summarize the pertinent facts of the existing problems or challenges that your policy ideas or recommendations aim to address.*

Recent state test scores show a persistent academic achievement gap between Latino and black students and their white and Asian classmates. These results are of particular importance to Californians because more than 1 out of every 2 infants born in California is Latino. An analysis of 8 national studies of racial differences show that at least half of the achievement gap observed at the end of twelfth grade can be attributed to the differences that exist at first grade.<sup>1</sup> A UC Santa Barbara study showed that half of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade achievement gap for California Latinos is observable when they enter kindergarten.<sup>2</sup>

A vast body of research shows that, when done right, preschool helps narrow the achievement gap before children start school. Effective pre-kindergarten programs can make a world of difference by building an important foundation in early cognitive and social skills and fostering a love of learning that endures through the K-12 years and beyond. Effective pre-k helps all children get ready to learn and ready to read and that early foundation will serve them well in their school careers.

In *Getting Down to Facts: Resource Needs for California's English Learners*, the authors' top recommendation is to provide part-day high-quality preschool for all English Learner students. However, our existing state and federal preschool programs do not have adequate quality standards or serve enough children to ensure that every child starts school with an equal opportunity to learn.

- Of the almost 466,000<sup>3</sup> low-income<sup>4</sup> 3 and 4 year olds in California, only a little more than half receive either Head Start or state-subsidized preschool.

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<sup>1</sup>Sadowski, Michael, *The School Readiness Gap*, Harvard Education Letter, page 1, July 2006, Volume 22, Number 4

<sup>2</sup> Rumberger, Russell, Anguiano, Brenda, *Understanding and Addressing the California Latino Achievement Gap in Early Elementary School*, UC Latino Policy Institute, page 19, July 2004

<sup>3</sup> *National Center on Children in Poverty, State Profiles*, Columbia University, 2005

- The patchwork quilt system of subsidized programs serving preschool-age children<sup>5</sup> lacks sufficient quality standards, resources and accountability:
  - teachers are only required to have 24 college units, far short of a college degree;
  - part-day state preschool is funded at one-third the rate of K-12<sup>6</sup>, and less than half that of Head Start<sup>7</sup>; and,
  - there is no valid, independent assessment of program quality.

### **Discussion of Policy Issues, Options, and Recommendations**

*Please address how the policy area you are discussing is related to improved student achievement, what the policy issues are, what some of the policy options might be, and what you or your group is recommending and why. Discuss how your policy recommendations might fit into a more comprehensive set of education policy reforms addressing school finance, governance, personnel and leadership, and state education data systems.*

#### **1. Effective Programs Maximize Child Outcomes**

California should provide access to effective preschool for all children, starting with those who need it most. The children who lack access to preschool space are disproportionately children of color, children whose home language is not English, and children whose parents did not graduate from high school. Effective preschool requires establishing high quality standards that have been shown to significantly increase child outcomes. These include:

- Developmentally appropriate, research-based learning standards (foundations), linked to an intentional curriculum, and a comprehensive professional development system.
- Classroom size no larger than 20 children with one teacher and one associate teacher.
- A program that provides a minimum of 3 hours of instruction a day for 175 days a year.
- Family involvement and education infused throughout the program.
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum that prepares English Language learners for success in school.
- Programs that serve children with special needs.
- Articulation with K-3, including kindergarten transition planning.
- Lead teachers have a B.A. with at least 24 Early Childhood Education (ECE).
- Associate teachers have 60 units with at least 24 ECE units.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Federal Poverty Guidelines, issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, define "low income" as below 200% of the federal poverty threshold.*

<sup>5</sup> *This refers to CDE Title 5 State Preschool, Full Day State Preschool, General Child Care for 3 and 4 year olds.*

<sup>6</sup> *National Institute for Early Education Research, State of Preschool, 2006 State Preschool Yearbook, California, page 49, 2006.*

<sup>7</sup> *National Institute for Early Education Research, State of Preschool, 2006 State Preschool Yearbook, California, page 49, 2006.*



- Time for teachers and associate teachers to reflect on their classroom practice, observe, and track children's progress, and develop curriculum plans based on the needs of each child.

## **2. Increase Teacher Qualifications and Invest in the Teaching Workforce**

It requires special skills and training to teach young children, particularly in a population as culturally, linguistically and economically diverse as California. When children have expert teachers, they make progress. The well-studied programs around the country that have produced significant results for children have all been taught by teachers who hold BA degrees.

- Access to financial aid will be particularly important to maintain a highly qualified and linguistically competent workforce that preserves the diversity of the existing ECE workforce.
- Bring together institutions of higher education, the California Department of Education, stakeholders from K-12 and early care and education as well as others to develop teacher competencies that are up-to-date and widely supported.
- To meet demand for better qualified preschool teachers, leadership will be needed at local levels around the state to encourage collaborations among community colleges, CSUs, UCs, and County Offices of Education to ensure the availability of classes where students need them.
- Courses should offer college credits and include on-the-job mentoring, reflective practice, and opportunities for peer collaboration.
- Ongoing professional development and mentoring should be required for preschool teachers and associate teachers.

## **3. Create Incentives for High Quality**

Creating an effective pre-k system will require a significant investment of public resources. As preschool programs meet increasingly high standards, they should be funded accordingly. A Quality Rating Scale (QRS) is one method for tracking this progress. A QRS could also be used as an information tool for parents to learn about the quality of their child's preschool.

## **4. Collect Data**

Effective preschool requires a substantial investment and with such investment should come assurances about programs' ability to produce the outcomes that quality preschool promises. At the moment, little is known about the outcomes produced by California's subsidized preschool programs.

- Existing data on state subsidized preschools should be analyzed and reported on an annual basis.
- Methods for tracking student progress in preschool and K-12 should be instituted.

## **5. Provide Full-Day Services**

Many California families, especially working poor families, need full-day care for their children. Right now, California has a patchwork quilt of funding for full-day care, with a complex web of regulations and standards. Below are some ideas for improving this system:

- Maximize opportunities for full-day care including giving funding priority to preschool programs that offer full-day services for families who need it.
- Any part-day preschool program should have the flexibility to braid other publicly funded ECE programs to create a full day.

## **6. Zero to Three and the Whole Child**

It is critical to understand and support the development of children prior to beginning preschool. Quality care for infants and toddlers is important, whether in a group setting or provided by a parent or guardian. As effective preschool investments are made, we should also support quality infant/toddler programs.

- Supporting the whole child means reaching out to parents before they enter preschool.
- For preschool and infant/toddler care, a holistic approach to child development and family support is critical to success.
- This begins by building strong relationships with families and by supporting family literacy, parenting skills, health, and other family needs

## **7. Meet Facilities Needs**

There is a clear need for building new preschool facilities. A 2007 study by the Advancement Project shows that California lacks facility space for 1 out of 5 preschoolers. This analysis of the facilities gap remains the same in both universal and targeted preschool scenarios. This analysis assumes utilization of the state's existing preschool facilities, including Head Start and state subsidized preschool.

- Identify significant financing, through education bonds, for building new preschools in the many low-income communities and attendance areas of Academic Performance Index deciles 1 through 3 schools that currently lack them.
- Provide repair and renovation funding for existing subsidized preschools.
- Open up the existing Child Care Facilities Revolving Loan fund to allow for more than just portables to be built.
- Work with the Department of Social Services Licensing division to streamline the licensing process for new facilities.

BRIEF SUBMITTERS: Pacific Research Institute director of education studies Lance T. Izumi, J.D, and senior fellow in education studies Vicki E. Murray, Ph.D.

TOPIC: Underperformance of non-socioeconomically-disadvantaged students in California schools and the importance of increasing school choice options to address the problem.

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## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

California's inner cities, like those in other states, are beset with social problems, but in California those problems are often exponentially greater. Yet, it is much too convenient to blame California's dismal overall education performance on the low achievement of poor inner-city children. A look at the data shows that hundreds of public schools with predominantly non-poor student populations are performing badly.

Examine the California Standards Test data in English and math at schools where less than one-third of students were on the free-and-reduced lunch program and less than one-third were classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. With two-thirds or more of students determined to be non-disadvantaged, it is surprising to see how many of these schools had test results showing that less than 50 percent of students performed at proficiency in at least one grade level on either the CST math or English language arts exam. In other words, even if every disadvantaged student performed below the proficient mark, a significant percentage of non-disadvantaged students were also performing below proficiency as well.

In fact, it turns out that 284 public schools in California had both predominantly non-disadvantaged student populations and test results showing that less than half of students in at least one grade level performed at proficiency on the 2006 state math or English test.<sup>1</sup> Continuation schools, charter schools and magnet schools were excluded from the pool of schools examined. Although the large majority of the students in these schools are accurately labeled non-poor or non-socio-economically disadvantaged, most would be considered "middle class" based on the average layperson's use of that term. For instance, when looking at the median home prices in the zip code in which the school is located, 94.2 percent of the schools, or more than nine out of ten of them, were located in zip codes where the median home price was more than \$300,000. Further, 78.4 percent, or more than three out of four of the schools, were located in zip codes where the median home price more than \$400,000.

More than half, 54.7 percent, were located in zip codes where the median home price was above half a million dollars. More than a quarter, 27.3 percent, were located in zip codes where the median home price was above \$600,000, and 11.5 percent were

located in zip codes with median home prices above \$700,000. In fact, there were schools among this group where the median home price was above \$800,000, \$900,000, and up to an astounding \$1.6 million.

Further, of the 157 high schools with predominantly non-poor student populations where 90 percent of the 11<sup>th</sup> graders took both the CST English exam and the California State University Early Assessment Program (EAP) English exam, which is supposed to identify the college-ready level of students, not a single school in the group had an EAP college-ready rate higher than the 11<sup>th</sup>-grade CST English proficiency rate. Further, the average percentage difference between the CST exam proficiency rates and the EAP English college-ready rates was a whopping 27.6 percentage points. In other words the CST English exam proficiency rate was, on average, 27.6 percentage points higher than the EAP English college-ready rate. This disparity no doubt helps explain the 60 percent remediation rate among entering CSU freshmen.

## SCHOOL CHOICE: POLICY ISSUES, OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is very little incentive for underperforming public schools, whether they serve disadvantage or non-disadvantaged student populations, to improve their performance and to change the ways they do things in order to accomplish such improvement. Although the state has a school accountability system, it is largely ineffective because of a variety of factors:

- Participation by low-performing schools is voluntary
- Focus is on average school-wide performance, not individual grade-level proficiency of students
- State improvement targets for schools are minimal and incremental
- Schools can exit state improvement programs without showing significant improvement
- No serious consequences befall continually underperforming schools

Because of these major deficiencies, there is little incentive for most underperforming public schools to improve.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the lack of real consequences for poor performance, the players in the public education – districts, school site officials, unions, etc. – have little motivation to change fundamentally a system that is failing to produce high numbers of students proficient in basic subjects. Top-down dictates from Sacramento and/or magic-bullet programs, such as universal preschool, do not get at the essential dysfunction of the system (manifested in policies such as teacher union contracts that protect ineffective teachers).

The key, then, is to instill competition in the system in order to force public education actors to focus on proven ways to improve student achievement. In the marketplace, because of competition, good ideas are copied because they are successful, effective, efficient and consumers benefit from them. Yet, monopolies, like the public

education system, have incentive to copy good ideas because they have an essentially captive clientele.

According to Ben Chavis, until recently the principal at high-performing American Indian Public Charter School in Oakland, no one from poor-performing Oakland schools or the school district ever visited his school to see what was going right in his classrooms.<sup>3</sup> Former U.S. secretary of education Rod Paige explained the reason for this lack of interest: “Under the current monopolistic system, public schools have no incentive to embark on substantial reforms or make major improvements because no matter how badly they perform: their budgets won’t be cut; their enrollment won’t decline; [and] the school won’t close down.”

In contrast, when Wisconsin approved a voucher program for low-income children in Milwaukee, the city’s public school system responded by: raising graduation requirements; closing and reconstituting failing schools; implementing accountability reforms based on measurable objectives and reported results; improving the school selection process for parents; expanding kindergarten; increasing fiscal autonomy for schools; and creating parental and community involvement programs.

John Gardner, a former union organizer who served on the Milwaukee school board when the voucher program was being implemented, observed that school choice forced the school district to “begin treating poor children of all races as valued customers, in large part because, for the first time, they are.” “The pressure for school choice creates more than a safety valve,” noted Gardner, it’s “the energy to transform bureaucratic systems of juvenile warehousing into public education.”

The result is better student and school performance. In their review of more than 200 scientific analyses spanning 30 years concerning the effects of competition on district schools and students, researchers from Columbia University Teachers College concluded: “A sizeable majority of these studies report beneficial effects of competition across all outcomes,” including improved performance by public-school students, higher graduation rates, and greater public-school efficiency.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, if California truly wants to reform education in 2008, it should focus on empowering parents as education consumers who can choose from a variety of education options for their children. The beneficiaries would be both parents and their children taking advantage of the greater number of options to choose the optimal one for their individual situation, and the public schools which would have to improve or face losing their customers. In that vein, here are school-choice options that California policymakers should consider:

***Educational Opportunity for All Scholarships.*** All California students should have an equal opportunity to attend schools that best meet their individual needs, regardless of their families’ address or income. Educational Opportunity for All (EOA) Scholarships allow education dollars to follow K-12 students to the schools their parents think are best,

both district-run and independently-run. EOA Scholarships resemble the G.I. Bill and Pell Grant programs for college students, which have helped make American higher education the envy of the world. Thirteen states, including the nation's capitol, currently have publicly-financed scholarship programs that enable parents to send their children to schools of their choice.<sup>5</sup> Thus far this year, more than 30 additional publicly-funded scholarship programs have been proposed in nearly 20 states.<sup>6</sup>

***Universal District-school Choice.*** Under California law, students are largely assigned to district schools based on where their families can afford to live. Only if resident school districts consent are parents permitted to enroll their children in district schools outside their attendance area. Districts have a powerful incentive to limit out-of-district transfers, meaning only parents who can afford to move can exercise this form of public school choice. Universal, inter-district school choice, or mandatory statewide open-enrollment, would put quality public schools within the reach of all California families, regardless of their zip code. Nineteen states have mandatory inter-district public school choice.<sup>7</sup> Research from Harvard University also finds that this form of public school choice is among the most effective forces for school improvement: school productivity grows by as much as 10 percent, spending is trimmed by nearly eight percent, and student achievement rises almost six percentile points.<sup>8</sup>

***Multiple, Independent Charter-school Authorizers.*** A growing body of scholarly and empirical research, including recent analyses by the Legislative Analyst Office, indicates making district school boards the primary authorizers does not ensure that the supply of high-quality charter schools meets demand.<sup>9</sup> School boards often do not have the staff, resources, or time for effective oversight. That is why today more than a dozen states with charter schools have one or more types of independent charter authorizers besides district school boards:

- Eight states permit colleges and universities to charter schools.
- Seven states and the District of Columbia use independent state-level chartering boards.
- Three state statutes specify municipal offices that may charter.
- Two states allow foundations and nonprofit organizations such authority.<sup>10</sup>

Allowing businesses to charter schools, for example those that focus on math, science, and vocational skills, is also a reform that could help reduce dropout rates by offering students a more hands-on education and improve remedial education rates by focusing on skills students need to succeed in college.

***Tax-credit Scholarships and Tax Deductions for Educational Expenses.*** Currently, 10 tax-credit scholarship and credit programs exist in six states.<sup>11</sup> Nearly 30 additional programs in more than a dozen states have been proposed this year. Tax-credit scholarship programs exist in five states and allow individuals and/or businesses to receive credit against their state taxes for contributions to charitable, 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organizations that distribute school scholarships. Three states allow families to take a tax credit or deduction against their state income taxes for educational-related expenses,

including tuition, books, school supplies, tutoring, and home-schooling.<sup>12</sup> Such programs expand educational options for families and their children, while allowing the public and businesses take a more active role in supporting the education of the next generation.

***Educational Savings Accounts.*** To restore parental control over their children’s education, the state should establish a system of Education Savings Account (ESAs). Instead of channeling education funding through government bureaucracies, the state could deposit funds directly into each child’s ESA. Parents could then choose the educational setting they deem best for their children—district, charter, private, or home-school—or pay for other qualified education expenses such as tutoring. Unspent money would accumulate tax-free, and parents could eventually use those savings for their children’s college education or job-training. To encourage greater savings among families with a tax liability, the state should make non-government contributions tax-deductible. To bolster savings among middle- and lower-income families, who have smaller or no tax liability, the state could also offer means-tested, dollar-for-dollar deposit matches, and allow employers, family members, and other donors to make tax-deductible contributions to children’s ESAs as well.<sup>13</sup>

*Notes:*

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<sup>1</sup> Data in “Statement of the Problem” section comes from Lance T. Izumi, Vicki E. Murray and Rachel S. Chaney, *Not as Good as You Think: Why the Middle Class Needs School Choice* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the shortcomings of California’s school accountability system, see James S. Lanich, Lance T. Izumi and Xiaochin Claire Yan, “Failing our Future: The Holes in California’s School Accountability System and How to Fix Them,” Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, CA, November 2006.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of successful charter school models see Lance T. Izumi and Xiaochin Claire Yan, *Free to Learn: Lessons from Model Charter Schools* (San Francisco, CA: Pacific Research Institute, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin, “The Effects of Competition on Educational Outcomes: A Review of the U.S. Evidence,” *Review of Educational Research*, 72(2), March 2002, pp. 279-341, online at [http://www.ncspe.org/publications\\_files/688\\_OP35V2.pdf](http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/688_OP35V2.pdf). See p. 2 of pdf. version for quotation.

<sup>5</sup> Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, “School Choice Programs,” <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/schoolchoice/ShowProgram.do>.

<sup>6</sup> Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, “School Choice Legislation,” <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/schoolchoice/ShowLegislation.do>

<sup>7</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Open Enrollment,” <http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/issuesK12.asp>; and “[State Policies for Open Enrollment Database](#),” <http://www.ecs.org/html/offsite.asp?document=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Eecs%2Eorg%2FOpenEnrollmentDatabase>.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Hoxby, “Does Competition among Public Schools Benefit Students and Taxpayers?” *The American Economic Review*, vol. 90, no. 5 (December 2000): 1209.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Hill, E. (2004). *Assessing California’s Charter Schools*. Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office. [http://www.lao.ca.gov/2004/charter\\_schools/012004\\_charter\\_schools.pdf](http://www.lao.ca.gov/2004/charter_schools/012004_charter_schools.pdf); Legislative Analyst’s Office. (2005). “Charter Schools.” In *Analysis of the 2005-06 Budget Bill*. Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, pp. E-82-92. [http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis\\_2005/education/ed\\_an105.pdf](http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_2005/education/ed_an105.pdf);

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Powell, J. et al. (1997). "Charter School Governance, Finance, and Accountability" in Evaluation of Charter School Effectiveness. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, Inc. Prepared for the Legislative Analyst's Office, pp. III-1-28. [http://www.sri.com/policy/cep/choice/SRI\\_CA\\_charter\\_schools\\_1997.pdf](http://www.sri.com/policy/cep/choice/SRI_CA_charter_schools_1997.pdf). See ch. 3; Hassel, B., Ziebarth, T. and Steiner, L. (2005). A State Policymaker's Guide to Alternative Authorizers of Charter Schools. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/64/69/6469.pdf>; Bierlein Palmer, L. and Gau, R. (2003). Charter school authorizing: Are states making the grade? Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute. [http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/CharterAuthorizing\\_FullReport.pdf](http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/CharterAuthorizing_FullReport.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Louann Bierlein Palmer, "Alternative" Charter School Authorizers: Playing a Vital Role in the Charter Movement, Progressive Policy Institute Policy Report, December 21, 2006, especially p. 15, [http://www.ppionline.org/documents/Alternative\\_Charter\\_122106.pdf](http://www.ppionline.org/documents/Alternative_Charter_122106.pdf); Gau, R. (2006). *Trends in charter school authorizing*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, p. v, <http://www.edexcellence.net/institute/publication/publication.cfm?id=355>; and *Hopes, Fears, & Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools in 2005*. Seattle, WA: National Charter School Research Project, Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, [http://www.ncsrp.org/cs/csr/download/csr\\_files/HopesandFears2005\\_report.pdf](http://www.ncsrp.org/cs/csr/download/csr_files/HopesandFears2005_report.pdf); cf. National Association of Charter School Authorizers, Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing, 2005, revised edition, <http://www.qualitycharters.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3393>.

<sup>11</sup> Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, "School Choice Programs," <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/schoolchoice/ShowProgram.do>.

<sup>12</sup> Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, "School Choice Programs," <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/friedman/schoolchoice/ShowProgram.do>

<sup>13</sup> Dan Lips, "Education Savings Accounts: A Vehicle for School Choice," *Goldwater Institute Policy Report #207*, November 15, 2005, <http://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/AboutUs/ArticleView.aspx?id=807>.





*California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA)*  
Public Education Policy Brief

October 19, 2007

Parents' priorities for school finance and education reform

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## *Problem statement*

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Education is consistently identified as the number one priority by the voters of California, and indeed the nation. It is the one priority that crosses political affiliations. And yet, we find that our state's education system is not adequate to prepare all of our children to take on the challenges of a new century and a global economy. Thus, the ability to improve the educational outcomes for California's youth relies on our collective intent to translate this priority into greater investment in the public school system.

## *Policy issues and recommendations*

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California State PTA includes nearly one-million members statewide, with approximately 3700 local PTA associations, 170 PTA councils, and 29 regional district PTAs. As such, the organization is uniquely positioned to offer policy recommendations based on the experience and perspectives of local volunteer parents whose children, grandchildren and communities are served by the public school system. The following recommendations emerged from survey research and focus groups conducted among California parents and PTA members in 2006-07, as well as formal resolutions and position statements approved by California State PTA delegates and commissions.

In general, as the state considers any systemic public education reforms, we recommend strongly that:

- California's public education system must be focused on student needs, rather than being "compliance-driven."
- The definition of a quality education must include breadth and depth far beyond the 3 "R's." The end goal of our system must be to develop students with lifelong learning and career skills – critical and creative thinkers who are able to contribute to society and fulfill their own potential, based on a well rounded, interdisciplinary curriculum of arts, sciences, literature, technology, physical, cultural and vocational education.
- Quality education must be individualized. The system must respond to how individual children learn, and what is developmentally appropriate for their physical, emotional, intellectual and vocational needs. There must be multiple ways to assess and evaluate student progress, and flexibility to support different needs. One size does not fit all.
- Equity and equal access are paramount. Across schools and communities throughout the state, every child must have access to quality programs and services.
- Any reforms must be funded at levels that ensure successful implementation. Once implemented and funded, reform efforts must be given a chance to work.

We have divided our recommendations into several key categories:

### Funding

- More resources are needed for virtually every aspect of education, from materials, textbooks, and supplies to technology, libraries and facilities; plus expanded and enhanced human resources via trained professionals in all academic curriculum areas, arts education, physical education, nutrition, health and counseling services.
- We must increase the overall per-pupil allocation of funding to provide the staff, support services and other resources needed to improve outcomes for all children.
- All funding must be used effectively and efficiently.
- The state budget process must be stable and allow for adequate resources and planning at the local level.
- The school finance system at all levels must be easier to understand, so that it helps strengthen confidence in, and support for, public education.
- The school finance system must account for differences in the needs of children and local communities.

### High Quality Staff

- Quality education depends above all on quality staff. California's efforts to raise student achievement and reduce the achievement gap require additional investments in training and support for new and experienced teachers, as well as leadership development for administrators.
- Teachers must be expertly trained in interdisciplinary approaches; they must be able to deliver curriculum and assessments in multiple ways. As individuals, they must be culturally competent, emotionally invested, and committed to lifelong learning.
- Leadership development must include training in the evaluation and coaching of staff.
- Additional investments must be made to raise staffing levels of school support personnel in order to help improve student outcomes.
- More flexibility in the compensation of staff should be considered.

### Parent and Community Engagement

- Strengthening the connection between families and schools must be a priority, including programs that assist parents in better understanding their role in the educational success of their children.
- Staff development at all levels must include strategies to increase parental and community engagement and to promote home-school connections.
- Laws and regulations should be reviewed and revised as appropriate to allow maximum collaboration between local agencies and entities that deliver programs and services for children and families.
- Schools should be centers of the community. Partnerships must be forged with parents, the business community, youth groups, social services – everyone with a vested interest in the community. There should be open communication and a sense of ownership by all members of the community.

## Governance

- Decision-making authority must be moved closer to the district and/or school site.
- The state should establish standards and maintain and support the state accountability program. Accountability must include multiple measures and be focused on student learning; it must be fair, not punitive.
- Whenever it is in the best interests of children and families, local schools and locally elected school boards that are accountable to the local communities who elect them, must have maximum ability to set policies and make decisions to ensure all students meet the standards.

## Facilities

- Quality environment, facilities and material resources are essential. Learning environments must be clean, safe and configured to promote multiple ways of learning. All teachers and students must have the materials and resources they need. Class sizes must be reduced across all grade levels.

## Data

- School and state data systems must be accessible, comprehensive and understandable, so as to enhance the ability at the local and state levels to evaluate programs and make informed decisions about reforms.
- Student performance must be measured across time.
- Assessments must be accurate, timely and student-focused. They must be recognized primarily as a means of improving classroom instruction so all students can succeed, not as a scorecard for evaluating schools.

## *Summary of research methodology*

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The recommendations contained in this brief are based on surveys and focus groups conducted by the California State PTA as part of a school finance partnership project launched in 2006. California State PTA joined with the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, California School Boards Association and Children Now in this project, which is funded by the Hewlett Foundation. Between January 2006 and May 2007, California State PTA undertook to gain a detailed understanding of how its membership views the public policy issues surrounding school funding and comprehensive public education reform. To achieve this understanding, a research consultant group, Creative Qualitative, was selected to work with members to develop a clear internal assessment. The Creative Qualitative (CQ) consultant team consisted of Nancy Schmidt and Terry Ogawa. Research was conducted in several phases:

### **Phase I: State Board of Managers**

#### **January, 2006 – Riverside, California**

10 discussion/brainstorming groups were conducted with the different PTA commissions, to define quality education and address five core questions:

- What is the definition of “high-quality education?”
- What resources are needed to support high quality education?
- What types of accountability and reform measures need to take place to support high quality education?
- How should quality education be funded?
- How can broad support for quality education be built throughout the state?

### **Phase II: State Legislative Conference**

#### **March, 2006 – Sacramento, California**

6 brainstorming groups responded to core questions about funding, accountability and reform

- *Funding:*
  - a) What funding systems do we currently have in place that may serve as a potential opportunity to increase funding for education?
  - b) Of these, which are most appropriate for this purpose?
  - c) Do you believe that PTA would support this recommendation?
- *Accountability and reform of student achievement*
  - a) What measures currently exist?
  - b) What do they measure?
  - c) How effective do you think they are?

### **Phase III: State Convention**

#### **May, 2006 – Anaheim, California**

A tutorial session on the school finance system was conducted in coordination with Ed Source, followed by break-out groups. Brainstorming groups addressed funding and accountability priorities with the following question:

- “What are the top 3-5 priorities the PTA should focus on in the next 2-3 years in the areas of funding and reform, to ensure that all children receive a high quality education?”

Each of these activities was iterative – that is, each built on the findings of the previous research, and was aimed at moving the discussion forward. The qualitative research also formed the basis for a quantitative survey conducted in September, 2006.

### **Phase IV: Online membership survey**

#### **September, 2006 – statewide**

An online survey of California State PTA members was conducted during the month of September, 2006, through the organization’s website. A call to participate was sent to members via personal emails to each District president from the State leadership; invitations were also sent through all available email lists, including the legislative committee list and lists compiled at the State Convention. Multiple follow-up emails and personal phone calls from the State PTA leadership were also made to encourage participation. A total of 1336 responses were received for the survey, 90% of whom described themselves as currently active members.

***Phase V: State convention survey***

***May, 2007 – Sacramento***

A follow-up survey was conducted with 245 participants; topics focused on three core questions related to school funding and reform. A California State PTA task force also reviewed the association's existing resolutions and position statements related to school finance and reform.

## **FAIR Student Funding--A Model for California Schools**

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**October 1, 2007**

“The Getting Down to Facts” studies called California’s current financing system “irrational and complex” and said “tinkering around the edges of reform is unlikely to have any effect.” The reports argue that California needs to throw out its current school finance system and “start from scratch.” However, this does not mean that California needs to reinvent the wheel. In fact, California should look to New York City with 1.1 million students and more than 1,400 schools for a lesson in how to restructure school finance from scratch and scale it up to every school in California.

### **The New York City Model**

Beginning in 2007-08, the New York City Department of Education is empowering all public schools, so that educational decisions are happening in schools, where the people closest to students are deciding what will help students succeed.<sup>1</sup>

Public School Empowerment builds on the Empowerment Schools initiative pilot. In the 2006-07, 332 New York City public schools took on greater decision-making power and resources in exchange for accepting accountability for results. These “Empowerment Schools” worked under performance agreements, committing to high levels of student achievement with clear consequences for failure. In exchange for this commitment, principals and their teams had the freedom to design educational strategies tailored to their students. These schools have hand-picked their support teams, hired additional teachers, implemented creative schedules, designed tailored assessments, invested in professional development, and purchased both internal and external services that meet their needs and their students’ needs. Initial results were promising, with more than 85 percent of empowerment schools meeting the performance targets set by the Department of Education.

Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, all public schools are empowered, as their principals and their teams gain broader discretion over allocating resources, choosing their staffs, and creating programming for their students. Schools also have increased resources, because of the Department’s new Fair Student Funding formula, which allocates funds based on student need.

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed information about school empowerment and fair student funding in New York City, including the budget of every school in New York City in terms of actual dollars go to New York City Department of Education here:  
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/ChildrenFirst/FairStudentFunding/default.htm>

In New York City, “Fair Student Funding” is based on simple principles:

- School budgeting should fund students fairly and adequately, while preserving stability at all schools.
- Different students have different educational needs, and funding levels should reflect those needs as best as possible.
- School leaders, not central offices, are best positioned to decide how to improve achievement.
- School budgets should be as transparent as possible so that funding decisions are visible for all to see and evaluate.

In keeping with these principles, Fair Student Funding means that:

- Money will begin to follow each student to the public school that he or she attends, without hurting better-funded schools.
- Each student will receive funding based on grade level. Students also may receive additional dollars based on need.
- Principals will have greater flexibility about how to spend money on teachers and other investments—along with greater responsibility for dollars and greater accountability for results.
- Key funding decisions will be based on clear, public criteria.

Below is an actual example of the differences in resources in one Queens middle school between the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 budget year. Because New York City is phasing in fair student funding, in the first year of the program schools receive 55 percent of their fair student funding amount over and above their budget allocation under the old approach up to \$400,000. This is because schools that receive less funding under the new approach will be held harmless and phased in through 2010.

### **School Budget Overview -**

#### **I.S. 5 - THE WALTER CROWLEY INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL (Q005)**

In fiscal year 2007-2008, New York City schools begin the transition to Fair Student Funding. We are showing three budget views, but only the third represents a school's actual budget. All schools are receiving additional funds this year.

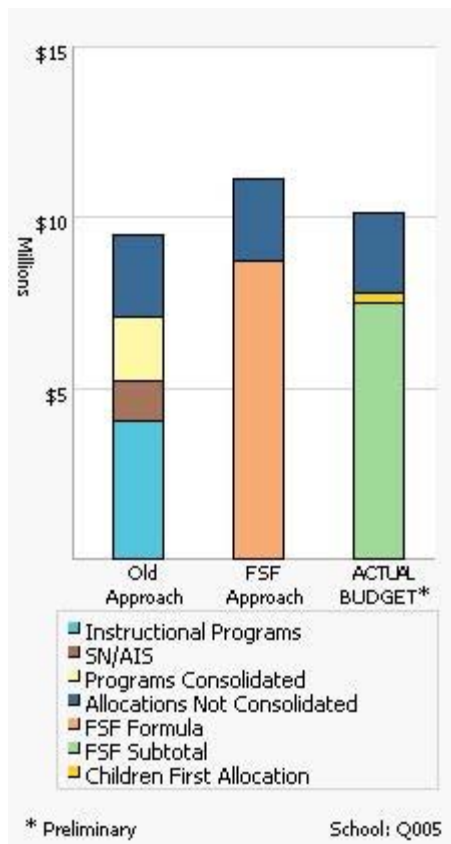
- I. **OLD APPROACH** - This section shows how much money a school would receive in fiscal year 2008 based only on the fiscal year 2007 methodology.
- II. **FAIR STUDENT FUNDING (FSF) APPROACH.** This section shows how much money a school would receive under the new Fair Student Funding formula. *For schools receiving less funding under FSF, this number is hypothetical.*
- III. **ACTUAL BUDGET (PRELIMINARY).**
  - a. If funding is greater under the Old Approach than under the FSF Approach, a school will receive base funding equal to its Old Approach funding.



- b. If funding is greater under the FSF Approach than under the Old Approach, a school will receive base funding equal to its Old Approach funding plus new funding.
- c. All schools receive funds from unconsolidated programs.
- d. All schools receive additional "Children First" dollars from reductions in central and regional offices.

**I. OLD APPROACH**

<u>Instructional Programs</u>	\$4,087,213
<u>Special Needs / Academic Intervention Services (SNAIS)</u>	+\$1,145,114
<u>Programs Consolidated</u>	+\$1,901,652
<b>Amount Under Old Approach</b>	<b>=\$7,133,979</b>



**II. FAIR STUDENT FUNDING (FSF) APPROACH**

FSF Formula=\$8,785,259

**Difference: FSF would increase your funding by: \$1,651,280**

### III. ACTUAL BUDGET (PRELIMINARY)

Amount Under Old Approach		\$7,133,979
New FSF Allocation (Approx. 55% of Difference up to \$400,000)	+\$400,000	
FSF Subtotal		= \$7,533,979
Allocations Not Consolidated	+\$2,392,571	
Children First Supplemental Allocation	+\$266,323	
<u>FY08 Budget</u>		= \$10,192,873

#### California's History with Weighted Student Formula

According California's 2007-2008 state Budget total per-pupil expenditures from all sources are projected to be \$11,163 in 2006-07 and \$11,541 in 2007-08. The key question for school funding equity, efficiency, and student performance is how do we get more of these current California education resources into the backpacks of students to more effectively serve individual student needs and raise student outcomes?

A weighted student formula model coupled with local school empowerment addresses several of the key issues raised in "The Getting Down to Facts" reports. California should look closely at New York City's Fair Student Funding Model which pairs weighed student formula and school empowerment through budgetary control. Following the New York City model and moving to this type of system would use current resources more effectively, make school finance simple and transparent, and provide a positive way to strengthen the role of the principal in California schools.

California has one of the most centralized public school systems in the United States. In California, local property taxes are aggregated in Sacramento and then re-allocated to school districts on a per-capita basis. These reallocated funds—both general revenue and categorical funds—do not flow directly to schools, but to school district central offices. The central offices then allocate personnel to schools rather than money. For example, a school district would determine the number of teachers and other kinds of personnel each school receives based on the district's student population and characteristics. If a school principal wanted to invest resources in an additional reading instructor to raise reading scores at the school, the school principal would not have the budgetary discretion to hire the reading teacher because employees are assigned at the district level based on the average characteristics of schools in the district.

In a February 2005 study by the Education Trust West, *California's Hidden Teacher Spending Gap: How State and District Budgeting Practices Shortchange Poor and Minority Students and Their Schools*, found that state education dollars are not distributed equally within school districts. The report found that the money spent on teachers' salaries in California, which makes up the majority of education funding in California, varies widely from school to school within the same school district. For example, all ten of California's largest school districts post a spending gap on teachers' salaries between

high and low minority high schools. These gaps range from \$64, 291 to \$522,459.<sup>2</sup> The Education Trust-West report found dramatic spending gaps in teachers' salaries within districts, with more highly paid teachers and more experienced teachers concentrated in more affluent schools.

Districts report average teachers' salaries for entire districts instead of calculating the actual salaries of teachers assigned to any particular school. These district averages are even reported on the school level report cards. These averages mask teacher salary differences between schools within the same district. The report uses this analogy:

*It's as if we had two pots of water, one ice cold and the other boiling hot, and concluded that the average water temperature is warm: True, but not very informative about the conditions in each pot.*<sup>3</sup>

The Education Trust-West recommends reporting transparent school salary and budget information at the school level, changing the funding system to allow money to follow the child rather than districts allocating funds based on teaching positions in an individual school.

In California weighted student funding gained visibility in 2003 when Governor Schwarzenegger appointed former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan as Secretary of Education.<sup>4</sup> Riordan called for a major overhaul of California's education system that included streamlining school finance through weighted student formula, empowering school site principals, and making sure the money followed students all the way to the school. Although there was speculation about a pilot program for school empowerment, the Schwarzenegger administration never introduced a concrete proposal.

In California, we have two striking examples of districts using weighted student formula. San Francisco, with 116 schools and 60,000 students, is in its seventh year of using a weighted student formula for funding and giving more decision-making power to principals and their School Site Councils, made up of parents and school staff. Since implementing the weighted student formula, San Francisco's test scores have improved every year, and it is now the highest-performing urban school district in California.

Similarly, in 2004 the Oakland Unified School District transformed its budgeting formula from a centralized process to "results-based budgeting." As reported in a new Education Trust West report, "California's Hidden Teacher Spending Gap," the Oakland District allocates funding to its schools based on the number and type of students at each school. Oakland gives each school administrator the flexibility to allocate this funding in whatever way fits the school's instructional needs. Oakland allocates funds to the school

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<sup>2</sup> Education Trust West, *California's Hidden Teacher Spending Gap: How State and District Budgeting Practices Shortchange Poor and Minority Students and Their Schools*, February 2005. <http://www.hiddengap.org/report/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "Weighted Student Formula" *Concept Enlivens School Finance Debate*" Edsource Issue Brief, May 2004, <http://www.edsource.org/pdf/WeightedStuForm04.pdf>.

in the same way it receives revenue from the state: unrestricted Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding is allocated to the schools based on their current year enrollment. According to *Education Week*, Oakland is the only district in the nation that gives principals direct control of their ADA funding. In 2006 Oakland made the largest gains of the state's thirty largest districts on the states Academic Performance Index.<sup>5</sup>

Also in California, Los Angeles school and union officials have agreed to develop a group of independent small schools in the Pico-Union area, allowing students to choose a campus that best fits their interests. The Belmont Pilot Schools Network would consist of five to ten fully autonomous high schools launched over the next five years, with a maximum of 400 students each. Principals and teachers at those schools would work under a separate contract that would free them to determine school calendars, curricula, budgets and administrative structures.<sup>i</sup>

California could take advantage of its largely centralized school funding system and implement a state-level weighted student formula that would fund students based on their individual characteristics. The weighted student formula would create an equitable funding stream, give all principals more control over their budgets, and let students choose their schools. California could easily follow the map of New York City which offers step by step instructions on how to divide a complex budget into actual per-pupil funding based on weights that follow the child.

If California is not ready to institute fair student funding statewide—an interim solution would be to offer school districts a financial incentive to pilot the weighted student formula concept within a school district. This financing mechanism would be especially important for those California districts with higher achievement gaps, higher concentrations of school dropouts, and a greater need to weight funding toward individual student characteristics.

California could offer waivers to state-level categorical mandates that limit discretionary funding to those districts willing to implement weighted-student formula financing schemes with principal control and public school choice.

New York City's school empowerment program has the motto that "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." That's just what California's finance system needs: a clear transparent funding system that like New York City puts "Children First" and funds them in a clear transparent manner.

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<sup>i</sup> Arin Gencer, "Plan Aims to Boost School Choice, New Campuses in the Pico-Union Area would get Freedoms Similar to those of Charter Sites." *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 2006.

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<sup>5</sup> Lisa Snell and Shikha Dalmia, "Experimenting with school choice: A Tale of two California Districts," *Education Week*, February 12, 2007.

**Strengthening School District Capacity as a Strategy  
to Raise Student Achievement in California**

**Policy Brief  
for**

***Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening***  
**Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007, in Sacramento**

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**Topics covered: Governance, personnel and leadership, state data systems**

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## Problem Statement

Student achievement in California lags behind most other states, and if current achievement levels persist, the state's work force will be wholly under-prepared for California's future economy.<sup>1</sup> The state is pursuing a range of strategies to improve student achievement, from creating a strong accountability system to providing resources to schools for teacher professional development and program support. Another strategy for improving student achievement is to strengthen the capacity of school districts to launch and sustain effective reform in their under-performing schools.

This strategy is based on a simple premise: *improvement depends on capacity*.<sup>2</sup> This premise underlies all training and professional development designed to develop the *individual capacity* of educators. Yet relatively little attention has been focused on improving the *institutional capacity* of schools, districts, and state education agencies.<sup>3</sup> This brief focuses on building capacity of school districts to quickly improve under-performing schools. More specifically, we offer suggestions for how districts and states can work together to infuse local school systems with high yield reform strategies within relatively short periods of time.

## The Importance of District Capacity

School districts carry out a number of important functions in supporting their schools: *managerial functions*, such as providing materials along with support and personnel services to schools; *political functions*, such as representing community interests through local school boards; and *instructional functions*, such as developing curriculum and providing professional development.<sup>4</sup>

Some critics of public education have argued that some or all of these functions should be decentralized and carried out by individual schools; others call for outside for-profit and non-profit entities to provide some or all of these services; still others see market forces fed by parental choice, charter schools, or vouchers as correctives for school districts where problems exist in executing these functions.<sup>5</sup> While experiments reflecting all of these perspectives are underway, their efficacy and scalability remains uncertain. In the meantime, many school districts continue to perform all of these functions in ways that are producing unacceptable results for millions of California's children, while continuing to act as the primary conduits for large sums of state and federal dollars targeted at improving struggling schools. For these reasons, the state needs to adopt strategies to strengthen school districts' capacity to adopt and sustain school reform.<sup>6</sup>

What does district capacity to transform struggling schools look like? Where systemic district reform has occurred and shown meaningful results,<sup>7</sup> these systems have specified and institutionalized:

1. an overall vision specifying a clear set of "critical conditions for teaching and learning" that all students and teachers deserve, and toward which all reform efforts are aimed—conditions that credible evidence suggest are necessary and sufficient to make a difference in student commitment and performance, such as:<sup>8</sup>
  - *organizational structures* small enough and structurally sound enough to ensure teachers and students can build more respectful, mutually accountable and longstanding relationships in the classroom and the school;
  - all students and their families having *personal relationships* with at least one caring adult, working together for extended periods of time toward each student's success;

- *instructional leaders equipped* to measure, coach, and support teachers’ instructional practices effectively; and
  - teachers having *high quality curricular materials* and *sufficient planning time and training* to discuss students and their work in productive ways;
2. a structured, participatory and timed process for creating those conditions in all targeted schools specifying clear implementation benchmarks and outcomes;
  3. the technical support and assistance to move the schools through this process from the current conditions to the desired conditions;
  4. a comprehensive data system providing data at all levels of the system, both to inform educators about their practices and their results, and to monitor the implementation of the teaching and learning conditions;
  5. a sustained relationship with an external partner providing new ideas and technical support, both in the reform process and in substantive areas of curriculum, restructuring, professional development for administrators and teachers, and data systems.

In addition, these districts have successfully managed two inherent tensions. One is the tension between the district and the schools—between a “top-down” or control strategy that emphasizes coherence, efficiency and accountability within and across schools, and a “bottom-up” or local autonomy approach that emphasizes participatory and close-to-the ground decision making over instructional, curricular and professional development activities. Both reform approaches have documented strengths and weaknesses, and neither alone has proven sufficient to instigate and sustain widespread instructional and school improvement.<sup>9</sup>

A related tension is between the district (and its schools) and their external partners—determining the roles, responsibilities, and resources provided by each partner and ensuring that the partnership best serves the district’s instructional vision, addresses any community resistance, and ultimately builds the local capacity of districts and schools.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, external partners will need to share the district’s commitment to create the specific learning and teaching conditions; but they also need to bring new expertise to that work, adding value to the district’s existing capacity, not simply re-crafting their mission to fit new market demand.

### **Building District Capacity**

There are several steps in building these capacities: 1) marshalling the will of the district, community, and school leaders to change specific conditions in struggling schools; 2) specifying the new conditions that will ensure success for *all* students and staff; and, 3) committing to a timeline for delivery of these conditions.

What characterizes successful efforts for systemic change are the clarity and precision of the district’s promise to all its students and staff in these struggling schools. For example, what began in Kansas City, Kansas, with *broad principles* such as “personalizing all students’ learning environments” and “rigorous and engaging curriculum for all students”, became, within two years, district-wide commitments to create a set of *specific conditions*: small learning communities in all schools, with equitable distribution of qualified staff; with staff in these communities staying with students all four years of high school; trained advocates for all students and their families; and regular common planning time for all teachers within *and* across disciplines—time used primarily for instructional improvement around shared instructional goals. In four years, the achievement and graduation trends began to move dramatically, and have continued to improve since.<sup>11</sup> We believe these timelines could be accelerated if the

insights from these successful sites get built into policies and support structures for California's struggling schools.

Successful capacity building also depends on district and outside partners committing themselves—meaning their time and their people—to making sure that capacity is built in all key reform areas, that mastery of concepts and practices is checked, and that fidelity is maintained, as district and school personnel take increased responsibility for expanding and sustaining reform within the district. Taking these actions has proven challenging, both for the outside partners and for the districts themselves. Outside partners are typically quite proprietary toward their intellectual capital, and in this scenario would now be asked to transfer it to their district “clients”. District leaders may have trouble managing the demands of running their district and protecting and promoting the change process, while still making time to learn and master new technical and staff development skills from outside partners.

### **The Role of the State in Developing District Capacity**

So how can the state encourage and support school districts to move beyond lofty goals and vague guidelines, to guaranteeing their students and teachers *specific* teaching and learning conditions shown to improve the performance of struggling schools? The following is a set of strategies the state could pursue:

1. **Create “portfolios” of *critical conditions for teaching and learning*.** The state would create several portfolios to serve as blueprints that districts in various stages of program improvement could choose to adopt. The portfolios would be created through a deliberative process bringing together knowledgeable educators, reformers, and researchers. Portfolios would include instructional strategies for specific populations, such as English learners and special education students, drawing on research-based practices.<sup>12</sup> Portfolios would vary from more sparse and customizable interventions to more comprehensive and prescriptive ones, depending on the severity of the district's performance problems and their current capacity to address those problems. Districts with multiple schools having severe performance issues, and with low capacity to address these issues, would be required to adopt the same portfolio of conditions for all these schools in order to ensure district-level capacity can be built quickly and effectively to address these critical situations. The state would also provide financial support to implement the portfolio.
2. **Match districts with external providers.** The state would then match districts with external providers who would help build the district's capacity to promote this set of conditions in struggling schools.<sup>13</sup> The state would then provide introductions and support a short but intensive “courtship period”, followed by a proposal from the district and the external partner laying out both the district reform plan for the struggling schools and the capacity building activities and outcomes of the partnership. This proposal would be reviewed, and required funding provided if acceptable. Throughout the “courtship” and proposal writing process, external evaluation/research entities would be engaged in developing both local and state-wide evaluation strategies for accountability and learning purposes, should the work move forward.
3. **Support and certify external providers.** The state would identify and certify qualified outside partners with track records supporting schools and districts in implementing one or more of these portfolios, and having evidenced the



- characteristics of effective partners described earlier. The state could also invest in strengthening and expanding potential outside partners to perform the district capacity building activities. State support of external providers could mean accessing training for, and then allocating its own staff to become, outside partners to districts supporting planning and implementation of one or more of the portfolios of “conditions for teaching and learning”; and/or providing support to qualified reform support organizations to expand their capacity to act as outside partners with districts in the state.
4. **Modify accountability system.** Adjustments in state and federal accountability mechanisms (slowing down or stopping the clock) might be required to provide more time and flexibility for successful implementation of the agreed-upon teaching and learning conditions and to build sufficient district capacity to sustain and extend them to all targeted schools. To maintain the state’s commitment to district accountability for student performance, the monitoring system would also include a series of “progress indicators” of implementation of these conditions, and ensuring that districts are “on track” to achieve meaningful reform and improved student performance.
  5. **Develop a statewide educational data system.** Some of the functions now carried out by school districts—such as developing an educational data system—may be more efficiently carried out by the state or other agencies. All districts need comprehensive data systems that serve both internal uses—to help local educators improve their practices and to monitor the performance of programs and schools—and external uses for accountability. Currently, the state is developing a longitudinal student data system to monitor the performance of students over time; there is also some work being done on developing a longitudinal teacher data system.<sup>14</sup> But the state could also help develop a more comprehensive educational data system that districts could use to help transform themselves into “learning organizations” in which all members of the organization engage in ongoing, data-based, professional learning activities designed to improve their practice.<sup>15</sup> Such a system would include student survey data providing information on students’ reports of teacher expectations, teacher and school support, their own engagement, and school academic and disciplinary climate. It could also include classroom measures that teachers could use to improve their instructional practice. Such a system would be “on-line” to enable educators throughout the system to access information in real time and to participate in multi-district professional development training with results from these shared data systems used as grist for these training.
  6. **Establish a state education inspectorate system.** This system, modeled after the British system, would serve an *inspection* rather than an *audit* function.<sup>16</sup> In an inspection function, trained professionals would visit schools and districts that have received state funds for school improvement and offer constructive feedback to the district and its external partner around agreed-upon benchmarks of implementation and student outcomes, to address any ongoing problems in the reform process.

### **Cautions and considerations**

Suggesting that school districts be targeted for increased investments on the part of the state may raise some concerns—“sending good money after bad,” for instance. This new

strategy would differ from the state’s current method of working with school districts in the following ways:

- the state would establish “progress indicators” around points closer to where teaching and learning actually occur—classroom instructional practices, quality of professional development and coaching, student/teacher relationships—rather than using structural indicators, such as class size, or focusing solely on outcomes further downstream, such as graduation rates and test scores;
- the state pairs its expectations for this investment with explicit and credible supports for achieving these expectations in the form of partnerships with qualified outside partners;<sup>17</sup>
- the state explicitly validates the districts’ efforts to build their own capacity to meet the needs of their struggling schools through these partnerships.

Finally, these strategies also require that the state develop its own capacity to carry them out, requiring an infusion of resources and training to build up the Department of Education. However, the costs may be lowered if current categorical programs were consolidated or eliminated, reducing the need for departmental officials to manage these categorical programs.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to projections of employment demand and the population, in 2020 California will have a shortfall in the proportion of college-educated workers, and a surplus of workers with less than a high school education. See Public Policy Institute of California, *California’s Future Economy*, Just the Facts (San Francisco: PPIC, 2006). Retrieved October 1, 2007, from [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF\\_FutureEconomyJTF.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF_FutureEconomyJTF.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Norm Fruchter, *Urban schools, public will: Making education work for all our children* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007), p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> See Richard F. Elmore, *School reform from the inside out* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan A. Supovitz, *The case for district-based reform: Leading, building, and sustaining school improvement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2006), Chapter 7.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, markets, and America’s schools* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Although states, external providers and other intermediate organizations, and individual school leaders play a role in school reform, “local districts must orchestrate the delivery of resources to schools and lead the charge for systemwide improvement” (Supovitz, p. 219).

<sup>7</sup> Fruchter (2007) examined district reform in New York City (District 2), New York, Kansas City, Kansas, and Hamilton County Tennessee. Supovitz (2006) examined district reform in Duval County, Florida.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of features and challenges to reforming high schools, see: National Research Council, Committee on Increasing High School Students’ Engagement and Motivation to Learn, *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students’ Motivation to Learn* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2004) and Janet Quint, *Meeting five critical challenges of high school reform: Lessons from research on three reform models* (New York: MDRC, 2006), retrieved September 8, 2007, from <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/428/overview.html>

<sup>9</sup> See Supovitz (2006), pp. 223-225.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210-216.

<sup>11</sup> Fruchter (2007), pp. 105-112.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the federal government is developing a series of Practice Guides around specific educational practices based on the best available evidence. See <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguides/>

<sup>13</sup> County offices of education could serve as external providers along with national and local organizations.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/nl.asp>

<sup>15</sup> See Supovitz (2006), Chapter 6.

<sup>16</sup> See Fruchter (2007), pp. 48-53.

<sup>17</sup> Elmore refers to this as “...reciprocity of accountability and capacity—for each increment in performance I require of you, I have an equal and reciprocal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to produce that performance.” See Richard F. Elmore, “Conclusion: The problem of stakes in performance-based accountability systems,” In S. H. Furchman & R. F. Elmore (Eds.), *Redesigning accountability systems for education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), p. 294.



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*Superintendent*

## *Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening*

Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007, in Sacramento  
School Finance Issues – An Urban School District Perspective

I want to thank The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation and The Stuart Foundation for funding the *Getting Down to Facts* (GDTF) Research Project and for funding this *Education Policy Convening*. I want to thank all the researchers and other staff that worked hard to organize the Project and to compile the numerous and valuable background papers. Finally, I want to thank Trish Williams and EdSource for organizing and hosting this event.

As per your request, this paper provides a very short description of the Sacramento City Unified School District followed by a brief problem statement, and then a discussion of specific policy recommendations.

### I. Sacramento City Unified School District:

The Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) serves approximately 50,000 students in the Sacramento region. Our students include (21.3%) African American; (31.2%) Latino; (2%1.2) Asian; (21.4%) Anglo American; (1.3%) Native American; and (1.2%) Pacific Islander. Almost 30% are classified as English Learners and 11.4 % are classified as students with disabilities needing special education services. Additionally, close to 66% of our students qualify for free and reduced meals, the poverty indicator established by the federal government. Our annual per student funding is approximately \$5,700, and with additional categorical funds provides our District an operational budget of about \$400 million dollars. Approximately 80% of these funds are used for employee salaries and benefits. The balance is used to support the educational program and the infrastructure needs of the District. Finally, Sacramento City Unified School District must meet 45 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks in order not to be labeled a Program Improvement district.

While SCUSD faces the problems and dilemmas of most urban and rural school districts with a large number of students in poverty, there are a number of urban school districts that contain an even greater percentage of special needs students. Some of these school districts are Montebello Unified - my former school district, Los Angeles Unified, San Bernardino City Unified, Fresno Unified, and Santa Ana Unified.

## II. Problem Statement:

The major issue impacting Sacramento City is an archaic and inadequate state funding system that does not provide the necessary resources to 1) educate all students to higher levels in order for them to exercise maximum options beyond high school and 2) to adequately fund the necessary supports for the growing numbers of students with special needs, e.g., EL, special education, living in poverty, homeless. This is compounded by the shortage of the best and brightest selecting and staying in our profession at both the teaching and administrative levels.

## III. School Finance Recommendations:

California's school finance system is not tied to results. For general discretionary revenues, urban school districts receive a revenue limit per average daily attendance (ADA). This year the base revenue limit for Sacramento City Unified is about \$5,540 per ADA. It is about \$5,260 on a per student basis. Revenue limit funding started in 1973-74 as a way to control property tax revenues. If state funds are available, each year the revenue limit amount for each school district is increased by a cost-of-living increase. The following two recommendations propose two options for tying the funding to student achievement results.

**Recommendation 1: Provide additional funds to school districts based on the number of students that progress from basic to advanced and to the proficient levels of mastery of California's rigorous content standards.** This additional funding should be allocated as a per pupil amount and the funds should be required to be used on instructional practices that are research based and proven effective strategies, e.g. secondary literacy, differentiated instruction, special designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE), and process writing.

**Recommendation 2:** At the secondary level, we need state policy that mandates the provision of a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students in grades 7-12 and schools and districts should be held accountable for preparing more underserved students in the successful completion of the A-G sequence in high school. **Incentives and rewards should be given to schools for increasing the number of AP courses** they offer and for increasing the number of students achieving a passing score. High schools should also be rewarded for the number of **UC approved career/technical courses** they offer and the number of students that successfully complete these courses.

Proposition 98 was created to protect K-14 education while at the same time providing the Legislature and Governor with viable options during difficult fiscal times. Consequently, the voter-approved initiative is complex. Proposition 98 determines the minimum level of state funding for K-14 schools. Proposition 98 determines the floor for funding. Unfortunately, Proposition 98 has often become the ceiling for funding. For example, the state budget for this year cut K-12 education funding by \$475 million in order to meet the minimum Proposition 98 funding level. That was most unfortunate. Without Proposition 98, K-14 education would have suffered even greater reductions in the past.

**Recommendation 3: Proposition 98** funding levels should be treated as a floor and not as a ceiling. There are some who have argued that the requirements of Proposition 98 will force the state to spend an inordinate amount of money on our schools. That obviously has not been the case in the past; otherwise, our national rankings on per pupil spending would not have dropped in education

funding. It also will not be the case in the future. For example, this year state Proposition 98 expenditures increased by .5% compared to a state budget increase of 1.5%.

**Recommendation 4: Fund a seventh period day for the high schools.** Many other states fund seven periods for high schools. An additional period in high schools would allow more flexibility for our students and allow them to take that elective that will motivate them to complete their studies. If funding is a problem the program could be implemented based on any of the following three indicators: 1) the decile ranking (deciles 1 to 3); 2) the percentage of EL students, greater than 35%; or 3) the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals, greater than 50%.

**Recommendation 5: Increase the hours in the school day and the days in the school year.** Additionally, the number of minutes in a school day and the number of instructional days in the school year need to be increased in order for students to have the opportunity to master the rigorous content we offer in all our schools. A strategy to fund this could be to block grant the funds currently available for extended day, summer school, and intersession and require that their use be only for increasing instructional time that is delivered with the research based strategies I identified earlier that offer students the academic support they need to achieve mastery of our content standards.

**Recommendation 6: Our school finance system should be based on enrollment,** not on average daily attendance. Most states use an enrollment based funding system because enrollment is the determining cost factor for our schools. AB 73 (Dymally) addresses this issue.

**Recommendation 7:** The current school district funding formulas for elementary, unified, and high school districts need to be modified. For unified school districts, there is a single funding level (revenue limit) for every student in the district. It would be more appropriate to have a **separate funding level for grades K-5 students, grades 6-8 students, and grades 9-12 students** because the costs are different for those grades. This change would be logical and make the system easier to understand. AB 599 (Mullin) addresses this issue. Currently, unified school districts receive only 4.6% per student more than elementary school districts. In the 1970's prior to Proposition 98, unified schools districts received approximately 12% more. We know that that the current system under funds urban school districts. Perhaps, the researchers could determine the cost relationship between elementary, middle and high schools. AB 599 (Mullin) proposes to keep the existing relationships in order to control the fiscal impact. Sacramento City Unified School District is supportive of AB 599 (Mullin) and AB 73 (Dymally).

**Recommendation 8:** We should increase the funding level for categorical programs that we know are working. The **Healthy Start Program, AVID Program, Community-Based English Tutoring (CBET) Program, and the Parent/Teacher Home Visitation Program** are such programs. The Healthy Start program was last funded in 2006-07. Because of lack of funding, the state was not able to fund our Jedediah Smith Elementary School application (total funding of \$450,000 for three years). The score for this proposal was eight, the highest available. This school exhibits the highest and most compelling need:

- 100% of the students live in one of two large housing projects in an industrial, very isolated location south of downtown, with no commercial or medical amenities for families
- 100% of the students are eligible for free lunch (not reduced lunch, free lunch) and eat two of their three meals a day at school

- 100% of the families require the support of CalWORKS and that often does not meet their basic needs
- A large percentage of the kids come to school hungry, angry, lacking self control, lacking hope for the future and unable to tap into what meager resources are actually available to them

The Healthy Start proposal submitted to CDE on February 2, 2007 outlined ambitious goals with two overarching objectives: 1) improve academic performance for all students; and 2) contribute to the community's family health and wellness. The plan to accomplish these objectives included creating an infrastructure of school resources; partnering with community organizations and agencies to respond to student and family needs that interfere with student learning and family life; planning a prevention and early intervention program of health and wellness for all stakeholders at Jedediah Smith; minimizing social and emotional risk factors that lead to student dropouts; and setting up a referral system to match students and their families with appropriate resources.

Jedediah Smith Elementary School has demonstrated a capacity for improvement as illustrated by the fact that as a Program Improvement Level 3 school, the leadership and staff worked together to implement strategies which resulted in the school meeting its 2006 AYP and API targets.

This was an exemplary proposal. It was not funded because there was only \$10 million allocated in the budget, and there were not enough funds to fund two SCUSD projects. Healthy Start along with AVID are the two state programs where there is substantial research showing that the programs are extremely effective. The funding for these programs should be greatly increased.

Recommendation 9: Our schools should be working jointly with the health community to provide and **fund health clinics in our most needy areas**. Our schools should be 1-stop centers for our communities. This concept should be part of a health package that supports comprehensive health services and it should, at minimum, be provided on a pilot basis at our schools of highest need.

Recommendation 10: We need **more professional staff development**. It needs to occur beyond the school day and the school year, and finally it should be mandated at all decile 1-3 schools. Teachers and site leaders need high quality, content specific and instruction specific professional development. The Subject Matter Institutes, established in partnership with the UC system during the 1980's, need to be fully funded and incentives for teacher and principal participation should be provided. Our current professional development opportunities require that teachers and leaders be absent from their schools during the school day and school year. Teachers and principals away from their schools contribute to student learning loss and is disruptive to the achievement of student outcomes. Students need their teachers and principals in school when they are in school and professional development is essential to the provision of high quality learning opportunities for students. Therefore, offer high quality professional development beyond the school day and academic year, and reward our teachers and principals for their participation through incentives for participation. This professional development should be mandated for decile 1, 2, and 3 schools.

Recommendation 11: Use the funds allocated for supplemental educational services under NCLB, which have not proven to be effective in raising the levels of student achievement, to award grants that support the **conversion of junior high school and high school libraries to media/technology centers that are open after school, in the evening and Saturdays** for both student and family use. These centers could be coordinated with adult education courses in technology, English as a Second

Language, etc., and other courses specific communities identify to raise parent participation and student achievement. CBET dollars could also be re-directed for this use.

**Recommendation 12:** Whenever possible **eliminate the incoherence of federal, state and local policies.** The following are a few examples:

1. The most obvious is the accountability system of NCLB, which punishes schools and districts, rather than rewards progress toward the achievement of targets.
2. One State policy allows parents to opt out their children from taking mandated tests, yet NCLB requires that districts test 95% of their students in order to meet its adequate yearly progress targets.
3. Variances in local policies send confusing messages to parents and do not hold all districts to the standard of educating all students to higher levels in the name of flexibility and local control. For example, districts can decide whether to award students a diploma or award them a certificate of participation or attendance when they graduate from high school. I strongly believe that instead of this flexibility all districts should be required to provide the needed supports that students need to earn a diploma from high school.
4. State policy needs to require mandatory training for school boards, ensuring that they have the knowledge base and are equipped to govern the complex organizations, we know as local districts.
5. The legislation on High Priority Schools needs to be modified in order to prevent schools from opting out simply by holding a public hearing. Additionally, local districts should be required to accept these funds on behalf of their schools and be given intervention authority.

**Recommendation 13: Fully fund the Home to School Transportation program.** Many states reimburse school districts for 100% of their cost of transporting students to and from school. States usually fund variable cost items because the cost varies depending on the geographic and demographic characteristics of the school district. In California, school districts are only partially reimbursed for the state-approved cost of home-to-school transportation for regular and special education children. The problem is that 1) California severely under funds the program, and 2) the formula is extremely outdated and inequitable. This program is especially unfair to school districts – both rural and urban – that serve a large number of poor children that have to be transported to school. The following are a few “getting down to facts” about school transportation programs for urban school districts:

- The state reimbursement rate is less than 50%.
- The average unified school district must subsidize the cost of transporting each non-special education child by \$800 per child and \$2,650 per child for each special education child. These funds have to come out of the classroom. They must be paid with general fund dollars or existing categorical funds.
- The reimbursement rate for SCUSD is around 40%. The district has to spend \$1.4 million of local funds for the regular transportation program and \$3.4 million of our local funds for special education transportation. This is clearly unfair.
- The PTA passed a resolution in 2004 arguing for 1) adequate funding and 2) equitable funding for school transportation.
- State Auditor just released a report that recommended that all school districts should be allowed to participate in the program and that they should be funded equitably.

- We are last in the nation in terms of the percentage of children ride school buses – 16%.

**Recommendation 14: Increase the funding for the Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA)** so that all decile one and two schools can participate. The Research Project recognized the difficulty facing schools that contain a large number of children in poverty. Consequently, new and continued investment was proposed for these schools. Under the QEIA program, schools will be able to reduce class size, hire new staff and counselors, and provide training for principals and teachers. We are proud to say that we were one of the earliest supporters of this program. We had 12 schools selected representing 8,900 children. Over the next seven years, these schools and their children will receive \$48.7 million in QEIA funds.

**Recommendation 15: Be very cautious of categorical block grant proposals.** The last time there was a serious proposal it was accompanied by an across-the-board cut proposal of around 10%. In general, flexibility is a good thing, but it took a *Williams v. California* court settlement in 2004 just to make sure that our poorest children in our neediest schools had updated textbooks that they could take home.

#### **IV. Conclusion:**

According to the Rand Study, California's K-12 per pupil spending relative to the national average reached an all time high in 1977-78. It is not a coincidence that our K-12 public school spending as a percentage of personal income peaked about the same time. In 1987-88, California's education spending became less than the national average. According to your researchers, California is about 30% below the national average.

Increasing class size has been the main way school districts have coped with this relative decline in funding. Even with grades K-3 class-size reduction, our student-teacher ratio is 37% above the national average. Schools and school districts have had to become very ingenious in finding ways to raise additional funds. The basic aid school districts are fortunate because they can use their excess property tax revenues. Schools and school districts from wealthier communities can use private foundations, parcel tax revenues and parental involvement in their schools to raise or save dollars.

Poorer urban and rural communities have fewer if no options.

There is no question that we need additional state dollars for our schools and for our students. The challenges are even greater in our poorer communities. In those communities, it is not just an education issue – it is a jobs issue, a health issue, a safety issue and a housing issue. We must focus our resources in a more comprehensive manner in order to succeed.

I am optimistic that California can once again lead the nation in its commitment to its children. We all need to work together to ensure that it happens.

Thank You,



M. Magdalena Carrillo Mejia, Ph.D.  
Superintendent, Sacramento City Unified School District



# **Interest-Group Mapping and Education Reform: The Case for a Comprehensive, Consensus-Focused Proposal**

**The School Finance Exploration Partnership** : California School Boards Association, Children Now, the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund and the California State Parent Teachers Association

**Topics Covered:** Finance, Governance, Personnel, Data and Transparency  
Primary Partnership Contact: Lisa Burlison

The members of the School Finance Exploration Partnership would like to thank the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for their generous support of the project.

### **The School Finance Exploration Partnership**

During 2005-06, the School Finance Exploration Partnership conducted nearly 70 interviews with key opinion and political leaders in California on school finance reform through a generous grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The interviewees included major statewide and regional business organizations, prominent business leaders, major statewide ethnic, faith based and community based organizations, leading policymakers and opinion leaders, and key education leaders.

The interests and perspectives represented by these interviewees are likely to have great influence over the success or failure of any significant school finance reform effort. Either because of their own personal political influence or through their representation of powerful advocacy organizations, these 70 interviewees will play a key role in determining the outcome of any comprehensive package of finance and policy reforms in public education.

The goal of these interviews was to begin identifying common ground for the development of a comprehensive package of both reform and investment relative to California's public school system. While much work remains to be done to develop and implement such a package, it is clear based on these initial interviews that there is the potential for a diverse coalition of California leaders to come together and promote a comprehensive solution that is politically viable and will have a positive impact on our state's students.

### **The Need for Comprehensive Stakeholder-Driven Reform**

*In order for any comprehensive education reform to successfully be passed either by the legislature or the voters, key interests must be in agreement and supportive of the proposed reform.*

Too often, the statewide education policy debate is highly polarized between two camps: one advocating only for increased resources, the other advocating only for more efficiency. The reality is that the only pathway for substantive reform lies in the ability of the major constituencies on both sides of this debate to find consensus and commit to moving the education reform agenda forward. Identifying the general areas where interests coincide and consensus may be found is therefore critical. An analysis of the interviews conducted thus far indicates that these divisions are not insurmountable, and there is actually greater agreement than many initially believed. This process also underscores the fact that it will be critical for a comprehensive package to be developed in order to ensure that every child is well served by our education system.

### **Reform Options and Recommendations – the Beginning of a Comprehensive Map**

Constituency groups and policymakers were divided about how to proceed on public education policy and the political rhetoric made it appear as though there would be little opportunity for them to come together. Interestingly though, as each interview was conducted, several themes emerged. It became clear that while there is vast diversity in terms of political ideology and knowledge of the nuances in the K-12 system, there are a set of core values that are consistent among California's political and opinion leaders – responsibility, openness, stability & flexibility, adequacy and equity

Eight major reform ideas generated the most support among interviewees. These ideas can be loosely categorized into the broad areas of: 1) recruitment, retention and equitable distribution of staff; 2) school finance and governance reform; 3) transparency and data; 4) choice; and 5) revenue options.

To the extent possible, information is provided on how interviewees talked about these reforms, why they believe they have promise and what concerns were raised. It is important to note that while the interviews followed a common protocol, the discussions were dynamic and interviewees did not necessarily address every policy area. Therefore, in the following discussion, the number of positive or negative responses to specific policy proposals are based only on the subset of interviewees that directly addressed each issue.

### **Recruitment, Retention and Equitable Distribution of Staff**

Having well-trained, experienced staff equitably distributed throughout the public school system was highly valued by most interviewees. In fact, it was the most commonly cited priority during the interview process.

Interviewees identified various strategies to attract, retain and ensure the appropriate distribution of staff, especially teachers, with a primary focus on compensation reforms and improvements to working conditions. A great majority of respondents were supportive of compensation reform, several were willing to consider it and only one was opposed to reform in this area. Improving working conditions, especially in hard-to-staff schools, garnered the support of many respondents, with no opposition.

Interestingly, the balance between compensation reform and working conditions varied among interviewees, with most focusing almost exclusively on compensation reform; some saying the most leverage should be applied to improve working conditions; and a significant proportion believing that a combination of approaches is the preferable option.

While there were varying degrees of interest and support for the specific reform ideas outlined below, most interviewees were open to exploring these strategies further, especially if a comprehensive package included well-developed reform proposals and additional resources.

### *I. Staff Compensation Reform*

While several of the interviewees discussed the desire to increase teacher compensation overall, the vast majority of respondents explored three specific compensation reform concepts – performance pay, differential pay and incentive pay.

Performance pay was the most highly charged compensation reform strategy, with strong advocates for and against this approach. By and large, the business community was the most interested in pursuing this model. Proponents discussed the need to reward outstanding teachers and to identify teachers that may be struggling. Many of these same business leaders, as well as educators, researchers, and civil rights groups raised concerns about how to create a fair and accurate system. Some educators discussed the possibility of piloting this approach if: 1) there were additional resources to do so; 2) there were multiple performance measures employed; and 3) the policy was locally negotiated.

Numerous interviewees advocated for, or were open to, the idea of implementing differential pay in order to attract teachers with credentials in math, science, special education and English Language Learners (EL). A few respondents were opposed. For math and science teachers, the prevailing discussion centered around the need to compete for staff given existing market demands. Special education and EL teachers were also mentioned because of the increased work load (e.g. IEPs), the need for specialized training and the current shortages. Some interviewees were concerned, however, that paying teachers different amounts based on subject area could create animosity at the school site and promote an unhealthy school culture.

Incentive pay to attract teachers to the hardest to staff schools was the most supported concept of the compensation reform strategies. Interviewees from business, education organizations, civil rights groups, community organizations and researchers talked about the need for greater equity in the distribution of teachers, and many saw this strategy as a promising approach. Some researchers and educators commented though, that the incentive may need to be substantial to actually draw teachers to hard-to-staff schools. On the other hand though, other interviewees also questioned whether using salary incentives would create the right motivation for teachers to work in these schools.

### *II. Working Conditions*

Making schools inviting places to work and learn was a goal expressed by virtually every interviewee. Respondents often used the term “working conditions” as short hand for ensuring that school facilities are well equipped, inviting and the school grounds are safe); there is a collegial, collaborative working relationship among teachers; and the principal is a knowledgeable, respected instructional leader. Some interviewees also discussed the need for smaller classes, and collaboration and preparation time for teachers.

While ideally all schools would be a desirable place to work and learn, many interviewees believed that the state should begin by targeting school investments in hard-to-staff schools in order to support students and

to attract and retain skilled and knowledgeable teachers, administrators, and certificated staff (i.e. counselors, nurses). Some interviewees also discussed the importance of giving schools and districts the flexibility to determine the right combination of working condition improvements in order to meet the needs of their unique students and communities.

### School Finance and Governance Reform

Fiscal and governance reform were closely linked in the interview conversations due to the fact that much of the debate is not only about how the money gets allocated, but who makes funding decisions. Reforms in this area were often identified as a priority for interviewees. In fact, all of the interviewees believed that California's public school finance system is too convoluted and impossible to explain to the public. In addition, most had concerns that the decision-making process is not clear, nor is it necessarily oriented to ensure student success.

#### *III. A Weighted Student Formula*

The concept of a weighted student formula was viewed favorably by interviewees. Of the interviewees that commented on this reform, a large proportion were supportive and several thought the idea had merit but wanted to consider it more (none were opposed). A weighted student formula made conceptual sense to interviewees because it was seen as being a more rational approach than our current school funding system. In addition, interviewees talked about it in terms of equity (certain students getting more, certain high cost regions getting more), transparency (it is easier to explain to the public), as well as stability and flexibility (districts will know what they will receive and have the ability to spend it to meet local needs).

There was a difference in opinion among interviewees, however, about whether the weighted student formula should solely be an allocation model from the state to school districts or if funding should flow all the way to school sites. Several of interviewees believed that school sites should have greater control over resources, a handful were open to the idea and a couple were opposed. This governance question focused mainly on whether school sites, namely the principal, should be making more, or all, of the funding decisions. Much of this debate centers on questions of capacity, the role of the school district and how to ensure both flexibility and quality decision making.

A handful of interviewees also raised concerns about how the state was going to ensure that the money is spent on high needs students (that the additional "weights" would reach them). For some, this conflict was resolved by the existence of the state's academic accountability system. Others had specific concerns with the current accountability measurements and mechanisms in place and/or believed that existing categorical programs serve an important function.

A few interviewees also discussed the potential difficulty in determining the weights for each student subgroup. Their concerns ranged from the inability to ground the weights with solid research and the yearly political negotiating over the weights, to the possibility of encouraging a culture of victimization. Even with these concerns, most interviewees believed the promise of a weighted student formula outweighed the potential implementation difficulties.

#### *IV. Local Revenue Authority*

Granting school boards the ability to raise revenue locally was seen by many interviewees, especially in the business and education community, as a useful way of activating community members that have become disengaged in their local schools since the passage of Proposition 13. Interviewees discussed the importance of a local connection between generating revenue and decision making and felt that it could help ensure that the public was paying closer attention and would hold school boards accountable for how funds are allocated. In addition, many respondents believed that the provision of local revenue authority would be an opportunity to augment the amount of resources available to students and make certain community priorities were met.

A significant number of the interviewees supported this model and a handful were open to the idea. A few respondents were opposed. Even among supporters however, there were concerns about the potential to

create inequity in the system. Respondents believed that if the state played a role in providing adequate funding and implemented a mechanism for ensuring equity (so that there was not too much disparity between districts' funding levels), this would be a reform worth pursuing.

Researchers on teacher recruitment and retention also cautioned that it was especially important to ensure equitable funding within a region. Teachers tend to seek employment within a set regional market, so if hard-to-staff schools do not have equal levels of funding (or more funding) to attract teachers within a region, the result could be a maldistribution of less experienced teachers in these schools.

### Transparency and Data

Of interviewees that participated in this outreach process, nearly two thirds wanted better, more user-friendly academic and fiscal data. Most believed this information would help inform and engage the public, ensure accountability, and could lead to better state, local and site-based decision making. While none of the participants believed that creating better data systems would be the linchpin in a comprehensive package, over half mentioned that it is an important element and believe it is well overdue.

#### *V. Linked Data Systems*

California currently offers publicly available academic and fiscal data. However, many interviewees commented that the data is often difficult to understand, is not longitudinal, and is isolated in separate systems. At a minimum, many interviewees would like to see the creation of a student identifier system to track student achievement scores over time. In addition, some respondents wanted better site based financial data, such as actual teacher salaries (instead of averages), curriculum offerings and an idea of other locally-available resources.

Several interviewees also advocated for or were open to the establishment of a teacher identifier in order to track the movement and qualifications of teachers. In addition, this identifier could be used to link teacher data with student data. By and large, most respondents were interested in a teacher identifier for research purposes and to target professional development opportunities. Some however, also saw it as a necessary component in order to implement performance pay.

While each of these data options could independently enhance transparency in the system, many interviewees saw value in linking them for research purposes and to help inform decision-making.

#### *VI. User-Friendly Educator and Public Formats*

In addition to creating and maintaining improved data systems, respondents wanted to make sure the information could be used by educators (to inform practice and policy) and by the public (to access information, advocate for changes and hold the system accountable) alike.

### Choice

While only a couple of interviewees mentioned that expanding access to choice in the public school system should be part of a comprehensive reform and investment package, the support for charter schools was significant enough to warrant its inclusion in this portion of the analysis.

#### *VII. Charter Schools*

Many interviewees were supportive of charter schools. A handful of key leaders were strong proponents of these programs generally and advocated expanding access to charters by raising the statewide cap or allowing for multiple authorizers. They talked about the competitive pressure charters put on the system and how they allowed for greater innovation.

By and large, interviewees were moderately supportive of charters because of the belief that they provided more choice and flexibility for parents. Even among supporters though, many felt that charter schools should be unnecessary because, ideally, neighborhood schools would be the community's first choice.

## Revenue Options

Most of the interviewees (including representatives from every constituency subgroup that participated in this process) said they would be willing to consider, and potentially advocate for, an increased investment in K-12 public education if it were coupled with structural reforms.

Many of the interviewees were uncomfortable identifying a particular tax or set of taxes in order to raise revenue. Instead, participants tended to discuss taxing principles. The two most prominent principles were that the tax should be progressive in nature and a collective investment. In addition, numerous interviewees suggested that polling should be used to help determine the specific tax, and that sound tax policy should be employed in order to ensure that there are minimal impacts to any one specific sector of the state's economy.

### *VIII. Proposition 13*

Approximately one-third of the interviewees thought that Proposition 13 should be revisited in some way, but very few thought it was a politically viable option. On the other hand, nine interviewees were open to the idea of rethinking Proposition 13 and only one interviewee expressed opposition. While many discussed the inequalities the policy has created for new homeowners and businesses, most believed the public would be reluctant to trade the stability Proposition 13 provides.

A few organizations with access to polling information indicated that property taxes are not necessarily the third rail of the electorate. It may just be that taxes in general are viewed with suspicion.

### *IX. Other*

Below is a list of some of the other revenue options that were identified by interviewees:

- Some interviewees were supportive of lowering the threshold on local parcel taxes to 55%.
- An increase in the income tax garnered a similar number of supportive responses, with a few maybe and opposed responses.
- The establishment of a statewide parcel tax was attractive to the majority of interviewees, the remaining responses split equally between those opposed and open to the idea.
- Some interviewees were supportive of an increase in the sales tax, with a small amount expressing that they were willing to consider the idea, or were opposed.
- A tax on services was supported by several interviewees, one interviewee was opposed, and one was open to the idea.

## **Building Capacity for Continuous Improvement: The Role of School District Data Systems**

*A Policy Brief from Springboard Schools  
Spring, 2007*

*425-348-5500/ [www.springboardschools.org](http://www.springboardschools.org)*

### **Background: A Data-Focused Policy Context**

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has brought a new focus on annual testing of students and on collecting data on student progress. Annual improvement targets have brought a heightened level of accountability for improvement of performance by all student subgroups as schools (and, ultimately, school districts) that fail to meet improvement targets become subject to various interventions and sanctions. The success of this new system is directly dependent on the ability of states to collect, analyze and report data.

Despite this policy focus on data, California has moved relatively slowly to build a state data system that reflects the entire package of NCLB requirements and that tracks all of the state's 6.5 million students. The California School Information Services (CSIS) currently assigns a "unique student identifier" to each student in the state and maintains a database that contains basic demographic and program participation data. The unique student identifier makes it possible for the first time to connect this information with the assessment data that is currently housed at the California Department of Education (CDE). In order to provide functionality for the state, a new longitudinal database must be designed and built to analyze this data. This new system – called the California Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) – is scheduled to be launched in 2009.

CALPADS will be useful – but it is designed to serve many goals. The recent Request for Proposals released by the CDE for CALPADS calls for an initial focus on building a system that will support reporting for NCLB purposes, with relatively fewer resources allocated to feeding data back to school districts in ways that are useful for school and district decision makers. A second phase for CALPADS is envisioned that would focus more attention on data to support local improvement efforts, but this is clearly viewed as a secondary purpose. In a resource-limited environment, there is good reason to fear that these goals will get short shrift.

As an organization which works with school districts to build their capacity to use data to guide improvement efforts, Springboard Schools finds this situation to be cause for concern. We know how important it is for leaders at all levels of the system to have access to data that will inform their work. Excellent data systems are essential support for the effort to raise achievement for all students and close the achievement gap. However, while state data systems can inform the continuous improvement of *policy*, it is only local

systems that can provide the fine-grained data necessary to inform the continuous improvement of *practice* at the school and classroom level.

### **Local Data Systems: The Current State**

Data systems currently in place in most California school districts serve five discrete functions. In most districts, the result is separate – and often disconnected – systems.

1) **Accounting systems track resources and expenditures.** California’s many categorical programs make financial management complex, but guidelines and expectations for these systems are relatively well-developed. *Missing in many cases are the connections between accounting systems and other data systems that would allow us to determine the how expenditures are impacting instructional practice and student achievement.*

2) **Student information system (SIS) are the interactive systems used on a daily basis for tasks such as attendance accounting and maintaining classroom rosters.** Most districts purchase off-the-shelf programs from private sector vendors for this purpose. Like accounting systems, the SIS systems are a key part of the data flow that generates and tracks funding and this ensures that maintenance of these systems is a priority. *These systems may be connected to assessment systems, but other key connections are often missing.*

3) **Assessment systems allow districts to manipulate data from state tests and often also provide a way to enter and display data from local assessments.** Some large districts have invested in creating their own systems, but many medium-sized and smaller districts purchase an off-the-shelf product. *Some of the systems available for purchase are quite sophisticated, and many features may go unused because of lack of funds and time for training.*

4) **Human resources systems that track data about teachers and teacher qualifications.** These systems are required for reporting on the “highly qualified teacher” requirements of NCLB. *These systems are almost always separate from the others. Often this disconnect reflects a concern about potential inappropriate use of student data for teacher evaluation.*

4) **Data warehouses store longitudinal data generated by, and make data available to, the other systems.** Data warehouses allow districts to track information about students over time. *In most cases data warehouses do not include data on financial resources, human resources, student services, and education services.*

Every district needs a data system that supports all of these functions and in the ideal case all of these components would be linked together into an integrated data system. However, the state has not provided separate funding to help districts purchase computers or software for what have traditionally been classified as administrative purposes, and as



a result, school districts in California have largely operated on their own in developing such systems. Years of lean budgets and the oft-repeated promise to “keep the cuts far from the classroom” have led to delays in building data infrastructure in many districts. Even in those districts that have invested in data, the first priority is almost always on building systems that generate required reports rather than systems that support continuous improvement, and California’s large number of highly-specified categorical programs helps ensure that state reporting is complex..

In general, these factors combine to ensure that many districts will continue to struggle to use data to inform their local improvement process. The variations in the quality and usefulness of local data systems constitute a significant equity issue for students who attend districts with limited data capacity.

## **Next Steps for School Districts**

Improvement requires that teachers and principals have access to the kinds of summative data on progress that is provided by the state assessment system, but teachers also need formative or diagnostic data on what their students know and what they need. This means that both district and school leaders are especially interested in fine-grained data on student performance and progress in targeted standards-based subject areas, topics, processes, and skills. Such data may come from “benchmark assessments” which track students’ progress toward standards; or from curriculum-embedded assessments, which assess students’ mastery of the curriculum; and/or from diagnostic assessments which may focus on sub-skills such as reading fluency. Any of these tests may be invented locally by teachers but more often are purchased either as part of the curriculum materials, as part of the data system, or as a stand-alone assessment system. Whatever the source or type of test used – and there are advantages and disadvantages to each – fast feedback loops are crucial. To be most useful to teachers, data needs to be available quickly and just good enough to inform the next lesson and to indicate what kind of support is needed by those students who are struggling.

Moving from a system that is focused on compliance and reporting to one that is focused on continuous improvement requires investing in both technical systems and in human ones.

### ***Essential investments in the capacity of the system include:***

1. Building the technical infrastructure

If all district systems should be aligned to support high quality instructional practice, then good data systems must link fiscal, administrative, and assessment data services and build the ability to track longitudinal data to determine the impact of all work on student achievement.. District budgets must be restructured to ensure sufficient resources are available for both short term and long term data needs. For this to be possible, data

systems must be re-understood at the local level not as “administration” or “bureaucracy” but as key elements in a continuous improvement process that is focused on teaching and learning. The “silo” approach to data management must be replaced by a much more integrated system and districts must make a set of important strategic decisions about which of the many important links between separate systems they will build first.

2. Adopting assessments that will provide teachers with useful data on student learning.

Teachers need to have easy to use access to data on student learning that enables them to see connections between instruction and student achievement. Unless the assessments being used to populate the data system are valued by teachers, it will be difficult to create and maintain the political consensus needed to invest in the data system. For this reason, building the system primarily around the goal of providing analysis of the CST – which was never designed as a diagnostic measure for teacher use – is probably not the best approach.

3. Using the unique student identifier as part of a system that connects a number of data fields with individual students.

Disaggregating data by student subgroups, once controversial, has become the norm in public education. The new cutting edge is the ability to use the student identifier to track individual students and investigate more complex questions and issues. We are moving from asking questions like “what are test score trends for Hispanic eighth graders and how do these compare with trends for other ethnic groups?” to questions like “how do results for students who have been in the district for at least three years compare with results for newcomers?” or “how do results for students who participated in the after school program compare with results for similar students who did not?” The ability to answer questions about “value added” by particular budgetary actions, human resources decisions, educational programs or instructional practices is an important and achievable goal.

***Investments in the capacity of the people include:***

1. Building consensus and developing a plan for an integrated data system that supports continuous improvement

Both local decision-makers and the end-users of the district data system need to have a role in shaping a multi-year plan to develop it. School board members and superintendents play a key role in advocating for and planning for local data systems, while teachers and administrators play key roles in ensuring that the resulting system is useful for the central goal of improving teaching and learning.

2. Funding ongoing high-quality professional development and technical assistance, and building in time for teachers to work together

Staff development and training must be provided to enable administrators, teachers, clerical staff and other personnel to develop role-appropriate skills in administering assessments, using the technology, interpreting the data, and, for teachers, adjusting curriculum and/or instruction to respond to the needs that emerge. In the highest-performing, high poverty schools in the state, grade level or department teams of teachers meet in regularly-schedule collaboration time to review data from local assessments, to compare results, and to talk about implications for curriculum and instruction.

3. Creating new roles for district data coordinators, school based “data mentors” and coaches who can help teachers understand the data and make needed changes in their instruction.

Many districts and schools lack the technical skills needed to design and maintain data systems, and even purchasing “off-the-shelf” products from vendors is only a partial solution. Investing in technical assistance is essential. So is investing in building capacity for data use: many districts are experiencing success with creating teacher leader positions charged with taking on important roles in data analysis and in helping their peers understand and use data.

## **Conclusion: Recommendations for state policy**

There is an emerging consensus in California that investment in the state data system is overdue. Still, the equally important role played by local data systems is less widely appreciated. Ultimately, though, the continuous improvement of teaching and learning can only happen at the local level and local data systems are a crucial tool in achieving this goal. State leaders need to move now to take coordinated action on two fronts:

### **Recommendation one: Build a state data system that also supports continuous improvement at the local level. This means:**

1. Invest the resources to develop an integrated statewide relational database designed both for reporting to the federal government and also to support local use. Delaying the investment in creating a state system that will be useful to local users is shortsighted.
2. Create an advisory group that brings together experts from districts that are effectively using data to inform and support the design and construction of the state data system from the outset.
3. Build on the beginning work of the California School Information Services to create web-based training to help districts understand and use the emerging state data tools.

### **Recommendation two: Make a parallel investment in local data systems**

1. Provide earmarked funding for districts seeking to develop, upgrade or maintain local data systems. Earmarked funding is essential to ensure an adequate level of investment in improvement infrastructure; however, this funding source can and should remain relatively flexible and not be over-regulated.
2. Target funding first to those districts with the least functional systems, but include incentive funding for districts with good systems who are seeking to “push the envelope” and improve good systems. These districts will be an important source of lessons learned and best practices.
3. Develop a set of guidelines for developing effective data systems and providing the professional development needed to support meaningful data use and ensure that these are reflected in guidelines for school district technology plans. The work at the national level of the “Data Quality Campaign” provides one model for encouraging better data systems without resorting to regulation.
4. Review the role of County Offices of Education in developing and supporting local data infrastructure for small districts.
5. Develop and support a “best practices clearinghouse” effort to identify and disseminate models of good local practice for using data and a “consumer reports” type review or buyers guide for districts purchasing off-the-shelf software packages.

### **About Springboard Schools and Sources for this Policy Brief**

Springboard Schools is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization whose mission is to work with education leaders to generate and put to use the knowledge needed to improve teaching and learning for all of California’s children. Springboard conducts research and provides research-based professional development and on-site coaching to partner school districts across the state. The recommendations of this Policy Brief are drawn from twelve years of experience as a reform support provider and from a research paper published by Springboard Schools as part of the “Getting Down to Facts” study commissioned by the Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. For more information about Springboard’s paper and other Springboard research, see our website at [www.springboardschools.org](http://www.springboardschools.org). For more information about the full study, go to [www.irepp.stanford.edu](http://www.irepp.stanford.edu).

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Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening  
October 19, 2007, Sacramento California

## Funding K-12 Education Investments Under Proposition 98

### **Required Information**

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#### Topic

School Finance—Funding Priorities and Proposition 98

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### **Problem Statement**

According to the study authored by Jon Sonstelie, *Aligning School Finance with Academic Standards*, the state may have to spend up to 40% more on K-12 education to raise student performance to reach the goal of 800 on the Academic Performance Index (API). Which specific education programs should be expanded and where will this money come from? Some have suggested that funding under Proposition 98 will be insufficient and that additional revenues will be necessary.

However, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), funding under Proposition 98 could provide billions of dollars in additional ongoing revenues when the minimum funding guarantee is determined by Test 1 (a fixed percentage of the General Fund revenues, plus property taxes), as opposed to Test 2 or Test 3, both of which reflect changes in workload and inflation. This shift to Test 1 could occur as early as 2010-11. The shift to Test 1 provides a unique opportunity for funding augmentations because the minimum guarantee will then be decoupled from workload. In other words, significant funding above baseline costs would be available in a Test 1 year.

This paper proposes to join the Sonstelie research with the forecast of the LAO to recommend a specific schedule of augmentations to K-12 education. The paper presents the implied "rate of return" on specific budget augmentations presented in the Sonstelie study, expands these costs statewide, and adjusts them for inflation. The paper then concludes by recommending K-12 program enhancements based on the priorities derived from the Sonstelie research and the availability of new revenues under Proposition 98.

## Funding K-12 Education Investments under Proposition 98

Much has been written about the needs of California's K-12 education system and the current finance system under which it operates. In April 2007, 23 studies coordinated through Stanford University and funded by four major foundations were unveiled. Taken together, these studies concluded that significant new resources would be needed to bring student achievement up to the level the state has set as its standard. In addition, the studies identified numerous flaws in the current school finance system, suggesting that major structural reforms are needed.

For the most part, however, these papers avoided offering specific prescriptions on how to change the current system or where additional resources should be targeted. As a result, state policy makers do not have a detailed agenda for action. This paper, drawing from one of the papers, makes a case for specific program augmentations to promote students' academic performance.

### Targeting Additional State Resources

The study by Jon Sonstelie, *Aligning School Finance with Academic Standards*, concluded that an estimated 40% increase in funding would be needed to boost student achievement to the level established by the state as defining an adequate education. The study relied upon the professional judgment of 567 randomly selected public school teachers, principals, and superintendents to determine (1) the resources required to bring school test scores up to 800 on the state's Academic Performance Index (API), (2) where those resources should be targeted, and (3) how much should be allocated to each of the expenditure categories.

The results of these budget simulations provide detailed insight into how best to schedule budget augmentations for elementary, middle, and high schools. They also reveal the areas of school site spending that should receive the greatest increase in funding and those areas that are relatively well funded currently. The Sonstelie study, however, did not evaluate school district costs, such as administration, transportation, maintenance, and operations, nor did it consider the costs of special education.

**Table 1. Funding Priority Targets (% increase in spending)**

Staff/Programs	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Staff			
Teachers	14.9%	27.4%	24.2%
Administrators	22.8%	19.5%	37.7%
Support Staff	168.7%	40.5%	75.0%
Professional Development			
Academic Coaches	600.0%	106.7%	173.3%
Collaborative Time	45.7%	173.2%	135.5%
Student Programs	170.0%	171.3%	99.8%



Table 1 shows the percentage increase in funding recommended by the survey respondents for each of the expenditure categories for elementary, middle, and high schools. In total, these changes yield an increase in spending of roughly 40% for each school type.

The budget simulations reveal significant differences in resource allocations both among the three school types and among the various expenditure categories. For elementary schools, the budget simulations suggest that resource augmentations first should be targeted to support staff, specifically instructional aids, as opposed to teachers and administrators. The study suggested that school site expenditures for instructional aides should increase by more than 360%, with other support staff increasing in the range of 100% to 150%. For middle and high schools, support staff augmentations also exceeded recommended increases for teachers and administrators; however, the magnitude of these differences were not as great as for elementary schools.

Table 1 also shows that professional development is an area that should be expanded relative to other expenditure categories. For elementary and high schools, academic coaches are identified as warranting significant augmentations, while increasing collaborative time for middle school teachers is the preferred method for advancing professional development.

Finally, the survey respondents would increase spending on various student programs by roughly 170% for elementary and middle schools and by almost 100% for high schools. This category includes preschool, after-school tutoring, summer school, longer school year, longer school day, full-day kindergarten, and computers for instructions. The one clear pattern that emerges from the data is the need to expand after-school tutoring for all grade levels. For elementary schools, the budget simulations yield a 125% increase in spending for after-school tutoring; for middle schools, a 140% increase; and for high schools, a 143% increase. An expansion of this program above all others appears to be the most effective means of serving students whose academic performance may be lagging.

Table 2 displays the statewide costs of these funding priorities, based on the Sonstelie research. That study used actual expenditure data for 2003-04 for each survey respondent. The results in Table 2 have been converted from school site data to statewide costs using an enrollment conversion factor for the span of grades covered by each type of school. In addition, the expenditure data have been adjusted for inflation using both the actual and projected statutory cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) through 2010-11. The 2010-11 fiscal year was selected because significant state funding increases are projected to occur in that year under Proposition 98 (discussed below).

Table 2 shows that, if all of the components of the education program were funded according to the collective recommendations of the Sonstelie survey respondents, a total of almost \$12 billion in ongoing funding would be needed to bring California students up to the academic standards the state has established. Even under conditions of robust economic growth, an augmentation to the education budget of this magnitude cannot be achieved in a single year under the state's current tax structure. However, the near-term outlook for Proposition 98 provides an opportunity for significant program expansions.

**Table 2. Statewide Costs of Funding Priorities (2010-11 inflation-adjusted costs in millions)**

Staff/Programs	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Staff			
Teachers	\$1,343	\$1,246	\$1,504
Administrators	311	159	357
Support Staff	1,753	475	884
Professional Development			
Academic Coaches	508	216	247
Collaborative Time	137	200	108
Student Programs	1,181	771	557
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$5,233</b>	<b>\$3,067</b>	<b>\$3,657</b>

**Source of Additional State Resources**

The state’s minimum funding contribution to both K-12 education and the community colleges is established in the State Constitution through Proposition 98. Enacted by state voters in November 1988, this constitutional provision sets the state’s minimum funding requirement for K-14 education from one year to the next, based on several formulas.

With the exception of the initial year of implementation, Proposition 98 funding has been determined by adjusting prior-year expenditures for workload changes and inflation, as determined by either “Test 2” (ADA and per capita personal income) or “Test 3” (ADA and per capita General Fund revenues). The common denominator in both of these formulas is that year-to-year funding adjustments reflect workload changes, as measured by ADA. In the long run, both of these tests merely keep overall K-14 funding on pace with increases in workload and inflation. They do not provide any significant revenue increases to expand the state’s investment in education.

This situation changes, however, when funding is determined by “Test 1.” Under this formula, the minimum funding guarantee is no longer determined by a change in workload and inflation. Instead, the state is required to allocated a fixed percentage of the General Fund tax revenue to K-14 education, regardless of any change in ADA. In addition, K-14 education is entitled to receive all of the expected property tax revenue that it receives when either “Test 2” or “Test 3” is operative. Moreover, these local revenues do not offset the state’s General Fund allocation.

In large measure, the conditions under which “Test 1” would apply have not materialized because of ongoing growth in K-12 enrollment. This situation, however, has been changing over the current decade, with statewide enrollment now falling from year to year. In fact, the LAO projects that “Test 1” will become operative in 2010-11, providing roughly \$2.2 billion in ongoing funding above the baseline requirements for public schools. In other words, under a “Test 1” year, the costs of funding all K-12 and community college enrollment, adjusted for inflation, would be fully covered, leaving an additional \$2.2 billion for program augmentations. The LAO also projects that an additional \$2 billion above baseline requirements would be available in 2011-12.



The LAO report that identified these added revenues was issued in November 2006 and an updated forecast is expected in November 2007. While a revised forecast may identify a later year in which “Test 1” becomes operative, the broader economic and demographic trends are expected to continue. Thus, when education funding under Proposition 98 is determined by “Test 1,” multi-billion dollar augmentations to the state’s K-12 and community college systems can be expected. Moreover, these augmentations will become a permanent part of the Proposition 98 funding base and will not be lost when the enrollment picture brightens and the minimum funding guarantee is again driven by “Test 2” or “Test 3.” This near-term outlook sets up a unique opportunity to provide a significant and ongoing investment in K-12 education.

**Schedule for Program Augmentations**

If we assume that the LAO’s forecast is largely accurate, even though the timing of the increases may be delayed, and if we assume that the findings and relative investment needs identified in Sonstelie’s study reflect the best judgment of education professionals in California, then we can present a series of recommendations for specific program augmentations. In other words, these two reports, when taken together, provide a general prescription on when the state can make significant investments in K-12 education, at what level these investments can be made, and on which educational programs and staff they should be targeted. The following tables present recommended areas of staffing and program augmentations and the projected statewide costs of these increases, based on the specified year of implementation.

**Table 3. 2010-11 Elementary School Investments (dollars in millions)**

Elementary Schools	Statewide Costs
Administration	
Assistant Principals	\$171
Support Staff	
Instructional Aids	862
Nurses	148
Librarians	212
Technology Support Staff	292
Professional Development	
Academic Coaches	508
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,192</b>

**Table 4a. 2011-12 Elementary School Investments (dollars in millions)**

Elementary Schools	Statewide Costs
Student Programs	
Preschool	\$30
After-school Tutoring	237
Support Staff	
Security Officers	23
Community Liaisons	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$359</b>

**Table 4b. 2011-12 Middle School Investments (dollars in millions)**

Middle Schools	Statewide Costs
Professional Development	
Academic Coaches	\$216
Collaborative Time	200
Student Programs	
After-school Tutoring	257
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$672</b>

**Table 4c. 2011-12 High School Investments (dollars in millions)**

High Schools	Statewide Costs
Support Staff	
Instructional Aides	\$353
Community Liaisons	56
Professional Development	
Academic Coaches	247
Collaborative Time	108
Student Programs	
After-school Tutoring	212
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$976</b>

We acknowledge that an additional consideration of state budgeting is targeting augmentations to specific types of schools and school districts. The Sonstelie study explored this question and offered as a solution a weighted student formula that would focus additional resources toward districts that face higher-than-average labor market costs and/or whose students come from low income families. Moreover, other research has shown that the racial/ethnic makeup of a school also correlates to student performance, even after adjusting for income differences, thus warranting an incremental funding adjustment as well. Given these relationships, any allocation of additional state resources should consider an effective means of targeting these funds to most effectively improve student performance statewide. The specifics of how this should be done, however, are beyond the scope of this paper.

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# School Transportation

# Coalition

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## *Education Policy Convening* Hosted by EdSource • October 19, 2007 School Transportation Crisis

We wanted to thank EdSource and the foundations for organizing and hosting this convening.

This paper will present a problem statement followed by "Getting Down to School Transportation Facts".

### Problem Statement

We believe that California is facing a School Transportation Crisis. This crisis is especially impacting both rural and urban school districts that need to bus children from lower-income families. In the last 20 years, we have seen over a 40% decrease in the percentage of children that ride school buses. Every state in the union has a greater percentage of children riding school buses.

The state pays less than 50% of the cost of state 'approved' trips to and from school. The system is broken. It is archaic, unfair, and extremely inequitable. It needs a complete overhaul.

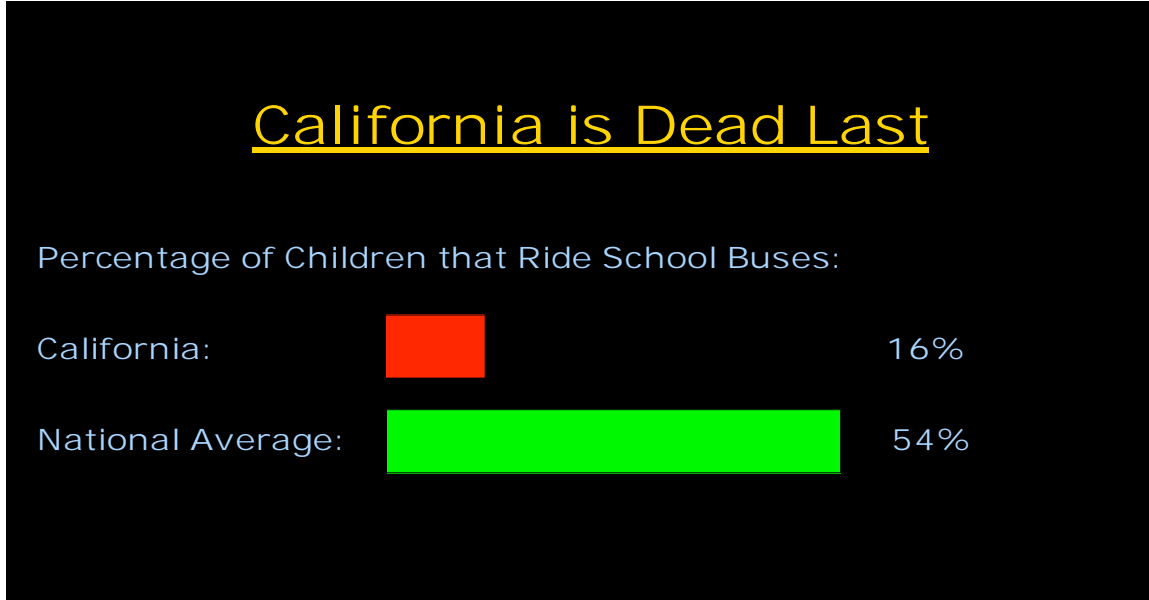
Our school bus fleet is one of the oldest in the nation. We still have buses on the road that were built before 1977 and do not meet the federal safety standards. We have over 3,000 school buses on the road that were built before particulate standards were required.

Ironically, the new seat belt requirement will only make things worse because the installation of seat belts will reduce the seating capacity of school buses. We will have to buy 3 new buses in order to replace 2 old buses. Fuel and labor cost will increase by 33%.

**Before the state funds any new programs, it needs to equitable and fully fund the school transportation program. The state also needs to provide additional funds for school bus replacement.**

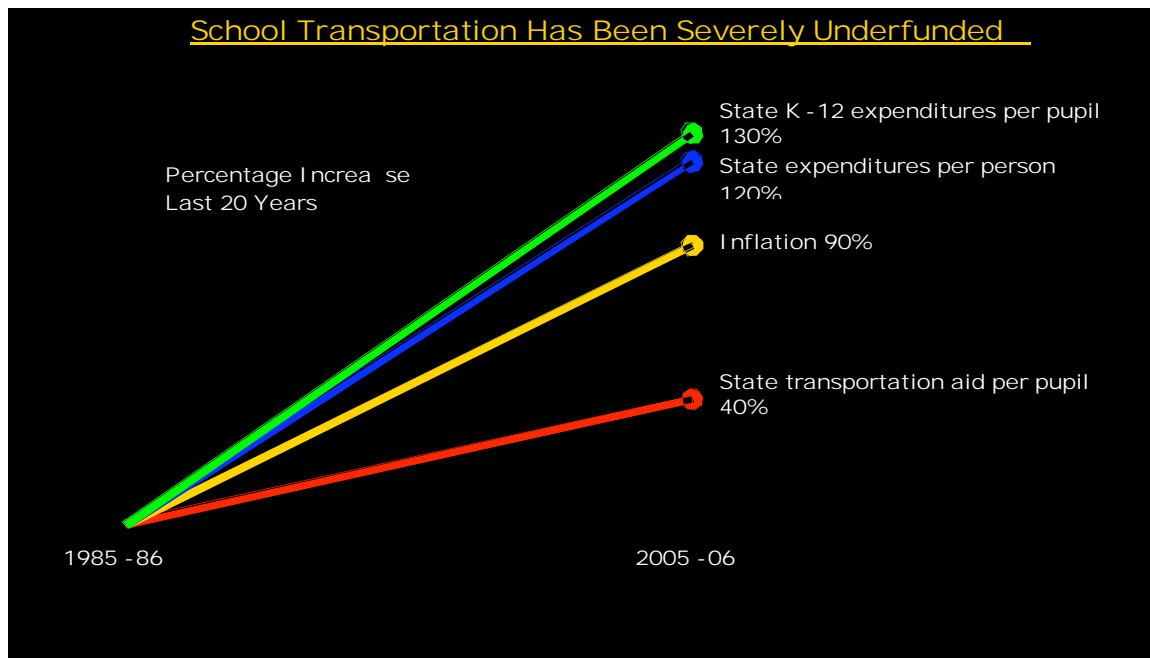
Getting Down to School Transportation Facts:

The recently released State Auditor report (March 2007 – Report # 2006-109) on School Transportation is a valuable resource on the problems with the current school transportation system. Currently, California is dead last in the percentage of students that ride school buses – 16%.



In 1985, 23% of California students rode to school in school buses. Since then, many school districts especially in wealthy areas, have simply shut down their school bus service, because it was too costly and they were not receiving sufficient funds from the state. Children are walking longer distances to school. California does not have a limit on the walking distance to school. More children are transported in cars. Rural and urban school districts are limited in their options. They must provide transportation services to their neediest students.

The following chart shows how much school transportation has been under-funded since 1985-86.



It is no wonder that there has been the drastic decrease in the ridership and in the number of school districts that offer school bus services. Every other state has a greater percentage of children that ride school buses.

School buses are the safest form of transportation for children – safer than walking, cars, or transit buses. Using school buses means fewer accidents, injuries, and fatalities. It also means fewer cars on the road, less congestion, and less pollution.

Many states reimburse school districts for 100% of their cost of transporting students to and from school. School transportation costs vary depending on the geographic location, student density, and demographic characteristics of the school district. It is a true variable cost program. The California Department of Education (CDE) only ‘approves’ the cost of transporting students – regular and special education, to and from schools. All other transportation costs such as athletic events and field trips are not ‘state approved’ for state reimbursement.





In California, school districts are only partially reimbursed for the state-approved cost of home-to-school transportation for regular and special education children. California severely under funds school transportation. The state reimbursement rate is less than 50%. That is, the state pays for less than 50% of the approved state cost. The approved state cost for regular and special education transportation is over \$1.3 billion. The state share is \$630 million. The other \$600 million plus has to be paid for by the school districts. These funds have to come out of the classroom.

The State Auditor has recommended that the Department of Education (CDE) should seek legislation to revise the current law so that 1) all school districts that provide transportation services could receive funds, and 2) ensure that all school districts are funded equitably for the Home-to-School Transportation program.

The school transportation formulas are so outdated, that the program is extremely inequitable. The reimbursement rates can range from 0% to 100%. This program is especially unfair to school districts that serve a large number of poor children.

Attachment A shows the reimbursement rates for a sample of 75 school districts in the state. The first school district in the attachment is West Contra Costa Unified. Their approved transportation cost is \$3.7 million. Their reimbursement rate is 11.5%. That means that the state only reimburses the school district for \$425,000 for home-to-school transportation costs. The school district must use \$3.3 million of their discretionary funds to make up the difference. These are funds that would have been available for classroom purposes. This is extremely unfair to the school district.

As far back as 1988, the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) recommended that the school transportation formula needed revision because:





-  It resulted in an inequitable distribution of state aid.
-  It does not relate reimbursements to actual cost.
-  It does not provide an incentive for schools to be efficient and use economies of scale.
-  There is no mechanism for new school districts that want to start up a transportation program to receive reimbursements.

Recent attempts to solely study options to the transportation formula have failed – AB 1786 (Bermudez), AB 2803 (Cogdill), AB 1213 (Liu), and AB 1191 (Benoit)

Because the formulas are so inequitable and inadequate, in May of 2004, the California State PTA adopted a resolution that stated:

*“RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support legislation that provides more equitable and adequate funding for home to school transportation and replacement of school buses that do not meet current safety standards.”*

In the *PTA in California, April 2005*, the state PTA made the following points about increased transportation funding:

-  One of the purposes of the PTA is to “secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth”.
-  A new pupil transportation funding formula needs to be developed and implemented that will provide equitable transportation funding throughout California.
-  The California State PTA has been advocating for seat belts in school buses since 1980s, yet most school districts are not prepared to handle this added fee for safety without state funding.
-  Talk to your legislative representatives about equitable and adequate funding for home-to-school transportation.

In recent years, funds have been allocated for school bus replacement. Both the Davis and Schwarzenegger administrations have allocated funds for new school buses. Proposition 1B provides \$200 million for new school buses and diesel traps. Local air quality districts will determine the how much of the funds will be spent for new school buses and how much will be allocated for traps.

However, California has the dubious distinction of having one of the oldest, dirtiest, and most inadequate school bus fleets in the nation. The average age of our fleet is 15 years, compared to the national average of 9 years.

California has 3,400 school buses that do not meet the Air Resources Board particulate standards. These buses were built prior to 1988. A large number of these buses are located in the worst air quality areas of the state – the Los Angeles Basin and the Central Valley. The new buses emit 60 times more pollution than new school buses.

The State PTA, the Coalition for Clean Air, the Union for Concerned Scientists, and the American Lung Association all agree that California needs a major increase in funding to upgrade its aging school bus fleet in order to protect the health and safety of its schoolchildren. Without this funding, California school districts are going to have to choose between school books and school buses.

The new seatbelt requirement is a fiscal nightmare for school transportation. It will cost \$20,000 per bus to add seatbelts to existing school buses. New or old school buses will have their seating capacity reduced from 84 students to 54 students. Districts will have to buy 3 new school buses in order to replace 2 old school buses. Fuel and labor costs will increase by at least 33%.

#### Conclusion:

California does have a crisis in school transportation. Our recommendation is to follow the State Auditor’s recommendations. All school districts providing school transportation services must be able to receive state aid. The funding formulas need to be changed so that all school districts

are treated equitably. There is no reason why a school district like West Contra Costa should have a state reimbursement rate of 11.5% and another school district have a state reimbursement rate of 80%. That simply is not fair. There is not a logical rationale for such large differences. The system needs to be changed. The state's average reimbursement rate must increase. We need additional dollars for school transportation. This is our number one priority.

We also need and support additional state dollars for school bus replacement. However, without additional state aid for increasing school transportation reimbursements, our school transportation system is just going to continue into a death spiral. The students in those school districts that have a large number of students in poverty will suffer the most because an inordinate amount of local funds will have to be taken away from the classroom to be spent on school transportation. Those school districts, both rural and urban have no other choice. They have to bus their students to and from school.

**Attachment A**  
**Sample of School Districts**  
**Regular Home-to-School Transportation**

District	County	2005-06 Approved Cost	2005-06 % Approved Cost
West Contra Costa Unified	Contra Costa	\$3,742,274	11.5%
San Ramon Valley Unified		\$1,492,129	3.2%
Calexico Unified	Imperial	\$732,377	26.0%
Central Union High		\$837,688	19.6%
Baldwin Park Unified	Los Angeles	\$1,296,375	8.4%
Bellflower Unified		\$1,975,083	10.0%
Burbank Unified		\$250,834	0.0%
Covina Valley Unified		\$846,803	34.4%
El Rancho Unified		\$1,167,237	12.9%
Glendale Unified		\$706,530	10.7%
Inglewood Unified		\$800,107	1.8%
Los Angeles Unified		\$76,836,276	53.0%
Montebello Unified		\$3,917,216	28.1%
Montebello Unified		\$3,917,216	28.1%
Norwalk-La Mirada Unified		\$1,875,391	35.0%
Palmdale Elementary		\$2,020,658	3.2%
Pomona Unified		\$1,604,626	33.1%
South Pasadena Unified		\$135,223	28.6%
Atwater Elementary	Merced	\$675,342	34.4%
Merced Union High		\$1,697,476	34.8%
Salinas Union High	Monterey	\$1,757,258	26.0%
Anaheim Elementary	Orange	\$4,113,004	16.3%
Anaheim Union High		\$2,963,342	1.1%
Capistrano Unified		\$5,440,328	14.2%

District	County	2005-06 Approved Cost	2005-06 % Approved Cost
Fullerton Jt. Union High		\$1,189,749	17.3%
Garden Grove Unified		\$7,012,027	34.0%
Placentia-Yorba Linda		\$1,537,932	22.4%
Santa Ana Unified		\$4,467,419	22.9%
Tustin Unified		\$2,999,760	13.3%
Eureka Union	Placer	\$1,205,972	38.2%
Roseville City Elementary		\$993,711	13.7%
Roseville Jt. Union High		\$1,203,225	20.6%
Rocklin Unified		\$2,057,161	11.9%
Corona-Norco Unified	Riverside	\$4,361,674	25.2%
Moreno Valley Unified		\$5,269,197	11.4%
Perris Union High		\$1,424,787	38.2%
Riverside Unified		\$5,269,197	11.4%
Murrieta Valley Unified		\$1,725,190	5.6%
Elk Grove Unified	Sacramento	\$6,118,294	27.4%
Sacramento City Unified		\$3,738,386	37.1%
San Juan Unified		\$8,946,188	31.9%
Chaffey Joint Union High	San Bernardino	\$1,875,340	24.3%
Chino Valley Unified		\$2,433,271	24.7%
Fontana Unified		\$3,004,032	38.2%
Ontario-Montclair Elem		\$1,524,181	23.7%
Redlands Unified		\$3,308,969	29.5%
Rialto Unified		\$2,554,445	26.0%
San Bernardino City Unif		\$8,109,902	10.1%
Victor Elementary		\$1,549,923	15.4%
Chula Vista Elementary	San Diego	\$3,583,536	14.6%
Fallbrook Union Elem		\$1,875,231	32.6%
Grossmont Union High		\$2,799,447	24.0%
Poway Unified		\$5,171,316	27.9%
San Diego Unified		\$6,480,070	42.0%
Santee Elementary		\$835,443	30.4%
San Jose Unified	Santa Clara	\$5,453,730	30.8%
Fairfield-Suisun Unified	Solano	\$2,074,211	26.4%
Travis Unified		\$934,452	23.5%
Ceres Unified	Stanislaus	\$1,263,866	39.4%
Oakdale Joint Unified		\$1,472,280	30.4%
Turlock Unified		\$1,914,982	25.7%
Washington Unified	Yolo County	\$1,417,044	22.4%



# The State Data System to Assess Learning Barriers and Supports: Implications for School Reform Efforts

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## Problem Statement

In assessing the current state of *Education Data in California*, Hansen (2007) concluded “that California is lagging most other states in developing education data systems capable of helping policymakers and others understand how schools are doing.” Absent is a “culture of data” emphasizing the connection between good data and school improvement efforts. Her review, however, did not take into consideration one area of education data in which the state is on the cutting edge. The California Department of Education (CDE) has created the nation’s most extensive, comprehensive system for providing local education agencies with data on school climate, student engagement, and nonacademic learning barriers and supports. This system is based on two complementary surveys — the *California Healthy Kids Survey* (CHKS) for students and the *California School Climate Survey* (CSCS) for school staff. LEAs are required to administer these two surveys simultaneously at least once every two years in compliance with Title IV provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act.<sup>1</sup> In this brief we describe the surveys, the value of the data for school improvement efforts, and the challenges that have been encountered. Efforts to reform schools and improve achievement often fall short because they fail to consider the school context in which instruction occurs and whether students are ready, able, and motivated to learn. By providing such critical data, the CHKS and CSCS help guide schools in creating school climates that support effective learning and teaching.

## Survey Framework

Underlying these two surveys is the recognition by CDE that learning is a complicated phenomenon, affected by a multiple related variables, and that local schools need data to determine:

- the nonacademic social, emotional, behavioral, and health-related barriers to learning and success that their students’ face; and
- whether their school climates impede or promote students’ motivation, readiness, and ability to learn, as well as their teachers’ ability to effectively teach.

The supports and services that students need to learn and stay in school tend to be viewed as outside the core academic activities and marginalized within schools themselves (Adelman & Taylor 2005). Reflecting this fragmentation, most school reform plans focus almost exclusively on the educational factors that directly affect student academic achievement, such as curriculum and instruction, teacher content expertise, leadership, and governance and finance, as framed by the *Getting Down to Facts* report. While these are certainly the essential cornerstones of school reform, they are not sufficient in themselves. Too often reform efforts fall short because they fail to address the context in which the curriculum and instruction are implemented. Not all students may be ready or able to learn — to from improvements in instruction — because: (1) they don’t feel emotionally or physically safe at school; (2) they don’t feel connected to school; (3) they don’t find school relevant or engaging; and/or (4) they are hungry, worried, depressed, under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, or suffering from other nonacademic “barriers” that undermine the process of learning.

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<sup>1</sup> The surveys were developed by WestEd under contract to CDE. WestEd provides technical assistance to schools in collecting, processing, reporting, and using the results. Information is available at the website [www.wested.org/chks](http://www.wested.org/chks).

## **Assessing Learning Barriers and Supports**

The fundamental challenge to school reform, the National Research Council (2003) observes, is to create a set of circumstances in which students take pleasure and meaning in learning and have the supports they need to be able to learn. It is estimated that 40-60% of high school students are chronically disengaged, with the percentages of low-income, minority, urban students being even higher. Growing numbers of children are coming to school with a variety of health-related problems that make successful learning difficult, if not impossible (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1998). How do schools engage, motivate, and support students so that they can achieve? Ensuring that students are safe, healthy, and resilient is central. It is, of course, not the role of the schools alone to solve all student problems, but neither can they neglect them when they interfere with their students' ability to learn, the collective learning environment, and teachers' ability to teach. Research studies and reviews over the past decade have consistently concluded that student health and developmental status and achievement are inextricably intertwined (CDE 2004). They are not competing goals but rather complementary or even synergistic processes. Students' capacity for learning cannot be optimally engaged if their basic developmental needs — such as belonging, security, respect, identity, power, mastery, and meaning — are not being met. As the National Research Council (2003:17) emphasized, “Although learning involves cognitive processes...motivation to learn depends on a student's involvement in a web of social relationships...It is not coincidental that many of the qualities associated with engaging schools also have been found to foster healthy youth development.”

It is precisely in the schools that are experiencing the greatest academic challenges — such as those in marginalized, high-poverty communities — that the needs for learning supports are the greatest. Many urban schools are plagued by “nested inequalities.” Failure to systematically address the barriers to learning and engagement that their students experience may be one reason why school reform efforts have not improved outcomes for urban high school students on a large scale. A growing body of research shows that turning around low-performing, high-poverty schools requires a comprehensive, systemic approach to fostering a learning culture and climate that is rooted not only in effective pedagogy and governance but also in providing a safe, caring, supportive, and engaging environment for both students and teachers.

### **Survey Content**

The *California Health Kids Survey* (CHKS) and *California School Climate Survey* (CSCS) are designed to provide the data that schools need to undertake such an integrated, effective approach to school improvement. Developed in 1998 and required since fall 2003, the CHKS is the largest, most comprehensive effort in the nation to assess *local* students and schools on a regular basis to provide key data on youth learning barriers, engagement, and supports. A prime focus is *health-risk behaviors*, especially those linked to school *safety*, physical and psychological. It provides data on perceived safety, violence- and crime-related behaviors on campus, and the level of harassment and victimization that students' experience. Another focus is *substance abuse*, especially use on campus, which high school staff have indicated on the CSCS is the major problem school's face after truancy.

To assess *school engagement*, the CHKS provides student self-report data on usual classroom grades received, truancy, and school connectedness. The school connectedness scale, derived from the National Survey of Adolescent Health, is reliable ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ) and composed of five items that measure the degree to which students feel close to people at school, a part of the school, treated fairly, happy, and safe at school. This measure was found to be highly correlated with school attendance and grades and with low health-risk involvement (Resnick et al., 1997).

The CHKS also measures student perceptions of the presence in school of the three developmental *supports* or protective factors that research has consistently linked to resilience in

## **Assessing Learning Barriers and Supports**

the face of adversity and to positive academic, social, personal, and health outcomes — *caring adult relationships, high expectations, and opportunities to participate in meaningful activities* (Benard 2004).<sup>2</sup> These three protective factors align with the characteristics of effective schools (e.g., National Research Council 2003). They lie at the heart of a comprehensive systemic approach that addresses both the pedagogic *and* social, emotional, and behavioral barriers to learning and engagement.

- **Caring relationships** between students and staff have been shown to be one of the most powerful influences on school connectedness, learning motivation and performance, and involvement in risk behaviors. Reflecting this, one of the four main charges of CDE’s P-16 Council is to ensure that all students have access to *caring* and qualified teachers. The CHKS measures student perceptions that there is a teacher or other adult in the school that really cares about them, notices when they are not there, and listens to them.
- **High expectation** messages have been consistently linked to academic success, and are a key component of school reform initiatives, one of the four principal educational needs identified by the P-16 Council. But too often this concept is operationalized solely as “pressure to succeed” on tests in ways that are counterproductive to learning. Based on evidence that high expectations must be accompanied by teachers’ encouragement and commitment to student progress, the CHKS asks students whether there is a teacher or some other adult at school “who tells me when I do a good job; who always wants me to do my best; and who believes that I will be a success.” The survey thus draws delineates to the nature of effective expectation messages as well as their prevalence.
- **Meaningful participation** refers to the involvement of students in activities that are relevant, engaging, interesting, and/or provide opportunities for responsibility and contribution. The CHKS scale asks students whether they have a chance in school to help decide things like class activities or rules and do things that are interesting and that “make a difference.” Giving youth these opportunities helps to promote a sense of autonomy and to engage their intrinsic motivation to learn.

Establishing these conditions not only will positively impact learning directly but also indirectly to the extent that meeting the developmental needs of youth and fostering school connectedness are associated with lower levels of health-risk behaviors, which facilitates learning.

A series of school-level analyses of the relationships between CHKS indicators, school demographic characteristics, and STAR test-score results have begun to demonstrate how these school-climate factors and health-related behaviors are related to academic performance in California schools — corroborating the merit of learning supports to school improvement efforts:

- Schools with large percentages of students who engaged in risky behavior, were exposed to health risks, or had low school supports had lower API scores than other schools. Skipping breakfast, substance use, drug availability at school, and lack of school safety had strong relationships to lower performance (Hanson & Austin 2002).
- Schools made greater progress in raising test scores over a year when their students were less likely to engage in substance use and violence, and were more likely to eat nutritiously, exercise, and report caring relationships and high expectations at school (Hanson, Austin, & Lee-Bayha 2004); and

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<sup>2</sup> These scales are also measured in the community, peer, and home environments. The CHKS also measures six key individual resilience traits: Cooperation and Communication, Empathy, Problem Solving, Self-efficacy, Self-awareness, and Goals and Aspirations. However, these questions are not required to be administered. The elementary CHKS has fewer and shorter versions of these scales.

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- Although school poverty was strongly linked to both academic performance and school-related well-being, this link could not entirely explain why students in low-performing schools consistently reported lower levels of school supports, safety, and connectedness than students in high-performing schools (Hanson et al. 2007).

The *California School Climate Survey* (CSCS) was developed and implemented in fall 2004 to fulfill the NCLB Title IV mandate to conduct an anonymous teacher survey of the incidence, prevalence, and attitudes related to drug use and violence. CDE also recognized that this was an opportunity to collect other data to guide school improvement efforts. To this end, the CSCS consists of 48 questions which factor into scales that measure the level to which staff perceive their school to have: (1) a *positive, safe learning environment*; (2) *norms and standards* that encourage academic success; (3) positive intra-staff and staff-student *relationships*; and (4) students *behaviors that facilitate learning*, including being ready and motivated to learn. It also asks staff to report on the degree to which 13 student behaviors pose a problem to the school.

In addition, a second part of the CSCS consists of 21 items assessing the presence of student programs, supports, and services answered only by practitioners who provide services or instruction related to health, prevention, discipline, safety, or counseling. The results can be compared to the level of need as indicated by staff perceptions and student self-report.

Together, these two surveys provide a wealth of information about the learning climate at a school. They assess variables that align with the three main educational conditions that the National Research Council (2003) posits promote intellectual engagement: belief in competence and control, the values and goals of education, and belonging to the school. The CSCS provides an unprecedented opportunity to understand the learning climate and challenges of California schools as perceived by staff, and the factors associated with variations in these perceptions. These results can then be compared to the student behaviors and attitudes measured by the CHKS. Using their CHKS datasets, schools can analyze how student attendance, performance, connectedness, supports, and risk behaviors are interrelated and vary among groups of students.

In addition, both surveys can be customized. Schools can add questions of their own choosing to meet other local data needs. In this sense, the CHKS and CSCS are not just surveys but data systems that can be used to collect any information needed to guide school improvement.

### **Survey Administration and Data Availability**

The CHKS is conducted biennially among students in grades 5, 7, 9, 11, and in continuation and community day schools. Survey participation requires parental consent and is voluntary on the part of students. The data are processed by WestEd, the survey contractor, and each school district automatically receives a report summarizing the results and discussing the significance of the questions, as well as a *Key Findings* suitable for public dissemination. Aggregated, weighted county-level reports are also now produced. All reports are posted on the CHKS website, where they may be publicly downloaded ([www.wested.org/chks](http://www.wested.org/chks)).

Only a few (all small) districts are exempt from administering the survey because they do not accept Title IV funds, and it is administered to every school and student in 85% of the state's districts. In the 30 largest districts in California — representing 29% of state enrollment — the CHKS is administered only in a sample of schools. The entire dataset is available for analysis under a Memorandum of Understanding to preserve the confidentiality of the results. As of spring 2007, the CHKS dataset consists of 2,700,000 records since 2000. Since fall 2003, approximately 900,000 student records have been added every two years from about 850-900 districts (depending on years covered) and almost 7,000 schools.

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Since fall 2004, the CSCS has been administered online to administrators and all certificated staff (grades 5 and above, on a voluntary basis) in the same schools and at the same time as the CHKS. Results are received automatically online as soon as the survey is completed. In the first two-year period of its availability (2004-2006), the CSCS was completed in 4,136 schools, by 67,901 staff, in 535 districts. Plans are now being made for posting results on the website.

### **Creating a Culture of Data: Progress and Challenges**

The CHKS and CSCS are helping to build the “culture of data” that California needs (Hansen 2007). All data are easily available to the public and researchers. Districts receive reports that highlight the significance of the questions and guidelines for using and disseminating the data. Since the CHKS began in 1999, much progress has been achieved, notably in the growing recognition of its value and in its fostering of school-community collaboration.

**Growth in Local Data Appreciation.** Providing data for the first time about local students has raised school officials’ awareness of the problems and learning barriers that their students face, and the need to implement learning supports to help them. Reflecting this, districts and schools are increasingly requesting school-specific data reports to guide programs and policies, in addition to the district-level data that they automatically receive. In 2005/06 approximately half of districts requested 1,900 school-level reports.

**School-Community Collaboration.** Schools alone can’t address all the barriers to learning that students face. Yet achieving the school-community collaboration that is needed has long seemed to be a barrier in itself. By providing local data, the CHKS has helped promote such collaboration at the local and county levels, a testimony to the power of data to affect change.

But more remains to be done to further harness the value of the surveys, and ensure that the time, effort, and expense involved in conducting them bears fruit. The following are some of the challenges that survey still faces.

- **The Exception of Large Districts.** The survey results are of less value to the 15% of large districts that are required to survey only a representative sample of students (c. 900), possibly in only ten schools per grade.
- **Data Collection.** Schools have made tremendous progress in learning how to properly administer the CHKS, but they continue to need human and financial help. In one promising development, many county health and education agencies are collaborating to provide assistance and organize county-wide survey efforts. Because it is so new, the CSCS remains plagued by low staff participation in many schools. As recognition of the value of CSCS data spreads, participation rates can be expected to increase.
- **Data Use Capacity.** Many districts are challenged in their efforts to fully understand how to interpret, analyze, and use CHKS/CSCS data, making the link to program needs. There is yet no systematic assessment of how districts have applied their data, or the barriers encountered in making data-driven decisions.
- **Data Marginalization.** Reflecting the general marginalization of learning supports in schools, use of the surveys results is still largely limited to staff responsible for student health, risk-behavior prevention programs, and counseling.
- **Dataset Analysis.** A final “limitation” of the system is that the aggregated datasets are under utilized. This is due, in part, to the lack of state funding for analysis. However, it also arguably reflects, again, the marginalization of learning barriers in the field. Yet the precise value of the dataset lies in analyzing how school climate and nonacademic factors

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enable achievement, as demonstrated by the studies discussed above. There are two other areas to note in which the dataset is particularly useful because of its unprecedented number of records (c. 450,000 added per year). The first is analysis of variations among ethnic/racial groups, such as factors influencing the achievement gap, especially among subgroups usually underrepresented in general population samples (the survey asks about 13 Asian and 8 Hispanic subgroups). The second lies in understanding the state's little-studied alternative education system and its students. It includes data from 70% of continuation schools in the state, representing 82% of state enrollment in them, and approximately 40% of community day schools, representing 60% of state enrollment.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

As schools, agencies, and the public search for strategies to improve low-performing schools, retain more students in school, and ensure that all students learn and succeed, the CHKS and CSCS provide important but still largely overlooked data resources for finding solutions. Unfortunately data fragmentation has mirrored policy fragmentation. It is time to ask a critical question: Have efforts to boost academic performance in California been hampered because the impact of nonacademic barriers to learning and engagement has been overlooked? The great value of the CHKS and CSCS lies precisely in identifying those barriers that must be taken into consideration along with effective pedagogy. In this regard, more analysis of the dataset is needed. In addition, to ensure that the surveys fulfill their potential, districts need more assistance in collecting, customizing, and using their data, and research is needed to understand and address the problems they experience in the process. Finally, large districts that sample should at a minimum survey all their low performing schools.

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