



Top Down, Bottom Up

California Districts in Corrective Action and Schools in Restructuring under NCLB

Center on Education Policy

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Top Down, Bottom Up: California Districts in Corrective Action and Schools in Restructuring under NCLB

With a staff of about 80 and numerous other school and district responsibilities, the California Department of Education's Division of Accountability and Improvement has been hard pressed to directly help the 145 districts in corrective action and 1,180 schools in restructuring, the final stages of district and school improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In these stages, federal guidance requires schools and districts to make major changes but leaves states, districts, and schools to flesh out most of the details (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Using this flexibility, California has turned to a variety of intermediate service agencies and state-approved providers to assist districts that have been in corrective action and schools that have been in restructuring for a number of years.

The statewide system of school support is organized on a regional basis, as discussed in previous reports, and focuses primarily on schools identified for restructuring under NCLB—those that have failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in raising student achievement for five consecutive years or more. Since 2007-08, California has focused in on a subset of districts identified for “corrective action” under NCLB—districts that have failed to make AYP for four consecutive years or more. The districts identified by the state had a number of characteristics indicating a need for assistance, including low scores on state tests and large proportions of schools identified for improvement under NCLB.

This report describes how California is providing direct intervention to improve structures and processes in districts, which is intended over time to improve curriculum, instruction, and student achievement at the school level. For districts subject to federal Corrective Action under NCLB, California's approach is “top down” in that both federal and state law mandate districts' participation. It is also “bottom up” in that the changes districts make are customized to the needs of that district based on a comprehensive on-site needs assessment, explained Laura Wagner, who directs the state's assistance to districts in corrective action.

In this follow-up report (the fourth in the series of reports on restructuring in California), the Center on Education Policy (CEP) examined these questions by reviewing restructuring documents, analyzing state test data, and interviewing decision makers at the state and local level in the fall and winter of 2008-09. We also conducted case studies of restructuring through interviews and document reviews in four school districts—Oakland Unified School District, Palmdale Elementary School District, Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District, and Twin Rivers Unified School District¹—and in nine schools within these districts. Finally, we interviewed representatives from all 21 technical assistance providers that served districts in corrective action in 2007-08. Several key points emerged from our analysis.

Key Findings

- ***California districts that recently entered corrective action have been targeted for additional funding and special interventions.*** Consistent with federal law, 145 California school districts are now in corrective action under NCLB. In addition, new state law and the state re-appropriation of federal resources have differentiated technical assistance for these 145 districts, based upon the severity and pervasiveness of their performance problems. California consolidated almost all of its federal school improvement funds (\$112 million) and has dedicated them to help the districts in corrective action. The districts with the most severe and pervasive problems, according to state criteria, get extra funds and must spend them in part to contract with a state-approved District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) provider. The DAIT assesses district needs and issues a report on district capacity including recommendations for improvement. The DAIT then provides technical assistance to facilitate district implementation of the recommendations, which may include the reallocation of existing resources.

¹Twin Rivers Unified school district was newly formed for school year 2008-09. The new district is a combination of Grant Joint Union High School District, which has participated in CEP's study of California restructuring since 2005-06, and three nearby elementary schools, including Del Paso Elementary, North Sacramento Elementary, and Rio Linda Elementary.

- ***The number of schools entering restructuring slowed in 2008-09 but is still overwhelming.*** In the 2008-09 school year, the number of Title I² schools in restructuring in California increased by 167, bringing the total number of California schools in restructuring to 1,180. In the previous two years, the number of schools in restructuring had risen by about 300 schools annually, so 2008-09 saw a slowdown in this increase. The number of schools currently in restructuring, however, is too large for the California Department of Education (CDE) to oversee directly, according to state officials. Instead, the state has worked through a variety of intermediate service agencies and state-approved providers to assist schools in restructuring.
- ***As AYP targets have risen, district and school leaders in our case studies have set their sights on making AYP through NCLB's safe harbor provision rather than by meeting achievement targets.*** Beginning in 2007-08, California's AYP targets for the percentages of students who must score at the proficient level on state tests are scheduled to rise by at least 10 percentage points per year. Officials in our case study schools often said AYP targets seemed out of reach; instead, they were focused on meeting NCLB's safe harbor provision, which allows a subgroup or school to make AYP if it decreases the percentage of students scoring below the proficient level by 10% or more from the previous year.
- ***Some but not all restructuring schools are in districts in corrective action.*** Of the 97 districts identified for corrective action in 2007-08, 86% had at least one school in restructuring. This percentage decreased to 70% for districts identified in 2008-09. Many restructuring schools have as yet been untouched by district corrective action. In 2008-09, just 11% of California's 1,180 restructuring schools were in districts in corrective action, compared with 62% of 1,013 restructuring schools in 2007-08. Three of our case study districts were in corrective action and one qualified for work with a DAIT. School principals in Palmdale and Tahoe Truckee believed district corrective action was positive

²Title I schools are those that receive federal funds to improve education for low-achieving children in low-income areas through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by NCLB.

for their schools. Given the relative newness of state intervention at the district level, however, it is too soon to know how that intervention will impact individual schools.

- ***District corrective action costs vary, and many providers are concerned about adequate funding.*** Districts in corrective action with the most severe achievement problems according to state criteria receive \$150,000 per school in improvement and are assigned a DAIT provider to help them implement corrective action based in part on DAIT recommendations. Districts with less severe problems receive \$100,000 per school in improvement and choose their own DAIT provider. Those with the least severe problems receive \$50,000 per school in improvement for technical assistance. According to our interviews with DAIT providers, the cost of hiring a provider varied from \$100,000 to \$500,000. About half of these providers expressed concerns that DAIT funds were not enough to improve districts, especially if the district did not get much extra funding because it did not have many schools in improvement. In addition, both providers and officials in case study districts said a single year of funding was insufficient to turn around troubled districts. Several were concerned that in the future funds would again be redirected to other efforts as state policies evolved.
- ***DAIT Providers are a mix of public and private entities.*** CEP's analysis showed that the 38 state-approved providers came from a mix of governmental and private organizations: 23 were governmental organizations, 10 were for-profit organizations, and 5 were nonprofit groups. Private providers were concentrated in urban areas, including San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Diego. The central part of the state, in contrast, had primarily governmental providers. CEP interviews with DAIT providers revealed tensions between private and governmental providers. Representatives of county offices questioned private providers' expertise and motivation to help districts, and private providers questioned county offices' abilities to help districts in corrective action, since these offices have been providing technical assistance to the same districts for years.

New Developments in Restructuring at the State Level

During the past year, the state of California has made noteworthy changes in state support for district and school improvement. California is not one of the states in the U.S. Department of Education's pilot of differentiated accountability, which allows states to target sanctions and supports to schools in new ways (Erpenbach, 2008). The state, however, is using NCLB's original flexibility to target funds and technical assistance differently. These changes have important repercussions for some but not all schools in restructuring.

CHANGES IN SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING IN CALIFORNIA

From 2007-08 to 2008-09, California's targets for the percentages of students, both in the aggregate and by subgroup, who must score at the proficient level or above rose as follows:

- At the elementary or middle school level, from 37.0% to 47.5% in math and from 35.2% to 46.0% in ELA
- At the high school level, from 32.2% to 43.5% in math and from 33.4% to 44.5% in ELA

AYP targets in California will continue to rise by at least 10 percentage points per year, making California one of the states with a "backloaded" approach to increasing targets that will make it more difficult for schools to make AYP (CEP, 2008). To make AYP, schools must also meet a 95% test participation requirement and reach other state-determined targets in such areas as attendance and graduation.

In 2008-09, California had 1,180 schools in restructuring. Of these, 265 were in their fourth year of NCLB improvement (the restructuring planning phase), 369 were in their fifth year (the onset of the restructuring implementation phase), 246 were in their sixth year, 117 were in their seventh year, 173 were in their eighth year, and 10 were in their ninth year.

While schools continue to enter restructuring annually in California, the increase in the number of schools in restructuring has slowed from about 300 per year in the past two years to 167 in 2008-09. The number of schools exiting restructuring has also slowed from 33 in 2006-07 to 19

in 2008-09. To address this issue, the California Department of Education is pursuing various initiatives to support schools that have been in restructuring implementation for multiple years.

A NEW FOCUS ON DISTRICTS IN CORRECTIVE ACTION

The 2006 federal guidance for NCLB specifies that states must continue to ensure that districts in improvement under NCLB receive technical assistance and must take at least one of the following actions with districts in corrective action:

- Defer programmatic funds or reduce administrative funds
- Institute and fully implement a new curriculum based on state and local content and academic achievement standards that includes appropriate, scientifically research-based professional development for all relevant staff
- Replace school district personnel who are relevant to the district's inability to make adequate progress
- Remove individual schools from the jurisdiction of the district and arrange for their public governance and supervision;
- Appoint a receiver or trustee to administer the affairs of the district in place of the superintendent and school board
- Abolish or restructure the district.

California has chosen to require districts to use the second option: fully implementing a standards-aligned curriculum, providing scientifically based professional development for staff, and addressing the learning needs of students who are furthest from meeting standards. The state has provided webinars and technical assistance guidance on the implementation of the corrective action, posted at the California Comprehensive Center (CA CC) Web site (<http://www.cacompcenter.org/pi-lea3>). The state has also required districts in corrective action with the most severe and pervasive problems to engage in the DAIT process.

The CA CC and the state undertook a pilot of a DAIT process in four school districts, all recipients of Title I resources but at different stages of improvement in 2005. This pilot was expanded in 2006 to include an additional 11 districts through an initiative funded by the Bill and

Melinda Gates Foundation in cooperation with the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), a nonprofit organization representing the 58 county offices of education around the state. The DAIT process begins with a needs assessment and a report on district capacity that includes recommendations for improvement by a state-approved DAIT provider. These providers can include governmental agencies, such as county offices of education, or private organizations, such as education management or consulting firms. These private organizations can be nonprofit or for-profit. The district then implements the recommendations, often with assistance from the DAIT provider.

DAIT recommendations focus on helping districts build systems for school improvement. Thus, rather than making school improvement solely the province of any single district office, the DAIT process requires the participation of many district officials, including the district superintendent and governing board as well as leaders from human resources, fiscal services, data management, community involvement, and professional development. DAIT recommendations typically include reallocating resources, reorganizing responsibilities within district offices, and engaging district leaders and school staff in professional development. At the school level, recommendations for technical assistance include increased use of data, teacher coaching and collaboration, and increased accountability. Although the DAIT pilots have been designed to take place over two years, state law is silent about the duration of DAIT work in corrective action districts.

In both 2007-08 and 2008-09, the state created criteria in accordance with state law to rank the districts in corrective action under NCLB by the “pervasiveness and severity” of their academic problems. The state then used these rankings to determine which of three state-determined categories of technical assistance corrective action districts would be required to undertake. Those with the most pervasive and severe problems were assigned an agency to provide DAIT services by the state board of education. Those with moderate problems were allowed to choose their own DAIT providers from among the 38 providers approved by CDE. The rest with minor problems were not required to participate in DAIT but were asked to seek technical assistance as they implemented their corrective action. All districts were also required to revise their district

improvement plans. **Table 1** shows the number of districts identified for each of the three state categories and the percentages of these districts with at least one school in federal restructuring.

Table 1. Numbers of Districts* in State Corrective Action Categories

Category	2007-08		2008-09	
	Number of Districts	Number (%) of Districts with At Least One Restructuring School	Number of Districts	Number (%) of Districts with At Least One Restructuring School
Extensive and severe performance problems	7	7 (100%)	1	1 (100%)
Moderate performance problems	37	34 (92%)	25	19 (76%)
Minor or isolated performance problems	53	42 (79%)	24	15 (63%)
<i>Total in corrective action under NCLB</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>83 (86%)</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>35 (70%)</i>

Table reads: In 2007-08, seven districts were found to have extensive and severe performance problems, and all these districts had at least one school in restructuring. In 2008-09, one district was found to have extensive and severe performance problems, and this district had at least one school in restructuring.

*The number of districts also includes county offices of education that are local educational agencies and subject to corrective action just as districts are under NCLB.

Source: CEP analysis of data from California Department of Education, Accountability Progress Reporting, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ar/>.

As is evident in table 1, 86% of districts that benefited from assistance to districts in corrective action had at least one school in restructuring in 2007-08; this share decreased to 70% in 2008-09.

Another way to look at the relationship between districts in corrective action and schools in restructuring is to examine the percentage of all California schools in restructuring that were in districts that received services through district corrective action. This type of analysis shows a dramatic decrease in the percentages of all restructuring schools that were in districts in

corrective action. In 2007-08, 62% of restructuring schools were in districts in corrective action, but the percentage dropped to 11% of restructuring schools in 2008-09.

Because districts have only been in corrective action since March 2008, it is too soon to determine the interaction of district corrective action and school restructuring activities. A basic premise of DAIT is that building the capacity of school districts will ultimately build the capacity of schools within those districts. It will be important in the future to examine the relationship between districts in corrective action and schools in restructuring.

FUNDING FOR RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS IN CORRECTIVE ACTION

States have two sources of federal funding to assist districts and schools identified for NCLB improvement, including restructuring schools. The first is the 4% set-aside of funds for school improvement authorized by section 1003(a) of Title I.³ The second source is a separate appropriation of funds for school improvement authorized by section 1003(g) of Title I.

For 2008-09, much of the federal school improvement funding in California has been pooled. “Through the passage of AB 519, the legislature has taken most of the money and rolled it into districts in corrective action,” explained Julie Baltazar, administrator of CDE’s Regional Coordination and Support Office. This includes about \$101 million from the Title I 4% set-aside (\$67,936,528 is from 2008-09 and the rest was rolled over from the previous year). County offices still received \$10 million annually to provide technical assistance to schools and districts in improvement, including schools in restructuring. But the majority of the funds were allocated to districts in corrective action based on the severity of their performance problems (as determined by their state rating) and their number of schools in improvement, as described in **table 2**.

³Although all states were required to set aside 4%, some were not able to do so because of a hold-harmless provision in Title I, as amended by NCLB. This situation is explained in more detail in two CEP reports (2006; 2007) available at www.cep-dc.org.

Table 2. Funding for Districts in Corrective Action 2007-08 and 2008-09

Category	2007-08 and 2008-09
Extensive and severe performance problems	\$150,000 per school in improvement
Moderate performance problems	\$100,000 per school in improvement
Minor or isolated performance problems	\$50,000 per school in improvement

Table reads: In 2007-08 and 2008-09, districts in corrective action found by the state to have extensive and severe performance problems received \$150,000 per school in improvement.

Source: California Department of Education, November Board Meeting, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/main1108.asp>.

Several individuals interviewed for this study at the state, district, and school levels said that getting this funding through the system in a timely manner was a challenge, beginning with delays in the state legislature.

Funds from 1003(g) included \$16.2 million in 2007-08 and \$61.8 million in 2008-09. The California Department of Education originally intended to use these funds for schools in improvement directly; however, with the passage of state legislation AB 519, the focus shifted to districts in corrective action. California is now working to revise its proposal to use these funds, Baltazar explained, but has not yet been approved by the U.S. Department of Education; therefore, these resources have not been re-appropriated by the state legislature for use in California.

Twenty-one different public and private organizations provided DAIT needs assessments and services to 44 districts in corrective action in the first two state categories in 2007-08, and an additional 26 districts were required to work with DAITs in 2008-09. For this study CEP interviewed people from the 21 DAIT providers that delivered services in 2007-08. When CEP conducted these interviews in November 2008, providers differed in how they charged for DAIT services and what they charged. Several also said they were unclear about state expectations for costs, and one did not provide information about costs. According to state officials, districts and DAITs were free to negotiate their own contracts to reflect differences in cost of living, district size, geography, and services to be received. State law requires that districts use allocated

resources first, to fully fund the contract for the DAIT, before using resources for other reform initiatives.

The least a provider said a district paid for DAIT services over two years was \$100,000. The most was \$500,000, which was the reported cost during a DAIT pilot prior to 2007-08. The most frequently cited cost was \$225,000 for two years.

Six providers also reported that what they charged varied by district. The ways these providers calculated costs were diverse. One simply charged one-third of the district's total school improvement allocation from the state. Factors considered by the other five providers in calculating costs included district size, types of services requested, travel time needed to get to the district, and length of the contract.

Interviewees in about half of the 21 DAIT providers said the funds in general were not enough to help districts with major problems. "It's a drop of water in the desert," one said. About half of the provider interviewees also said they provided services that were more expensive than what the districts actually paid for, because funding was tied to schools in improvement rather than district needs. Either districts used other funds to add needed services or providers did not charge for some services.

Several of the 21 DAIT providers interviewed noted that in the past the state directed the Title I set-aside to districts in earlier stages of improvement. They said the new policy kept districts in the early stages of improvement from being proactive about staying out of corrective action. For example, one provider interviewee noted that districts in their first or second years of NCLB improvement were not getting any funds. "That's choked them."

Several providers also said the funds should continue if districts are not able to improve. In a typical comment, one provider interviewee said, "These changes aren't a two-year fix. The districts have taken a lifetime to get where they are." Another explained, "This work cannot be accomplished if funding is not available to implement the DAIT requirements."

DISTRIBUTION OF DAIT PROVIDERS

According to state law, CDE is responsible for identifying organizations to provide DAIT services as well as individuals to lead DAIT teams within those organizations. Potential providers must apply and show their expertise in all academic subject areas, in services that meet the needs of special groups such as English language learners and students with disabilities, and in the state's seven areas of district capacity building:

1. Governance
2. Alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to state standards
3. Fiscal operations
4. Parent and community involvement
5. Human resources
6. Data systems and achievement monitoring
7. Professional development

The provider interviewees all mentioned their organizations' expertise in these seven areas. They said that all teams had a state-approved lead or co-leads and that team size ranged from 3 to 16, depending on provider capacity and district need. In addition to these areas of expertise, Wagner noted that "the DAIT pilot showed the importance of attending to district culture and context and building relationships and trust with the district."

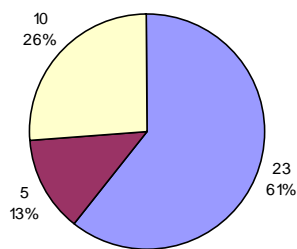
CDE officials said that both governmental and non-governmental organizations had been approved as DAIT providers. "There is a tension in California between public and private providers," Laura Wagner of CDE noted. Interviews with the 2007-08 DAIT providers illustrated this tension. A few representatives of county offices questioned private providers' expertise and motivation to help districts, while a few private providers were skeptical of county offices' abilities to help districts in corrective action, since these offices have been providing technical assistance to the same districts for years.

As shown in **figure 1**, almost two-thirds of the 38 state-approved providers in 2007-08 and 2008-09 were governmental, while 39% were private organizations. Of these private providers, 5 were for-profits and 10 were nonprofits. In 2007-08, however, nonprofit providers represented a greater share of providers actually chosen to deliver services than their share of all approved

providers. Most county offices, with the exceptions of Kern, Monterey, and Santa Cruz Counties, provided services to only one district, while most nonprofits provided services to multiple districts. For example, the nonprofit Springboard Schools provided services to five districts, while the nonprofit WestEd provided services to four districts.

Figure 1. DAIT Providers by Organization Type, 2007-08

State-Approved DAIT Providers



District Employment of DAIT Providers

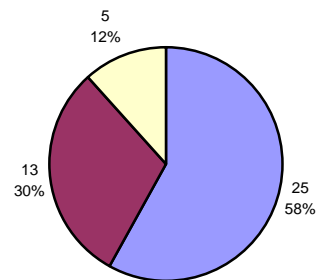
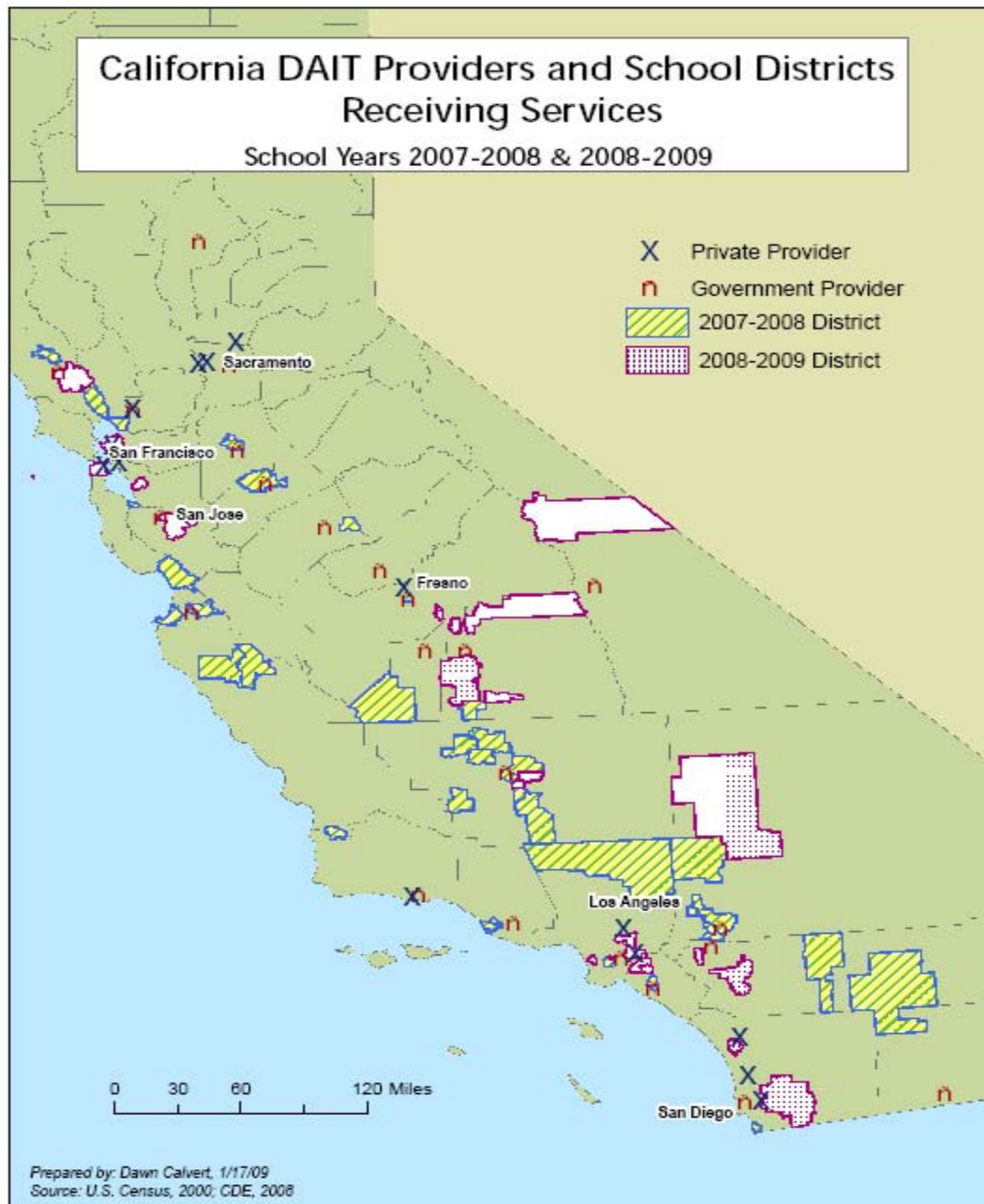


Figure reads: In the 2007-08 school year, 5 providers, or 13% of all DAIT providers approved by the state, were nonprofits. During the same year, 25 providers, or 58% of DAIT providers employed by districts, were governmental organizations.

Source: CEP interview data and California Department of Education, *Approved DAIT Providers*, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ti/daitproviders.asp>.

In addition to differing in their organizational structures, governmental and private providers vary in their geographic location. The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association's 11 regions were created to distribute services equitably across county offices. Private providers typically were created by individuals to serve a variety of educational needs in the state regardless of geography, although just one private provider reported coming into existence simply to provide DAIT services. As a result of these differences, it might be logical to assume that districts in more densely populated areas might have more DAIT providers (and especially more private providers) from which to choose. To test this theory, CEP created a map (see **figure 2**) showing the locations of the districts receiving DAIT services in 2007-08 and

Figure 2. Location of DAIT Providers and School Districts Receiving Services



2008-09 as well as the governmental and private DAIT providers. One provider (located in Massachusetts) is not included. Private providers were concentrated in urban areas such as San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Diego. The central part of the state, in contrast, had primarily governmental providers.

Despite the differences between private and governmental providers of DAIT, interviewees from both types of organizations said they hired outside consultants who were not full-time employees to work on DAIT teams. Often these employees were retired school district personnel who brought particular types of expertise to the team, such as former human resource directors who could help districts reorganize staff in schools.

RESULTS OF ASSISTANCE TO DISTRICTS IN CORRECTIVE ACTION IN 2007-08

Since districts began to be identified for improvement in 2004-05, no district in California has exited improvement, except by closing or reorganizing (such as our case study district Grant Joint Union High School District, which combined with neighboring elementary districts to form Twin Rivers Unified School District in 2008-09).

One way to measure the results of district corrective action is to examine how districts complied with state requirements. According to CDE records, 43 of the 44 districts in corrective action required to participate in DAIT in 2007-08 had needs assessments provided by DAIT teams. The needs assessment covered four areas: governance, fiscal resources, human resources, and curriculum and instruction alignment.

Table 3 shows the state's initial analysis of the percentages and numbers of DAIT providers that assessed each of these areas, as well as the percentages and numbers of districts that addressed a specific area by rewriting their improvement plan. Most areas were addressed in the needs assessment but not all areas were included in the districts' improvement plans. This may change in 2008-09, since passage of AB 519 in 2008 has mandated that districts adopt DAIT team recommendations unless excused from a recommendation through appeal to the state board of education.

Table 3. Results of Corrective Action Activities for DAIT Districts in 2007-08

Area of District Capacity	Number (Percentage) of Districts Assessed in This Area by DAIT Team	Number (Percentage) of Districts That Addressed This Area by Changing Their Improvement Plans
Governance	42 (98%)	36 (84%)
Fiscal	42 (98%)	37 (86%)
Human resources	39 (91%)	35 (81%)
Curriculum and instructional alignment	43 (100%)	42 (98%)

Table reads: In 2007-08, 42 districts, or 98% of districts participating in DAIT, were assessed in the area of governance, and 36 (84%) of these districts addressed governance in their improvement plans.

Source: CEP analysis of data from California Department of Education, November Board Meeting, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/ag/ag/main1108.asp>.

Restructuring at the District and School Level

In the fall and winter of 2008, CEP interviewed personnel from four California districts and nine public schools in restructuring to determine what had changed since we last did case studies in California about a year ago. The schools we studied included the following:

- Greenleaf Elementary, Cox Elementary, New Highland Elementary, and Sobrante Park Elementary in Oakland Unified School District
- Palm Tree Elementary and Yucca Elementary in Palmdale Elementary School District
- North Tahoe Middle School in Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District
- Grant High School and Martin Luther King Junior High School in Twin Rivers Unified School District (formerly in Grant Union High School District).

COMMON THEMES FROM DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING

Due to increases in AYP targets, at least one official in each district said restructuring schools were no longer aiming to meet AYP targets but to make NCLB's safe harbor provision, which allows a subgroup or school to make AYP if it decreases the percentage of students scoring below the proficient level by 10% or more from the previous year and meets other state benchmarks, such as attendance and graduation rates. "I doubt we will make AYP," noted Liz

Ozol, principal of New Highland in Oakland. “It would take quite a miracle. Our eyes are on safe harbor.” This seems reasonable, since California’s AYP targets are now rising by more than 10 percentage points each year.

In contrast to CEP’s past reports, which found that district and school officials were often unaware of federal funding for school improvement, officials in three of the four districts studied this year were quite knowledgeable about the state’s new grants to districts in corrective action. School principals in Palmdale and Tahoe-Truckee reported they were actively participating in either the DAIT process or in technical assistance, and both believed these efforts were positive for their schools. Principals in Twin Rivers were aware of the district corrective action funding and, to a certain degree, were disappointed that their schools could not benefit from these funds, but were relieved that the district was not in corrective action. Principals in Oakland (as of fall 2008) said they were not yet aware of how their district would use its corrective action funds.

As in past years, officials in all schools indicated they were building on past initiatives rather than starting from scratch. This approach took the form of using multiple strategies rather than relying on any single strategy, although the coherence of the strategies varied by school. Common elements appeared across schools. All of the schools had benchmark assessments that teachers used to make decisions about instruction, academic or leadership coaches, and before- or after-school tutoring for struggling students. Additional strategies varied by school. In addition, this year no district or school officials said they were replacing staff as an improvement strategy.

ADDRESSING MINOR OR ISOLATED PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS IN OAKLAND

Oakland Unified School District serves the city of Oakland in northern California. The district’s enrollment is diverse: 37% of the district’s 49,000 students are Latino, 36% are African American, and the rest are Asian and white. In addition, 30% are English language learners (ELLs), and 10% are students with disabilities. Demographics vary by school, with some schools serving the city’s more affluent “hill” neighborhoods and others serving very poor, high-minority neighborhoods in the “flatlands” between highways 880 and 580. Placed in state receivership in

June 2003 due to financial difficulties, Oakland has continued to face fiscal challenges, but enrollment has stabilized this year after substantial losses in previous years, district officials said.

Although Oakland students overall typically met state achievement targets, the district did not make AYP based on 2007-08 tests due to the performance of a number of subgroups. Across individual schools, student achievement varies: 12 of the district's 128 Title I schools are in restructuring planning, and 21 are in restructuring implementation. The district is in corrective action under NCLB, and the state rating system of these districts found that Oakland had "minor or isolated performance problems," the category that receives funding for school improvement but does not have to engage in the DAIT process.

The four Oakland schools that participated in this study are high-poverty, majority-minority schools. All have been in restructuring at one time.

- **Cox Elementary** became a charter school in 2005-06 but kept the previous school's restructuring status. Based on 2007-08 testing, the school made AYP in math due to safe harbor but not in ELA. Since 2003, the percentage of proficient students has increased by 2 percentage points in ELA and 8 percentage points in math.
- **Whittier Elementary** began to be phased out in 2007-08 when **Greenleaf Elementary** opened on the same campus. Whittier will close in 2009-10. Based on 2007-08 testing, Whittier made AYP in both math and ELA due to safe harbor. Since 2003, the school has increased the percentage of proficient students by 28 percentage points in ELA and math. Greenleaf's first year of testing was in 2007-08. The school made AYP in math but not in ELA.
- **New Highland Elementary** was created as a "new school" 2006-07 but kept the previous school's restructuring status. Based on 2007-08 testing, the school made AYP in math due to safe harbor but not in ELA. Since 2003, the percentage of proficient students has increased by 7 percentage points in ELA and 25 percentage points in math.

- **Sobrante Park Elementary** exited restructuring in 2006-07. Based on 2007-08 testing, the school made AYP in math and in ELA due to safe harbor. Since 2003, the school has increased the percentage of proficient students by 19 percentage points in ELA and 28 percentage points in math.

Principals interviewed in October for this study were not aware that the district had received \$3,050,000 for corrective action. The state legislature released the funds on September 23, and the state issued grant awards on September 28, 2008. In October, therefore, the district was still planning the use of the funds, said Chief Academic Officer Brad Stam. He noted that the funds were received after the start of the school year, making their use limited: “It’s too late to craft agreements to extend the school day or year, or to get high-quality coaches, or buy additional teachers. So, the most effective options are really taken off the table.” Funds are currently required to be expended by September 30, 2009. Stam also emphasized that paying for any additional staff with one-time funds is risky. Principals, however, did have items on their wish list if more funds were available, ranging from additional professional development to more tutoring. Network Officers (Oakland’s regional superintendents) and principals submitted proposals to the district to expend the funds in alignment with the district’s improvement plan.

Regardless of how the district spends its funds for corrective action, Stam noted a number of district initiatives he believed would help improve restructuring schools, including the following:

- A two-day school quality review conducted in a subset of restructuring schools by Cambridge Education, using a rubric designed specifically for Oakland that assesses the implementation of practices critical to school improvement
- The phasing out and closure of a number of restructuring schools where new schools have been opened on the same campus
- “Score cards” that rank each district school using a student performance metric similar to AYP, a growth metric similar to the state’s Achievement Performance Index, a value

added metric, an achievement gap metric, and other measures such as enrollment, and that provide more information about where schools need to improve

- Color coding of schools based on the score cards that labels most of the restructuring schools “red” and assigns a district-level Network Officer, who provides close support during the restructuring process and has veto power over the schools’ purchases if they are not aligned with the school improvement plan
- Coaches at most restructuring schools from a variety of sources, including Education Trust–West, Reading First, Performance Fact, and the district itself.

Stam noted that the district has also discontinued two school improvement practices used in the past. First, the district is curtailing new school creation. Stam said the district now has 39 new small schools and needed to focus on supporting those schools rather than creating more. Second, Stam said the district is no longer requiring or advocating replacing staff as a restructuring strategy: “In the past, while we’ve replaced staff, those staff have gone to other schools. So, what we’ve had is churn. If you have wave after wave of doing this reconstitution process, it can result in the dance of the lemons.”

In addition to district strategies, all four schools studied in Oakland were taking the following additional approaches to improving academics:

- Time dedicated to teacher collaboration
- Before- and/or after-school tutoring
- Benchmark assessments in ELA and/or math used to plan instruction and group students

Schools have also taken unique paths to improvement. For example, New Highland, which started as a new small school in 2006-07, has focused on improving the school climate. “It really does feel like a friendlier place here. I think kids feel included and happy to be here,” said Principal Liz Ozol. “This has been accomplished by consistently following the progressive steps of classroom management we have all agreed on as a faculty, as well as having a schoolwide emphasis on four core values: be kind, work hard, get smart and talk it out.” In addition, she

said, the school has an arts integration program in which teachers partner with local arts organizations to create active, highly motivating lessons for students.

Greenleaf, another new small school in Oakland, has taken steps to improve reading by focusing on data-driven instruction and by integrating bilingual and monolingual students during science and social studies instruction. The school has also reached out to parents through monthly meetings with a core group of parents, who help organize at least three meetings of parents by grade level. “We’re not saying, ‘Show up and bring us cupcakes,’” explained Principal Monica Thomas. Instead, the principal sees parents as teaching partners: “We’re saying ‘Here’s what we’re doing in the room to support your students. Here’s what you need to do at home.’”

In contrast to these two small schools that were created within the district, Cox restructured by becoming a charter school in 2005-06. As a charter school, Cox has non-unionized teachers and focuses on getting teachers to teach the core curriculum with fidelity. Part of this focus has included “walkthroughs” in which administrators conduct brief visits to classrooms to ensure that teachers are following the curriculum and to provide suggestions for improvement. In 2008-09, the school’s charter organization is working to calibrate these walkthroughs across the organizations’ three schools. “We go in a group of seven or eight administrators and try to all gauge what we saw and what kind of feedback we would give. I think is pretty neat because we can hone in on what we are looking at. It allows us to ‘get our stories straight,’” explained Principal Fernando Yanez.

As of 2006-07, Sobrante Park exited restructuring. Perhaps as a result, the school is focusing not just on general classroom instruction but particularly on catching students who are falling behind. To do this, the school kept its earlier start time (begun during restructuring) as well as an early morning tutoring time for struggling students. In 2007-08, the school also hired an intervention teacher who provides tutoring to small groups of struggling students during the regular school day. The approach worked so well that Principal Marco Franco hired an additional retired teacher to do interventions in 2008-09.

The 2008-09 school year also brought a focus on teaching reading comprehension to Sobrante Park. After examining the school's test scores, Franco said, "reading fluency was going through the roof, but everything else was kind of staying behind." After observing and talking with teachers, Franco said he discovered teachers did not have time to read all the companion stories in the school's reading curriculum and weren't able to ask in-depth comprehension questions. So, Franco said he used some leftover funds in the budget to pay teachers to read the books over the summer.

The budget for 2008-09 has left shortfalls that threaten some of the reforms at Sobrante Park. The district's Reading First grant was ended by the state, and enrollment at the school was down by 10 students. Franco had to let one teacher go and combine classes. The school also lost its security guard and suffered a break-in. Franco said he looked not only to the district's new funding for corrective action to address educational needs but also to the federal government: "I just hope the new President's going to give us more money to invest in education."

CORRECTIVE ACTION AND THE DAIT PROCESS IN PALMDALE

The Palmdale Elementary School District is about 67 miles north of the Los Angeles International Airport. While some residents commute to Los Angeles, the parents of many Palmdale students work in the Antelope Valley or at Edwards Air Force Base, about 50 miles away. About 71% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and 33% are ELLs. Ethnically 65% of the district's 22,000 students are Latino, and the rest are African American, white, and Asian.

Since 2003, the district has increased the percentages of students scoring at or above proficient but not enough to avoid entering corrective action in 2007-08. Fifteen of the district's 26 Title I schools are in restructuring. Similarly, Yucca Elementary, which participated in this study, has increased the percentage of proficient students by about 11 percentage points in ELA and 14 percentage points in math since 2003 but is in its eighth year of school improvement. Palm Tree Elementary, which also participated in this study, increased its percentage of proficient students

enough to exit restructuring in 2007-08. The school, however, did not make AYP based on 2007-08 testing in ELA for all students or in math for African American students and ELLs.

The state rating system placed Palmdale in the “moderate performance problems” category. The district contracted with Springboard Schools, a private organization that had provided professional development in Palmdale previously, to provide DAIT services. Overall, Palmdale officials said they were pleased with the DAIT process and the services provided by Springboard Schools.

In addition to the federal corrective actions, the DAIT recommendations gave the district many things to work on. Springboard School’s District Capacity Study resulted in quite a laundry list of recommendations, according to Melinda Jaggi, the district’s director of curriculum and instruction. “The recommendations are throughout all our departments,” Jaggi said. “It’s not just an educational services thing. There’s a human resources piece, a business office piece, and a variety of things that need to be done in each department.” Although the district has begun to implement the recommendations, Jaggi predicted, “we will not be done this year.”

The district was still deciding how to prioritize changes and how to spend the \$1.9 million it received from the state. “It’s a substantial amount of money,” Jaggi noted. “The difficulty, I believe, is that it all goes away the end of September 2009, so nothing can be a long-term expense.”

While the DAIT recommendations are targeted at the district level, Jaggi said she expects them to benefit schools in restructuring as well. “There are issues beyond schools’ control, like district policies and procedures, district systems. DAIT will address all of those,” she explained. “This is about increasing the district’s capacity and leadership as well and adjusting systems so that they’re more effective to bring about the results we need for student achievement in schools.”

Principals in Yucca Elementary and Palm Tree Elementary had positive views of DAIT and Springboard Schools. Kim Shaw, principal of Yucca, who serves on the district team that works with DAIT, said Springboard Schools is especially effective because it solicits input from

schools while also providing more accountability. “They get our opinions on different things. Personally, I’ve found DAIT to be a positive thing because they have all of us working in the same direction towards standards and things that we should all be doing to help kids.”

Springboard Schools is also providing professional development to leaders, which new principal Pamela Egbert of Palm Tree found especially helpful. About six principals are in a cohort that meets with a coach from Springboard Schools. “They’re very patient, they are completely non-judgmental, and it’s all about student achievement and how they can help me, the principal, work with my staff and my students in order to get us where we need to be,” Egbert said.

In addition to DAIT, the district is doing a number of things to improve schools in restructuring including Palm Tree and Yucca. These include the following:

- Benchmark assessments in ELA and math about every six weeks
- Daily tutoring by paraprofessionals for students struggling in reading
- Instructional coaches for teachers in reading through Reading First, a federal grant aimed at improving K-3 reading
- Weekly visits to schools by district cabinet members

Five elementary schools are also piloting Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), a program aimed at improving study skills. Jaggi said the district hopes to expand the program to all schools within the next five years.

The two elementary schools have a few unique strategies. Yucca closed one of its two computer labs and put the computers into the classrooms, where students will have greater access to them. The former lab space became a place for teachers to meet and examine schoolwide data. Palm Tree has an extended day with tutoring in ELA and math for students who are close to meeting benchmarks on state tests.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN TAHOE-TRUCKEE

The Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District is located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, about 100 miles northeast of Sacramento and 35 miles west of Reno, Nevada. The district includes the north shore and some of the west shore of Lake Tahoe and encompasses more than 720 square miles. Most (66%) of its 4,000 students are white, 30% are Latino, and the rest are African American and Asian. About a fourth (24%) are English language learners, and 13% are students with disabilities.

Since 2002-03 testing, the district has increased the percentages of proficient students but did not make AYP based on 2007-08 testing due to the performance of ELLs and students with disabilities in ELA and math, as well as the performance of Latino and low-income students in ELA. One of the district's five Title I schools is in its third year of NCLB improvement, one is in its fourth year, and one is officially in "fifth year" status (as high as NCLB goes) but has actually been in improvement for seven years. North Tahoe Middle School, in its fifth year of improvement, participated in this study. The district itself entered corrective action in 2007-08 and was categorized by the state as having "minor or isolated performance problems."

As a result of corrective action, Education Service Director David Curry said the district had to rewrite part of its improvement plan and contract with an agency for technical assistance. The district chose to work with the Placer County Office of Education (PCOE). Part of the work is to continue and intensify efforts begun over the past few years, Curry said. "We've maintained a pretty strong relationship with them." These efforts include creating common assessments in ELA and math for every grade that can be given multiple times a year and analyzing data from those assessments.

Teresa Rensch, principal of North Tahoe Middle School, also reported having a close relationship with PCOE and said the organization coached the leadership of the school and assisted in training school staff in the new assessments and analysis. The results, however, were not yet perfect. "Last year's work was a step in the right direction for us," Rensch said, "But, obviously we didn't have all the pieces in play yet."

The overall percentage of students proficient in ELA decreased at the school for the second year in a row. For 2007-08, the drop was about 4 percentage points, although the school has gained 6 percentage points since 2002-03 testing in both ELA and math. Math percentages remained relatively steady from 2006-07 to 2007-08. The school declined by just 0.4 percentage point.

Both Curry and Rensch attributed the decline to a new system for tracking student achievement and said the system worked for the subset of students who were followed in 2007-08 but not for the rest of the school. With the help of PCOE, the school created “learning logs” for students who were below proficient on state tests at the beginning of the year. These logs tracked what students learned and the interventions the school provided when they had not learned the material, Curry explained.

When end-of-year state tests showed a decline in the overall percentage proficient, Curry and Rensch said they went to work analyzing the data and found that the students who had been below proficient mostly moved up, but an even larger number of students who started the year proficient moved down. “We discovered we did a piece of it really well. It was really effective for students with learning logs. But the kids that were proficient dropped,” Rensch explained. She said for 2008-09 the school is focusing on all students: “When one group’s getting retaught, we have enrichment for the kids who got it.”

The 2008-09 school year also saw the continuation of a number of district and school improvement efforts at North Tahoe, including the following:

- Full-time coaches in ELA and math as well as a half-time coach in ELL instruction
- A half day of professional development and teacher collaboration time every Wednesday
- An extra period of ELA or math for struggling students while other students have electives

The school’s efforts are supported by a districtwide “Collaborative Inquiry” initiative, which is funded for three years with a grant from the S.H. Cowell Foundation and matching funds from the district. The district is in the second year of the grant. “Last year was training. This year is

real implementation,” Curry noted, adding that the training taught staff to participate in discussions, identify student learning problems, and formulate strategies to address learning problems. In addition to PCOE’s help with data analysis, Curry noted that the Center of Data Collaboration and Results was also assisting the district with data analysis and training for this initiative.

Both Rensch and Curry reported that the staff collaboration inquiry was going well. One difficulty for the district, however, has been filling all the coaching positions. One position went unfilled in 2007-08, and one was still vacant for 2008-09 at the time of this study. “There are qualified people out there, even within our district, but coaxing them to leave the classroom and become a coach is difficult,” Curry said.

MERGING DISTRICTS TO BECOME TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED DISTRICT

In 2008-09, Grant Joint Union High School District, which has participated in CEP’s study of California restructuring since 2005-06, merged with three nearby elementary school districts to become Twin Rivers Unified District. Local media reports attributed the merger in part to a sense that better communication between the elementary and secondary schools would help improve student achievement (Rosenhall, 2007).

Serving over 30,000 students, Twin Rivers District encompasses 120 square miles in northern Sacramento County and is 37% white, 27% Latino, 17% African American, 14% Asian, and the rest other ethnicities. Because of its incorporation as a new school district, Twin Rivers must write a new district improvement plan but is not in corrective action. “For the most part we’re glad that we did not get that status,” said Torie Flournoy England, the district’s director of program improvement. However, she noted that the downside of not being in district corrective action is not receiving state funding due to that status.

Schools within the district do retain their NCLB status. In Twin Rivers, two schools are in restructuring planning, two just entered restructuring, and five have continued in restructuring for multiple years. Of the four former districts that comprise Twin Rivers, Grant had the largest

number of schools in restructuring (four in all), while Del Paso Elementary had three, North Sacramento Elementary two, and Rio Linda Elementary none.

Grant High School, in its eighth year of improvement, and Martin Luther King (MLK) Junior High, in its seventh, both participated in this study. Grant did not make AYP due to the performance of all students in ELA and subgroups in math, specifically African American and Latino students. Since 2003, the school has increased the percentages of proficient students but has frequently had difficulty making AYP due to subgroups. Percentages of African American students making AYP, for example, fell 5 percentage points in ELA and 4 in math last year. Similarly, MLK saw drops in the percentages of African American students making AYP last year. The school overall did not meet AYP targets in either ELA or math, although its percentages proficient have increased in both ELA and math since 2003.

Officials at both schools noted that the district was in transition but that some strategies for restructuring schools from the previous administration had continued. These included quarterly benchmark assessments and a district employee who worked at the school on school improvement. The focus of the district employee, however, changed from a leadership coach to an instructional coach who works primarily with teachers. The two schools also had unique initiatives to improve student achievement.

At Grant, Principal Craig Murray said the school had to work hard to continue weekly assessments that drive instructional decisions as well as an after-school tutoring program called Launching Educational and Academic Performance (LEAP). “It’s been a struggle this year because funding is getting tighter and tighter,” Murray said. He noted that LEAP started later in the year in 2008-09.

Murray also said the school started a new initiative in 2008-09 in response to AYP results, in particular the drop in African American scores. “We were kind of shocked and horrified when we saw that,” he said. The new initiative started with professional development in “culturally responsive teaching,” a method that tailors lessons to students by making them culturally

relevant and respectful. Unfortunately, Murray explained, he has not had funds to pay for teacher coaching in this area.

MLK has also kept many of the strategies from its past efforts to improve student achievement. This year the school has added an honors class for students at or above benchmarks. The continuing efforts include the following:

- Extra periods of math and ELA for struggling students in lieu of electives and sometimes also in lieu of science and social studies
- After-school tutoring
- A technology focus

In 2007-08, the school added a “thin client” to every desk top, so that all students had access to computers in most classes and switched to many computer-based text books through a grant from Qualified Zone Academic Bond Technology. “We went through a lot of learning last year,” said Assistant Principal Latonya Derbigny-Boarders. “Our teachers are now extremely fluid and flexible with all this new information.”

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