

California County Superintendents Educational Services Association
Briefing Paper for
Getting from Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening
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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 project¹ 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.¹

¹ 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 Neededⁱⁱ: \$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 48th in the country; we are 49th in teachers-per-pupil, 50th in guidance counselors, and 51st in librarians.² 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 Neededⁱⁱⁱ: \$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

² "Comparing California", Ed-Data Partnership, March 6, 2007. 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 mathematics³. We recommend that all teachers have ongoing access to standards-aligned professional development in the subjects they are teaching.

Investment Needed^{iv}: \$250 million

Education Leadership

California ranks 48th 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 participating⁴. 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.

³ June 2005 report to the Legislature

⁴ 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^v: \$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^{vi}: \$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^{vii} 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^{viii}: \$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.

Endnotes

ⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

^{iv} 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.

^v 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.

^{vi} 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.

^{vii} 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>

^{viii} 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.