

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.

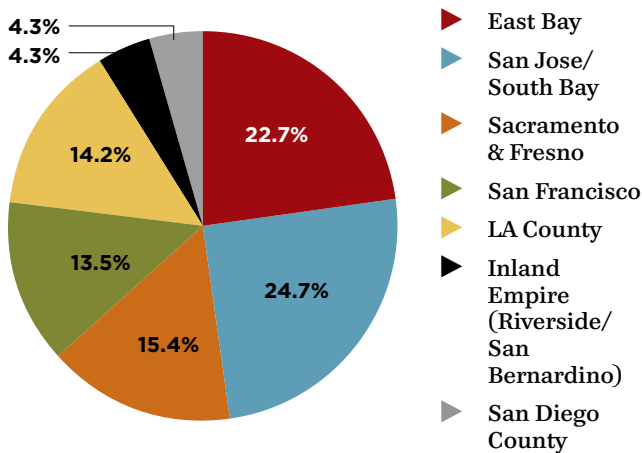
In a parallel effort, Parents and Students for Great Schools, a collaboration of California ACORN, Californians for Justice (CFJ), PICO California and Public Advocates, spent the second half of the 2006-2007 school year conducting their own study of the educational priorities of students, parents and 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.

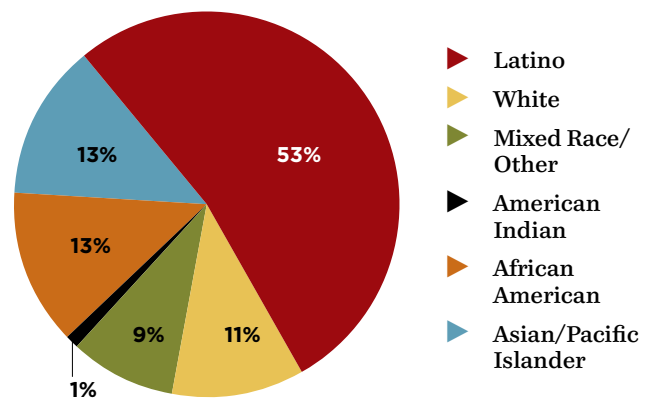
Members of participating organizations administered surveys in a variety of venues, including churches,

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**

