

# Students First

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*Renewing Hope for California's Future*



Governor's Committee on Education Excellence

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*November 2007*



We dedicate this report to the memory of our friend and colleague **Lew Solmon**, whose commitment to excellence inspired us and whose wit warmed our hearts.

## Our Approach

In April 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger established The Governor's Committee on Education Excellence "to analyze current impediments to excellence, explore ideas and best practices relevant to California, and recommend changes and reforms. ..." The Committee was specifically charged to focus on four inter-related topics: governance, finance, teacher recruitment and retention, and administrator preparation and retention.

For over two years, the Committee has held meetings across the state and spoken with numerous stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers from California and throughout the nation to learn from their ideas and experience. The Committee also has benefited from an extensive array of research on education, prior studies

of the California education system, and reports from other states and cities seeking to dramatically reform their school systems. The breadth of these inputs demonstrated the magnitude of the challenges facing our education system and extended the scope of our inquiry.

Despite the remarkable diversity among our members, our Committee has achieved this report by consensus; remarkably, there has been little philosophical difference among members regarding our purpose, our principles, or the bases of our recommendations. We believe that this report sets the foundation for a system of schools that will meet the needs of Californians today and into the future, with the expectation that the system will continue to improve to meet the needs of future generations.

## The Committee

Ted Mitchell (*Chairman*), *President and CEO*, New Schools Venture Fund

Dede Alpert (*Vice Chair*), Nielson & Merksamer LLP; State Senator (retired)

Arlene Ackerman, *Christian Johnson Professor*, Columbia University

Russlynn Ali, *Executive Director*, The Education Trust-West

Jeffrey Camp, *Education Chairman*, Full Circle Fund

Ernesto Cortes, *Southwest Regional Director*, Industrial Areas Foundation

David Gordon, *Superintendent*, Sacramento County Office of Education

Eric Hanushek, *Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow in Education*, Hoover Institution

Thomas Henry, *President and CEO*, Education Management and Assistance Corporation

Sherry Lansing, *CEO*, The Sherry Lansing Foundation

Peter Mehas, *Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (retired)*

Irene Oropeza-Enriquez, *Principal*, Prairie Elementary School, Woodland

Mark Rosenbaum, *Legal Director*, ACLU Southern California

Lewis Solmon, *President*, National Institute for Excellence in Teaching

Sau-Lim (Lance) Tsang, *Board Member*, Oakland Unity High School

Randolph Ward, *San Diego County Superintendent of Schools*

John White, *Principal*, Mulholland Middle School, Los Angeles

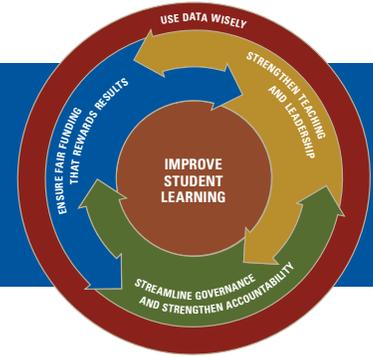
Caprice Young, *President and CEO*, California Charter Schools Association

Stephen Blake, *Executive Director*

Robert Manwaring, *Policy Director*

*Our Committee gratefully acknowledges the generous support of The Broad Foundation, The Doris and Donald Fisher Fund, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation, without which we could not have conducted this inquiry and offered these recommendations with such independence.*

*Our Committee is grateful for the myriad contributions to its work made by Jennifer Anastasoff, Laura Brown, Rebecca Chamow, Samantha Dobbins Tran, Jessica Garton, Scott Hill, Liliana Loofbourow, Christine Marra, Linda Murchison, Richard Seder, Jules Stein, Thomas Timar, and Deborah Woo; for the editorial and design services of KSA-Plus Communications; and for the translation services of Transcend. Our Committee expresses special gratitude to Christine Beckman, Donna Anderson, and Susan Burke, whose contributions to this effort have been extraordinary.*



# Executive Summary

Adopting the recommendations in this report will take a combination of common sense and courage.

Common sense says that the learning needs of students should come first, whether it's making policy or teaching math. California's diverse student population cannot be served by a one-size-fits-all model. Students come to school with differential learning needs that require different levels of resources to help prepare them for college and careers. Those closest to the students — principals, working closely with teacher leaders — should get to make key decisions that impact student learning, such as who should teach, how to allocate resources, and how to organize the school day.

working conditions, as well as opportunities to grow on the job, work with their peers, and be rewarded for professional growth and student success.

Common sense says that Sacramento should stay the course with the high academic standards it has set for each student, but should avoid micromanaging how funds are spent in classrooms; the current hodge-podge of categorical programs, each with its own red tape and personnel, is a recipe for inefficiency.

Common sense says that we ought to make decisions based on what works, not what is fashionable or politically advantageous. That means having modified assessments and an accurate data system that can monitor the year-to-year progress of every student.

California's current system turns common sense on its head. Too often, students are an afterthought. How else to explain a 100,000-section Education Code in which the words "student achievement" rarely appear? How else to explain how such a system can survive and, in fact, grow when less than one-quarter of students statewide are mastering reading, math, and other subjects? How else to explain our tolerating some high schools where, year after year, less than half of 9th-graders ultimately earn a diploma, and even fewer actually are prepared to succeed in college or on the job?

"California will spend \$50 billion on K–14 education this year. ... What do we get for that money? We get many wonderful and dedicated teachers. We get many children who are doing terrific. But \$50 billion, and we still have 30 percent of high school students not graduating. That is a human disaster. Fifty-billion dollars, and we still have hundreds of schools that are failing. That is an institutional disaster. Fifty-billion dollars, and the majority of our students cannot even perform at their grade level. That is an educational disaster."

— **Governor Schwarzenegger**,  
*January 2005 State of the State Address*

Common sense says that we ought to have a system that rewards success, provides assistance to improve, and is intolerant of failure. The way to attract and retain the best and brightest into teaching and school leadership is to treat them like professionals, with safe and productive

## The Public Understands

- 84%** Believe that better use of existing funds would lead to higher quality.
- 71%** Believe that school districts in lower-income areas should receive more resources.
- 65%** Believe that additional state funding would lead to higher quality.
- 64%** Believe that increases in teacher pay should be based on merit, including student performance, rather than seniority.
- 53%** Believe that California ranks below average (39 percent) or near the bottom (14 percent) compared to other states on test scores.
- 52%** Believe that the quality of California K–12 education is a big problem. Teacher quality is at the top of the list that needs improvement.

Source: Public Policy Institute of California statewide surveys, 2005 and 2007

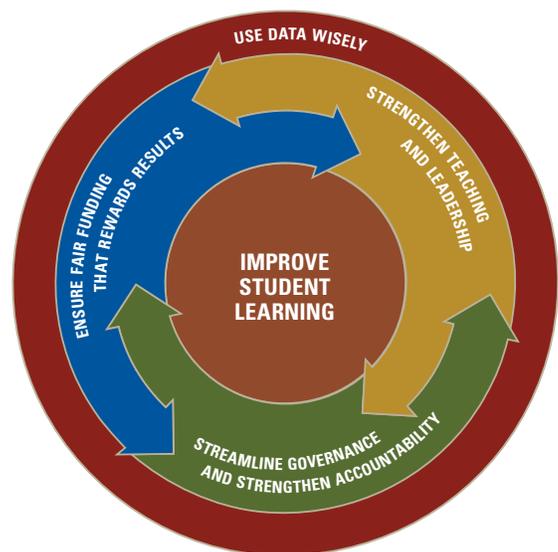
A student-centered system does not force good teachers and principals to work around the rules to get results. Such a system does not pay all teachers and principals the same, even though, year after year, some get better results than others. A student-centered system tries to replicate the success of high performers.

It is said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. It is time to say “enough” and to fundamentally rethink how we have organized ourselves to educate the 6.3 million children whose future depends on our effectiveness. It is time to replace a system that gets in the way of effective teaching and successful learning with one that supports our best educators and their students. Specifically, the Committee recommends action on four inter-related priorities and a fifth key foundation. (See *Four Inter-Related Priorities* on next page.) Taken together, this

systemic overhaul will reduce the achievement gap and create a constantly escalating cycle of **continuous improvement** in our education system. Therefore, it is essential that our proposed reforms be considered as a coherent, comprehensive package. Cherry-picking proposals could make the current intolerable situation even worse. For instance, simply spending more money on ineffective programs without measuring results and rewarding success will exacerbate inefficiencies. Giving principals and teachers more authority without first ensuring they are well-prepared to wield it effectively would be irresponsible.

This is where our political leaders will have to demonstrate uncommon courage. Everyone professes to put students first. But collectively, the results suggest otherwise. Each of the state’s top-down education programs has a constituency that may feel threatened by the kinds of sweeping changes we propose. To them, we say, stand by common sense and research. The time has come for student interest to trump adult self-interest.

Common sense and courage — a potent combination that can transform our flawed system, prepare our children for the opportunities ahead, and in the process, allow our state to reclaim its proud legacy as an education leader.



# Four Inter-Related Priorities

## 1. Strengthen teaching and leadership.

- Make teaching and education leadership true professions:
  - Give teachers advanced career opportunities without leaving the classroom, including mentoring and site leadership roles.
  - Have peers and leaders use professional standards and performance outcomes to evaluate teachers and principals. Let good teaching and leadership drive out bad.
  - Target professional development to school priorities and student needs.
  - Grant professional compensation based in part on student-performance gains, skills, and responsibilities.
- Deregulate professional preparation.
- Close the gap in teacher and principal effectiveness among schools.

## 2. Ensure fair funding that rewards results.

- Invest more resources in students, particularly in those at the lowest end of the achievement gap who have been least well-served by the system in the past.
- Deregulate finance, and link local control to outcome-based accountability:
  - Use student-centered budgeting to get additional funds to students with the greatest needs:
    - Drive fiscal accounting to school level to ensure equity.
    - Correct incentives to ensure students' progress is not held back.
  - Eliminate almost all categorical program mandates; allow local choice to drive program selection.
- Create local incentives to reward teaching and leadership excellence.

## 3. Streamline governance and strengthen accountability.

- Refocus accountability on *improving outcomes* and meeting proficiency targets for all students and subgroups.
- Enhance assessments to measure growth of student achievement.
- Expand local control to increase efficiency: Combine resource flexibility with greater accountability, and encourage greater school autonomy.

- Have county offices provide support to address district needs and state-delegated roles.
- Create a school inspection system to identify problems and support improvement.
- Empower county superintendents through their established service regions to enforce district accountability and intervention.
- Enhance sanctions for school failures, with zero-tolerance intervention.
- Designate the Superintendent of Public Instruction as the independent guarantor of success, overseeing accountability (post-2010):
  - Expand and manage data/evaluation systems.
- Create an independent data commission until the Superintendent role changes.
- Have the Secretary of Education manage policy, program, and funding (post-2010):
  - Have the California Department of Education support instructional delivery and stop monitoring process compliance.
- Have the State Board of Education become advisory to the Governor and Secretary.
- Empower parents to help improve learning quality, and give them real choices.

## 4. Use data wisely.

- Make performance, program, and financial information transparent, and provide it to parents, educators, communities, and the state.
- Create comprehensive data systems that link student, teacher, school, district, and state data, with capacity to link to college, work, and social services data.
- Create capacity to analyze data and programs and to support districts' needs:
  - Evaluate programs to ensure effectiveness before continuing them.

## Plus, create a foundation for continuous improvement.

- Prepare our children for success from the earliest age:
  - Implement mixed-delivery, statewide preschool for all 3- to 4-year-olds in poverty.
  - Make kindergarten full-day and change entry date.

## Governor's Committee on Education Excellence

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