

Fingertip Facts

“The longest stretch

on earth, it is

sometimes said, is the

distance between

education

policymakers and

what goes on in the

heads of kids.”

– Peter Schrag, author
and columnist

Harper’s Magazine,
September 2007

The 16,500-member Association of California School Administrators strives to ensure all students have the essential tools and knowledge needed to excel. California schools educate a growing number of minority and immigrant children who speak little or no English. More students than ever before come to school hungry and in need of health and dental care, and many have had no preschool experience. At the same time, our global high-tech economy requires more specialized skills than ever before. Our school accountability systems - both state and national – require *all* schools to bring *all* students to the highest levels.

There are a handful of facts most stakeholders know about California’s public education system:

Fact: California has some of the most rigorous academic standards in the country, yet California also has the largest class sizes in the country and California’s K-12 spending is below the national average.

Fact: Parents and voters continuously rate increasing funding for education as one of their top spending priorities. Californians also know the current education finance system is deeply flawed and is not making the most effective use of its current resources.

Fact: Highly prescriptive finance and governance policies thwart local schools and districts in their efforts to meet the needs of their students and promote higher achievement.

Fact: School leaders, especially site principals, believe that more efficient and flexible policies and targeted resources would help their efforts to support and evaluate teachers and to ensure their own success as educational leaders.

Fact: ACSA believes that specific improvements in four priority areas – narrowing the achievement gap; building capacity among teachers and administrators; measuring results through reliable data on student achievement; and providing adequate, stable and ongoing funding – will greatly aid our success for students.

A Look at How Additional Resources Would Benefit Students

ACSA recently asked California superintendents to respond to the following question:

“If you were given more financial resources to spend at your discretion, where would that money be spent?”

Here are some answers from the field:

Narrowing the Achievement Gap

“Directly in the classroom... Overall improvements to the access to technology for our students... Inception/creation of a preschool program for our families.”

“...Educational technology to help with intervention efforts, professional development for staff and administration, campus safety officers, librarians...”

“Additional funding should/would be designated for additional intervention and support. However, we need the money for intervention but without all the strings attached by the current state programs.”

“We would add counselors for elementary and middle school levels, psychologists, nurses, teacher specialists to address our most needy students in the areas of English language arts and math.”

“We would provide a more robust technology support program to assist teachers in utilizing technology to support student achievement.”

Building Capacity among Teachers and Administrators

“Significantly increase incentives to become an educator in places where educators are difficult to hire...”

“We would like to increase the amount of teaching time available to our certificated staff. Because of the amount of instruction time necessary to address all of the instructional standards, it is very difficult to complete the task. We would like to increase the amount of instructional time per day and the length of the instructional year.”

“More financial discretion would be spent on leadership teams, collaboration time with teachers, assisting in meeting the NLCB challenges.”

“We need teacher coaches to work with teachers as they seek to address the needs of the significant subgroups within our district. I would look to extend the school day and the school year.”

Measuring Results through Reliable Data on Student Achievement

“To provide targeted, data-driven, research-based individualized intervention to students sooner rather than later so that they could get the additional help and support they need early in their schooling.”

“The current STAR assessments are designed and deployed without any consideration regarding their validity for English Language Learners. SB385 was an attempt to improve this issue. It died on the governor’s desk in 2006. An assessment strategy that accurately shows what ELLs know and gives them credit for their academic growth is needed.”

“If given additional resources we would combine them with QEIA funds to assist student learning in 14 of our most struggling schools.”

Providing Adequate, Stable and Ongoing Funding

“Adequate nursing support, adequate number of counselors, technology support, special education teachers, occupational therapists, child development staff, adequate remedial and support programs, adequate facilities and returning programs that have been cut in recent years, such as arts, music, drama...”

“Improve the funding, staffing and intensity levels for after-school intervention and summer enrichment/remediation programs. Expand summer professional development programs for new and tenured teachers. Increase the funding for visual and performing arts programs. Increase funding for library-media teachers. Step-up and accelerate the professional development related to upcoming adoption and implementation of new science and math curriculum. Add staffing/funding for foreign language instruction and PE resource teacher positions.”

“Investing in school leadership must also be a priority, as leadership is the second highest contributing factor to what students learn at school.”

Sample Letter to the Editor #1

Dear Editor:

Recent education studies have brought attention to the need for efficiency, equity and adequate funding for all our public schools and students. Many stakeholders know that California has the most rigorous academic standards in the country, yet California also has the largest class sizes in the country and California's K-12 spending is below the national average. Parents and voters continuously rate increasing funding for education as one of their top spending priorities.

We know that the current finance system is deeply flawed and is not making the most effective use of its current resources. We know that highly prescriptive finance and governance policies thwart local schools and districts in their efforts to meet the needs of their students and promote higher achievement. Administrators, especially school principals, believe that more efficient and flexible policies and targeted resources would help their efforts to support and evaluate teachers and to ensure their own success as educational leaders.

The Association of California School Administrators' standpoint is clear: Education reforms must be accompanied by adequate, efficient, stable and ongoing resources to achieve education excellence.

Maximum resources should be directed to public schools so school districts and educators have the resources they need to improve student learning. Investing in school leadership must also be a priority, as leadership is the second highest contributing factor to what students learn at school.

County, district and school site educational leaders are great resources for ideas and stand ready to promote positive policy change. The members of the Association of California School Administrators, along with the rest of the education community, are ready to work with the governor and the Legislature to ensure that all schools get the adequate, stable and ongoing funding they need to help students reach their highest potential.

In order to advance the dialogue surrounding the needs for California's schools, we believe policymakers and other education stakeholders should have a better understanding of how California's schools are financed and governed. We welcome the opportunity to have an open discussion with your editorial board about the nature of the current education system, what efforts must be made and potential solutions. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact _____.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to the Editor #2

Dear Editor:

School leaders in California have made a clear choice. Together we are advancing the dialogue and we are proactively offering recommendations for action. We've made the choice to be proactive. We agree that the evolution of our public education system depends on adequate, efficient, stable and ongoing funding to help students achieve the high academic standards we set for them. We also agree that specific improvements in four priority areas will lead to success for students.

California schools educate a growing number of minority and immigrant children who speak little or no English. More students than ever before come to school hungry and in need of health and dental care, and many have had no preschool experience. At the same time, our global high-tech economy requires more specialized skills than ever before. Our school accountability systems – both state and national – require all schools to bring all students to the highest levels.

We are committed to our schools and the students we serve. We urge the governor, lawmakers, policy leaders and all stakeholders in the public education system to join us in focusing on the following priorities: narrowing the achievement gap; building capacity among teachers and administrators; measuring results through reliable data on student achievement; and providing adequate, stable and ongoing funding.

Sincerely,

Student Achievement Growth in California

What's Happened in this Age of Accountability?

In 2007 there were 600,000 more students rated proficient and above than there were in 2003, despite the fact that there were 8,138 fewer students. Significant improvement was made by all student subgroups.

English Language Arts

Subgroup	2003	2007	% Increase	Change in number of students
African American	118,456	158,614	+33.9	-4.2
American Indian	16,817	20,245	+20.4	-6.0
Asian	281,456	353,786	+25.7	+2.9
Filipino	79,191	103,267	+30.4	+5.8
Hispanic	579,070	924,754	+59.7	+6.7
Pacific Islander	13,498	17,382	+28.8	-2/7
White	1,134,900	1,219,317	+7.4	-9.3

Math

Subgroup	2003	2007	% Increase	Change in number of students
African American	108,622	150,853	+38.9	-4.2
American Indian	16,678	20,345	+22.0	-6.0
Asian	330,733	396,664	+19.9	+2.9
Filipino	81,439	108,449	+33.2	+5.8
Hispanic	709,396	1,097,216	+54.7	+6.7
Pacific Islander	14,607	18,741	+28.3	-2.7
White	1,110,746	1,190,873	+8.1	-9.3

- Increase in number of students proficient or advanced in English language arts from 2003 to 2007: +573,978
- Increase in number of students proficient or advanced in math from 2003 to 2007: +619,879

State Ranking Change

Elementary Schools

API Score

	300	400	500	600	700	800	900
1999	1	1	3	5	7	9	10
2006	1	1	1	1	3	7	10

Middle Schools

API Score

	300	400	500	600	700	800	900
1999		1	2	5	7	9	10
2006		1	1	1	5	8	10

High Schools

API Score

	300	400	500	600	700	800	900
1999	1	1	2	5	8	10	10
2006		1	1	2	5	9	10

Source of all data: www.ed-data.ca.gov

ACSA Policy Recommendation/Brief for Getting from Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening

ACSA will be participating in an October 19 conference organized by EdSource at which individuals and organizations have been invited to share education reform ideas in several areas. ACSA is submitting the following policy brief in the area of personnel and leadership.

Brief Problem Statement

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

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

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

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

Discussion of Policy Issues, Options, and Recommendations

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

The link between what school leaders do and student achievement has been the subject of an enormous amount of educational research. Hallinger and Heck (1998) summarized such research in a mega-study of the work related to principals' effectiveness, and concluded that "the general pattern of results drawn from this review support the belief that principals exercise a measurable though indirect effect on school effectiveness and student achievement. . . . [This effect] is statistically significant, and, we assert, meaningful" (p. 186).

A subsequent mega-study by Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) also summarizes rigorous research on the influence of school leaders on student achievement. The study led the authors to conclude: "A highly effective school leader can have a dramatic influence on the overall academic achievement of students"

(p. 10). Their report cites several leadership responsibilities that are accompanied by associated practices that describe exactly what a principal must do to promote student achievement. These studies, as well as many others, provide clear evidence regarding the importance of specific skills, abilities, and behaviors that leaders must exhibit in order to be effective. Thus, a critical element for policy development must be to ensure that school leaders have the opportunities to expand their repertoire of skills and time to practice what they learn.

Michael Fullan comments on this dilemma: “The irony is that as the change in expectations heightens, the *principalship* itself has become overloaded in a way that makes it impossible to fulfill the promise of widespread, sustained reform” (Fullan, 2007, p. 156). This perspective is affirmed in a study by Cooley and Shen (2003), in which they surveyed more than 4,000 secondary principals from across the nation. Cooley and Shen conclude:

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

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

1. Restructuring of Working Conditions:

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

The need to increase California’s administrator to student ratios is obvious from the data. However, models that provide classified school “manager” positions to manage and coordinate the many time-consuming day-to-day tasks, such as maintenance, grounds, facilities, materials ordering, security, etc., that are now done in many schools by a single certificated principal can free the time of the trained instructional leader to influence, supervise and evaluate instructional practices.

The previous research citations acknowledge that time spent evaluating data, supporting teachers, and leading collaborative discussions aimed at pedagogical improvements will reap achievement benefits when done by a skilled and knowledgeable instructional leader. In parallel models with increased administrative allocations, central office administrators can provide opportunities to also mentor, develop and coach site principals, creating the organizational capacity for internal sustainability. Providing time for principals to hone their own skills by creating “principals in training” positions for novice or even seasoned principals can remove them from day-to-day responsibilities while demanding increased aptitudes in those best practices used to attain robust student achievement. Such mentoring models rejuvenate the professional and promote leadership retention.

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

It is our belief that much of this necessary work could be completed by a classified school manager or other administrator. A few school districts, such as Los Altos School District, have funded such a position for schools over a specific size. In Los Altos the number is 500 students. Los Altos School District, one of the highest achieving school districts in the state with a district base API of 949 in 2005, understands that its principals must be instructional leaders. Its large parcel tax and bond measure allow district funds to be used to support this school manager position. The school manager position allows the principal to spend much more time ensuring high quality instruction.

Our schools serving the lowest achieving students rarely have the funds to support such a position. New monies should be set aside at a state level so that districts, at their discretion, can support the leadership of instruction by creating classified school managers to coordinate many of the everyday issues that must now be dealt with by the school principal.

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

2. Broader Opportunities for Capacity Building:

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

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

According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Ferrandino, 2007), 22 states currently have legislated support for leadership coaching, with many mandating a coaching-based induction program for new principals. Supporting this observation, Darling Hammond and Orphanos (2007) reported, “Many states are introducing requirements for full-time administrative internships under the direct supervision of veteran principals as part of their overhaul of administrator preparation. ... A number of states have developed innovative funding streams for administrator internships that address issues of both supply and quality” (p. 43).

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

Additionally, Darling Hammond and Orphanos noted that:

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

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

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

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

Clearly, the capacity for this type of leadership cannot be fully developed by reading books or by attending workshops, trainings, or graduate classes. Certainly, principals need a foundational understanding of best practices, but true leadership is not about administering programs or installing and managing new structures. Today, effective school leadership must be centered on making connections between people, practice, and student learning; building trust; and effectively exerting influence to change and improve the way educators work with one another in the service of children and for the sake of learning. This type of leadership can only be developed through on-site, of-the-moment, reality-based, on-the-job experience with real people and their unique sets of resources, challenges, background histories, and cultures.

Preparation for and processing of these experiences is greatly enhanced if guided, shared, and reflected upon with a highly qualified, trained, and certified leadership coach. Research demonstrates that principals who receive coaching not only "are more engaged in instructional leadership, they actually are spending more time on instructional issues and are addressing them with more skill than unsupported principals" (Bloom, 2003).

The development of professional networks or purposeful learning communities is seen as a key ingredient of school improvement. Elmore (2007) has observed that "the network model is designed to provide a setting where school leaders can work together in a structured way on issues of instructional practice that are directly relevant to their work, developing their understanding and skill around practices of

improvement” (p. 22). Fullan (2007) has pointed out that “the starting point for working toward a solution [for maximizing student learning] is the sobering realization that it cannot be done *unless each and every teacher is learning every day*. Personal learning in a collective enterprise is the *sine qua non* of large-scale success” (p. 153).

Leading the collaboration of these networks or professional learning communities is a talent requiring time, specific skills, and tremendous knowledge. Developing the capacity of school and district leaders in the art and science of leading such networks is essential to sustain school reform.

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

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

Summary of Research/Evidence Supporting Recommendations

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

Furthermore, California ranks near the bottom in state support for programs whose goal is to increase the capacity of school and district leaders (Darling Hammond & Orphanos, 2007). In particular, two approaches are recommended for increasing the knowledge and skills of those who lead our schools. One, to provide skilled coaches to support on-site, reality-based professional learning experiences. The other is to create programs in which leaders can develop the unique skills required to create purposeful learning communities in which teachers and administrators, as well as students, are learning every day.

Expert practitioners and researchers (Elmore, 2007), (Fullan, 2005), (Garmston & Wellman, 1999) remind us that leading such communities requires time, specific skills, and tremendous knowledge, and that such networks are essential if school reform is to be sustained. The needs of California’s children are vast. Providing both the number of leaders as well as increasing their capacity to meet those needs must be in the forefront of California’s educational policies.

References

- Bloom, G., Castagna, C. & Warren, B. (May/June 2003). More than Mentors: Principal Coaching. *Leadership Magazine*, 32(5), 20-23. Sacramento, CA: Association of California School Administrators.
- Cooley, V. E. & Shen, J. (2003). School accountability and professional job responsibilities: A perspective from secondary principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, 87(634), 10-25.
- Darling Hammond, L., & Orphanos, S. (2007). *Leadership development in California*: Stanford University.
- Elmore, R. F. (2007). Professional networks and school improvement. *The School Administrator*, 64(4), 20-24.
- Ferrandino, V. (2007). *Report to the Delegate Assembly*. Paper presented at the National Association of Elementary School Principals, Seattle.
- Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (Fourth ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fuller, B., Loeb, S., Arshan, N., Chen, A., & Yi, S. (2007). *California principals' resources: acquisition, deployment and barriers*: University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University.
- Garmston, R., & Wellman, B. M. (1999). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. R. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9(2), 157-191.
- Leithwood, K. A., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.
- Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wheatley, M. (1992). *Leadership and the new science: Learning about organizations from an orderly universe*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.



Report to the Little Hoover Commission

Topic: Educational Accountability

By Richard Bray, Superintendent, Tustin Unified School District
President, ACSA Superintendency Council

Question #1: How has the role of the district changed under the accountability/intervention system?

Response: The role of district has evolved, along with tremendous changes in expectations and responsibilities thrust on teachers and principals. Before the accountability movement teachers were paid to teach lessons. It was clearly the student's job to learn the material presented, and the teacher gave chapter tests and quizzes to give students and parents feedback on how well the student was doing. That has completely changed. Now, teachers are paid to assure student learning. The teacher now gives frequent quizzes and assessments to determine what to reteach, and to whom. Each child is expected to master everything.

Not that many years ago, principals managed their schools. Now they continue to manage the school, but serve as highly effective instructional leaders. District leadership has had to learn and teach instructional leadership, using data to drive instructional decisions, teaching to mastery, differentiating instruction, collaboration, and aligning what is taught to what is tested. Districts have also had to learn to be both open and selective to new instructional programs and strategies.

We realized early on that the great truth is that if you do the same thing in the same way, you will get the same result. If the result is not acceptable, then you have to look at doing things differently. We looked at best practices that are getting results, as well as trying research-based strategies that have shown promise. We have found that teachers and principals can only handle so much change at one time. The district must continually determine what changes would produce the most positive results to increasing student learning. Once implemented, they must be monitored to assure we are getting the result desired. The change process is complex, and handling focused change over time has become the highest priority for the superintendent and district office staff.

Society's expectation of K-12 education has changed dramatically—from most students going directly into the world of work after high school to the new expectation that every high school graduate be prepared for college, and most students needing some additional post-secondary training and education. Every student is expected to graduate from high school, even though up through the 1950s only half the students finished high school and only a quarter of them went on to college. Now, in my middle class district, 99 percent finished high school and pass the CAHSEE, and 93 percent go on to college.

Question #2: How are districts reorganizing internally to meet these needs?

Response: Most districts have increased their Curriculum & Instruction division (sometimes also called Educational Services) to meet the need for increased staff development, regular districtwide assessments (benchmark tests), use of data to drive instruction, districtwide pacing plans, collaboration (both vertical and horizontal) and to share and implement best instructional practices.

Larger districts have a Chief Academic Officer to lead this division. Reading, math, science and writing coaches have been hired. Assessment positions have been added to develop benchmark tests and disaggregate data for teacher use.

Districts must also provide a clear common vision to all schools and keep everyone focused on that vision over time. To close the achievement gap, research and experience have shown that the only thing that really works is uniformly high expectations of every student, on every assignment, in every subject. Every child achieving is a vision that must be the consistent focus of the entire district, with leadership on the part of the school board, superintendent, district staff and principals.

Question #3: What are the challenges of implementing interventions and sanctions?

Response: School Assistance Intervention Teams (SAIT) and District Assistance Intervention Teams (DAIT) from the outside have been helpful, especially in smaller districts that have fewer resources at the district level.

However, the short timeline for results is often not realistic, given the demands of the change process. Efforts are further hampered by continual staff turnover, so you are always retraining new staff and never get to full implementation.

Some interventions are one-size-fits-all, which just don't work for some.

Sanctions are punitive and not at all motivating when you are making steady progress on the API (especially with English language learners and special education students), but falling just short of ever-increasing AYP targets. NCLB requires that every child be "proficient" or above by 2014 (college entrance/above grade level) in California. Sanctions can be devastating to hard working staff and present the school as "failing" to the community in spite of the great progress on AYP. You get no credit at all for growth short of the benchmarks.

Having to allow students to transfer out of a program improvement school promotes "white flight" and the transfer of better students.

At the district level there are 38 indicators—38 ways to fail making AYP. Miss any one of the 38 benchmarks and you are a "failing district" and are on track for sanctions. This makes no sense, is unfair and hurts, not helps, districts.

CDE modeling shows that all districts in California will eventually be in program improvement because they will miss AYP by not making one or more of the 38 indicators. There

is no regular public school in California where every student scores proficient or above. This is the hard target and we must be there by 2014; however, it's hopeless. Almost a third of California's 1,000 districts are now in program improvement and will soon face one or more of the seven deadly sanctions—even though their students are doing better every year.

Other states will not face having all of their districts being “failing” Program Improvement schools and districts because they established a more realistic definition of “proficient.” Most states adopted “proficient” levels that, with work, most students, including special education and English learners, could reasonably be expected to achieve. We, on the other hand, set our level of proficient at well above grade level and equivalent to U.C. entrance. We are labeled a failing school or district if we can't get every student to that level by 2014. The target bar rises 11 percent each year between now and 2014, when it hits 100 percent of students at a “proficient” level. While NCLB has problems, California has caused the most profound problem by its unrealistic definition of “proficient.”

Using deciles to separate schools and make value judgments on “good” (decile 7, 8, 9) and “bad” (decile 1, 2, 3) schools is fallacious and just makes no sense. By simply dividing the schools in the state into 10 groups by test scores each year in reality tells you very little. In fact, the schools labeled decile 1, 2 or 3 in 2000 have all made great progress, and their scores today using the 2000 decile cut points would put them in deciles 4, 5 or 6. However, they are still listed as decile 1, 2, and 3 schools because all of the other schools in the state have also improved greatly. So people feel their children are attending a poor school that has not progressed at all because it is still a decile 1, 2 or 3 school. By definition, 30 percent of California schools will always be listed as decile 1, 2 or 3—and its probably the same 30 percent, because the rising tide of student achievement is raising all the boats. Using deciles gives schools no credit for increased student achievement. Deciles should never be used to identify “good” and “bad” schools.

Question #4: Ideas for improvement.

Response: With high stakes, standards-based tests, the key is to closely align what is taught to what is tested. This often has the effect of narrowing the breath of subject matter and is a concern for teachers. Students need to learn about many topics that are not tested. Yet the enormous number of tested standards makes it difficult—probably impossible—to have enough time for students to master all tested standards.

Whatever the link between assessment and sanctions, credit should be given for continuous improvement and multiple measures should be taken into consideration, not just one test. Stair-step growth over time is the hallmark of a successful district and should be recognized.

Sanctions should be employed very selectively and only in situations where the school or district is showing years of no student achievement growth and no real desire or ability to address

the variables that they do control.

Schools should take advantage of Response to Intervention (RtI), which was put into the reauthorization of IDEA by Congress. Almost 300 schools (mostly elementary, with some middle schools) are employing an RtI model in California and it is being successfully implemented all across the country. RtI allows you to restructure your school to use the regular education and special education staff to meet the needs of all kids, whether or not they have been labeled special education. It is a very effective early intervention plan that costs nothing, uses the same texts and instructional materials and really works. It benefits all students, remedial to gifted.

Everyone wants to close the achievement gap and have every child succeed to his or her maximum ability. Good instructional practices and programs benefit all kids, and have therefore not narrowed the gap. Research and experience have shown that the only way to close the achievement gap is universally high expectations—every student doing his or her best work on every assignment, in every subject. I’m sure you can remember a teacher you had growing up who required your very best on every assignment and simply would not settle for anything less. Imagine every teacher doing that. Imagine how good kids would feel about themselves and the pride of knowing that every assignment turned in was their best work. Kids rise to our level of expectation. “Strive for perfection and only settle for excellence” is the motto of many California superintendents, principals and teachers. That said, high expectations alone will not close the gap. There are gaps in societal conditions, such as poverty, crime and access to health care, that must be closed before we can create the conditions where all children can reach those high expectations.

Money is a challenge that limits the range of possible solutions. A longer school day and school year would give teachers the gift of time to effectively teach to mastery the huge number of required (and tested) state standards.

The cost of textbooks has far out stripped the state textbook money provided. Only about half of our textbook needs are met through state textbook funds.

There is more time needed for focused, sustained staff development. Attending one workshop seldom makes a difference in a teacher’s instructional performance. Providing ongoing, multi-part, focused training over the course of a year does make a difference. But this takes more than the current three available staff development days.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you. I look forward to talking with you on October 25.

Sincerely,

Richard Bray

Superintendent

Tustin Unified School District