

The Evolution to Educational Excellence

Our students.... Our schools.... Our future

An Overview

School leaders in California are advancing the dialogue about the **true cost of educational excellence** and we are proactively offering recommendations for action. 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.

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.**

Narrowing the Achievement Gap – A Focus on Outcomes

Recent reform efforts should be given time to work and the emphasis should be on student achievement.

During the last decade, California’s public education system has transitioned to a comprehensive, standards-based, continuous improvement system. Student achievement and school success should be measured by growth over time.

Schools must have the resources to help students achieve results. Districts throughout the state report that preschool and before- and after-school programs, access to technology, more counselors and librarians, and more adequate staffing across the board will lead to more success for students. Poverty, mobility and second language also bring significant needs and challenges. While significant progress is being made to narrow the achievement gap and to increase literacy levels, increased resources for support and intervention strategies will improve opportunities for learning.

A well-rounded curriculum is essential. In the transition to a standards-based educational system, many creative opportunities that motivate students to succeed and connect to schools have been shortchanged and/or dismantled. Career technical education programs, civics, physical education, music and the arts must be part of the learning environment so students reach their true educational and life potential.

Student, school and district achievement must be measurable over time with results provided in a timely fashion. California’s current system of ranking schools does not acknowledge the tremendous improvement almost all schools and all districts have made. It focuses on negative sanctions, rather than building capacity to achieve higher results. The state’s emphasis should be on improvements not sanctions and the Academic Performance Index should be enhanced to reflect individual student growth over time.

Building Capacity among Teachers and Administrators

Quality teaching is essential to student success. Recruiting, training and retaining high quality teachers, and building capacity among those who are compassionate and want to make a difference in the lives of students, must be priorities. Providing competitive salaries for all teachers, providing support for collaboration and learning among teachers and principals, and offering greater incentives for quality teachers to work in high poverty and high need schools will help ensure student success.

Effective leadership influences student learning. Surveys show the single most important working condition for teachers is a strong leader. Adequately staffing leadership in our schools, providing support through vice principal posts, reducing paperwork and red tape, and streamlining redundant processes will allow principals to focus as instructional leaders and on results. Professional support also is a priority as a well-trained and coached administrator can make even the most challenging schools attractive places to work. Investing in school leaders will attract teachers into schools that need the most help.

Emphasis must be placed on the role of the principal. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among factors that influence student learning. California ranks at the bottom of the nation in the number of staff to students and the number of administrators to teachers. Resources and coaching for school leaders will help develop leadership skills and provide principals, vice principals and others the support needed to help teachers improve instruction and increase student achievement.

Building central office capacity must be a priority. Instructional leaders are critical to ensuring students can perform successfully in our rigorous, standards-based system. Central offices should be provided adequate staff and staff development and training so they are fully equipped to help school sites improve student achievement.

Measuring Results through Reliable Data on Student Achievement

State and local data systems currently don't measure up. Multiple measures – not a single test – must be used to measure progress. Plus many classroom teachers now lack access to training and the data required to enhance instruction.

Understanding how to interpret data can help all educators improve student achievement. All stakeholders should know how data helps measure growth and target necessary interventions. Staff development and training must occur for teachers and administrators to use data efficiently and effectively.

Individual student progress should be accurately measured over time. California's accountability system limits its focus to cohorts of students, rather than assessing individual student progress over time. The only way to truly assess and meet the needs for student success is to follow the same student's progress as he/she moves up by grade level and compare how that student is performing each year to previous years.

Providing Adequate, Efficient, Stable and Ongoing Funding

California's existing school finance structure does not align with its educational goals. Experts including the Fordham Foundation (one of the nation's leading proponents of rigorous academic standards), the Public Policy Institute of California, EdSource and researchers at Stanford University all confirm that California's K-12 academic and performance standards are among the most challenging and the best in the nation.

Proposition 98 does guarantee schools minimum funding, but minimum funding simply won't do. The recent *"Getting Down to Facts"* reports show that an additional \$30 billion would have been necessary in 2004-05 to ensure the opportunity for essentially all students to meet academically rigorous content standards and performance standards in all major subject areas. The same reports note that levels of spending in California are among the lowest in the nation.

Resources to support teachers and school administrators meet the needs of all students is critical. All schools must be adequately staffed at the leadership level, in the classrooms and in support services. Plus, teachers and school administrators must be trained in proven methods to ensure the special learning needs of all student groups are met.