

A photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, a young girl with dark hair, wearing an orange t-shirt, is smiling and raising her right hand. Behind her, a boy in a red and blue shirt is looking down at his work. In the background, another student is raising their hand. The classroom has a chalkboard with writing, including "September 6, 1620" and "food, guns, nets, pots, sta. sts".

# CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Report of Superintendent Jack O'Connell's  
California P-16 Council

January 2008

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## CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES

TRUSTEE PROFESSOR  
CSU Chancellor '91-'98

### **A MESSAGE FROM THE CALIFORNIA P-16 COUNCIL** **Barry Munitz, Ph.D., Chair**

A year ago, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell directed his P-16 Council to undertake a most complicated and crucial responsibility for the benefit of all California public school students and their families. The assemblage of education, business, and community leaders was asked to examine strategies for closing the achievement gap in California, and instructed to pay particular attention to socioeconomic and ethnic gaps that are so damaging and painful for all concerned.

All agreed it was to be a task of extraordinary complexity, especially the daunting challenge of reaching consensus — indeed unanimity — on a series of core recommendations. Having the members of this council, who have worked with and for every possible constituency in the educational and socioeconomic system, reach complete agreement on the underlying assumptions related to this topic, as well as the key strategies for addressing its resolution, speaks emphatically to the insight, the experience, and the courage of its membership.

The Council acknowledged the ongoing work of those throughout the country who are also addressing this issue — from their underlying research to their practical innovations — and has leaned upon and learned from them wherever relevant for California. Members had considerable respect for the work undertaken by the Governor's Committee on Educational Excellence and look forward to a continuing alliance with the Governor. While California appears to be entering another period of serious financial stringency, the report notes carefully that not all of the council recommendations require new money, many of them could be realized with reallocation, and some are not based upon financial issues.

We have been privileged to serve Jack O'Connell in this capacity. Superintendent O'Connell has shown both courage and leadership in taking on the critical issue of closing California's pernicious achievement gap, and we as a council stand ready to assist and advise him and his superb staff in every way possible to continue this crucial work.

It is the goal and obligation of all involved to accomplish as much as possible, as rapidly as possible. With continued focus and commitment, this problem, which is currently eroding the vital fabric of our social system, will be actively addressed and ultimately resolved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Munitz", with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Barry Munitz**

*Chair, California P-16 Council*

Trustee Professor, California State University, Los Angeles



## Executive Summary

### A Framework for Closing California's Academic Achievement Gap

Access to high-quality educational experiences is the right of every student and the responsibility of the state. Today, the State of California has not lived up to this commitment for all students, particularly poor, racial/ethnic minority students; English learners; and students with disabilities. This need not be.

For many years, there has been a cry for a public education system that gives *all* students a chance at a more hopeful and more desirable future than the present. This report is dedicated to ensuring that all students are able to learn to their highest potential and sets forth an initiative to close the achievement gap. The initiative directly focuses on California's students and their entitlement to an equitable and rigorous education no matter their ethnic, social, or economic background.

The report highlights the work completed to date by the California P-16 (Pre-kindergarten through Higher Education) Council convened by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell *"to develop, implement, and sustain a specific, ambitious plan that holds the State of California accountable for creating the conditions necessary for closing the achievement gap."* Development of the plan is appropriately the work of the Council because closing California's pernicious achievement gap will take the efforts of everyone—the prekindergarten community, the school community from kindergarten to grade twelve, higher education, business, government, and philanthropy—working together toward a shared goal.

That mission, at its core, is about *doing what is right, not what is easy*. And although the challenge of educating *all* students to high standards is daunting, the means for facing that challenge are within our reach ... if we have the will, if we maintain a firm resolve.

## Why This Matters

Making schools work for all students, regardless of their background, condition, or circumstances, is an imperative for the State of California. The reasons are simple and straightforward. A strong education system ensures:

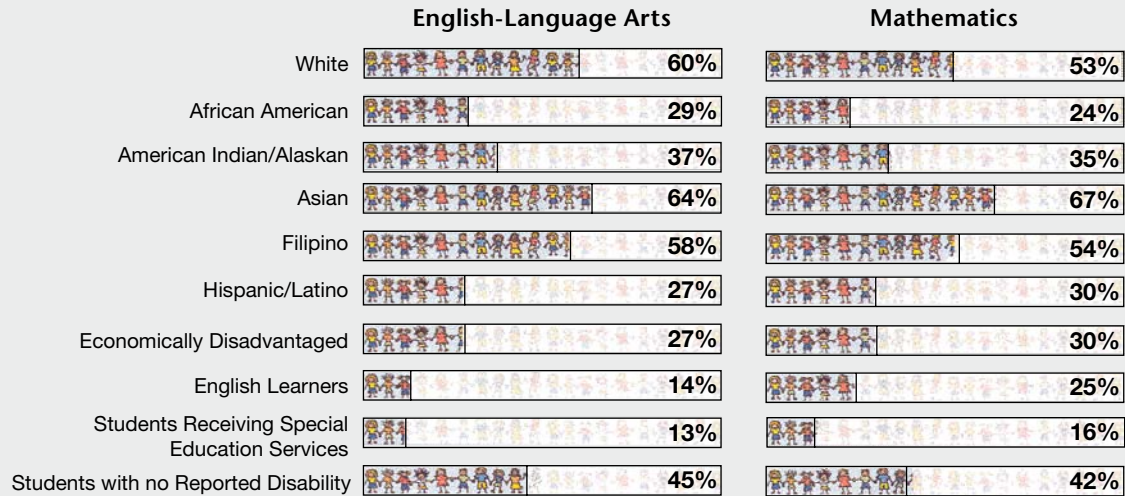
- Quality of life for Californians
- Economic growth and a competitive advantage for California
- Viability of a diverse, pluralistic, and democratic society to power California's prosperity

Each of these benefits depends on one condition: well-educated citizens. Strong public schools, where all students learn at high levels, remains society's best investment for producing well-educated citizens. California still has a long way to go in this regard.

Today, huge disparities in achievement exist among California's student sub-groups. For instance:

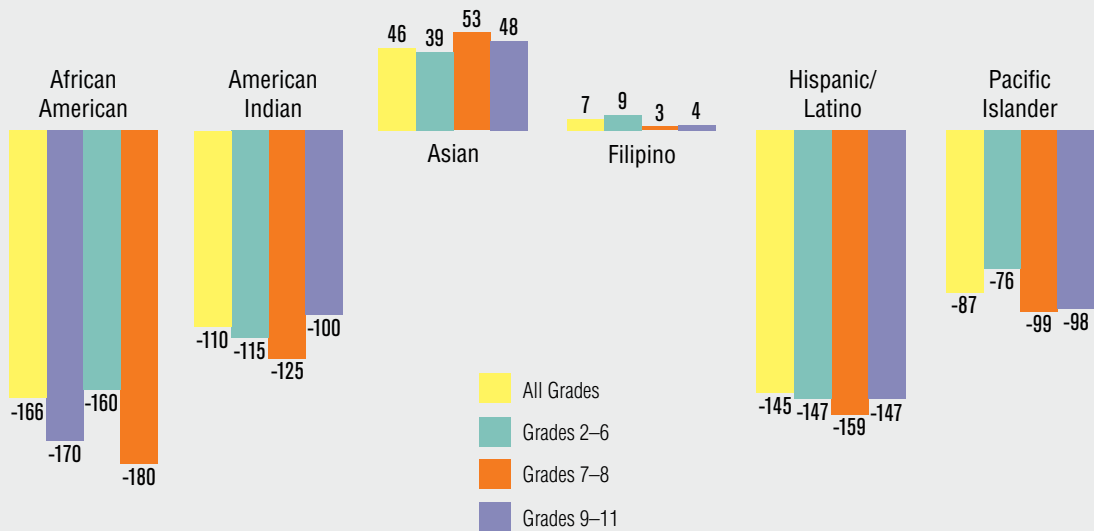
- About 12 of every 20 white students in grades two through eleven were proficient in English-language arts on the 2006 statewide test compared with fewer than 6 of every 20 African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, or economically disadvantaged students.
- Although nearly two-thirds of Asian students and more than half of white students were proficient in mathematics in 2006, only about 5 of every 20 African American students, 6 of every 20 Hispanic/Latino students, and about 3 of every 20 special education students met that performance standard (Figure 1).
- The 2006 Academic Performance Index (API) of African American, American Indian, Hispanic/Latino, and Pacific Islander students is significantly lower than the API for white and Asian students at every level: elementary, middle, and high school. Latino/Hispanic elementary students had an API 147 points *lower* than their white counterparts. At the middle school level, the API for African American students was 180 points *lower* than for white students. And at the high school level, American Indian and Pacific Islander students each had an API about 100 points *lower* than white students (Figure 2).

Figure 1  
**Achievement Gap among California's Student Subgroups:  
 Relative Proportions of Students Scoring Proficient  
 and Above on the California Standards Test**



(Source: California 2006 Standardized Testing and Reporting [STAR] Program)

Figure 2  
**Academic Achievement Gap in California**



2006 Base API	All Grades	Grades 2-6	Grades 7-8	Grades 9-11
White (not of Hispanic origin)	801	837	803	759

Base: 2006 Academic Performance Index (API) for White Students

Although California maintains some of the highest standards in the nation for what students are expected to know and be able to do, its schools are significantly underfunded. For instance, *Education Week's* "Quality Counts 2008" reports the following statistics:

- Although California has the most challenging student population in the nation, per pupil spending is a full \$1,892 below the national average when adjusted for regional cost of living.
- California spends \$5,137 below New York and \$5,171 below New Jersey. A mere 3 percent of the state's students attend schools in districts where per pupil expenditures are at or above the national average, compared with 37 percent in Louisiana, 16 percent in Florida, and an extraordinary 95 percent in Maryland.

The state can no longer ignore the fact that major segments of the next generation continue to fall short of their potential. Quite simply, the achievement gap among student subgroups is a threat to their future and to the future economic health and security of California and of this nation. This need not be.

That is why the call to action by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell matters. It challenges and mobilizes California to live up to its obligation: **ensuring that every student is given an equal opportunity to live up to his or her potential.**

### **Underlying Causes and Proposed Solutions**

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Council started with the premise that the major factors inhibiting successful learning for all students can be grouped into four main themes.

1. **Access**, or the extent to which all students have equitable access to basic conditions, such as qualified, effective teachers; rigorous, curriculum based on the state academic content standards; "safety nets" and accelerated interventions.
2. **Culture and Climate**, or the extent to which the learning environment is safe, promotes a sense of belonging, and fosters strong, positive relationships among students, among school staff and between the school and home/community.
3. **Expectations**, or the extent to which a *culture of excellence* exists for students and adults alike, so that a common, high standard is the norm for all students, and getting all of them to meet those high standards is a responsibility embraced by the school community.
4. **Strategies**, or the extent to which evidence-based or promising teaching, leadership, and organizational practices are employed by practitioners at all

levels in areas such as delivery of standards-aligned instructional programs, standards of professional practice, needs-based allocation of resources, collegial accountability and collaboration, articulation across grade spans, and leadership development.

Based on research conducted by the Council and other partners involved in this project, the following recommendations have been proposed to address the achievement gap among student subgroups.

## ACCESS

### **Recommendation 1: Provide High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs**

An educational head start in the early years yields huge payoffs in academic success in future years for all students, especially for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Educators continually comment that too many students enter kindergarten poorly prepared to start formal school.

Across many California communities, there is a lack of access to quality prekindergarten learning experiences for students from low-income communities, students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and other underrepresented students. Building quality programs and then expanding access to those programs is critical to narrowing the achievement gap for all students.

### **Recommendation 2: Better Align Educational Systems from Prekindergarten to College**

Graduation from high school ought to be viewed as preparation for success at the postsecondary level. Access to learning that is enriching and academically challenging is critical to all students, but it is particularly imperative for poor students and students of color. For large numbers of students, however, our kindergarten through grade twelve system does not provide adequate preparation for success at the next level; many of them require remediation prior to full entry into college-level course work or are underprepared to immediately enter the world of work. The misalignment of expectations for a high school graduate and the needs of the workforce and higher education institutions make the transition difficult for many students and nearly impossible for others. California can do better.

Closing the gap is going to take unprecedented collaboration between all segments of the business community, higher education and the K–12 system. The Council, therefore, recommends that the state align the K–12 system with higher education systems and the current needs of the workforce to promote better articulation amongst all stakeholders.



**Recommendation 3: Develop Partnerships to Close the Achievement Gap**

Connecting schools with educational organizations, city and county agencies, faith-based organizations, parent groups, and businesses is necessary to foster partnerships that will support a well-defined student support system. Such partnerships recognize that students have needs outside the classroom that, if unmet, can significantly and adversely affect their ability to learn. Breaking down barriers and creating partnerships throughout California is an important step toward implementing a consistent approach to a high-quality and inclusive educational program.

**CULTURE AND CLIMATE****Recommendation 4: Provide Culturally Relevant Professional Development for All School Personnel**

Learning occurs within the context of the values, beliefs, and rituals of the school community and the larger society. This is a necessary and potentially beneficial factor in creating strong schools—provided the school culture and climate reflect and are responsive to the diverse racial, cultural backgrounds, and needs of its student populations. This is not always the case; students of color often feel alienated from the norms and behaviors of the school culture or put off by educational practices that “do not reflect my background and where I come from.” To communicate and do an effective job of teaching, California’s educators need to have a cultural understanding of themselves, the students they teach, and the communities that house them.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a key step in addressing the lack of connection between scholars and educators. California needs to develop a comprehensive, culturally relevant and responsive strategy for educators that will help them to become the kind of educator who can teach any student effectively.

**Recommendation 5: Conduct a Climate Survey**

Data, when used wisely, inform continuous improvement of teaching, leadership, and organizational practices. A climate survey is a powerful tool for assessing the “organizational health” of a school and can be used to extend policies and practices that work for all students or to eliminate those that disaffect certain groups of students and parents. The survey will provide impartial judgments regarding

the quality of a school's climate and culture. Insights from the survey can be used to expand awareness and to initiate future actions.

Conducting a climate survey should not be a burden for schools and districts. An effort should be made to build on two complementary surveys currently in use: the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) for students and the California School Climate Survey (CSCS) for school staff. Both surveys may be used as a means of understanding the educational experience of underperforming students of color.

## EXPECTATIONS

### **Recommendation 6: Augment Accountability System**

Accountability and incentives motivate performance and strengthen a focus on positive results for students. California's current accountability system, the Academic Performance Index (API), is an outcome-based system that uses assessment results to measure the success of schools. The API, which includes annual schoolwide and subgroup growth targets, has focused attention on the needs of underperforming student populations. Now is the time to extend the measure to ensure the state is offering incentives and rewarding schools and districts for implementing strategies to close the achievement gap.

A key component of augmenting the accountability system would be the development of an Achievement Gap Intervention Index. Such an index, separate and distinct from the current API, would provide for recognition of schools and districts that are working to close the achievement gap. They may be using strategies such as the distribution of highly effective teachers, strong professional development, leadership enhancement, parental involvement, and community and business partnerships. The Achievement Gap Intervention Index would allow for a more immediate measure of progress made by schools and districts in educating all students to high standards.

### **Recommendation 7: Model Rigor**

The expectations for student learning and achievement and the standards for rigor vary widely in spite of the statewide content standards for most academic subjects. Sometimes, the expectations are based on the student population or community demographics; at other times, inconsistencies in oversight at the local level or in resource allocation result in *de facto* inequities.

The state needs to define more clearly what constitutes a rigorous program for students. Specific suggestions include development of an online "anchor" bank to

serve as a resource for every educator in the state. This depository of standards-aligned assignments would provide examples of relevant curricular breadth and depth. It also would provide best practices and refer users to professional development opportunities on how to incorporate rigor into all curricular areas, including career technical education programs.

### **Recommendation 8: Focus on Academic Rigor**

Many school districts have begun to increase the number of courses that meet the state's a–g requirements. Such courses help prepare students for successful entry into college. However, enrollment and completion rates in the a–g courses for underperforming student subgroups are significantly lower than the rates for their white and Asian counterparts. There are legitimate debates on whether a–g requirements, in particular, are appropriate only for college-bound students or whether they can equally serve those students who are taking career or technical classes. California needs a more consistent way of recognizing rigorous courses regardless of whether one uses the a–g framework or not.

California can improve these conditions by defining consistent and ubiquitous academic rigor to ensure that the state's high school graduates receive an education that prepares them for success at the next level, whether it is higher education or the workforce.

### **Recommendation 9: Improve the Awards System**

California should align its recognition programs to address the focus on improving academic achievement for all students. Current recognition programs do not incorporate criteria on how schools and districts have performed in regard to closing the achievement gap. This practice leads to confusion in the school and in the community when schools are recognized for their “success” and then designated a “needs improvement” status for lack of academic progress.

## **STRATEGIES**

### **Recommendation 10: Create a Robust Information System**

If schools are to be responsive to the learning needs of every student, then an information system is needed that will enable educators and their partners to track the progress of each student.

California must design, develop, and implement a system that collects rich, robust, high-quality information that meets the needs of educators, districts, and state-level policymakers. Such a system will enhance efforts to create a culture

of data examination for the improvement of academic achievement. This type of system is vital in determining the services, programs, and interventions that students need. Specifically, California should supplement the existing CALPADS and CALTIDES data-collection systems.

### **Recommendation 11: Provide Professional Development on the Use of Data**

Although the state collects a multitude of data reports, no purpose is served if those who need the information to develop appropriate instructional strategies are unprepared to use the data. Developing a robust information system, as noted in the previous recommendation, does not guarantee any measure of success without focused professional development.

California must design, develop, and implement coherent and relevant professional development in the areas of data collection, analysis, and interpretation for all educators that addresses the needs of students. The state must make significant investments in human capital and capacity-building at all levels of the educational system. The California Department of Education, in collaboration with higher education, the research community, and representative organizations, should develop a comprehensive training model, complete with themes, strands, and syllabi for local implementation.

### **Recommendation 12: Share Successful Practices**

Educators need reliable and vetted resources proven to be effective with the students in their classrooms. Furthermore, these resources need to be readily available, understandable, and applicable to the classroom.

California must collect and disseminate a high-quality, comprehensive body of knowledge, expertise, resources, and research on effective and successful practices that are proven or are promising in closing the achievement gap. California must develop a system in which sound educational solutions to common issues can be shared by educators in a collaborative format. This system should not only share this knowledge with educators but should also model *how* to apply the expertise, resources, and research in their classrooms. California must create a well-articulated and coherent statewide information-sharing system to address the achievement gap.

### **Recommendation 13: Fully Implement the California K–12 High-Speed Network**

California must fully fund the High-Speed Network (HSN) to ensure that every school, district, and county office of education has access to the level of technology necessary to assist students in academic need. The HSN, a state funded

program, provides Internet connectivity that gives educators, students, and staff access to a reliable high-speed network with high-quality online resources. Currently, 87 percent of school districts and 81 percent of all schools are connected to the HSN. Now is the time to connect the remaining schools and districts, particularly because a significant percentage of the not-yet-connected schools and districts are in Program Improvement. This goal of 100 percent connectivity can be accomplished through a fully funded HSN project.

#### **Recommendation 14: Create Opportunities for School District Flexibility**

Closing the achievement gap at the local level often requires creativity in developing the right mix of conditions and supports for students, teachers, and school administrators. A “one-size-fits-all” funding structure is not conducive to the needs of all schools and districts or to the goal of closing the achievement gap. California needs to provide flexibility in the use of education funds based on the academic improvement of students and the professional development of staff. Greater flexibility in the use of categorical funds, in particular, will substantially help with closing the achievement gap.

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Closing the achievement gap will be a long-term effort by all involved. This report and its recommendations are only the beginning of that journey. The state must make a long-term commitment to achieve success in this endeavor. Clearly, there is no “silver bullet” that holds a single solution, and the proposed recommendations are just part of the overall solution. However, the work must begin now in order for that dream to become a reality.

This initiative, championed by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell, represents a new focus placed squarely on what the *state* can do better to close the gap. The California Department of Education cannot—and must not—do this alone. It must mobilize other state agencies, schools, districts, county offices of education, business, higher education institutions, parents, and communities **in creating the conditions necessary for success of these recommendations and, consequently, for closing the achievement gap.** All of California’s students deserve to graduate from high school ready for college, career, and life.

Noted philosopher Teilhard de Chardin once said that a most powerful force for moving a society forward as one is “a great hope held in common.” The hope that this initiative articulates—for students, for citizens, for the state—holds within it the potential to propel the State of California to heights never before attained.

Closing the achievement gap will not be easy, but doing so is critical for California’s future.



## **Council's Report on Closing the Achievement Gap**

This report is dedicated to ensuring that all students are able to learn to their highest potential. The California P-16 (Prekindergarten through Higher Education) Council members' basic underlying assumption for this report was the importance of a clear initiative to close the achievement gap. The initiative directly focuses on California's students and their entitlement to an equitable and rigorous education that will prepare each of them for future circumstances no matter their ethnic, social, or economic background.

The achievement gap in California is a problem with a long history and complex causes. It will require deliberate, focused, and concerted actions to close it. No challenge is more urgent and no obligation greater than securing equity and access to excellent educational opportunities for every student. Closing the achievement gap is a continuous process and demands vigilant attention, as well as openness to exploring new research and proven practices.

The U.S. Department of Education describes the achievement gap as "the difference in academic performance between different ethnic groups." In California, the gap is defined as the disparity between the academic performance of white students and other ethnic groups as well as that between English learners and native English speakers; socioeconomically disadvantaged and nondisadvantaged students; and students with disabilities as compared with students without disabilities.

The achievement gap is a pervasive issue in many, if not all, of California's schools. California's achievement data clearly tell a story that is not easy to talk about. Here is how State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell described the gap in California's schools:

Now, to paint a picture of the challenges we face, I'd like to take you on an imaginary field trip to a fourth-grade classroom—a classroom that reflects the student population of California. While the scenario is imagined, the data it is derived from are real.

In this class are 32 youngsters representing the diversity of our state and also the potential for our future. Sixteen of them are Hispanic, nine are white, three are Asian, three are African American, and one is of Filipino descent.

Right off the bat when you enter this classroom, you need to know that 16 of these youngsters (half of the children in front of us) come from families that are considered low income by the federal government. Three have special education needs, like developmental or physical disabilities. Thirteen—40 percent of these children—go home and speak a language other than English.

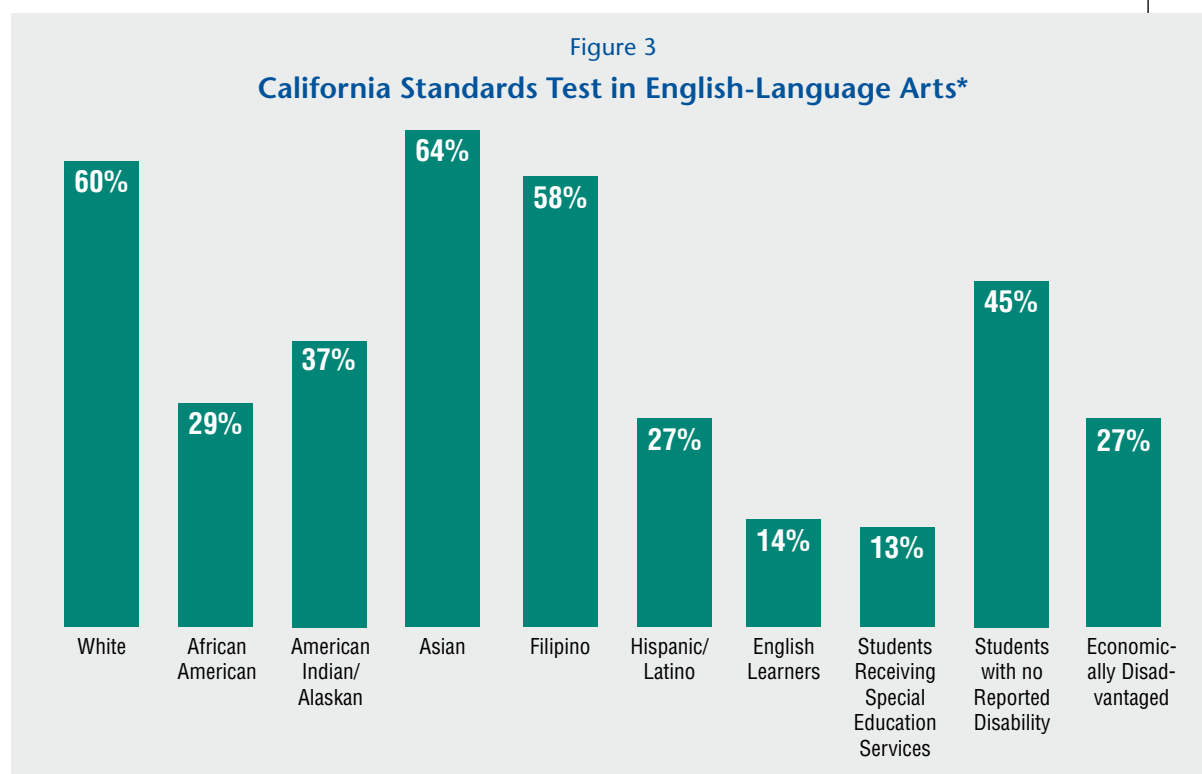
Now, let's imagine the likely futures of those students, given the state of education today. If the child is white or Asian, the chances of that child being academically successful are better than two in three. But the statistical chances of success for the 19 students sitting right next to them who are African American or Hispanic? Only slightly better than one in three. If graduation rates are not improved, odds are that of the 16 Hispanic students, six will not graduate. And while statistics tell us that all of the Asian students will graduate, two of the nine white students will not, and one in three African Americans will not.

Yes, this class is imaginary, but the disparities are real. This is the achievement gap.

Jack O'Connell  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
2007 State of Education Address

Superintendent O’Connell described an imaginary classroom of students by using real statewide data on enrollment and graduation rates. The figures that follow display the wide range of achievement among the noted subgroups on the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program in two content areas: English-language arts and mathematics.

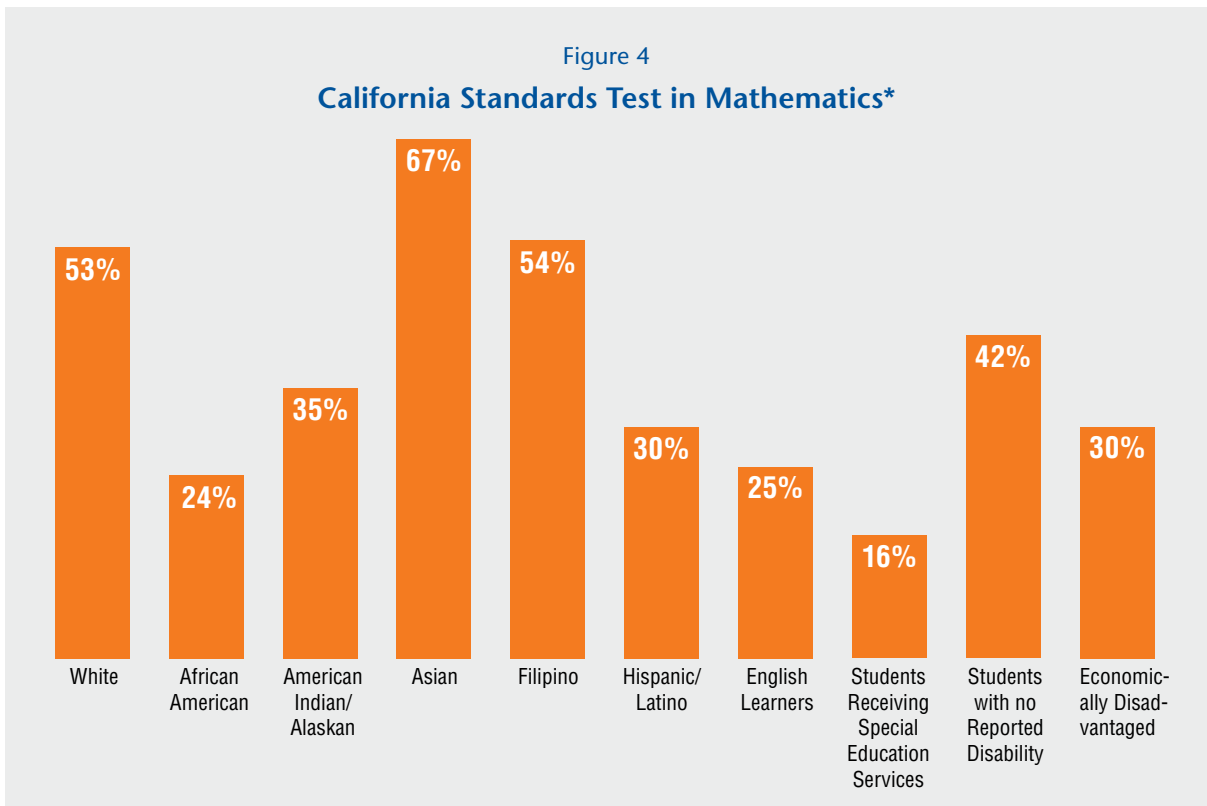
In English-language arts, about 60 percent of white students scored at proficient or above. However, only 29 percent of African American, 37 percent of American Indian or Alaskan, 27 percent of Latino, and 13 percent of students receiving special education services scored at proficient or above. There are additional stark gaps in achievement among other specified subgroups. See Figure 3 below.



\*Data reported from the California 2006 Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program

Similarly in mathematics, about 53 percent of white students scored at proficient or above. However, only 24 percent of African American, 35 percent of American Indian or Alaskan, 30 percent of Latino, and 16 percent of students receiving special education services scored at proficient or above. See Figure 4 below.





\*Data reported from the California 2006 Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program

The state cannot afford—morally, socially, or economically—to ignore the fact that major segments of the next generation continue to fall short of their potential. Quite simply, in a demanding global economy, the achievement gap threatens not only the future of California students, but also the future economic health and security of this state and nation. The simple yet terrible fact is that the population of students that is growing the fastest in this state is the population that is often lagging the farthest behind. According to a study by Eric Hanushek, the cost in lost U.S. economic output due to this dilemma was a staggering \$2.5 trillion between 1990 and 2002—enough to pay the entire cost of K–12 education in the nation over that time. Researchers say that closing that gap over a 12-year period would add \$980 billion to the annual gross domestic product.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that closing this gap must be a statewide imperative with all levels of government sharing in the development of solutions. With this in mind, State Superintendent O’Connell asked the Council to assist him in identifying ways the state can better assist counties, school districts, and schools in their efforts to close California’s achievement gap. The Council is composed of a high-level

<sup>1</sup>Eric Hanushek, “The Role of Education Quality in Economic Growth.” Policy Research Working Paper 4122, World Bank, Washington D.C

group of leaders from prekindergarten, K–12, higher education, business, and philanthropic communities.

The state must do things differently and be responsible for creating the conditions necessary to close the achievement gap. All of California’s students deserve to graduate from high school ready for college, career, and life.

Therefore, the Superintendent and the California Department of Education (CDE), aided by the Council, embarked on a mission to promote statewide success across the educational continuum by addressing the achievement gap.

## Council’s Mission Statement

To develop, implement, and sustain a specific, ambitious plan that holds the State of California accountable for creating the conditions necessary for closing the achievement gap.

## Guiding Principles

The following principles guided the work of the Council:

- The Council believes in the need to be respectful of different points of view and diverse opinions.
- The Council believes that it must stand ready to initiate courageous conversations about difficult topics.
- The Council believes that regardless of race, socioeconomic status, learning disability, or language background, all students can attain proficiency on California’s rigorous academic standards.
- The Council believes that in order to succeed, all programs that affect student achievement must be considered. For example, state bureaucracies, county and district practices, and the elimination or redesign of marginally effective practices will be considered.

## Parameters

The following parameters guided the work of the Council in addressing California’s achievement gap:

- The Council will hold the same high expectations for success of all students. The goal is that all students will score at proficient or above on all CSTs.
- To achieve success, all students must exhibit continuous gains. (If the high-performing subgroups decline in their performance, this would result in a clos-

ing of the achievement gap but not fulfill the Council’s intent. The intent is to continually improve the progress of all students while accelerating the achievement rates of the low-performing subgroups.)

- The Council will determine success by the continual and significant narrowing of the gap, which will result in the eventual closing of the gap among all subgroups as measured by California Standards Tests (CSTs), California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA), and California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).
- For the purpose of its work, the Council will focus on the academic disparity between the performance of recognized subgroups in the state and federal accountability systems.

Although the Council adhered to the federal and state definitions for subgroups, the Council believes that the current designations are an inadequate representation of the students served. Within recognized subgroups there is great diversity representing uniquely challenging educational needs. The Asian subgroup, for example, represents dozens of ethnic groups, cultures, and languages. The same is true for African American and Hispanic/Latino subgroups. Therefore, the Council recognizes that while the current federal and state definitions are not appropriately concise, the Council reluctantly needed to use the existing definitions and reporting structure to chart progress toward the overall goals.

Therefore, the Council focused on the gaps between:

**Ethnic groups**

- The white student subgroup compared with African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Pacific Islander subgroups. (The intent here is to use the traditional measure of the gap by comparing the academic proficiency of each lower-performing ethnic subgroup with the traditionally higher-performing white subgroup.)
- Other groups
  - For English learners (ELs), the gap will be addressed by two distinct approaches:
    - » The gap between current ELs with five years or more of schooling in the United States, plus former ELs who have been redesignated fluent English proficient (RFEP) to English-speaking students, including English only (EO) and Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)  
(The intent here is to consider EL progress by comparing CST results of ELs who have had at least five years or more of schooling in the United

States with test results of native English speakers on all CSTs. Five years or more of schooling represents a generally accepted threshold level that provides sufficient English-language instruction to allow EL students the opportunity to compete on the tests with their English-speaking counterparts.)

- » The rate at which ELs are redesignated as Fluent English Proficient, currently 9.2 percent per year, will be studied.
- > Economically disadvantaged students and nondisadvantaged students
- > Students with disabilities and students without disabilities

The Council began its work in June of 2007 not by asking whether there was an achievement gap but rather why there was an achievement gap and how it could be eliminated. Clearly there is no “silver bullet” that holds a single solution. With everyone working together, the state has the ability and talent to succeed at closing the achievement gap. California has already demonstrated that teachers, schools, and districts can work with those students traditionally left behind and educate them to high standards. But for the many students who are trailing behind their peers and not reaching their potential, there is an urgent need to do more. The causes of this systemic and persistent gap are varied, but the Council believes it comes down to teaching and learning. The achievement gap will never be closed if teachers do not receive support and the tools and training necessary to educate California’s uniquely diverse student population.



The state can do much more to create the conditions necessary to close the gap. But all of these strategies must be targeted to improving student learning. With this concentration in mind, the Council believes the state should work to eliminate the following barriers: the systemic and structural lack of access to the support and strategies students need to succeed; school cultures that are too often not conducive to high academic achievement; the pernicious existence of low expectations for a segment of the student population; and the lack of effective strategies to deal with the hardest-to-reach students.

In addition, the Council believes California’s educational system suffers from a racial/ethnic achievement gap that causes students of color to be consistently outperformed by their white peers even when controlling for poverty. Californians must talk about and confront the fact that nationwide, only about 17 percent of

African American young people and only 11 percent of Hispanic youths had earned a college degree in 2005, compared with 34 percent of white youths in the same age bracket.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it is widely known that all children can learn to high levels. The failure of students of color to perform to their potential is not based upon any innate condition but instead reflects the inability of the state's educational system to provide them with the support they deserve and need to succeed.

It is imperative that, with the changing demographics of the state, everyone be willing to undertake courageous conversations<sup>3</sup> about race and racism, no matter how uncomfortable they might be. Discussions focusing on the impact of race and racism on the achievement gap must take place if we expect to move forward with urgency. **We strongly believe all children can learn;** thus, it is critical that the state confront and reform those practices that are holding subgroups of students back.

The Superintendent and the Council started with the premise that the major factors inhibiting the learning of students can be grouped into four main themes: Access, Culture and Climate, Expectations, and Strategies. The Council was divided into four subcommittees to address the themes. The subcommittees' work included an intensive process of data collection, discussions, and school and district visits to assist the subcommittees in writing their portion of this report.

## Subcommittees

The four subcommittees of the Council examined the following areas:

- Access—How do all students gain access to what is needed to succeed? Access includes rigorous instruction, highly qualified teachers, extra learning opportunities that supplement the education provided in a typical school day, and so forth.
- Culture and climate—How can schools offer the best learning environment for all students? Is school a safe place for students to learn? Is it an environment that promotes learning and a sense of belonging for students, parents, and school staff? Do effective school-family-community partnerships exist?
- Expectations—Are high expectations for all students and teachers truly held? Are these expectations evident in the curriculum, instructional practices, and the school's communication to students, parents, and school staff? Is student progress measured through data-driven decision making and effective instructional strategies?

<sup>2</sup>H. Brady, M. Hout, and Jon Stiles, "Return on Investment," *Educational Choices and Demographic Change in California Future*, UC Berkeley Research Study, 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Glenn Eric Singleton and Curtis Linton, *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2006.

- Strategies—What practices have proven effective for closing the achievement gap? Strategies should address improving the quality of instruction, differentiated instruction, increasing instructional time, teacher collaboration time, reconsidering how to differentiate school by grade levels, and so on.

Strategies to reform education, as they relate to closing the achievement gap in particular, have centered on such things as incorporating a quality prekindergarten program, implementing a robust data collection system, developing rigorous curriculum, implementing quality professional development, investing in an effective accountability system, and strengthening articulation throughout the P-16 system. However, it must be emphasized that without complementary investments in socioeconomic areas that impact children the most (e.g., health care, housing, living in safe environments, extended day care), it will be significantly more difficult to close the achievement gap. No program, no matter how well it is designed, can work in isolation.

Closing the achievement gap will be a long-term effort by all involved. This report and its recommendations are only the beginning of that journey. The state must make a long-term commitment to achieve success in this endeavor. The Council intends to stay engaged in and be a part of the accountability factor for the state. Although not all of the recommendations have to be implemented in the immediate future, it is imperative that all eventually be instituted if success is to be achieved in this important task.

This report documents the Council's work to date regarding what it will take to close the achievement gap for the State of California. This report has three purposes: It is intended to educate readers on the topic of the gap, to provide the State Superintendent of Public Instruction with the data that support the recommendations submitted for his consideration, and to emphasize that this initiative does not have a fixed timeline. It must transcend continuously across future administrations if it is to impact and strengthen the educational system in California.



## ACCESS

Access may be defined as the availability of high-quality educational opportunities for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or gender (Education Commission of the States 2001). High-quality educational opportunities include such things as rigorous instruction, highly effective teachers, extra learning opportunities, and so on. Although it is known that access to these opportunities matter and help to close the achievement gap, there remains a group of students for whom access to these opportunities is systemically not available. How then can the state work to ensure better access for all students to necessary opportunities? The Council believes the state can do more and has prioritized three areas, (Recommendations 1 through 3) to start in order to best maximize access for more students.

## Recommendation 1: Provide High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs

**California should provide all children with access to a high-quality prekindergarten program.**

A vast body of research shows that, when done right, effective prekindergarten education helps narrow the achievement gap before children start school.<sup>4</sup> National research shows that children who attend effective prekindergarten programs:

- Perform better on standardized achievement tests in reading and math.
- Are less likely to be placed in special education.
- Are less likely to be held back a grade.
- Are more likely to graduate from high school.<sup>5</sup>

Quality prekindergarten programs can make a world of difference by building an important foundation of early cognitive and social skills and fostering a love of learning that endures through the K–12 years and beyond. Effective prekindergarten helps all children get ready to learn and to read. Early education will serve them well in their school careers.

California should provide access to effective prekindergarten for all children, starting with those who need it most. The children who lack access to quality preschool programs are disproportionately children of color, children whose home language is not English, and children whose parents did not graduate from high school.

The Council started its work by researching major reforms and alternative ways to assist in the early preparation of all children for school. Access is particularly important for prekindergarten students from low-income communities, students of color, students with disabilities, and Native American, English learner, special education, and other underrepresented students.<sup>6</sup> A recent RAND study on California’s achievement gap found that differences in achievement evident during the K–12 years exist when children first enter kindergarten.<sup>7</sup> In *Getting Down to Facts: Resource Needs for California’s English Learners*, the authors’ top recommendation is to provide high-quality prekindergarten for all English

<sup>4</sup>Lisa Klein and Jane Knitzer, “Effective Preschool Curricula and Teaching Strategies,” New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, 2006.

<sup>5</sup>Lynn Karoly and Jill Cannon, “Who Is Ahead and Who Is Behind?” Santa Monica: RAND, 2007.

<sup>6</sup>*Early Developments*, [entire issue], Vol. 11, No. 2, (FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Fall 2007).

<sup>7</sup>Karoly and Cannon, “Who Is Ahead and Who Is Behind?”



learner students.<sup>8</sup> The fact is, all children benefit from a high quality prekindergarten experience. However, existing state and federal preschool programs do not have the quality standards nor do they serve enough children to ensure that every child starts school with an equal opportunity to learn.

Of the approximately 465,734<sup>9</sup> low-income<sup>10</sup> three and four year-olds in California, approximately 254,968, or a little more than half receive either Head Start or state subsidized preschool. However, none of these programs, including Head Start and State Preschool, has the high standards or resources associated with effective preschool. (See Appendix B)

The patchwork quilt system of subsidized programs serving preschool-age children<sup>11</sup> lacks sufficient quality standards, resources, and accountability:

- There are three sets of state standards for teacher qualifications; however none of the standards is at the level of an AA or BA degree.
- Part-day state preschool is funded at one-third the rate of K–12<sup>12</sup> and less than half that of Head Start.<sup>13</sup>
- No valid, independent assessment of program quality is conducted.

Ultimately, ensuring that all children have access to effective prekindergarten will require a significant new investment. In concert with the Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence, a comprehensive set of prekindergarten policy recommendations has been developed, which designs a system and lays out a road map for achieving this ambitious yet critical goal (see Appendixes B and C). These recommendations focus on the importance of high quality, particularly:

1. Establishment of learning foundations that are developmentally appropriate and have been shown to significantly increase child outcomes
2. Construction of new prekindergarten facilities, which will have a lasting impact on future generations by ensuring access to prekindergarten for children who otherwise would not have it
3. Articulation with K–12, so that a child’s transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten is smooth and successful

<sup>8</sup>Patricia Gandara and Russell Rumberger, “Resource Needs for California’s English Learners,” University of California, UCLA & Santa Barbara, respectively. A policy brief for Getting Down to Facts: A Research Project to Inform Solutions to California’s Education Problems. (December 2006). <http://www.edsource.org/pdf/CompleteConveningBook.pdf> (Accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>9</sup>National Center on Children in Poverty, *State Profiles*, Columbia University, 2005.

<sup>10</sup>*The Federal Poverty Guidelines*, issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, define “low income” as below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold.

<sup>11</sup>This refers to CDE Title 5 State Preschool Full Day State Preschool, General Child Care, CalWORKS and AP vouchers for 3 and 4 year olds.

<sup>12</sup>National Institute for Early Education Research, *State of Preschool, 2006 State Preschool Yearbook*, California, page 49, 2006.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

4. Workforce recruitment and preparation because to realize the promise of preschool and to help close the achievement gap, it is critical that a skilled, diverse workforce is developed
5. Creation of a Quality Improvement System and tiered reimbursement to ensure that prekindergarten programs have the resources necessary to meet higher standards
6. Results-based accountability to ensure developmentally appropriate assessment of program quality and child outcomes, which supports the continual improvement of quality and preparation of young children for success in school and life
7. Expansion of full-day, full-year services because many California families, especially working poor families, need full-day care for their children.



### **How can high-quality prekindergarten programs help the state to close the achievement gap?**

There is a strong and growing evidence base showing that high-quality prekindergarten significantly narrows the achievement gap and allows all children to start school on more equitable footing. The converse is also true: without quality prekindergarten the Council does not believe the State of California can be successful in closing the achievement gap.

## **Recommendation 2: Better Align Educational Systems from Prekindergarten to College**

**California should better align its educational systems to prepare all students for postsecondary education and/or meaningful employment.**

The expectations for a graduate of the K–12 system are, in many ways, disconnected from the needs and demands of higher education and the world of work. California should review and refine its current systems to better align K–12 requirements and expectations with postsecondary and real-world needs.

This alignment gap is evident in the comparison of high school graduation requirements and college entry requirements, most notably for math and science. High school graduation requirements expect two years of math and three years of English.<sup>14</sup> However, the admissions requirements for the University of Cali-

<sup>14</sup>Education Code (EC) Section 51225.3(a)(1)(A). *Alternative courses of study are permitted under 51225.3(b).*



fornia (UC) and the California State University (CSU) system include three years of math and four years of English.<sup>15</sup>

Because requirements are not well articulated across different parts of the education system, students might proceed through high school without taking required courses in a sequence that allows them to become eligible for admission to certain institutions, thus artificially limiting their options after graduation. Students who do not perceive themselves as college-bound at an early stage are at a particular risk. This lack of connection has a direct effect on the achievement gap, which is evident by the completion rate of the a–g curriculum where 58 percent of Asian students and 40 percent of white students complete the sequence, yet only 25 percent of African American and 22 percent of Latino students do so.<sup>16</sup>

Even among students who meet requirements and matriculate at these institutions, many are unprepared for the expectations of higher education. For example, a look at the freshmen regularly admitted to CSU for the first time in the fall of 2006 shows that 45 percent of high school graduates were still required to take remediation courses in English even after being admitted to the CSU system. Not surprisingly, these numbers show another stark example of the achievement gap where 26 percent of white students were required to take remediation

<sup>15</sup>CSU-UC Comparison of Minimum Eligibility Requirements for Freshmen: University of California and California State University freshman course requirements by subject area as of Fall 2007. The university- approved a-g courses by high school chart can be viewed at [www.ucop.edu/doorways/list](http://www.ucop.edu/doorways/list)

<sup>16</sup>The Education Trust West (<http://ww2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/ETW/College+Pref.htm#students>)

courses compared with 63 percent of African American students and 61 percent of Latino students.<sup>17</sup>

This lack of connection between systems also exists for those students who move directly from high school to the world of work. Conversations with business leaders around the state and a review of research show a gap between the required educational attainment levels and the demands for the current workforce.<sup>18</sup> Employers estimate that 45 percent of recent high school graduates lack the skills to advance.<sup>19</sup>

This lack of connection is partially rooted in the changing demands of today's workforce. For example, in 1973 some 32 percent of jobs in the workforce were available to high school dropouts, but by 2001 that number was down to 9 percent—a full 23 percent decline. That change continues for high school graduates, with a 9 percent decline in available jobs for them.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, a higher skill level is needed to succeed in today's global economy, and California's expectations for a high school graduate are not necessarily anchored in the knowledge or skills necessary for success in today's workforce.

Microsoft founder Bill Gates voiced the concern shared by many observers this way:

**When I compare our high schools to what I see when I'm traveling abroad, I am terrified for our work force of tomorrow. In math and science, our fourth graders are among the top students in the world. By eighth grade, they're in the middle of the pack. By twelfth grade, U.S. students are scoring near the bottom of all industrialized nations. . . In the international competition to have the biggest and best supply of knowledge workers, America is falling behind. . .”**

The misalignment of California's systems should be addressed first through increased rigor and relevance for all high school students, an action that will take the concerted efforts of all segments of the K–12 system.

In terms of rigor, elementary and middle school students must receive the academic foundation necessary to succeed in challenging high school course work.

<sup>17</sup>*Proficiency Reports of Students Entering the CSU System*, downloaded from <http://www.asd.calstate.edu/performance/proficiency/shtml> on 11/08/2007.

<sup>18</sup>*From Education to Work: Is Arizona Prepared?* The Alignment Project Report. Phoenix, Ariz.: Public Works, February 14, 2006.

<sup>19</sup>Achieve, Inc., *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies, December 2004.

<sup>20</sup>Anthony P. Carnevale, and Donna M. Desrochers, *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform*. Educational Testing Service, 2003.

To avoid being unprepared, students and parents should receive information in middle school or sooner that allows them to make choices and be prepared for the decisions required in high school. It is imperative, then, for the state's business community and institutions of higher education to come together for a singular conversation to ensure true alignment so all graduates have the necessary skills to succeed in today's workforce.

For the curriculum to have real-world relevance, students should be able to understand how their learning will impact them after graduation and develop skills that will be useful in future employment. A paper by the International Center for Leadership in Education, states:

**What is important is that students enter the global economy with the ability to apply what they learned in school to a variety of ever-changing situations that they couldn't foresee before graduating. That is the mark of a quality education and a truer indication of academic excellence...Education should increase students' understanding of the world around them.<sup>21</sup>**

The Council therefore recommends that the state better align the K–12 and higher education systems. In doing so, the state should focus on:

- Developing an open enrollment policy for entrance into rigorous courses
- Scheduling students into rigorous course offerings based on the students' need
- Better aligning high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for success after high school
- Implementing an increased relevancy factor into the curriculum being taught so that students are able to incorporate real life experiences and have success after high school
- Streamlining an assessment system in which tests taken in high school also serve as readiness tests for college and work

### **How can alignment of the educational systems help the state close the achievement gap?**

The lack of alignment between the educational systems, not surprisingly, aggravates the achievement gap because students in the subgroups are more likely to be underprepared and lack access to the resources necessary to prepare beyond misaligned expectations. Aligning the expectations of the K–12 system with the world of work and higher education will ensure all that all students are better prepared for success in life.

<sup>21</sup>Williard R. Daggett, Ed.D., "Achieving Academic Excellence through Rigor and Relevance." White Paper for the International Center for Leadership in Education, September 2005, p. 1.

### Recommendation 3: Develop Partnerships to Close the Achievement Gap

**The state should foster partnerships to connect schools with educational organizations; city, county, and state agencies; faith-based organizations; parent groups; businesses; and other interested organizations to implement a comprehensive student support system leading to closure of the achievement gap.**

As noted by Joyce Epstein, a nationally recognized family and community involvement advocate:

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate; provide family services and support; increase parents' skills and leadership; connect families with others in the school and the community; and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create partnerships is to help all youngsters to succeed in school and in life. When families are involved, students hear common messages from home and school about the importance of attending school, staying in school, and working hard as a student.<sup>22</sup>

Research indicates that family involvement in schools increases student achievement. The benefits of parent and family involvement include higher test scores and grades, better attendance, higher rate of completion of homework, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in higher education.<sup>23</sup>

The Council knows that community partnerships lead to student success as well. According to the Educational Collaboration in California, the following are examples of partnerships that have assisted in closing the achievement gap in California:

- In Santa Ana, the Ford Foundation's Urban Partnership Program's efforts helped to decrease the number of high school graduates in remedial college English by 30 percent. In addition, 75 percent of Santa Ana high school graduates attend higher education institution. This is a significant increase over the past decade.

<sup>22</sup>J.L. Epstein, "School/Family/Community/Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76 (1995).

<sup>23</sup>J. Ballen and O. Moles. *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education, 1994. Available online: <http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/strong>; Epstein, "School/Family/Community Partnerships"; A. T. Henderson and N. Berla. (Eds.) *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*. Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 375 968).

- In 2005, the Merced County P-16 Education and Community Council was given a grant to support a partnership program that was able to enhance the rigor of its career-technical courses. This program led to a 10 percent increase in the number of students who met the admissions requirements when enrolling in a university.

The state should help develop partnerships among all stakeholders as a means of getting students access to the learning support they need to succeed. These partnerships should incorporate a collaborative model that will ensure all stakeholders share a role in the process of problem discovery and the solutions necessary for student academic success. There are partnerships that can assist students in coping with their emotional, health, and nutritional needs. Data must be provided to partners to illustrate the importance of collaboration between all segments of education as a crucial step in the process. It is equally important for the stakeholders to support schools with funding that will enhance learning.

### **How can partnerships help the state to close the achievement gap?**

Closing the gap will take unprecedented collaboration amongst all stakeholders. The development of partnerships has the potential to better serve all the needs of students and create a better opportunity for high-quality learning. These partnerships will greatly enhance efforts to close the achievement gap.



## CULTURE AND CLIMATE

- School culture involves “deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have formed over the course of [the school’s] history” (See Appendix A for “Definitions of Selected Terms.”)
- School climate is “. . . the feelings and attitudes about a school expressed by students, teachers, staff, and parents—the way students and staff ‘feel’ about being at school each day.”<sup>24</sup> School climate is How students, parents, and staff members feel about their school. Why students, parents, and staff feel the way they do about the school is determined by the values and belief systems that have evolved over time.

The strategies to reform education in general, as they relate to closing the achievement gap, have centered on developing rigorous curriculum and providing professional development, highly qualified teachers, after-school programs, and leadership. But even with those strategies in place, a gap persists between students of different racial groups. Austin and Benard make the following point in *The State Data System to Assess Learning Barriers, Supports, and Engagement: Implications for School Reform Efforts*:

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<sup>24</sup>B. Tableman (Ed.). *Best Practice Briefs* (Vol. 3). Lansing, MI: University Outreach & Engagement, Board of Trustees of Michigan State University. 2004.



The supports and services that may positively impact student retention and achievement tend to be viewed as outside the core academic activities and marginalized within schools.<sup>25</sup> Reflecting this fragmentation, most school reform plans focus almost exclusively on the educational factors that directly affect student academic achievement, such as curriculum and instruction, teacher content expertise, leadership, and governance and finance, as framed by the *Getting Down to Facts* report. While these are certainly the essential cornerstones of school reform, they are not sufficient in themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Austin and Benard further state that the environment or context in which education is taking place (namely schools) is overlooked or not considered.

Too often reform efforts fall short because they fail to address the context in which the curriculum and instruction are implemented. Not all students may be ready or able to learn—to benefit from improvements in instruction—because: (1) they don’t feel emotionally or physically safe at school; (2) they don’t feel connected to school; (3) they don’t find school relevant or engaging; and/or (4) they are hungry, worried, depressed, under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, or suffering from other nonacademic “barriers” that undermine the process of learning.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of numerous meetings, vetting processes, and suggestions from stakeholders, the Council concluded that:

1. Substantive solutions to the achievement gap, including organizational change, can come about only by understanding *the environment* in which the gap exists. Educators and stakeholders need to address both the academic and nonacademic factors that promote and impede the academic achievement of students. The intent is not to ignore important issues such as poverty, community, parents, and health care that impact students’ lives, but rather to stress the factors outside the classroom that also affect student learning. Everyone has a part to play in closing the achievement gap.
2. Educators and stakeholders at the state, district, and school levels need to do a better job of identifying their customers and their diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Likewise, educators and staff need to understand the culture that they bring to the educational arena.

<sup>25</sup>H. Adelman and L. Taylor. *School Improvement and Planning: What’s Missing*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2005.

<sup>26</sup>G. Austin and B. Benard. *The State Data System to Assess Learning Barriers, Supports, and Engagement: Implications for School Reform Efforts*. Los Alamitos, Calif.: WestEd, 2007, 1.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, 1-2.

The Council believes that the state can do more to assist schools and districts to develop a deeper understanding of culture and climate and has prioritized two areas, Recommendations 4 and 5, as a place to begin.

### Recommendation 4: Provide Culturally Relevant Professional Development for All School Personnel

**Create a world class, uniform, rigorous professional development strand for all school personnel, including teachers, administrators, counselors, and paraprofessionals that provides culturally relevant curriculum,<sup>28</sup> culturally responsive instruction,<sup>29</sup> culturally proficient educators,<sup>30</sup> and culturally courageous leaders (Browne 2007).<sup>31</sup>**

It is impossible to discuss closing the achievement gap without acknowledging the role of race and culture. In schools, as in other organizations, all ethnic groups, including white Americans, bring their particular cultural values to their environment. Consequently, those environments (schools or organizations) develop cultural values, which may be conscious or subconscious, but they exist.<sup>32</sup> To reach students, teachers need a cultural understanding of themselves, the students they teach, the families that raise them, and the communities that house them.<sup>33</sup> This level of consciousness benefits the students, teachers, parents, and community.

The demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau's *State and County Quick Facts* show that California is one of the most diverse states in America, as indicated by the following percentages of population groups:<sup>34</sup>

- 43.1 percent Whites
- 6.7 percent African Americans
- 1.2 percent American Indian and Alaska Natives
- 12.4 percent Asians

<sup>28</sup>Gloria Ladson-Billings. *Crossing Over to CANAAN, The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

<sup>29</sup>Geneva Gay. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2000.

<sup>30</sup>Kikanza NuriRobins and others. *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2002.

<sup>31</sup>J. Browne. Unpublished manuscript. "Culturally Courageous Leadership, Strategies for Enhancing Achievement in Low Performing Schools," 2007.

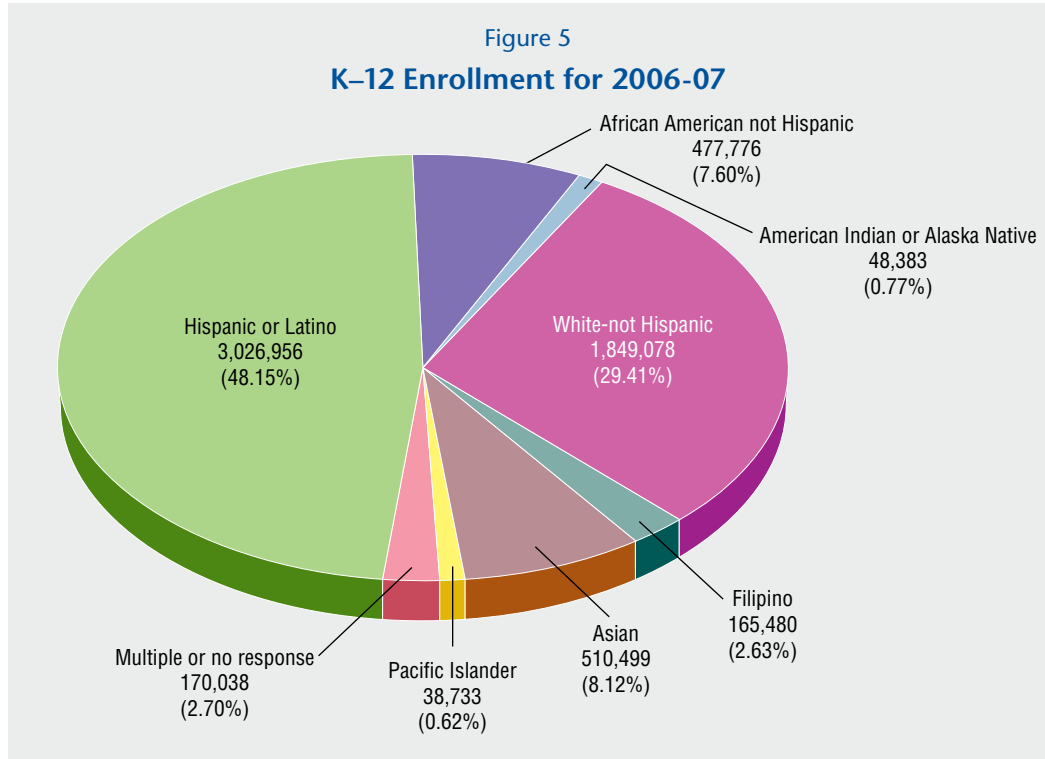
<sup>32</sup>Ronald Lindahl. *The Role of Organizational Climate and Culture in the School Improvement Process: A Review of the Knowledge Base*. 2006. Retrieved September 4, 2007 from <http://cns.org/content/m13465/latest/>

<sup>33</sup>G. Howard. *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Teacher's College Press, 2006; S. Nieto. *The Light In Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999; Ladson-Billings. *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms*.

<sup>34</sup>U.S. Census Bureau. *State and County Quick Facts*. Retrieved December 12, 2007 from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/gfd/states/06000.html>.

- 0.4 percent Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders
- 35.9 percent Latino or Hispanic origin

In California, 222,816 (72.2 percent) teachers are white females.<sup>35</sup> The data shown in figure 5, “K–12 Enrollment for 2006–07,” reveal that of the total K–12 student enrollment, 4,267,827 (67.9 percent) are students of color.<sup>36</sup>



Source: California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit

In terms of closing the achievement gap, the data raise some obvious questions, one of which Gary Howard addresses in *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, namely, “How do we prepare [our educators] a predominantly white teacher population to work effectively with racially and culturally diverse students?”<sup>37</sup> In addition, how do we retain educators, especially teachers, given the economic cost of losing them?<sup>38</sup>

The paucity of teachers of color only magnifies the need for all teachers, especially those teaching children of color to have a deeper understanding of every

<sup>35</sup>California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit. <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/NumTeachCo.asp?cChoice=StateNum&Radio2=T&cYear=2006-07&cLevel=State&cTopic=Paif&myTimeFrame=S&submit1=Submit>.

<sup>36</sup>California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit. <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/EnrollEthState.asp?Level=State&TheYear=2006-07&cChoice=EnrollEth1&p=2>.

<sup>37</sup>Howard. *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*, 117.

<sup>38</sup>K. Futernick. *A Possible Dream: Retaining California's Teachers So All Students Learn*. Sacramento: California State University, 2007.

student's culture, especially for Latino, African American, Native American, and some Asian students. Similarly, all administrators, paraprofessionals, and staff should participate in this ongoing professional development as well. In the absence of such training, the ground remains fertile for low expectations, unequal access to rigorous curricular programs, and for the groups listed previously, a disproportional enrollment in special education programs.

An excerpt from an interview with long-time educator and researcher Christine Sleeter makes the point that teachers should understand their students' cultural backgrounds and resist the notion of being color-blind:

- Q.** Some white teachers say they are sensitive to students of color because they adopt a color-blind approach. They'll say, "I don't deal with this kid as a black kid, I see a kid. I treat everyone equally." How would you respond?
- A.** In a color-blind approach, there is a whole lot about a student that you are not seeing. For example, if you have a student of Mexican descent and you say, "I don't see a Mexican kid; I just see a kid," you are preventing yourself from knowing something about that student's culture and community and an important part of the student. Do you know much about where the student's family came from? Do you know much about Mexican holidays and Mexican festivals that the student may be participating in? Do you know much about the student's church traditions or family celebrations? Do you know much about the Mexican-American literature and stories that the student is learning at home?

If a teacher is insisting on being color-blind, then the teacher is putting herself in a position of saying, "I don't know about the kid's background, I don't believe that's really important, and I'm not going to learn about it."<sup>39</sup>

### **The Need for Consistent Culturally Relevant Statewide Professional Development**

A study authorized by Assembly Bill 54 in 2003, authored by then-Assembly-woman Jenny Oropeza, reveals some telling information about the lack of quality and consistency of professional development statewide.<sup>40</sup> Even though some districts and school sites offer professional development in cultural competency, veteran teachers and teachers nearing retirement regard that program as having varying degrees of usefulness. They write:

<sup>39</sup>C. Sleeter. 2000, 2001. Diversity vs. White Privilege, Retrieved November 15, 2007, from [http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/15\\_02/Int152.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/15_02/Int152.shtml)

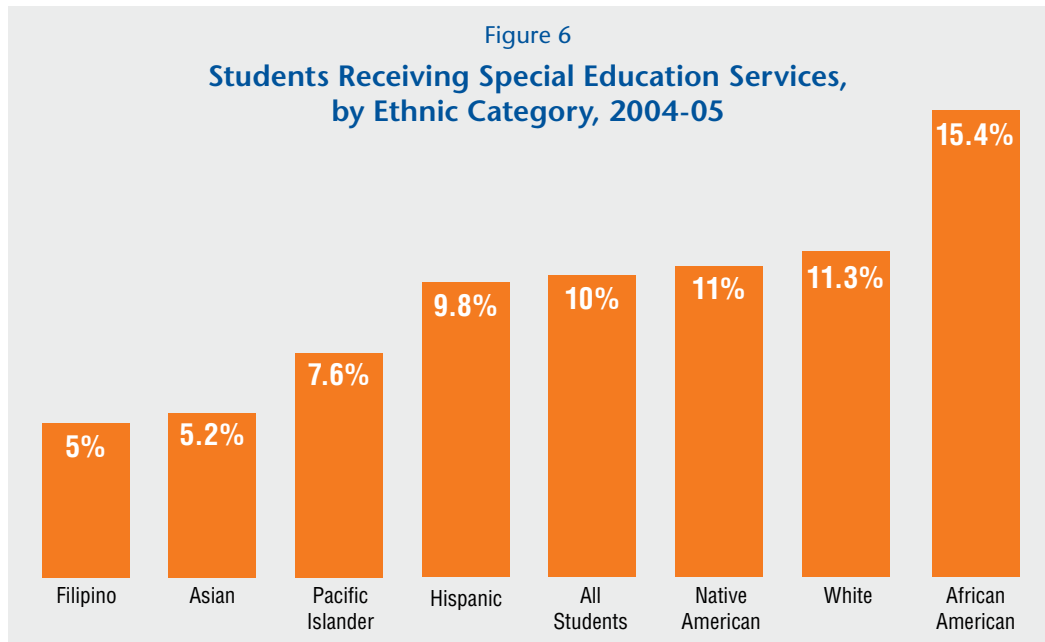
<sup>40</sup>*Study of Availability and Effectiveness of Cultural Competency Training*. Prepared by Beverly P. Farr and others. San Francisco: Rockman, 2005.

... Many districts and outside organizations have offered and continue to offer a wide variety of trainings, some of which focus on cultural competency. Again, this study found that the quality, relevance, and usefulness of these trainings varied across sites and districts.<sup>41</sup>

The study goes on to say that the teachers found the training to be insufficient:

Very few training opportunities related to cultural competency were identified by teachers as being of sufficient quality, length, and follow up to be effective over the long term in implementing and institutionalizing changes related to improving cultural competency of the teachers, school, and/or district.<sup>42</sup>

The need for professional development extends beyond general educators and administrators to include special education teachers as well. In California, 634,510 (10 percent) of all K–12 students receive special education services.<sup>43</sup> However, the ethnic breakdown shows a starker picture. Figure 6, “Students Receiving Special Education Services, by Ethnic Category, 2004-05,” shows the percentages for students in K–12 by seven ethnic categories and for “all students” that receive special education services.



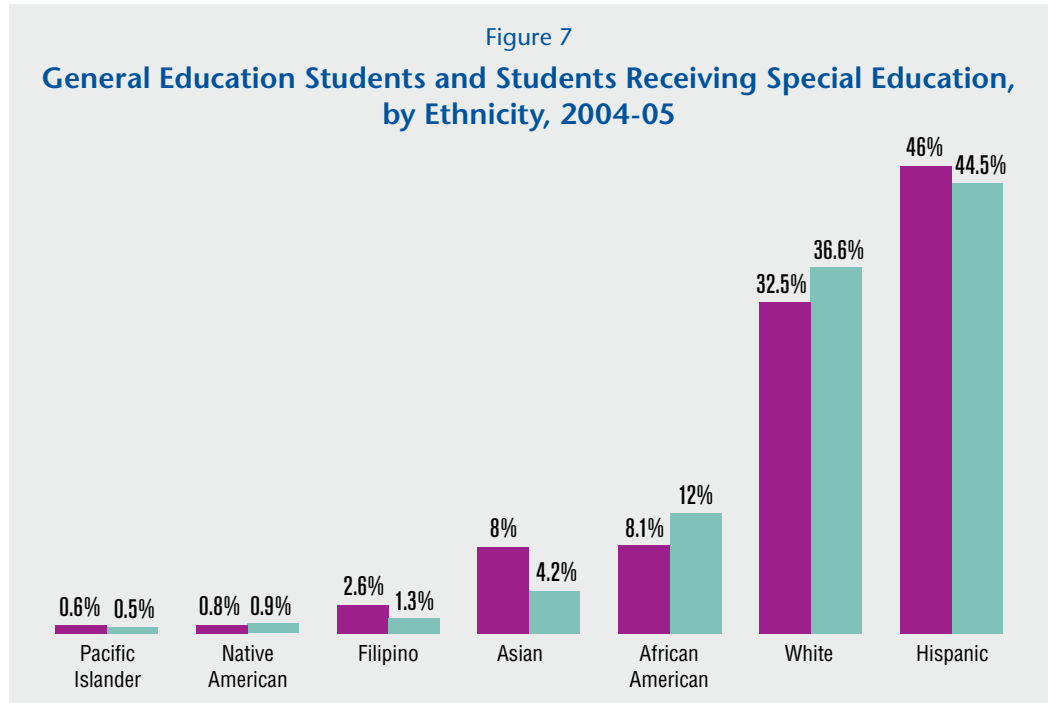
Sources: California Special Education Management Information System, December 2004; California Basic Educational Data System, December 2004.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>California Department of Education. *The Pocketbook for Special Education Statistics, 2004-05*, Sacramento, 2006. Retrieved December 15, 2007 from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ds/documents/pcktbk0405.pdf>

Given the history of disproportionate enrollment of ethnic students in special education, it is not surprising to see in Figure 7 “General Education Students and Students Receiving Special Education, by Ethnicity, 2004-05,” that 12 percent of African Americans receive special education, but they represent only 8.1 percent of the general education students.



Sources: California Special Education Management Information System, December 2004; California Basic Educational Data System, December 2004

The Council believes a greater sense of urgency must be focused on providing culturally relevant professional development during preservice and in-service training for all teachers (including special education teachers), administrators, and staff statewide.

**How can the creation of a world class culturally relevant professional development strand for educators help the state close the gap?**

Professional development will create the opportunity for uniform training for all preservice and in-service educators. The specificity of the training equips all educators with the tools to educate the culturally diverse student population in California.

## Recommendation 5: Conduct a Climate Survey

The CDE should create a school (as well as district, county, and state, if practicable) climate assessment or survey that can provide baseline data that tell how teachers, administrators, staff, and parents feel about the educational environment and that help to explain why they feel as they do, especially the subgroups. Specifically, the climate survey will identify and allow for the elimination of school policies and practices that may disaffect certain groups of students and parents in order to improve educational outcomes for all students.

For school administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents to fully understand their school climate and create needed changes, they must have a vehicle to provide baseline data. The climate survey is one appropriate tool.

The Western Alliance for the Study of School Climate (WASSC) writes in *School Climate Quality Analytic Assessment Instrument and School-based Evaluation/Leadership Team Assessment Protocol* that the purpose of the assessment tool is to:

**Form impartial judgments related to the quality of their school's climate with the intention of gaining awareness and initiating future collective action . . . [it] should never be used to assign blame to other faculty, put down kids, indict leadership, or promote the perception that certain "individuals" are a problem.<sup>44</sup>**

WASSC further states: "Solutions in the area of school climate improvement most often come as a result of the raising of the faculties' collective awareness related to their systemic patterns and choices that affect life in their school."

In line with the thinking of WASSC, Lindahl writes in *The Role of Organizational Climate and Culture in the School Improvement Process: A Review of the Knowledge Base* that the leaders of school improvement can benefit from the assessments of climate and culture and forge a path that will create sustainability:

**Leaders of school improvement processes can utilize the information gained through the assessment of the school's climate and culture to help guide each phase of the change process, from determining the readiness for change to selecting the types of improvements most likely to be compatible with the organization's climate and culture, from implementing the improvements to ensuring that they become institutionalized (p. 12).**

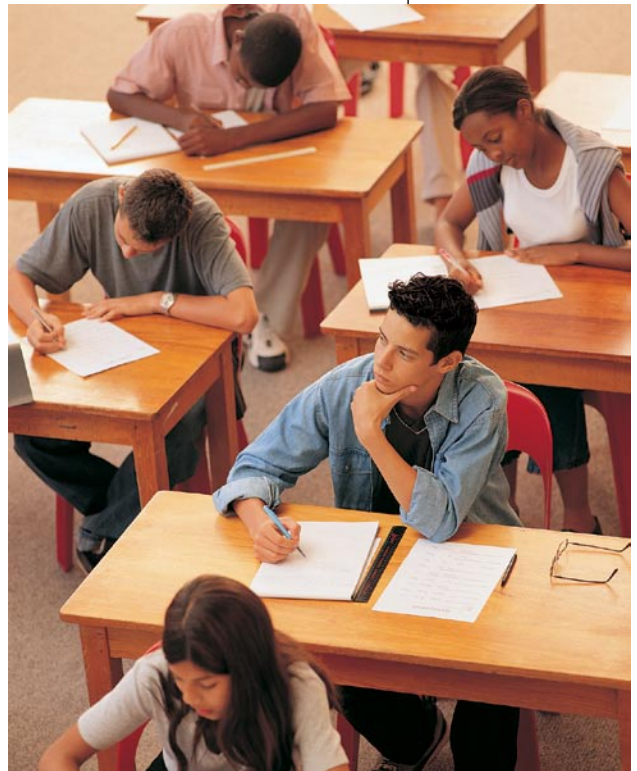
<sup>44</sup>The Western Alliance for the Study of School Climate, (2004). School Climate Quality Analytic Assessment Instrument and School-based Evaluation/Leadership Team Assessment Protocol, 1. Retrieved September 11, 2007 from [http://www.castatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/school\\_survey.html](http://www.castatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/school_survey.html)

Thus, without the appropriate tool to assess the environment of these students and that of the teachers, staff, and administrators, the correct plan needed to address the issue and develop a climate of high academic achievement for all students is lost. In other words, the climate survey helps teachers, administrators, staff, and parents with providing early intervention for the lowest performers rather than waiting until the students have fallen behind academically.

The concept of closing the achievement gap in California implies an organizational change at the state, district, and school levels. The change, to be effective, must be a cultural change within the aforementioned organizations, with a single focus—that closing the achievement gap should be the highest priority facing California’s educational system today.

The Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) conducted two studies: *Where We Learn* and *Where We Teach*. In the first study conducted in 2006, more than 30,000 students participated, making it “. . . the largest study on urban school climate in the history of public education.” It allowed the researchers to gain “tremendous insight into the daily perceptions about school climate of . . . schoolchildren in grades four through twelve.”<sup>45</sup>

In 2007 CUBE followed its first study with *Where We Teach*, in which it “surveyed teachers and administrators to get their perspective on the urban learning experience.”<sup>46</sup> In this study CUBE made it a point to include many of the schools that participated in the 2006 study, with some additional districts that are members of CUBE.



The 2007 CUBE study emphasizes that a safe and welcoming learning climate is a prerequisite to high student achievement. Thus accurately assessing the climate and addressing the findings are the first steps to improving academic achievement and, ultimately, to addressing the achievement gap. CUBE makes the point, “School districts need to understand climate issues, conduct assessments, pass policies, and take steps to make improvements where necessary.”<sup>47</sup> The author continues:

<sup>45</sup>Brian Perkins (2006). *Where We Learn: The CUBE Survey of Urban School Climate*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association, 10.

<sup>46</sup>Brian Perkins (2007). *Where We Teach: The CUBE Survey of Urban School Climate*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association, 10.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.



The school climate—the impressions, beliefs, and expectations about a school as a learning environment—plays a critical role in the academic development of the student learner, and administrators and teachers clearly strongly influence that impression. This is especially true in urban schools, which enroll almost 25 percent of the nation’s public school children.<sup>48</sup>

The value of using climate surveys can be seen in both small and large populations. The results in both cases allow school administrators, teachers, students, or parents to initiate the dialogue and change.

A point that will be raised here and that was raised in the recommendation on professional development is the benefit of teacher and administrator retention, or conversely, the economic loss from teachers and administrators exiting the profession. Futernick writes in *A Possible Dream, Retaining California Teachers* that one of the ways to reduce teacher turnover is to “assess teaching conditions locally and continuously” (p.xii). He continues as follows:

**To fully understand the problems teachers face in particular schools, the teachers themselves must be asked and asked often. Surveys and/or focus groups should be conducted regularly and continuously with all staff, including principals, to assess the quality of the teaching conditions in the school district.**

Several studies have pointed to the value or inferred the benefit of assessing the school climate and acting on the findings. In general, the research reveals that climate surveys:

- Assess the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of all stakeholders.<sup>49</sup> Those assessments reveal the deeper attitudes and behaviors that influence academic achievement.
- Allow for the creation of a climate of high expectations.<sup>50</sup> Efforts to change the school climate will positively affect the school culture. Changes to note are improved student attitudes about teachers, fewer suspensions, and daily improvement in attendance.
- Allow schools to apply strategies that fit their particular needs.<sup>51</sup>
- Are more apt to be used in high-performing schools that understand the connection between a positive school climate and high student achievement.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>49</sup>Perkins, *Where We Teach*.

<sup>50</sup>Lindahl, *The Role of Organizational Climate*.

<sup>51</sup>A. Harris. *School Improvement: What's In It for Schools?* New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002.

<sup>52</sup>M.L., Van Horn. “Elementary School Climate: Assessing the Unit of Theory of School Climate With the School Climate Survey.” *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 63, 2003, 1002-19.

- Can address equity issues, such as disproportional enrollment in special education participation.<sup>53</sup>

Examples of surveys currently in use are the California School Climate Survey (CSCS) and the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). The value of using the climate survey in improving academic achievement has great promise. According to an article by Austin and Benard prepared for the EdSource education policy:

The California Department of Education (CDE) has created the nation’s most extensive, comprehensive system for providing local education agencies with data on school climate, student engagement, and nonacademic learning barriers and supports. This system is based on two complementary surveys—the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) for students and the California School Climate Survey (CSCS) for school staff. LEAs are required to administer these two surveys simultaneously at least once every two years in compliance with Title IV provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act.<sup>54</sup>

The CSCS and CHKS provide schools and districts with the opportunities to address factors that impede academic achievement for all students, especially for the subgroups. However, the surveys in their present form do not adequately address the factors that may help to explain the educational experience of underperforming African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, English language learners, and some Asian students. Consequently, the Council recommends: (1) that the current surveys be changed to include additional questions that allow the preceding subgroups to reveal their educational experience accurately and openly; or (2) that a new survey be developed.

### **How can the climate survey help the state close the achievement gap?**

The climate survey is an assessment tool that captures the beliefs and attitudes that affect student achievement. These data should be disaggregated and communicated statewide, and from this understanding, strategies to ensure systemic improvements will be initiated. In the diverse educational culture in California, it is critical that all educators and staff have the beliefs and attitudes that foster high expectations for all children. In addition to creating baseline data that tell how teachers, administrators, staff, and parents feel, the climate survey also helps explain why those groups feel as they do. In other words, the climate survey, and the resulting improvement efforts, can assist in changing the school culture so that it benefits all students.

<sup>53</sup>Futernick, *A Possible Dream*.

<sup>54</sup>Austin and Benard, *The State Data System*.

The surveys were developed by WestEd under contract to CDE. WestEd provides technical assistance to schools in collecting, processing, reporting, and using the results. Information is available at the Web site [www.wested.org/chks](http://www.wested.org/chks).



## EXPECTATIONS

California's educational system must continually and systematically hold high expectations for student outcomes. Without the belief from educators, stakeholders, and the entire educational system that students can achieve at the highest levels, the state can not close the achievement gap.

Rafe Esquith is a highly recognized and successful teacher at Hobart Boulevard Elementary School in Los Angeles, California. A teacher since 1981, he explained the importance of high expectations as follows:

Successful classrooms are run by teachers who have an unshakable belief that the students can accomplish amazing things and who *create the expectation that they will*. My students perform Shakespeare because I believe they can, because they know that last year's class did, *because I explain to them how they will do it and then I show them*. As soon as they master the first page, they begin to develop confidence in themselves. *They raise their own expectations*. . . Someone has to tell children if they are behind, and lay out a plan of attack to help them catch up. . . There are no excuses. Students new to the country or living with economic hardship are just as capable of becoming top students as their more privileged peers in other parts of the city. However, they will never get there if the teacher doesn't believe this. Children need and deserve our belief in their ability to improve skills.<sup>55</sup>

Systematic and continuous high expectations cannot exist without strong leadership to provide these enriched settings for students. In an article by Kati Hay-

<sup>55</sup>Rafe Esquith, *There Are No Shortcuts*. New York: Anchor Books, 2003, 53-54.

cock, President of The Education Trust, she notes that young people have expressed their views on why an achievement gap exists:

**They talk about teachers who often do not know the subjects they are teaching. They talk about counselors who consistently underestimate their potential, and program them into lower-level courses. They talk about principals who dismiss their concerns about these things when they raise them. And they talk, in particular, about a curriculum and set of expectations that feel so miserably low-level that they literally bore the students right out the school door.<sup>56</sup>**

One of The Education Trust’s key findings in a 2005 report was that in high-impact schools, which are schools that produced unusually large growth in achievement for students who had entered significantly behind, students are encouraged to take on academic challenges. The report states, “high-impact schools have consistently higher expectations for all students, regardless of students’ prior academic performance.”<sup>57</sup>

If expectations for high achievement are not evident in the curriculum, instructional practices, and student assignments and in the school’s communication to students, parents, and school staff, or between student and teacher, then efforts are needed to address these shortcomings. A basic review should consistently be performed to determine whether students are truly being challenged, whether a sufficient amount of support time is dedicated to students who are struggling, or whether any level of communication exists between the teacher and students.

The Council believes the state can play an important role in helping to raise expectations for all students and has prioritized the following four areas, Recommendations 6 through 9 as a start:

### **Recommendation 6: Augment Accountability System**

**To help schools and districts reach high expectations, California should augment its accountability system to ensure that schools and districts are intervening in critical areas that will help close the achievement gap.**

The Council’s discussions concerning the characteristics of successful schools and districts highlighted the need to have districts incorporate successful practices. When the efforts of all the stakeholders to address the achievement gap and the

<sup>56</sup>Kati Haycock, “Closing the Achievement Gap: State Policy Levers,” *The State Education Standard*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2002), p. 9.

<sup>57</sup>*Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground: How Some High Schools Accelerate Learning for Struggling Students*. Prepared by Education Trust. Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2005, p. 16.

educational needs of its student population have been increased, the expectations for students will be elevated, and the culture of the school will be one that believes that all the students can achieve at a higher level.

The state’s accountability system, the Academic Performance Index (API), is an outcome-based system that uses assessment results to measure the success of schools. The API has existed since 1999 and has gone through a series of changes, but it has remained an outcome-based system. While supportive of the



API system, the Council also strongly believes that schools need a measure that recognizes their efforts to help close the achievement gap, even if those efforts are not immediately visible on the API. Such a measure would likely establish an input-based system that reflects school- and district-based decision making, such as teacher distribution, parent involvement programs, additional enrichment programs, and so forth.

Changing the API from a results-based system to one based both on results and inputs was not viewed as a reasonable recommendation because of a clear commitment to viewing student learning, as measured by the assessments, as the ultimate arbiter of success. Yet development of some carefully designed input-based measures would encourage districts to create and implement interventions, narrow the gap, and produce measurable change. Such an accountability model would also allow the state to design its recognition programs to reward schools for their efforts to bring change at their sites.

Therefore, the Council’s recommendation is for the State Superintendent to develop an Achievement Gap Intervention Index, which would stand in addition to the API, that contains key indicators that research shows are highly correlated with closing gaps in student achievement.

In considering the components of this new Achievement Gap Intervention Index, the Council found that the research points to a number of important factors, some of which include district-wide distribution of highly effective teachers, administrative leadership, strong professional development, use of data and assessments, positive school environment, parental involvement, and development of community and business partnerships.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup>Paul E. Barton. Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baselines for Tracking Progress. Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J., October 2003. <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICPARSING.pdf> (Accessed January 12, 2008).

Most important, this system should also be a true accountability model whose annual results are anticipated by every level of education. Therefore, the consequences linked to these results must mean that there is accountability, not just for schools but also for districts, counties, and the state. The state should not simply demand that schools do better, but it should have a stake in the improvement of every local educational agency.

### **How will augmenting the state accountability system help the state to close the achievement gap?**

By creating an Achievement Gap Intervention Index, California will gain more immediate recognition of progress. This recognition will both encourage and reward schools and districts that create and implement new initiatives to close their achievement gap. Goal-setting and annual targets to increase efforts will allow a local focus on initiatives that will lead to improvements on student achievement. This system will also make it possible for the state to provide more recognition to schools that make significant efforts to bring about change.

## **Recommendation 7: Model Rigor**

**California must create a way of modeling rigor for educators. To increase expectations for students from various backgrounds, with language or other special needs, California must provide a clear and consistent understanding of “high expectations.”**

The State Superintendent should address a statewide need for rigorous curricula by developing an anchor bank as a resource for the field. Often, the existence of low expectations in the classroom is due to a lack of understanding or agreement on what defines a rigorous assignment. *Rigor* is a difficult concept to define. The discrepancies and low expectations are evident in the manner in which standards are implemented by schools and districts, depending on the student population, the school demographics, and a perceived level of understanding of certain concepts. The development of an online anchor bank would provide an accessible resource for every educator in the state.

An anchor bank is essentially a depository of standards-aligned assignments that provide examples of breadth and depth. Students need to acquire different levels of understanding, including higher-order thinking skills, and they also need the ability to apply this knowledge to different or unfamiliar settings. The anchor bank would provide real world or relevant assignments, as well as assignments that can be used in a number of educational programs, such as career technical courses.

CDE should create and manage the anchor bank to provide consistency and access for all schools and districts. The state would assume the role of defining and clarifying practices that would address low expectations in classrooms throughout the state. Rigor is necessary in all grade levels but especially in all courses at the middle and high school grade levels.

Because of the shortage of resources for some subject-area expertise, the anchor bank can provide a strong appeal for many administrators and educators.

The anchor bank should:

- Address English, math, science, and social science curriculum.
- Include career, college preparatory, technology, and agricultural education programs.
- Provide more analysis of teaching strategies, ways to bring rigor into the classroom, and an understanding beyond the standard.
- Provide professional development on ways to best address these standards, things to consider in teaching a lesson (especially as it relates to subgroups), and some insight as to the success or reflections on teaching a lesson.
- Store only educators' assignments that have been successful with students from diverse backgrounds or that provide information on ways they can succeed with diverse populations.
- Provide attention to helping students acquire more-sophisticated levels of understanding and include higher-order thinking skills.
- Demonstrate relevancy by ensuring that students can apply the lesson outside the classroom.

**Why will modeling rigor help the state close the achievement gap?**

By modeling rigor and developing an anchor bank, California will provide a valuable resource for teachers and increase the potential for students to receive high-quality, challenging assignments in core subject areas.

**Recommendation 8: Focus on Academic Rigor**

**California should generate a focused effort on defining consistent and ubiquitous academic rigor to ensure that the state's high school graduates receive an education that prepares them for any path, whether it is higher education or the workforce.**

The State Superintendent should develop a system of identifying rigor in high school courses that will address the expectations for skills and knowledge held by employers and colleges and universities.

A 2006 study by ACT, Inc. found that rigor in courses, regardless of context, would help address the following finding:

**The results of this study underscore the importance of having a common expectation for all students when they graduate from high school: one that prepares *all* high school graduates for both credit-bearing entry-level college courses and workforce training programs associated with jobs that are likely to offer both a wage sufficient to support a small family and the potential for career advancement.<sup>59</sup>**

In the past few years, local districts have engaged in efforts to increase the number of courses that meet the state’s a–g requirements in order to provide increased access to all students. Despite these recent efforts, reports have shown that a continued disparity exists among the subgroup populations enrolled in a–g courses. In 2006, the University of California/All Campus Consortium for Research Diversity and the University of California at Los Angeles Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access provided data on California students that demonstrated that out of 100 white ninth graders, 75 graduated from high school, and 33 met the a–g requirements. In comparison, out of 100 American Indian, African American, and Latino students in the ninth grade, 58 graduated from high school, and only 15 completed the a–g requirements.<sup>60</sup> Some districts have opted to implement an a–g curriculum for all students in order to address this disparity. However, there are legitimate debates on whether a–g in particular is appropriate only for college bound students or whether it can equally serve those students who are taking career or technical classes.



The Council believes that California needs a more consistent way of recognizing rigorous courses regardless of whether one uses the a–g framework or not. The question remains whether the a–g sequence is the best way to provide academic

The Council believes that California needs a more consistent way of recognizing rigorous courses regardless of whether one uses the a–g framework or not. The question remains whether the a–g sequence is the best way to provide academic

<sup>59</sup>Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different? Executive Summary, ACT, Inc., 2006, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup>Jeannie Oakes and others, “Removing the Roadblocks: Fair College Opportunities for All California Students.” UC/ACCORD and UCLA/IDEA, 2006.



rigor or whether something else needs to evolve. Whether students opt to begin their career immediately after high school or choose a two-year technical school or four-year course of study, schools must prepare them with the skills to succeed in their chosen pursuit and to have the ability to change their path. This preparation can occur only if the educational system provides a rigorous, relevant education as students approach the end of their K–12 careers.

**Why will a focus on academic rigor help the state close the achievement gap?**

California must design a systemic way of defining academic rigor to ensure that its graduates will receive an education relevant to the world of higher education or the world of work.

**Recommendation 9: Improve the Awards System**

**California must identify additional ways to reward schools and districts that close the gap.**

The Council believes that when schools or districts have succeeded in closing gaps by making extraordinary improvements or have moved out of Program Improvement, the state should create a better system of acknowledgement for the significant amount of work that took place to achieve this success. The media attention that surrounds schools and districts when they are struggling is nowhere to be found when they manage to turn things around. The state should help recognize such achievements.

CDE’s School and District Awards System should incorporate criteria on how schools and districts have performed toward closing the achievement gap as part of the criteria to recognize successful schools and their practices. Specifically, CDE should ask California’s Distinguished School applicants to describe their efforts to close the achievement gap and demonstrate the results. The state should not consider schools “Distinguished” if they are not successfully addressing one of the most critical educational issues in California’s schools.

**Why will improving the state awards system help the state close the achievement gap?**

Ensuring that the state awards system recognizes gains and efforts made by districts and schools toward closing the achievement gap would require that schools and districts carefully consider their current efforts and increase the amount of time spent evaluating their programs in place and the results achieved. This approach would clarify for state districts and schools that to be recognized, they must demonstrate success toward closing the achievement gap as a factor of the awards program.



## STRATEGIES

Each of the concerns cited throughout this report requires unique solutions or strategies. In developing the recommended strategies that follow, the Council focused on state-level solutions rather than on those at the classroom, school, or district levels. The strategies embedded in these recommendations were identified as proven or promising practices supported by data to narrow the achievement gap.

Worldwide events are moving at an unprecedented pace. Technology, medicine, science, communications, and global business ventures are vastly different from when today's educators attended school. Yet, much of the infrastructures and practices employed in teaching present-day youths remain the same. It is not surprising, therefore, that doing the same things yields the same results for the children most affected by the achievement gap. In fact, for many students that gap continues to widen. If California's children are to thrive in tomorrow's economy and society, they will need to be far more knowledgeable and skilled than ever before. Achieving that end depends on the ability to establish foundational structures for all students to succeed. These foundations include access to data collections to show which interventions are the most effective; professional development to prepare the teaching workforce to use proven educational methods; ways to share the best educational practices among all educators; technology tools to share knowledge across the state; and flexible policies in schools and districts to permit innovation and creativity.

The Council believes the state can play an important role in helping identify and implement key strategies to create a system of continuous improvement and has prioritized the following five areas, Recommendations 10 through 14 to start.

### Recommendation 10: Create a Robust Information System

**California must design, develop, and implement a rich, robust, high-quality information collection system that meets the needs of educators, school systems, and state-level policymakers in their efforts to create a culture of data examination at the state, regional, and local levels.**

At the heart of closing the achievement gap lies the need for complete, robust, high-quality data to support efforts to make informed decisions. A robust data collection system is coherent, useful, accessible, structured, and timely. This type of system is vital so that educators can determine the services, programs, and interventions students need to improve their academic achievement.<sup>61</sup> Policymakers and researchers will also rely heavily on this system. Policymakers will use these data to make regulatory and legislative decisions, and researchers and academics will use it to study the longitudinal effects of decisions made by all stakeholders.<sup>62</sup>

To avoid relying on assumptions about which interventions are effective in closing the achievement gap, the state needs to collect the most relevant and critical data that support student achievement.<sup>63</sup> As stated in the report *Getting Down to Facts, Data in California: Availability and Transparency*:

**How [else] can policymakers and the public know how their elementary and secondary schools are doing and whether their investments are accomplishing their goal?. . . The ability to answer these questions depends on strong data systems that collect the relevant information and make it available to various stakeholders in the education enterprise in accessible and understandable ways.<sup>64</sup>**

<sup>61</sup>Ida Oberman, Jim Hollis, and Don Dailey. *Bringing the State and Locals Together: Developing Effective Data Systems in California School Districts*. Springboard Schools, 2006. [http://orepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/16-Springboard/16-Springboard\(3-07\).pdf](http://orepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/16-Springboard/16-Springboard(3-07).pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007); Susan Smith and others, *Linking Education and Social Services Data to Improve Child Welfare*. Casey Family Programs and The Data Quality Campaign. October 2007. [http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Meetings-DQC\\_Quarterly\\_Issue\\_Brief\\_091807.pdf](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Meetings-DQC_Quarterly_Issue_Brief_091807.pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>62</sup>“Addressing California’s Data Needs: Implementing Comprehensive, Longitudinal Systems at the Local and State Levels.” Submitted by the District Practitioner Working Group; California Collaborative on District Reform. Policy Brief for Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening. Hosted by EdSource (October 19, 2007 in Sacramento. <http://www.EdSource.org/pdf/CompleteConveningBook.pdf> (Accessed December 13, 2007) 59–64.

<sup>63</sup>Russell W. Rumberger and Jim Connell. “Strengthening School District Capacity as a Strategy to Raise Student Achievement in California.” Policy Brief for Getting From Facts to Policy: An Education Policy Convening. Hosted by EdSource (October 19, 2007 in Sacramento. <http://www.EdSource.org/pdf/CompleteConveningBook.pdf> (Accessed December 13, 2007) 261–66.

<sup>64</sup>Janet S. Hansen. *Education Data in California: Availability and Transparency*. The RAND Corporation. A report prepared for the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, Stanford University. (November 2006). [http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/15-Hansen\(3-07\).pdf](http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/15-Hansen(3-07).pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

The state must determine the specific data elements that it must collect to provide the useful, relevant information for closing the achievement gap.<sup>65</sup> To accomplish this goal, the Council recommends that the state must:

1. Supplement the minimal accountability and reporting data gathered through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) and the California Longitudinal Teacher Information Data Education System (CALTIDES).
2. Develop a data system that provides value as a tool for school reform and evidence-based decision making.
3. Use this tool for decision making at the school, county, and district levels.
4. Also use this tool in every aspect of decision making at the state level, including decisions about state-adopted instructional materials, content standards, standardized assessments, and distribution of funds.

Adopting the preceding recommendations will create a statewide culture of evidence-based decision making.<sup>66</sup>

As mentioned previously, supplementing the CALPADS and CALTIDES data collection systems will create the structure needed for a robust data collection system. However, the critical elements of data within CALPADS and CALTIDES for identifying academic achievement and the data that provide a clear understanding of promising practices need to be determined next.

The National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) proposes that a robust data system contain ten essential elements. California has seven of those elements. Elements 5, 6, and 9 have not yet been implemented. Only the following four states have data systems that include all ten elements: Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, and Utah.<sup>67</sup> The ten essential elements identified by NCEA are:

1. A unique statewide student identifier that connects student data across key databases across the years
2. Student-level enrollment and information on demographic and program participation
3. The ability to match individual students' test records from year to year to measure academic growth [longitudinal data tracking]
4. Information on untested students and the reasons they were not tested
5. A teacher identification system that matches teachers to students

<sup>65</sup>*Addressing California's Data Needs.*

<sup>66</sup>Rumberger and Connell, "Strengthening School District Capacity."

<sup>67</sup>Data Quality Campaign, *Using Data to Improve Student Achievement. Results of 2007 NCEA Survey of State P-12 Data Collection Issues Related to Longitudinal Analysis.* The Data Quality Campaign.

6. Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned
7. Student-level college readiness test scores
8. Student-level graduation and dropout data
9. The ability to match student records between the P–12 and postsecondary systems
10. A state audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability

The Data Quality Campaign identified the following longitudinal data not currently collected by California:<sup>68</sup>

- Links between achievement at the elementary and middle school levels that prepare students for rigorous coursework at the high school level
- High school performance indicators that provide the best predictors for student success at the postsecondary level
- Predictors for success in employment
- Predictors of the capabilities of high school students who go on to postsecondary education so that they do not have to be placed in remedial mathematics and English courses
- Indicators that identify the teacher preparation programs that produce the strongest student academic growth



When the state provides sufficient and robust data to schools and districts, as identified in this recommendation, it will encourage local control of systemic change, innovation, and creativity. These data will allow local educational agencies to respond immediately to change and varying conditions and to develop a culture of examining and using data to guide their practices as they address their needs to close the achievement gap.<sup>69</sup> This culture of data examination will consist of developing shared beliefs, values, and norms about collecting, using, and understanding in a deep and meaningful way what the data indicate about the teaching and learning conditions of the students.

Educators must be willing to understand fully the constructs for developing that

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Susanna Loeb and David N. Plank, “Continuous Improvement in California Education: Data Systems and Policy Learning,” University of California, Berkeley, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). A report prepared for the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, Stanford University, 2007. [http://pace.berkeley.edu/report/Data\\_Systems\\_October\\_2007.pdf](http://pace.berkeley.edu/report/Data_Systems_October_2007.pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

culture and think carefully about the meaning of the data that they collect and apply to their analysis in order to prepare strategic approaches to restructuring efforts. Only then will educators be able to develop a deep understanding and appreciation of the achievement gap and the requirements to close it.

The Council recognizes that developing such a culture of data examination and use at the state and local levels will not be easy. During the first stage of developing that culture, the state bears the inherent responsibility to make clear, accurate, and robust information available to all stakeholders so that policymakers and educators can learn from the strengths and identify the weaknesses.<sup>70</sup> The result of this undertaking will require the state and local educational agencies to address pertinent issues related to creating a culture of data examination. The Council of Chief State School Officers has identified the following as pertinent issues that need to be addressed to develop this culture of data:

- Developing a new level of collaboration and synergy among all levels of data users to make data agile, portable, responsive, and sharable for all users
- Transforming not only technological infrastructures but also the way in which educational organizations operate, use, and distribute data
- Creating a cultural shift to embrace the notion that good data provide information needed to improve student outcomes
- Understanding that lack of use of data leads to underutilization of critical resources

### **Recommendation 11: Provide Professional Development on the Use of Data**

**California must design, develop, and implement coherent professional development in the areas of data collection, analysis, and interpretation for all educational leaders that address the needs of students subject to the achievement gap.**

Although the state and some districts often gather more data than they need, they often fail to use all or even some of the data to their fullest potential.<sup>71</sup> Knowing how to use the data is the key to knowledge-based decision making.<sup>72</sup> Developing the robust data collection system discussed in recommendation 10 will not guarantee any measure of success unless all educators and CDE personnel receive specific and focused professional development on the collection,

<sup>70</sup>*Data Quality Policy Statement of the Council of Chief State School Officers*. Adopted January 2006. <http://www.ccsso.org/content/PDFs/FinalDQPolicyStatement.pdf> (Accessed December 28, 2007).

<sup>71</sup>Allison Cromley, "Using Student Data: What Can We Learn From Schools?" *NCREL Policy Issues*, Issue 6 (November 2000).

<sup>72</sup>Richard C. Wallace, *Vision to Practice: The Art of Educational Leadership*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press. 1996.

management, synthesis, and use of data to guide decision making in classrooms, schools, and districts.<sup>73</sup> Researchers have concluded that:

**The state needs to make significant investments in human capital and capacity building at all levels of the educational system. Personnel policies must ensure that California educators have the time, knowledge, and skill they need to improve the performance of their schools and students. . . .<sup>74</sup>**

Data analysis training needs to be implemented at the state and the local levels through a prioritization system. This training should focus specifically on trends associated with content standards, adopted materials, standardized assessments, funding effectiveness, state laws and regulations, and CDE policies.<sup>75</sup>

At the local level the CDE should assist schools, districts, and county offices of education with data analysis by developing specific training modules. The CDE, in collaboration with higher education, the research community, and representative groups and organizations should also develop a comprehensive training model, complete with themes, strands, and syllabi for local implementation. This training model should engage the entire local school system in understanding, collecting, and consistently using data to support programmatic decisions and systemic change throughout the organization.<sup>76</sup> After this model has been created, the CDE should distribute it to school systems and county offices of education, allowing them to create their own training programs. All local training programs will be subject to approval from the State Board of Education. Instead of creating their own programs, school systems may contract with other local educational agencies to obtain this training.

## Recommendation 12: Share Successful Practices

**California must collect and disseminate a high-quality comprehensive body of knowledge, expertise, resources, and research on effective and successful practices that are proven or are promising in closing the achievement gap.**

While this recommendation is good for all students, it is critically important for those most affected by the achievement gap. Educators of those students must have reliable and vetted resources proven to be effective with that group. These

<sup>73</sup>Linda Darling-Hammond and Stelios Orphanos, "Leadership Development in California." Institute for Research on Education Policy & Practice, Stanford University, 2007. [http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/12-Darling-Hammond/12-Darling-Hammond\(3-07\).pdf](http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/12-Darling-Hammond/12-Darling-Hammond(3-07).pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>74</sup>Julia E. Koppich and Amy Gerstein, "Reshaping Personnel Policies to Improve Student Achievement." University of California, Berkeley, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). A report prepared for the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, Stanford University, 2007. <http://pace.berkeley.edu/report/Personnel Policies October 2007 .pdf> (Accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>75</sup>Loeb and Plank, "Continuous Improvement in California Education."

<sup>76</sup>Oberman, Hollis and Daily, *Bringing the State and Locals Together*.

resources must be available instantly in a format that is easy to understand and applicable to the classroom. Regrettably, for far too long, educators across the state have been left to create or discover for themselves the interventions, materials, practices, and interventions that are the most effective in reaching and teaching their students, with no central source for collaboration.<sup>77</sup> While California has an appropriate and important system of local school control, it is imperative that a means for sharing sound educational solutions to common issues be developed statewide.<sup>78</sup> The fact that some low-achieving schools succeed while others, often within the same or similar communities and with similar challenges, continue to struggle is persuasive evidence of the need to disseminate successful practices more effectively.

Therefore, there is a great need to develop a statewide system to gather all available educational research that meets high standards and to create workable strategies to convert those research findings into successful practices that improve student achievement. In addition, educators need to be connected with one another to collaborate and think more critically about their practices.<sup>79</sup> A good example of this type of collaborative environment is the state of New York's program titled New York Learns.<sup>80</sup> This highly successful and popular program was developed in collaboration with prekindergarten through grade twelve public schools, the higher education community, independent colleges, and proprietary colleges in an effort to close the achievement gap through statewide sharing of resources and best practices. This program makes the best practices and resources throughout the state and the nation available to the schools and educators. From the lessons learned through effective teacher collaboration and support to increase student learning, New York has scaled the concept to cover the entire state by:

- Sharing the best classroom practices
- Sharing effective materials and resources
- Developing new teacher skills
- Increasing teacher-to-teacher engagement and relationships
- Aligning teacher-intended outcomes with curriculum-defined outcomes
- Providing information and knowledge support systems for teachers
- Providing monitoring of progress and assessment for educators and students

The Council recognizes that the impediments to school improvement are varied, complex, and unique for each district and school. However, it is clear that the

<sup>77</sup>Koppich and Gerstein, "Reshaping Personnel Policies."

<sup>78</sup>Loeb and Plank, "Continuous Improvement in California Education."

<sup>79</sup>Koppich and Gerstein. "Reshaping Personnel Policies."

<sup>80</sup>Available on the Internet at <http://nylearns.org/>



state must provide the necessary tools and resources to schools and districts as they strive to close the achievement gap. Providing a well-articulated and coherent statewide information sharing system would give all educators throughout the state the information they need in this endeavor. This system should not only share knowledge with educators but should also model *how* to apply the expertise, resources, and research in their classrooms. The system should provide video clips, online instructional guides, and hands-on, site-based guidance.

### Recommendation 13: Fully Implement the California K–12 High-Speed Network

**California must fully fund the California High-Speed Network to ensure that every school, district, and county office of education has access to 21st century technology to help the students most in need.**

The California K–12 High-Speed Network (HSN) is a state program funded by CDE that provides Internet connectivity to enable educators, students, and staff across the state to have access to a reliable high-speed network that delivers high-quality online resources to support teaching and learning and promote academic achievement.



This HSN administers K–12 public schools' participation in the California Research and Education Network (CalREN). CalREN is the high-speed, high-bandwidth statewide network of 14 Hub Sites and circuits linking to Node Sites at 72 K–12 locations, 11 at the University of California, 24 at the California State University system, 111 at the community colleges, and 6 serving the three participating private universities. CalREN is also linked to the national Internet2 network, forming an advanced state and national Intranet for educational use.

While California has invested wisely in educational technology by connecting 100 percent of all county offices of education, 87 percent of all school districts, and 81 percent of all schools to the HSN, the state has not attained the goal of connecting all schools and districts to the network. HSN believes this will be accomplished only when the state fully funds the HSN project. The HSN states that:

K–12 enjoys the advantage of leveraging resources in the aggregate across K–12 and with higher education in California. Without state funding it would be difficult and cost-prohibitive to provide the level of service to every region of California. Left to fund connectivity on their own, some California districts would be capable of obtaining service while many would not. Advances toward equal opportunity and distance learning for teachers and students would be lost or made ineffective. Critical business functions of schools would be jeopardized, along with a variety of professional development opportunities and student programs.<sup>81</sup>

Oftentimes the schools and districts most in need of the HSN are not receiving this service. Many schools and districts in Program Improvement are not connected to the HSN. For example, Los Angeles County has 83 districts, of which 21 are not connected. Eight of the 21 districts are in Program Improvement. In addition, a high percentage of the students in these districts are participating in the free and reduced lunch program, an indicator of economic disadvantage. It is unlikely that these economically disadvantaged students will have access to the Internet at home to help them in their schoolwork. Without access to the HSN at school, these students fall farther behind in school, and this problem perpetuates the achievement gap.

It is imperative that schools serving specific populations with the highest academic needs, such as students attending special education programs and continuation, community day, and alternative schools be connected to the HSN. Educators in these school settings often need specific instructional strategies that use the Internet to engage their students.

To close the achievement gap requires the delivery of accurate, timely, and relevant information and resources to educators and their students. To prepare students for the 21st century, technology needs to be incorporated into the classroom instruction. The HSN can help with this task by connecting teachers and students with the resources they need to close the achievement gap.

### **Recommendation 14: Create Opportunities for School District Flexibility**

To close the achievement gap at the local level, low-performing schools and districts will need to become highly creative in developing the right mix of conditions and support systems for their students, teachers, and school administrators. The state can help these schools and districts by providing them with greater

<sup>81</sup>California High Speed Network available at <http://www.k12hsn.org>

flexibilities so that they can tailor program development, instructional interventions, professional development, and student assessment to suit their immediate needs. California should perform a thorough review and analysis of all regulations and state policies that affect the discretion and flexibilities of schools and districts for program decision making and fiscal management. Analysis of programming flexibilities includes a review of the required instructional minutes for core instructional areas; use of required materials; alternative program offerings for English learners, including extended first language support; extended learning opportunities supported by technology; and guidance and support services.

The funding of California's education system is complex and highly regulated. In the development of the funding system, much attention has been paid to equitable distribution of resources. However, many researchers have concluded that a one-size-fits-all funding mechanism does not work for all schools and districts.<sup>82</sup> Through the years, a great deal of thought and expertise has been devoted to equitable funding, both in California and around the nation. Therefore, the Council recommends that the state provide schools and districts with more flexibility in the use of education funds on the basis of their individual needs and proven ability to increase student achievement. Analysis of fiscal flexibilities includes a review of categorical funds to determine gaps and opportunities in using these funds to close the achievement gap and to allow local flexibilities in using funds in the most efficient manner to meet the needs and conditions of the students.<sup>83</sup>

The rationale behind this recommendation is that students represented by the achievement gap often require additional and differentiated services and supports.<sup>84</sup> However, sometimes those services and supports may not always be directly related to learning, but they do have an impact on learning. Students and their families may require assistance in other areas before learning can happen.<sup>85</sup> For example, many economically disadvantaged students come to school with poor vision, dental problems, and personal health concerns. While schools and districts are rarely able to provide these services, they can assist these students in other ways. Given funding flexibility, schools and districts could create liaison

<sup>82</sup>Michael W. Kirst, "Evolution of California State School Finance with Implications from Other States." Stanford University. A report prepared for the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, 2007. [http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/03-Kirst/3-Kirst\(3-07\).pdf](http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/03-Kirst/3-Kirst(3-07).pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>83</sup>Thomas Timar, "How California Funds K-12 Education." University of California, Davis. A report prepared for the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, 2007. [http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/02-Timar/2Timar\(3-07\).pdf](http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/02-Timar/2Timar(3-07).pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>84</sup>Patricia Gandara and Russell W. Rumberger, "Resource Needs for California's English Learners." University of California, UCLA and Santa Barbara, respectively, A policy brief for *Getting Down to Facts: A Research Project to Inform Solutions to California's Education Problems* (December 2006); Kati Haycock, "State Policy Levers: Closing the Achievement Gap." *The State Education Standard* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2002). <http://www.nasbe.org/Standard/8/Winter2002/haycock.pdf> (Accessed December 28, 2007); John U. Ogbu, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003.

<sup>85</sup>Jon Sonstelie and others, "Aligning School Finance with Academic Standards: A Weighted-Student Formula Based on a Survey of Practitioners." Public Policy Institute of California. A report prepared for the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, Stanford University, March 2007. [http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/20-Sonstelie20-Sonstelie\(3-07\).pdf](http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/20-Sonstelie20-Sonstelie(3-07).pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

staff positions to help students and their families in getting access to resources in the community that provide the needed services. At other times, the support services are directly related to teaching and learning. Students may require additional time in class or throughout the year to receive extensive content and language instruction. Given funding flexibility, schools and districts could provide programs before and after school, or they could extend the school year for those students who most need to accelerate their learning.

Providing the support services mentioned previously will require additional funding. Creating flexibilities in categorical funds is not a new idea. Categorical funds are understandably prescriptive because they protect valuable programs for specific groups of students. However, considering these funds as a means to close the achievement gap provides a new direction. In this regard, categorical funds often fall short in providing the targeted assistance needed to close the achievement gap.<sup>86</sup> Schools and districts are held accountable for the way in which they spend the funds rather than for their gains in student achievement. Allowing categorical funding flexibilities will permit districts to explore a full range of learning opportunities for those students most affected by the achievement gap and thereby to assume greater local control of spending and programmatic decision making.

However, funding flexibilities alone probably will not be able to provide the complete level of fiscal support needed to close the achievement gap; other options will also need to be explored.<sup>87</sup>

As discussed previously in this recommendation, the different requirements and guidelines attached to specialized funding streams make developing a support system that addresses the many and varied challenges of students affected by the achievement gap nearly impossible. While many funding streams offer latitude to use funds in different ways, more is needed to provide support services and additional instruction to those students most in need. This type of additional instruction may vary, but there is no room to guess what works best, and there is none for mistakes. Therefore, all instructional decisions must be based on a high-quality, robust data system.

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<sup>86</sup>Bruce Fuller and others, "Principal Resources: Acquisition, Deployment, and Barriers." University of California, Berkeley. Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and Stanford University. A report prepared for the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, Stanford University, 2006. [http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/13-Fuller/13-Fuller\(3-07\).pdf](http://irepp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/STUDIES/13-Fuller/13-Fuller(3-07).pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>87</sup>Robert S. Michael and Robert K. Toutkousian, "What is the Complexity Index?" *Center for Evaluation and Education Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter 2007). [http://ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB\\_V5N2\\_Winter2007\\_EPB.pdf](http://ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB_V5N2_Winter2007_EPB.pdf) (Accessed December 13, 2007).

## Concluding Remarks

After a year-long, intensive effort studying the achievement gap in California, the Council emerged with surprising optimism. There is no doubt that an enormous amount of work must be undertaken. But there are numerous uplifting examples of success throughout this state. The Council recognizes that replicability is often one of the most difficult things to accomplish, but it also believes that California has the knowledge, ability, and will to improve its educational system. The recommendations set forth are just the beginning. However, they represent an important start to a long-term, joint effort between all stakeholders to marshal the resources and focus on the state's most compelling educational need: closing the systemic and pernicious achievement gap.

## Funding

Many of the recommendations raise the issue of funding. However, it was not the Council's assignment to analyze and debate the financial aspects of its recommendations. The Council was charged with putting forth the strongest ideas for consideration and to bring those recommendations forward to the legislative and executive leadership so that priorities can be established and funding can be determined.

## Implementation Plan

The plan to close the achievement gap comprises three phases.

- Phase I— (completed) Called for establishing four subgroups; providing topics for UC research papers; examining existing research; surveying educators, students, families, and other stakeholders; identifying current exemplary successful practices in California; organizing the work of the CDE around the priority to close the achievement gap; holding townhall meetings, community forums, and a Statewide Achievement Gap Summit in Sacramento in November 2007; and preparing a baseline report on the achievement gap for the Superintendent.
- Phase II—Begins the actualization of the Superintendent's recommendations. Activities include conducting policy meetings to discuss recommendations; implementing the CDE's recommendations applicable to developing and passing legislative packages and approving regulatory changes; collaborating with the Governor's Office as well as the Legislature for budget appropriations; partnering with the University of California (see below), and conducting further research as needed.

- Phase III—Focuses on implementation of the Superintendent’s recommendations, including ensuring state budget allocations for programs, implementation plans for chaptered legislation, and organizational changes with the CDE to ensure that all programs and changes are successful.

The intent of this report is to have the Superintendent review and analyze each of the recommendations and determine which ones will need legislative action, regulatory action, and policy recommendations and which can be implemented expeditiously without any additional intervention. It is the hope of this Council that everyone will examine carefully the ideas and recommendations to prepare a cohesive plan for closing the achievement gap.

## Partnership with University of California

In the process of continuing its work on the Initiative, the Council and the California Department of Education undertook an unprecedented research partnership with the higher education community specifically to address the achievement gap. Coordinated by the Office of the President for the University of California system (UC), the partnership is intended to form an effective partnership and a permanent relationship between a university system and a state’s K–12 system. The partnership would also serve as a national model for collaboration. The Council will coordinate and direct an extensive information-gathering process, including scholarly research and practitioner expertise. To begin this partnership, the Council commissioned a series of research papers that will help further the Council’s recommendations and explore additional options for closing the achievement gap. In their work, researchers are to review and synthesize empirical studies, best practices, meaningful cross-site comparisons, and other materials on aspects of the achievement gap. It is anticipated that up to three background papers will be prepared for each of the four major themes. The topics for the ten papers are as follows:

- Overview: Closing the multiple achievement gaps in California
- Understanding, measuring, and analyzing the achievement gap at the state and local levels
- Successful state-level strategies and policies for closing the achievement gap
- Getting access to high-quality instructional strategies
- Organizational strategies, resources, and opportunities that appear to have the greatest impact on improving student learning and closing the achievement gap
- Using resources wisely
- Aspects of teacher preparation, knowledge, and skills that contribute to the success of all students, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse students

- The role of a positive school climate in student achievement and how it is fostered
- Features of high schools that are successful in raising expectations and closing the achievement gap
- School-parent and school-community supports that can contribute to closing the achievement gap

### **Sustainability**

The CDE, in conjunction with the Council, will continue to serve instrumental roles in ensuring the sustainability of this project. There is a fundamental need to make sure that this initiative not only defines the causes of the achievement gaps, but also pursues the implementation of successful practices to close them. The task of closing the achievement gap is a long-term commitment that will include many facets of best practices and will take the concerted efforts of the systems most affected. The Council is committed to ongoing vigilance toward closing this gap and will work closely with all stakeholders to ensure eventual success and equity of access for all students.

### **Evaluation Plan**

Without question, the importance of accountability and the ability to evaluate the progress of this project are critical. Any belief that closing the achievement gap can be fully addressed in a year or two is unrealistic. The need to measure any advances continually and systematically is critical to successfully decreasing the achievement gap over time. The Council will evaluate its success by a review of the annual assessment results for gains or losses in state test scores of the subgroups in all curricular areas; the increase or decrease in the percentage of English learner students scoring at intermediate or above on the CELDT; the increase or decrease in the percentage of each subgroup enrolled in rigorous classes; the increase or decrease in the percentage of students in each subgroup who successfully pass Algebra I; the increase or decrease in the percentage of each subgroup passing the CAHSEE; the increase or decrease in the percentage of each subgroup graduating from high school, and the increase or decrease in the percentage of each subgroup graduating college or entering the workforce.

Through collaboration, research, and implementation of strategies, the educational community will prevail in this quest of closing the achievement gap in California. Doing this will not be easy. But doing this is the right thing for California's future.



## **Acknowledgments**

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## APPENDIX A

### Definitions of Selected Terms

By John R. Browne, Ed.D.

**Culturally courageous leaders.** Culturally courageous leaders are teachers, administrators, other school staff members, students, parents, and members of the community who have the knowledge, skills, and willingness to positively confront biased beliefs, attitudes, policies, and practices that fail to respect the identity and maximize the achievement of culturally diverse students. Culturally courageous leaders are committed to constantly improving their own cultural proficiency. They are also committed to taking risks to help historically under-achieving students who are victims of inequitable practices and unequal allocation of resources. Culturally courageous leaders model a commitment to critical self examination and reflection, to increasing their own cultural knowledge, and to pursuit of social justice, leading to personal transformation. Such leaders also give priority to facilitating the personal transformation of others and work in concert with others to help schools achieve both equity and excellence - even when that means challenging biased or counterproductive attitudes, behaviors, and norms of those in their own cultural groups.<sup>1</sup>

**Culturally proficient educators/schools.** Culturally proficient educators are educators who recognize and value five essential elements: (1) diversity in values;

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<sup>1</sup>J. Browne, "Culturally Courageous Leadership: Strategies for Enhancing Achievement in Low Performing Schools." Unpublished manuscript, 2007.

(2) access to one's culture; (3) managing the dynamics of difference; (4) institutionalizing cultural knowledge; and (5) adapting to diversity and incorporating it into their repertoire of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Examples of how these key elements are behaviorally manifested include:

- Identifying and changing the cultural norms of the school when they negatively affect those whose culture is different;
- Encouraging all school stakeholders to value diversity by involving all in learning about and celebrating diversity;
- Learning effective strategies for resolving conflict among those of different cultural backgrounds and values;
- Seeking and acquiring information and skills that enable one to interact effectively in a variety of cross-cultural situations; and
- Examining and changing district and school policies and practices that are discriminatory<sup>2</sup>

One example of how culturally proficient schools function is the ongoing commitment to changing the beliefs and practices of anyone that reflect inequity, exclusiveness, privilege, entitlement, and any of the “isms” of the school environment.<sup>3</sup>

**Culturally relevant curriculum.** Culturally relevant curriculum is driven by content standards that recognize the positive contributions of individuals, both male and female, and of groups from diverse cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds to the development of the United States and to humanity in general. It includes knowledge that reflects the culture of those in the classroom, school, community, state and nation in both authentic images and text. It aims to correct past omissions and distortions in school curricula that have misrepresented, ignored, or devalued the multicultural nature of the United States and the world. It also aims to correct societal ills such as institutional racism, sexism, and “classism” that have affected many people, both historically and in the present. A goal of culturally relevant curriculum is to positively affect the self-concept, esteem, motivation, and resiliency of historically underachieving students.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Lindsey Randall, Nuri Kikanza, and Raymond Terrell, *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1999.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>G. Ladson-Billings, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” *American Education Research Journal* (1995) 3 (6), 465-91.

**Culturally responsive instruction.** Culturally responsive instruction is driven by performance and delivery standards that recognize the need to build upon the characteristics, learning styles, strengths, interests, and cultural background/heritage of students in the classroom. It is based on the assumption that capitalizing on what students know, rather than just on what they do not know when they enter any classroom, is important. One goal of such instruction is to validate and empower all learners. Another goal is to provide multidimensional, transformative instruction that encompasses curriculum content, learning content, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments. Such instruction defies traditional educational practices for ethnic students of color. It reflects a rejection of the belief that good teaching is transcendent and identical for all students under all circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>G. Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2000.



## **APPENDIX B**

### **Pre-K Advisory Committee**

#### **MEMO**

**To:** P16 Council  
**Fr:** P16 Pre-K Advisory Committee  
**Re:** Pre-K Recommendations  
**Date:** January 8, 2008

#### **The Achievement Gap and Pre-K**

Recent state test scores show a persistent academic achievement gap between Latino and African American students and their white and Asian classmates. These results are of particular importance to Californians because our state's future workforce and ability to compete in the new global economy depends largely on how well we educate our children, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds. An analysis of eight national studies on racial differences shows that at least half of the achievement gap observed at the end of twelfth grade can be attributed to the differences that exist at first grade.<sup>1</sup>

A vast body of research shows that, when done right, effective pre-K education helps narrow the achievement gap before children start school. Quality pre-kindergarten programs can make a world of difference by building an important foundation in early cognitive and social skills and fostering a love of learning that

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Sadowski. The School Readiness Gap, Harvard Education Letter, page 1, July 2006, Volume 22, Number 4.

endures through the K-12 years and beyond. Effective pre-kindergarten helps all children get ready to learn and ready to read and that early education will serve them well in their school careers.

*In Getting Down to Facts: Resource Needs for California's English Learners*, the authors' top recommendation is to provide part-day high-quality pre-K for all English Learner students. The fact is, all children benefit from a high quality pre-K experience. However, our existing state and federal preschool programs do not have the standards or serve enough children to ensure that every child starts school with an equal opportunity to learn.

- i. Of the approximately 465,734<sup>2</sup> low-income<sup>3</sup> 3 and 4 year olds in California, approximately 254,968, or a little more than half receive either Head Start or state subsidized preschool. However, none of these programs, including Head Start and State Preschool, have the high standards or resources associated with effective preschool.
- ii. The patchwork quilt system of subsidized programs serving preschool-age children<sup>4</sup> lacks sufficient quality standards, resources and accountability:
  - There are three sets of state standards for teacher qualifications; however, none of the standards are at the level of an AA or BA degree;
  - Part-day state preschool is funded at one-third the rate of K-12,<sup>5</sup> and less than half that of Head Start;<sup>6</sup> and,
  - No valid, independent assessment of program quality is conducted.

## 1. High Quality Pre-K Programs

California should provide access to effective pre-K for all children, starting with those who need it most. The children who lack access to preschool space are disproportionately children of color, children whose home language is not English, and children whose parents did not graduate from high school. Effective pre-K requires establishing high quality standards that have been shown to significantly increase child outcomes. These include:

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<sup>2</sup>National Center on Children in Poverty, State Profiles, Columbia University, 2005.

<sup>3</sup>The Federal Poverty Guidelines, issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, define "low income" as below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold.

<sup>4</sup>This refers to CDE Title 5 State Preschool, Full Day State Preschool, General Child Care, Calworks, and AP vouchers for 3 and 4 year olds.

<sup>5</sup>National Institute for Early Education Research, State of Preschool, 2006 State Preschool Yearbook, California, 2006, page 49.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



- Developmentally appropriate, research-based learning Foundations should be linked to an intentional curriculum and a comprehensive professional development system.
- Classroom size should be no larger than 20 children with one teacher and one associate teacher.
- Family literacy programs, parenting education, and parent involvement should be infused throughout the program.
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum should prepare English language learners for success in school.
- Programs should identify and be inclusive of children with special needs.
- Lead Teachers should have a B.A. with at least 24 ECE units once the program has been established for 8 years.
- Associate Teachers should have 60 units with at least 24 ECE units within eight years of program establishment.
- Teachers and associate teachers are compensated on par with those of K-12 teachers and aides.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has established 10 Benchmarks for High Quality Preschool. Appendix A shows which benchmarks California's existing child development programs currently meet and what needs to be done to meet the remaining ones.

## 2. Facilities

There is a clear need for building new pre-K facilities, which can have a lasting impact on future generations by ensuring access to pre-K for children who otherwise would not have it. A 2007 study by the Advancement Project shows that California lacks facility space for one out of five preschoolers. The percentage is the same whether we have universal or targeted pre-K. This analysis assumes utilization of the state's existing pre-K program facilities, including Head Start and state subsidized preschool.

- Include additional funds in the next education facilities bond specifically for building new preschools in the many low income communities and low performing school attendance areas that currently lack them.
- Provide repair and renovation funding for existing subsidized preschools.

- Change the Child Care Facilities Revolving Loan fund to allow for new fixed facilities and the renovation of fixed facilities within the Child Care Facilities Revolving Loan fund.
- Work with the Department of Social Services Child Care Licensing division to facilitate an expedited licensing process for new facilities.

### **3. Articulation with K-12**

A child's smooth transition from pre-K to kindergarten is critical for a successful beginning to formal schooling. Articulation between pre-K and K-12 requires that standards, curriculum, and teacher training are synergistic. It is expected that the pre-K curriculum will be guided by developmentally appropriate foundations in all content areas.

- All kindergarten programs should offer coordinated transition processes for families in collaboration with preschools.
- Articulation should occur so that pre-K and K-12 personnel exchange best practices to prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond.
- Articulation should occur so that the K-12 and child development fields exchange best practices in order to ensure that children are ready for school and that schools are ready for children.

### **4. Workforce Recruitment and Preparation**

It requires special skills and training to teach young children, particularly in a population as culturally, linguistically and economically diverse as California. When children have highly qualified early education teachers, they make progress. The well-studied programs around the country that have produced significant results for children have all been taught by teachers who hold BA degrees with an early childhood specialization. To realize the promise of preschool and to help close the achievement gap, it is critical that we build a skilled workforce. This requires:

- Sufficient resources to expand ECE preparation programs, including recruiting faculty, at institutions of higher education;
- Collaborations among community colleges, CSUs, UC, private colleges and county offices of education to develop a well-articulated, user-friendly professional preparation and ongoing professional development system for teaching

staff, directors and school personnel that offers college credit, includes mentoring support for novice teachers, and provides opportunities for peer collaboration and reflective practice;

- Access to financial aid and academic supports for existing early care and education staff seeking to upgrade their qualifications as well as new recruits will be particularly important to ensure the phasing-in of a highly qualified and linguistically competent workforce that maintains the diversity of the existing ECE workforce; and,
- Development of up-to-date and comprehensive early childhood educator competencies with input from key stakeholders including institutions of higher education, CDE, stakeholders from K-12 and early care and education practitioners.

## **5. Quality Improvement System (QIS) and Tiered Reimbursement**

Creating an effective pre-K system will require a significant investment of resources. As preschool programs meet increasingly high standards, they should be funded accordingly. A Quality Improvement System provides coaching and resources to help programs improve quality by supporting such activities as coaching for teachers. A QIS also includes a mechanism to assess and track the progress of programs seeking to improve quality and, accordingly, can be used as an information tool for parents to learn about the quality of their child's preschool.

- The goal of a Quality Improvement System is to support early education programs to constantly improve and achieve the standards of high quality pre-kindergarten programs.
- Tiered reimbursement should tier up from funding of existing programs and should provide higher funding for a higher ranking on the QIS.

## **6. Results-Based Accountability System**

Effective pre-K requires a substantial investment, and with such an investment should come assurances about programs' ability to produce the outcomes that effective pre-K promises. While it is critical to measure child outcomes and program quality, it is just as important to ensure that preschool-aged children are only assessed by well-trained personnel who utilize developmentally appropriate instruments to measure child outcomes.

- Child outcomes ought to be evaluated annually and on a statistically significant random sample of children.
- The assessment tools should be administered by independent, trained assessors who conduct both pre- and post-assessments each year.
- Any assessment tool used should be scientifically valid, developmentally sound, and culturally fair.
- The developmental progress of children should continue to be measured by Desired Results' Developmental Profile (DRDP-R).
- All children entering kindergarten should have a kindergarten entry profile conducted by their kindergarten teacher.
- Program quality ought to be assessed every year on every program, both as self-assessments and independently. Results from the independent review of program quality should be a factor in a comprehensive tiered reimbursement system that rewards programs for meeting certain quality standards.
- A coherent accountability and improvement system hinges on a well maintained, integrated, user-friendly database on children's characteristics, staff and program characteristics, and assessment information. It is critical that pre-K be included in any statewide longitudinal data system, commonly referred to as CALPADS and CALTIDES.

## 7. Full Day, Full Year Services

The reality of many California families, especially working poor families, is the need for full day care for their children. Right now, California has a patchwork quilt of funding for full-day care, with a complex web of regulations and standards. Below are some ideas for improving this system:

- Provide encouragement and support to pre-K programs to offer full day services for families who need it.
- Any part-day pre-K program should have the flexibility to braid other publicly funded ECE programs to create a full day, full year program.



## APPENDIX C

### National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) Benchmarks of Preschool Quality

Quality Standards	Benchmark	Current State Preschool Requirement	Requirements to Meet Benchmark
Early Learning Standards	Comprehensive	None	Adopt Preschool Learning Foundations
Teacher Degree	BA	Child Development Associate Teacher Permit	<i>Legislative change and increased funding (EC 8360)</i>
Teacher Specialized Training	Specializing in Pre-K	12 units in child development required	<i>Benchmark met</i>
Assistant Teacher Degree	CDA or equivalent	Associate teacher qualifications and permit in place but not required for assistant teacher	Legislative or regulatory change and increased funding (EC 8360 or CCR 5, Chapter 19, Subchapter 4)
Teacher In-Service	At least 15 hours per year	105 clock hours within 5 years	<i>Benchmark met</i>

<b>Maximum Class Size</b>	20 or lower	Not specified in regulation but standard practice is 24 children per class	<i>Regulatory change (CCR 5, 18290)</i>
<b>Staff-Child Ratio</b>	1:10 or better	1:8 (Adult:child ratio)	<i>Benchmark met</i>
<b>Screening/Referral and Support Services</b>	Vision, hearing, health; and at least 1 support service	Health and social services referrals	<i>Legislative or regulatory change and increased funding (Chapter 2, Article 7, CCR 5, 18276)</i>
<b>Meals</b>	At least 1 per day	Depends on length of program day	<i>Legislative or regulatory change (Chapter 2, Article 7 or new section in Chapter 19, Subchapter 4)</i>
<b>Monitoring</b>	Site visits	Site visits and other monitoring	<i>Benchmark met</i>



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ACCESS

Culture/Climate

EXPECTATIONS

STRATEGIES