

Policy News

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Policy reflects research on effective grading practices

“Grades are an important tool for helping students understand their current academic achievement, predicting how they might perform in college, and determining the likelihood of their ability to attain a desirable standard of living in the future,” said CSBA’s Assistant Executive Director Naomi Eason in a presentation to CSBA’s Board of Directors. “With grades playing such an important role in students’ lives, it is critical that grades be as fair, accurate and consistent as possible.”

Researchers who study grading have uncovered common practices that contribute to the inaccuracy of grades. CSBA’s new governance brief, *Research-Supported Strategies to Improve the Accuracy and Fairness of Grades*, examines this research and presents two key recommendations designed to improve grading practices, especially at the secondary grade levels:

1. **Assess nonacademic factors separately.** Academic grades should reflect only student mastery of academic content. Although it is a common practice to combine academic and nonacademic factors in a single grade, there is little research to indicate that some of the factors often included in academic grades accurately reflect students’ academic achievement. Examples of such factors include student behavior, attendance, classroom participation, effort, study habits, and turning in assignments on time. While it may be important to provide an indication of student progress with regard to these elements, it is equally important to report such factors separately from academic grades.
2. **Ensure academic grades reflect only final mastery of content.** Researchers recommend basing grades on what students have learned by the end of a unit of study or course. They reason that students continue to learn content after an early test or difficult assignment, and therefore basing grades on assignments or tests given before they have completed this learning provides an inaccurate picture of their level of mastery. This recommendation may be implemented by using end-of-course assessments, allowing students to retest, and/or allowing late work to be submitted without penalty.

Although state law gives teachers the responsibility and authority to assign grades to students, it is appropriate for districts and county offices of education (COEs) to set criteria and establish a uniform grading system to be applied to all students in the same course or grade level. Toward this end, CSBA has updated BP/AR 5121 - Grades/Evaluation of Student Achievement to reflect these research-based best practices. Consistent with the recommendation to separate academic and nonacademic factors in grading, the sample policy suggests dealing with attendance problems separately from grading, despite the authority granted by Education Code 49067 to assign failing grades to students with excessive unexcused absences. Other policies and programs, such as those dealing with chronic absence, truancy or dropout prevention, may



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provide more effective strategies for addressing attendance that do not affect the assessment of a student's mastery of academic content.

For further details on the research findings and recommendations, read CSBA's governance brief at www.csba.org/GovernanceBriefs.

ESSA transition continues

Implementation of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (P.L. 114-95) continues to make progress in stages, with full implementation expected in the 2017-18 school year. As reported in the May issue of *Policy News*, the California Department of Education (CDE) is in the process of developing a state implementation plan as required, and will present the plan to the State Board of Education (SBE) by January 2017 and then to the U.S. Department of Education.

Following the authority granted to states under the ESSA, the SBE approved a one-year transition plan which eliminates requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act related to:

- » Determining whether schools and districts make "adequate yearly progress" using the federal accountability measure
- » Ensuring that core academic subjects are taught by "highly qualified teachers" according to a federal definition
- » Allowing students to transfer out of a school identified for Program Improvement (PI)
- » Providing supplemental educational services (SES) through an external provider for eligible socioeconomically disadvantaged students in schools in the second year of PI or beyond

The state's transition plan requires PI schools to provide alternative, locally defined supports in lieu of SES and allow a student who was previously granted an intradistrict transfer out of a PI school to remain in the school to which he or she transferred.

Federal regulations addressing accountability, state plans and data reporting were released in draft form on May 31 and are expected to be final by the end of the year. Board members and district/COE staff are encouraged to review the proposed regulations (<http://bit.ly/29ywmLE>) and, as appropriate, participate in the public comment process which runs through Aug. 1, 2016.

The ESSA is expected to impact many district/COE policies and administrative regulations. In the July Policy Update, CSBA updated the following samples to reflect ESSA: BP/AR/E 0520.2 - Title I Program Improvement Schools, BP/AR 0520.3 - Title I Program Improvement Districts, BP/AR 3553 - Free and Reduced Price Meals, BP 4112.2 - Certification, E 4112.9/4212.9/4312.9 - Employee Notifications, BP 4113 - Assignment, AR 4115 - Evaluation/Supervision, AR/E - Teacher Aides/Paraprofessionals, BP/AR 5116.1 - Intradistrict Open Enrollment, AR 6164.41 - Children with Disabilities Enrolled by Their Parents in Private School and BP 6179 - Supplemental Instruction.

CSBA's sample policy manual was previously revised to delete BP/AR/E 4112.24 - Teacher Qualifications Under the No Child Left Behind Act and delete material related to "highly qualified" teachers in a number of other policies, including E 0420.42 - Charter School Oversight, AR 4112 - Appointment and Conditions of Employment, BP 4112.21 - Interns, AR 4112.23 - Special Education Staff, BP 4117.13/4317.13 - Early Retirement Option, E 5145.6 - Parental Notifications, AR 6158 - Independent Study and AR 6171 - Title I Programs.

Other key components of the state accountability system are still to be worked out. Regular updates on the transition are provided by CSBA at www.csba.org/federal and by the CDE at www.cde.ca.gov/essa.

As additional information and guidance become available, CSBA will continue to review and update sample policies and regulations as needed.



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Audits will review compliance with federal Uniform Guidance

All new and continuing grants awarded by the federal government on or after Dec. 26, 2014 are subject to the requirements contained in the federal Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards* (commonly called "Uniform Guidance"), as specified in 2 CFR 200.0-200.521 and Appendices I-XII. The Uniform Guidance supersedes guidance from earlier OMB circulars, including OMB Circular A-87 (*Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments*), Circular A-133 (*Audits of States, Local Governments and Non-Profit Organizations*) and others. There are some new requirements within the federal regulations, but most requirements remain the same and were only consolidated and renumbered.

Although most requirements are effective now, the Uniform Guidance was amended in September 2015 (80 Fed. Reg. 54407) to provide a grace period of two fiscal years after Dec. 26, 2014 to implement changes to procurement policies and procedures. Thus, a district whose fiscal year begins on July 1 may choose to delay implementation of the procurement standards until July 1, 2017.

Districts/COEs should be aware that, for fiscal years starting July 1, the first audit that is subject to the Uniform Guidance is the one covering the audit period ending June 30, 2016. Local policies and procedures should be in place to guide staff in implementing the Uniform Guidance.

The Uniform Guidance mandates that districts/COEs have written procedures related to procurement, cash management, and allowable costs, and that they have written standards of conduct covering conflict of interest for employees engaged in the selection, award and administration of contracts. In addition, if a district chooses to delay implementation of the procurement provisions, it is mandated to document this decision in its procurement policy.

To help districts comply with these requirements, CSBA expects to issue a new sample policy and administrative regulation in a special August 2016 release. However, full compliance will require a more detailed financial management system, tailored to local circumstances and developed in conjunction with appropriate staff (e.g., finance department, personnel department), auditors and legal counsel.

Additional resources to assist in understanding the new regulations are available through the OMB (www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_docs) and U.S. Department of Education (<http://bit.ly/29HBCAF>), including comparisons of current and former regulations and Frequently Asked Questions.

Reminder to update policy on K-8 instructional materials

Effective Jan. 1, 2013, a change in state law (AB 1246, Ch. 668, Statutes of 2012) gave greater flexibility to governing boards in adopting basic instructional materials for grades K-8. In addition to materials that have been adopted by the SBE, boards may select other materials that are aligned with state academic content standards or Common Core State Standards if the majority of participants in the review process are teachers assigned to the subject area or grade level for which the materials will be used.

In November 2012, CSBA updated BP/AR/E 6161.1 - Selection and Evaluation of Instructional Materials to reflect those amendments to the law. However, according to a recent review of local policy manuals in CSBA's Policy Online service, an estimated one-quarter of districts have yet to update their policy since AB 1246 was enacted. Districts/COEs that maintain grades K-8 are encouraged to review and update their policy and administrative regulation, as needed, as soon as possible. This is particularly important to ensure that instruction is



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based on current state standards that have been adopted by the SBE. For further information about existing state standards, frameworks and instructional materials adopted by the SBE, visit the CDE's website at www.cde.ca.gov/ci.

In addition, boards should ensure that their annual resolution on the sufficiency of instructional materials, as required by Education Code 60119, is aligned with current law.

There are no state adoptions of instructional materials for grades 9-12. Boards have the authority and responsibility to adopt instructional materials for use in their high schools.

CSBA issues recommendations to improve LCAPs

Strengthening the LCAP, a report issued by CSBA in June, contains recommendations for the SBE as it works to revise and improve the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) process this year, and also provides recommendations for district/COE board members to help improve the local process.

The 16 recommendations for the SBE address two key areas: (1) improvement to the LCAP template and process, and (2) additional state-level support that should be provided. Specific strategies for improving the LCAP template and process are designed to support strategic planning efforts at the local level, facilitate alignment with other required plans, provide timely data for districts/COEs to use in updating their plans, and enhance the usefulness and understandability of the LCAP template. The report also calls for increased state-level support related to guidance for COEs, communications to promote greater statewide awareness about the Local Control Funding Formula and LCAP, and tools for data utilization and display.

Recommendations for districts/COEs are intended to help them broaden and strengthen stakeholder engagement, simplify the process and the documents, and increase their focus on student needs, including the needs of significant student population subgroups.

"Incorporating these recommendations into the LCAP process will help increase transparency, trust and engagement, and enhance the ability of local school districts and communities to plan and achieve their goals on behalf of their students," said CSBA President Chris Ungar.

The CSBA recommendations synthesize more than 400 individual suggestions gathered from more than 260 local governing board members around the state. They were further informed by an intensive analysis of the LCAP based on information culled from CSBA's LCFF Collaborative Working Group, which is a collaborative of superintendents and board members representing 18 local school districts and COEs. The collaborative is coordinated by CSBA and California Forward and receives support from The California Endowment and the Stuart Foundation. To gather information for the analysis, an independent researcher from UC Davis conducted interviews with collaborative members as well as district LCAP administrators to learn more about their on-the-ground experience with the LCAP. The collaborative's report, *Increasing LCAP Transparency and Reaffirming California's Commitment to Local Control: Experiences of District and County Leaders in Year 3*, explains the adjustments districts/COEs have made to their LCAPs since the first year and the processes they use for developing and improving their plans.

Strengthening the LCAP, as well as the collaborative's report, are available at www.csba.org/LCAP. For CSBA's related sample policy and administration regulation, see BP/AR 0460 - Local Control and Accountability Plan.



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New CSBA governance briefs

Kindergarten readiness

Research underscores the importance of early learning (preschool, Head Start, child care and development programs, and transitional kindergarten) to children's later success in school and life. Studies show that quality pre-kindergarten programs help build a stronger foundation in language, literacy and early mathematics skills as well as social and self-regulation skills. They also help narrow the gap in school readiness skills between children of high-income and low-income families.

To help districts/COEs develop and implement effective early learning programs, CSBA's governance brief *What Boards Can Do About Kindergarten Readiness* (May 2016) presents information about:

- » Early learning opportunities and funding streams in California
- » Research on the benefits of early learning
- » The importance of quality in early learning and elements of high-quality programs
- » The unmet need for pre-kindergarten programs in California

A set of questions to spur productive conversations among school board members and their governance teams is included with the brief. A list of additional resources is also provided.

The brief is available at www.csba.org/GovernanceBriefs.

Teachers of English learners

English Learners in Focus: Ensuring High-Quality Staff for English Learners is the third in a series of governance briefs that explores strategies for providing English learners with an equal opportunity to achieve their potential. The focus of the new brief is on the importance of staff who are well prepared to meet the needs of English learners and on strategies to recruit, support and retain qualified staff, particularly in view of the current teacher shortage.

The brief cites research indicating that students generally perform better when their teachers have some years of classroom experience and when there is a cultural and linguistic match between teachers and students. Furthermore, teachers skilled in integrating language and content for English learners are especially critical as California implements new content standards that include a stronger focus on high-level language skills. The need for such teachers is exacerbated by a statewide teacher shortage overall and an even greater shortage of teachers who are well prepared to work with English learners.

Key strategies to attract and retain teachers include mentoring, improving teaching conditions, providing adequate support and preparation, and increasing compensation. Additional strategies specific to teachers of English learners include increasing the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the teaching profession, reducing financial barriers to entry into the profession, treating teachers as respected professionals, and promoting bilingualism among teachers and other staff. Board members are encouraged to ask questions about district/COE staffing and programs and to advocate for additional resources and programs that can support their efforts to recruit, support and retain highly skilled teachers.

The governance brief, along with *Issue 1: Demographic and Achievement Profile of California's English Learners* and *Issue 2: The Promise of Two-Way Immersion Programs*, are available at www.csba.org/GovernanceBriefs.



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