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Governance for Equity

Educational Equity: The Need for Boards to Support Equity-Based Decisions

By Nicole Anderson with contributions from Manuel Buenrostro

Introduction

School boards play a key role in setting local education policy, and as such, have an important role in creating conditions within a school district or county office of education to support student success. Vital to those conditions is the ability of district and county office of education leaders to make equity-based decisions, recognizing that students and schools with higher needs require greater resources. Equitable education policies and practices ensure that all students have the opportunities they need to learn. In such systems, all students can thrive.

CSBA is committed to providing board members with assistance in promoting equity in their school districts and county offices of education. One way we are doing this is by producing tools, including a series of educational equity briefs to provide school board members with research-based information and resources to support equity-driven decisions. The series will focus on concepts that can help boards promote the implementation of equity-driven policies and practice, and guide the use of data and research to reveal and address opportunity and achievement gaps. This first brief in the series provides background on the issue of equity and the role of board members in supporting the concept in their local school districts and county offices of education. CSBA has also developed an Equity Policy (BP 0415) that is available to subscribers of CSBA's policy service (GAMUT Policy).

The Roots of Inequity in the U.S. Education System

The inequities in today's education system reach back to the beginning of the United States public school system— and there is a distinct connection between this history and our current reality. It is critical that we recognize that

In this brief you will find:

» Evidence supporting the need for equity, including examples of opportunity and achievement gaps;

» A description of shifts in California's education landscape, which present an opportunity to focus on educational equity;

» A discussion of the role of equity-driven boards, including the importance of defining equity; and

» Questions for board members to consider.

educational inequity is a symptom of societal inequities: racism, classism, sexism, and many other 'isms' that have an impact on our students and their families.

The history of public education in the U.S. is rooted in the belief that it is acceptable for some students to have greater opportunities than others. This is, in fact, a foundational idea in U.S. education, as evidenced in 1779 when Thomas Jefferson proposed a two-track educational system, with different tracks, in his words, for "the laboring and the learned." Scholarships would allow only a select few of the laboring class to advance, Jefferson says, by "raking a few geniuses from the rubbish." Vestiges of this view are manifested in our current school system—for example, through the disproportionate gaps persisting in excessive suspensions and lack of access to Advanced Placement/honors courses and courses meeting A-G requirements for students of color and in poverty.

And despite federal statutes on segregation, we find many of our public schools today more segregated than ever. California has its own history of decisions that separate students in ways that curtail their ability to receive a quality education in which they can learn from peers of different backgrounds. For example, over half of Latino (56 percent) and nearly half of African American students (49 percent) attend schools where at least 75 percent of students are eligible for the free or reduced-priced meals program (the most common barometer for measuring poverty among student groups). These high-poverty schools have more limited access to factors that create educational opportunities, including the most experienced teachers, 21st-century facilities, libraries, and other key resources (Figure 1).
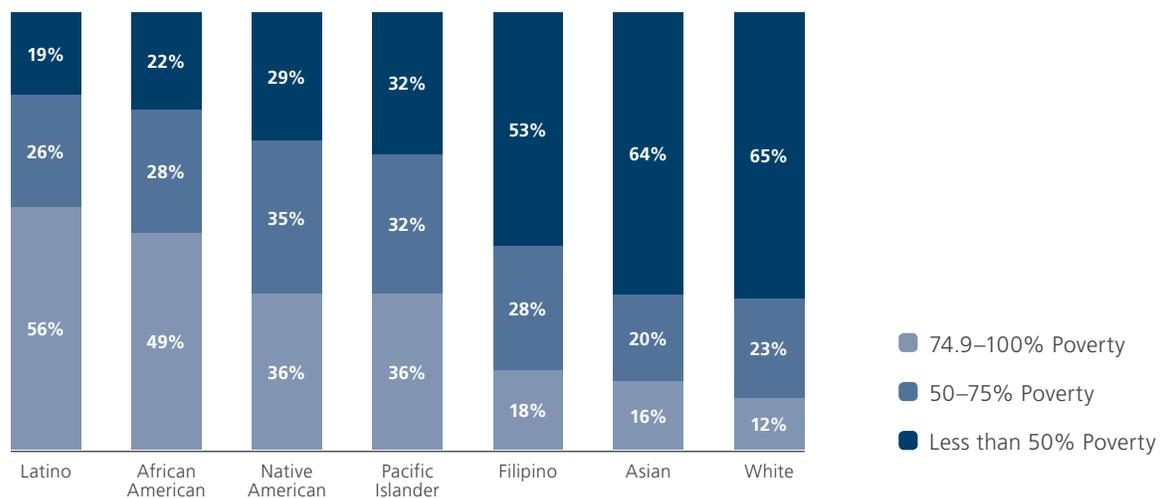
An Urgent Need to Focus on Equity: Opportunity Gaps

Research and data reveal numerous opportunity gaps among California students ranging from early literacy to access to college preparation courses. The intersection between race, poverty, disability, gender, and language provide a clear indication of systemic inequities that have a long history in U.S. public education. Very often, students of color and low-income students have more limited access to opportunities that can put them on a path to graduate from high school ready for college, career, and life success. Therefore, it is imperative that board members understand these opportunity gaps and how they are evident in their communities as a first step to making decisions that can help to close them.

CSBA's 2017 report, *Meeting California's Challenge: Key Ingredients for Student Success*, presented eight key factors for student success that would be available in an education system with Full and Fair Funding. In the same report, we documented gaps in opportunity for low-income students and students of color that include lack of access to several key educational opportunities such as:

» **A Rigorous, Well-Rounded, and Relevant Curriculum.** Students of color and low-income students are less likely to attend schools that offer rigorous courses. Even when such courses are offered, these students are under-represented in advanced STEM and AP courses. They are also more likely to graduate from high school without meeting A-G requirements. This under-representation is due to multiple factors, including few counselors who can advise students on courses and prerequisites, family experiences that may not include college preparation, and lack of the necessary preparation in earlier grades for more advanced courses in high school.

» **Academic Support to Enable Achievement.** Compared to all other states, California has the highest number of students per teacher, the second highest number of students per counselor, and the third highest number of students to total staff. This means that access to an adult at school who can provide guidance and support for education decisions is lacking for many California students, a fact that disproportionately impacts students whose parents are not able to provide this guidance. A gap also exists regarding other supports, such as enrichment activities,

Figure 1: 2018-19 Enrollment by School
Proportion of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals

Legend:
- 74.9–100% Poverty
- 50–75% Poverty
- Less than 50% Poverty

	Latino	African American	Native American	Pacific Islander	Filipino	Asian	White
Less than 50% Poverty	19%	22%	29%	32%	53%	64%	65%
50–75% Poverty	26%	28%	35%	32%	28%	20%	23%
74.9–100% Poverty	56%	49%	36%	36%	18%	16%	12%

which are more difficult for economically disadvantaged students to access than their peers from wealthier backgrounds.

» **Staff with the Skills, Competencies, and Knowledge to Promote Student Success.** Our highest-need students are most often in classrooms with the least experienced and prepared teachers. Low-income students and students of color are more likely to attend schools with more teacher turnover; underprepared and underqualified teachers; and staff absenteeism.

» **Early Support Services.** By age three, children from high-income families have double the vocabulary of same-age children from low-income families. Moreover, only two in five California students have access to quality early education programs, with low-income families more likely to attend lower quality programs. This lack of access is the root of many inequities in the later grades—children who did not attend kindergarten are less successful as they move through elementary school. Those children are less likely to read proficiently by the third grade, and even more likely to drop out of high school.

» **Education and Assistance for Families to Support and Guide Learning.** Parents or guardians care about their children's education. Nonetheless, parents or guardians with extensive education understand the system better, know what needs to be done in preparation for college, and more often have professional jobs that allow them the time to participate in school activities as well as the financial resources to invest in trips, learning experiences, and supports such as tutoring. All of this contributes to a positive association between student achievement and parents' level of education. Gaps are also associated with income status (which is itself strongly associated with education level) and neighborhood characteristics.

» **Physical, Mental, and Environmental Health Supports.** Nearly one in three students ages 10–17 in California are overweight or obese, a condition associated with missing more days of school, among other problems. Moreover, nearly two-thirds of California students do not meet health and fitness standards in the fifth, seventh, and ninth grades. Physical and mental health challenges are particularly prevalent among economically disadvantaged students, who are more often students of color. Children in poverty are more likely to suffer from asthma, heart conditions, hearing problems, digestive disorders, and elevated levels of lead in the blood. These children are also more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and stress—and have lower levels of health insurance coverage and more limited access to quality health services to address these issues.

» **Schools with 21st-Century Infrastructure and Technology.** A higher percentage of public schools in poor areas need repair than those in wealthier locales. There is also more limited access to the internet and teachers report more obstacles to using technology in low-income areas. Another important infrastructure issue that impacts the health of students is access to a healthy water supply. While adequate water consumption has been associated with several health benefits and stronger student achievement, aging lead water pipes are more common in the lowest-income neighborhoods or cities.

Impact of School Climate and Discipline

Disproportionate discipline is another gap that is evident between California's students of color and their peers. Students of color are suspended at disproportionately higher rates than White students, even for the same offenses. Students with disabilities are also suspended at rates much higher than their non-disabled peers—the same disproportionality exists for students who identify as LGBTQ. Gender also plays a role in whether a student will be suspended. Nationwide, more suspensions are given to males than females—males make up 66 percent of the students receiving a single out-of-school suspension and 74 percent of the students expelled. In California, African American students are three times as likely to be suspended as their White peers (18 percent vs. 6 percent). In some districts, the disparities are more profound. Variation in suspension rates among schools is largely due to the characteristics of the school and behavior of school personnel—schools with high suspension rates often have high student–teacher ratios, lower academic quality, reactive (as opposed to proactive) disciplinary programs, and ineffective school governance.

The Results of Opportunity Gaps: Achievement Gaps

The lack of access to opportunity and the disproportionate impact of school discipline policies are major contributors to persistent academic achievement gaps. According to the 2017–18 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) results in English language arts and math, a significant achievement gap persists between students of color and their White peers:

» **In English language arts**, there is a 33 percentage-point gap between African American students and their White peers, a 27 percentage-point gap for Native American

students, and a 26 percentage-point gap for Latino students. The gap is 32 percentage points between economically disadvantaged and non-economically dis-advantaged students.

Figure 2: 2017–18 Students Who Met or Exceeded Grade-Level Standards in English Language Arts, by Ethnicity and Economic Status
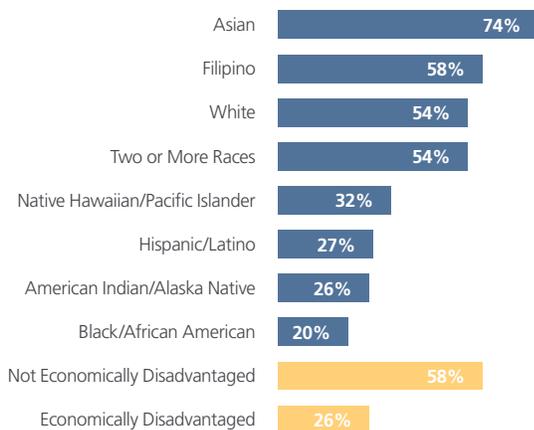
Asian	76%
Filipino	71%
White	65%
Two or More Races	65%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	43%
Hispanic/Latino	39%
American Indian/Alaska Native	37%
Black/African American	32%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	69%
Economically Disadvantaged	38%
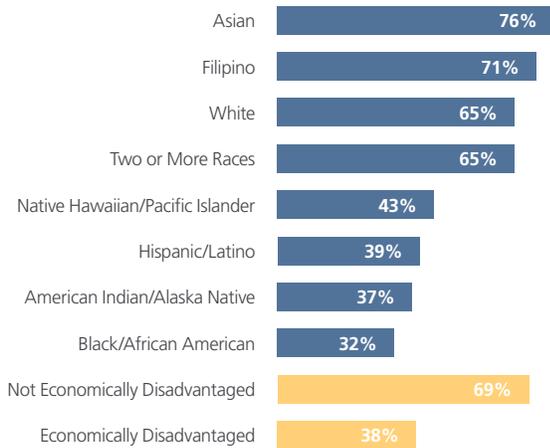
» **In math**, there is a 34 percentage-point gap between African American students and their White peers, a 28 per-centage-point gap for Native American students, and a 27 percentage-point gap for Latino students. The gap is 32 per-centage points between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students.

Figure 3: 2017–18 Students Who Met or Exceeded Grade-Level Standards in Math, by Ethnicity and Economic Status

Asian	74%
Filipino	58%
White	54%
Two or More Races	54%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	32%
Hispanic/Latino	27%
American Indian/Alaska Native	26%
Black/African American	20%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	58%
Economically Disadvantaged	26%

A gap also exists in high school graduation statistics. According to 2017–18 four-year adjusted cohort graduation data, 73 percent of African American students, 71 percent of Native American students, and 81 percent of Latino students graduated from high school, compared to 87 percent of White and 94 percent of Asian students. However, despite the progress in high school graduation rates, there is a larger gap in preparation for entrance to a University of California or a California State University campus (exemplified by completion of A-G coursework). Out of all of the cohort students, only 29 percent of African American, 23 percent of Native American, and 34 percent of Latino students graduated from high school having met UC and CSU entrance requirements—compared to 47 percent of White and 70 percent of Asian students. This means that although there have been increases in graduation rates for all students, there is a larger and often hidden achievement gap in preparation to enter and succeed in college and career (Figure 4, page 5).
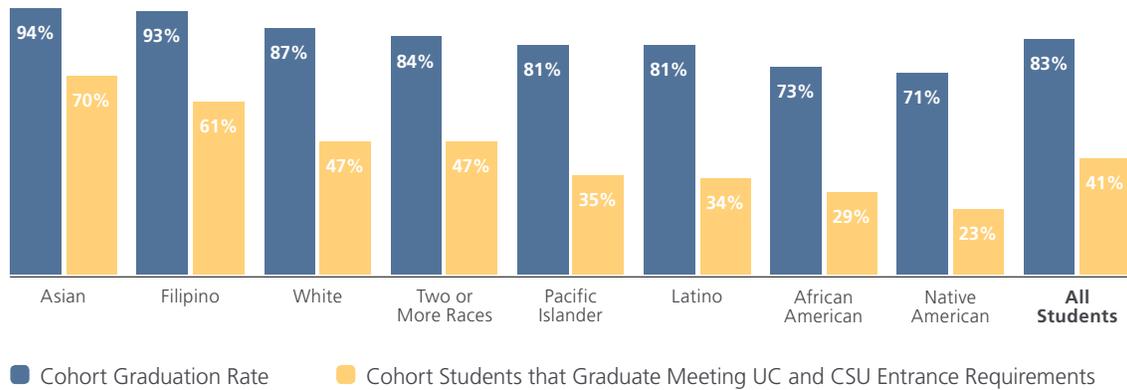
The Current Opportunity to Focus on Educational Equity in California

There is a moral imperative to close educational gaps in a system in which some students have not been served well since the inception of schooling. Changing trends in public education in California can help school board members seize the opportunity to make decisions for their district or county office of education that can make a real difference in the lives of their students and community.

Two changes that have taken place in California public schools within the past 10 years can help local educational agencies to think differently about how to provide a quality education for all students. These changes include:

1. **A shift to a funding formula and accountability system focused on student need and local empowerment.** The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) shifted California's funding for public schools toward a system focused on students and their needs, as opposed to programs and categories. The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) process and new accountability system (in the form of the California School Dashboard and the California System of Supports) encourages districts and county offices of education to focus on the opportunity gaps in their schools and deter-mine strategies to close them. The LCAP and Dashboard further push districts and county offices of education to redistribute funds to better serve the students who need them the most. Moreover, the stronger focus on contin-uous improvement should empower districts to work in collaboration with their county offices of education to

Figure 4: 2017–18 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate and Cohort Students that Graduate Meeting UC and CSU Entrance Requirements, by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Cohort Graduation Rate	Cohort Students that Graduate Meeting UC and CSU Entrance Requirements
Asian	94%	70%
Filipino	93%	61%
White	87%	47%
Two or More Races	84%	47%
Pacific Islander	81%	35%
Latino	81%	34%
African American	73%	29%
Native American	71%	23%
All Students	83%	41%

improve outcomes for students in the schools identified for support.

2. **A shift toward an assets-based philosophy and a focus on cultural relevance, where the backgrounds of students are viewed as an asset to the education of all students and not a hinderance.** Recent policy changes in California reflect a shift toward an assets-based and culturally relevant approach to education. Moreover, several of the strategies based on these views have a strong research base indicating their effectiveness at improving student outcomes. These attitudes are reflected in the support of bilingualism, biliteracy, and multiculturalism with the passage of Proposition 58, the expansion of the State Seal of Biliteracy, and the English Learner Roadmap. The move toward a more culturally relevant curriculum has also been seen in the expansion of ethnic studies. In 2016, California passed a law requiring the state to develop a model curriculum in ethnic studies and encourage districts to offer an ethnic studies course based on this curriculum for high school students (Assembly Bill 2016, now Education Code 51226.7). In 2018, a new law was passed, allowing the board of a school district to apply for a three-year grant from the California Department of Education during the 2019–20 school year, in order to provide a semester- or year-long course in ethnic studies and make it a high school graduation requirement, commencing with the 2020–21 school year (AB 2772). Regarding school discipline, the expansion of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative justice, trauma-informed care, and other research-based practices are positive developments toward creating a more inclusive school climate.

These ideas and shifts are not new, but when coupled with a stronger focus on local control and decision making that is better aligned with the needs of each community, there is an opportunity for school district and county boards of education to implement sustainable change that is tailored to local community needs.

The Role of Equity-Driven School Boards

School board members are local policymakers who can support access to programs that serve the educational needs of all students. Therefore, it is critical that board members understand their role in relation to the intersection between educational policy, leadership, and equity.

One way that educational leaders can create expectations for equitable schooling and outcomes is by beginning with equity conversations. To shape an equity discourse, school leaders must first encourage and lead the conversation in schools, districts, and county offices of education. How can board members do this? One way is to make equity an ongoing agenda item, providing space for not only board members, but also staff, parents, and community stakeholders to engage in conversations that can lead to progress in policy and practice designed to close opportunity and achievement gaps. Frank discussions of challenging issues, such as racially motivated behavior displayed by students or the bullying and harassment of students who identify as LGBTQ, can lead to the passage of resolutions; development of a new vision, mission, and goals; as well as policy to bring about systemic change.

Equity-driven work is undeniably politically charged, therefore educational leaders must understand the importance of

relationship building, including leveraging strategic alliances to move an equity agenda. Board members must reflect upon their roles as strong influencers on policy that directly impacts students. They must be bold in their convictions to advocate for the students who have the least power to invoke change in the system and act with urgency and intentionality to examine, revise, and develop policy with an equity focus. To successfully implement equitable practices across the district or county, board members must also understand the dynamics of school leadership and find ways to balance accountability with support of their superintendent and staff.

The following are general recommendations for board members to consider as they seek to develop and implement equity-driven policies:

1. Create a common definition and understanding of equity for the district or county office of education and what it means for board members, staff, parents and guardians, students, and other community members.

2. Analyze and question relevant data to identify root causes of opportunity and achievement gaps and use these analyses as drivers of an equity agenda.

3. Discover strategic ways to effectively discuss, interpret, leverage, and implement policy while aligning with and supporting current district or county office of education initiatives.

4. Communicate the message of equity effectively and often, beyond teachers and students, out to the larger community.

5. Cultivate alliances with the community and advocate for policies that have an impact beyond schools, reaching the community.

6. Listen to and consider student voice as an important lever for change in the educational system.

7. Embrace all stakeholder voices to provide ongoing assessment of progress toward educational equity goals.

The Importance of Defining Educational Equity

It is essential that equity-driven leaders take the time to define the term before diving into equity-driven decision making. The term often raises emotions based on past experiences and can be associated with the concept of racism or confused with the word equality. Because many people have been conditioned to avoid discussing race, it is critical to unpack the meaning of equity.

In addition, equity has become a buzzword in education, and its overuse and misuse can lead to a loss of meaning. Therefore, developing a common understanding of what is meant by equity in a district or county office of education is essential to working toward that shared understanding and vision. Without this common understanding, leaders run the risk of applying the word equity to efforts that do not substantially change structures, policy, or practice. This can undermine future initiatives and decrease trust and support as community members and other stakeholders perceive new equity initiatives as false promises.

Developing this definition is a foundational step in an organization's equity journey. To do this, strategic facilitation with shared community agreements must be established up front. There are numerous ways to collaboratively develop a definition of educational equity. It is often effective to have a skilled external facilitator work with the various stakeholder groups because the process can result in discourse and raise emotions that can create barriers to progress. There are multiple activities that can be utilized during this process, depending on the readiness of the group and the level of expertise of the facilitator. Examples of activities include allowing stakeholders to share their personal experiences with equity and inequity (which allows for storytelling, building of empathy, and making cultural connections) and asking stakeholders to share one word that expresses equity for them (which fosters deeper discussion and buy-in). Moreover, activities to define equity can be used as a tool to improve staff culture, deepen shared belief systems, and create a shift from equity as a side item on the agenda to equity as the focus of the agenda.

Once a definition is developed, it can be revisited and revised until consensus is reached. This process is a simple, organic, yet profound starting point that could last the entire school year and beyond. The definition can then be used as a lens for reviewing, revising, and developing policy that promotes equitable practices.

Conclusion

Our public education system faces equity challenges that call for board members and others in the education system to build capacity as equity leaders in order to gain the tools and strategies to close educational equity gaps. To meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and families, leaders must commit to a long-term plan for equity. A pivot to an equity paradigm requires a shift away from a focus on compliance with legislative initiatives and educational trends to a focus on the moral imperative to create an equitable school system. Board members have a unique and critical role and opportunity to lead an equity-driven agenda and impact the closing of opportunity gaps in their schools. Future CSBA briefs will

provide additional information and resources on educational equity to support this journey.

Questions for Board Members

Based on the information covered in this brief, board members might consider the following questions:

1. What are some of the opportunities in our district or county office of education to improve services for historically underserved students?

2. How can we use data to guide, support, and communicate about equity-based decisions?

3. What is the role of board members in leading for educational equity?

4. Does our district or county office of education have a common definition of equity?

    a. If not, how can we begin an ongoing conversation to establish one?

    b. If we do, how can we use the definition to continuously foster equity-based decisions?

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Six Essential School Board Roles in LCAP Implementation and Development

by the School Board Member and Superintendent Participants in CSBA's California Collaborative for Educational Excellence Professional Learning Network, with contributions from Manuel Buenrostro and Julie Maxwell-Jolly

Introduction

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was signed into law in July 2013. The three fundamental principles on which the LCFF is based are local control, continuous improvement, and equity. The LCFF directs resources to the state's most vulnerable student populations while giving school districts and county offices of education (local educational agencies or LEAs) greater flexibility in how they allocate these funds to most effectively serve the students in their communities. The LCFF also changed how LEAs are held accountable for improvement. All LEAs are required to create a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), in consultation with their communities and specified stakeholder groups, which details how funds will be used to improve outcomes for students.

The LCFF legislation explicitly notes that school boards have a role in the LCAP process, although it does not provide extensive details about the parameters of this role (see California Education Code link in the Resources section). The governance implications of the LCFF policy changes are significant. LCFF reflects a move away from state mandates and categorical grants, and toward empowering communities to determine what works best for them. To achieve the potential of these changes, school boards have an important role in supporting their superintendents and staff in the effective development and implementation of their district's LCAP. School boards are instrumental in ensuring that budget decisions made through the LCAP process are equity-focused (designed to close persistent opportunity and achievement gaps), reflect the meaningful engagement of community stakeholders, and serve the needs of all their students.

To promote understanding and effective school board governance in the LCAP development and implementation process,

In this brief you will find:

Details about six essential roles of the school board in the effective development and implementation of a school district's LCAP, including:

- » Understanding the LCAP;
- » Developing goals and supports;
- » Encouraging engagement;
- » Understanding data;
- » Advocating about strategies;
- » Monitoring progress; and
- » Resources to support boards in fulfilling these roles.

from 2017 to 2019 CSBA worked with over 30 school board member and superintendent participants in a Professional Learning Network (PLN). The network was supported by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) and included participants from small, medium, and large school districts. One goal that the group identified was to develop information that would assist board members in their work as a board, and in their collaborative work with the superintendent and cabinet, to develop and approve an LCAP that best serves the needs of students and families in their local communities.

While this brief was created by board members and superintendents of school districts, these roles and actions can also

be pertinent for county boards of education that must adopt an LCAP with strategies to improve outcomes for students enrolled in their alternative schools.

This brief describes six roles identified by the PLN as essential to the work of school boards in the LCAP process and provides examples of actions that boards can take to fulfill each of these roles. CSBA intends for this document to serve as a tool that can help school boards and superintendents discuss how to best work together to support the LCAP development and implementation process in their school districts.

Key terms in this brief:

» **Board priorities.** Refers to priorities established by a governance team for their school district. These can also be referred to as district priorities.

» **Goals.** Refers to the goals established in the district LCAP. These LCAP goals support the achievement of board priorities.

» **Strategies.** Refers to the strategies in the LCAP, which are meant to achieve the goals. These LCAP strategies can include programs, initiatives, policies, and other key investments.

» **Supports.** These include policies, agreements, procedures, and resources that boards can approve to support effective development of the LCAP and implementation of its strategies.

Six School Board Roles in the LCAP Development and Implementation Process

The following six roles can help governance teams (the board and superintendent) reflect upon their engagement in the LCAP process in their districts. All six roles help boards work with the superintendent and staff to incorporate equity and continuous improvement in the development and implementation of their LCAPs. These board roles are to:

1. Develop a deep understanding of the LCAP purpose and process;

2. Develop LCAP goals and the supports necessary to achieve effective implementation of the strategies in the LCAP;

3. Encourage and participate in the ongoing engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders;

4. Build an understanding of data to inform board discussions and actions related to the LCAP;

5. Serve as key communicators and advocates with stakeholders about LCAP strategies and outcomes; and

6. Continuously monitor and evaluate progress of LCAP strategies.

Continuous improvement is an additional central focus of LCFF that is woven into these roles. Continuous improvement requires looking for the root causes of challenges and understanding those causes to make strategic decisions about investments. It requires a mindset that empowers district staff and the superintendent to try new strategies that have promise for closing opportunity gaps, expand strategies that are proving successful, and adapt and learn from experience when strategies prove unsuccessful.

Role 1: Develop a Deep Understanding of the LCAP Purpose and Process

The first step to effective school board leadership in the development of the district's LCAP is building a deep understanding of the LCAP purpose and process. This understanding should incorporate a focus on equity—with LCAP strategies designed and resources allocated according to student need. Doing so helps to ensure that all students, including the most disadvantaged, have the resources and supports they need in order to succeed. It should also focus on continuous improvement to inform yearly updates to the LCAP that lead to greater effectiveness and include an understanding of the support that district staff require to reinforce equity and continuous improvement.

In developing this deep understanding, school boards can take the following actions:

Engage in Ongoing Learning

Ongoing learning should focus on the LCAP purpose and process and begin as soon as a board member is elected. This means that the orientation process for new board members should include specifics about the LCAP requirements, the details of their district's LCAP, and the role that the board plays in the process (see Board Bylaw 9230 for additional guidance on an orientation process). Experienced board members should ensure that they understand these elements as well and engage in continuous professional development to improve their effectiveness. There should also be whole-board professional development opportunities led by expert facilitators (both staff and external) to learn about how to equitably improve student outcomes, as well as other equity-focused

learning opportunities. Throughout the year, boards can also schedule workshops or study sessions to explore the vision and mission of the LCAP, student outcome data (such as from the California School Dashboard), survey results, community input, and any other topics that inform the development and implementation of the LCAP. Boards should also ensure that meetings, workshops, and study sessions include ongoing updates from staff on the status of LCAP development and implementation.

Develop a Clear Definition of Equity for the District

An agreed-upon definition of equity for the district is a necessary foundation for all decisions of the school board, superintendent, and staff. This definition should guide the LCAP development and implementation process. In developing this definition, the board should discuss and define what equity (or inequity) means and looks like in the district, thereby ensuring a common understanding of equity. A board should also revisit this definition regularly to ensure that the common understanding is still agreed upon, and if it is not, to make changes as necessary. Throughout the year, the board should reflect on how the district and its schools are meeting the definition of equity and take necessary actions to bring the district closer to fulfilling the vision of the definition. To help with this process, CSBA is developing a definition of equity that districts can reference as they develop their own definition. In addition, CSBA has a sample board policy on equity that provides guidance for addressing equity in school board decisions (see Board Policy 0415).

Demonstrate a Commitment to Excellence

Effective governance takes hard work and a commitment to excellence for the benefit of students in the district. Before making decisions, board members should practice due diligence by reading all relevant materials and asking questions when issues are not clear. Within the context of the LCAP development and implementation process, this means a commitment to understanding and reading the entire LCAP and staying focused on its goals, implementation of its strategies, and outcomes of those strategies in order to adjust as necessary to ensure continuous improvement. A commitment to excellence is also reflected by having the courage and conviction to engage in difficult conversations about the underlying reasons for inequity in the district—all with the intention of working together to discover a better path forward.

Role 2: *Develop LCAP Goals and the Supports Necessary to Achieve Effective Implementation of the Strategies in the LCAP*

Once individual board members and the whole board have developed a deep understanding of the LCAP purpose and process (with equity and continuous improvement as driving principles), LCAP goals can be set, and policies and budgetary commitments can be made to support those goals. In developing goals, a board sets clear expectations for what is to be achieved with the investments delineated in the LCAP. By developing policies and allocating resources that support the successful implementation of those strategies, the board is also empowering the superintendent and staff to meet LCAP goals.

When developing the LCAP goals and the supports necessary to achieve the effective implementation of LCAP strategies, boards can take the following actions:

Establish Board Priorities Aligned to the Mission and Vision of the District

Before setting LCAP goals, it is important for a board to first discuss, develop, and adopt its board priorities. In adopting board priorities, the board should frame the discussion around student outcomes and focus on closing opportunity gaps. These board priorities are also referred to as the district priorities.

Develop Aligned LCAP Goals to Meet the Board Priorities

Once the board priorities are set, the board can begin to establish LCAP goals designed to meet them. The governance team should establish a process for coming to agreement on LCAP goals they all believe can be met. These LCAP goals must focus on improving student outcomes and closing opportunity gaps by looking at student outcome data and setting faster growth targets for students that are further behind. All goals must have specific strategies and clear timelines for accomplishment.

Establish a Common Understanding in the Boardroom

To support successful implementation of LCAP strategies to meet the board's goals, the board should establish a common understanding of key issues and terms with the superintendent and staff. To establish this understanding, the governance team must come to agreement on (and periodically revisit) the shared definition of commonly used terms as well as expectations for the superintendent and staff, including how to communicate with the board on progress toward achievement of LCAP goals. Equally important is a clear understanding of

the role of the board in relation to the role of the superintendent and staff. For example, the superintendent and staff devise strategies, plans, and actions to meet goals; while the board is responsible for asking questions, setting direction, allocating resources, and approving the LCAP. The board should also establish agreements for working together and communicating effectively as a governance team. These agreements can include how to communicate effectively when there is a disagreement or how to ask difficult questions during staff presentations and updates.

Support Implementation by Staff

Once the goals are established and strategies are set, it is the role of the superintendent and staff to implement the strategies. It is important for the board to develop policies and approve resources that will help staff with this implementation. One way the board can do this is by ensuring that staff have opportunities for the professional development necessary to support implementation. The board should also develop policies and approve resources to accomplish goals and make actions sustainable. The board can assist staff and superintendent efforts to implement strategies by establishing and maintaining partnerships with nonprofits, city agencies, and businesses. The board can do this by spreading the district message and encouraging continued collaboration. Supporting implementation by staff also means that the board is accountable for sticking to its goals and messages and taking time to understand and communicate an issue with one voice rather than changing direction abruptly in the face of opposition.

Role 3: *Encourage and Participate in Ongoing Engagement of a Diverse Range of Stakeholders*

All stakeholders within a community should have opportunities to provide input related to LCAP goals, and this feedback should be used to inform the development and updates made to the LCAP. Within this role, the board's principal responsibility is to support the superintendent and staff in ensuring that there is effective and meaningful engagement with a diverse range of community stakeholders and to encourage stakeholders to participate in the engagement opportunities established by the district.

To encourage and participate in the ongoing engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders, boards can take the following actions:

Ensure Opportunities are in Place to Engage all Stakeholders

To ensure that opportunities are in place to engage all stakeholders in the LCAP process, a board can establish stakeholder

engagement goals with their superintendent. Governance teams should incorporate existing engagement requirements, such as those under the Plan for Student Achievement (formerly called the Single Plan for Student Achievement). Education Code 52060 already requires consultation with school personnel (including teachers, principals, and administrators); employee bargaining units; parents and guardians; and students; as well as the establishment of a districtwide parent advisory committee and, if applicable, an English learner parent advisory committee. Within these requirements, the board can direct the superintendent and staff to include additional community organizations and specify strategies that provide for meaningful engagement (such as listening circles for engaging students). Overall, in developing opportunities for stakeholder engagement, the board can ensure that the process is accessible to all stakeholders and that all engagement approaches are considered. For example, the board can support the district use of social media to gather input (e.g., by creating a website where stakeholders can post). Agreements should also be made about the board role in stakeholder engagement (e.g., what is the board member role in public forums and in encouraging stakeholders to participate?). For example, there can be an expectation for the superintendent, along with a board representative, to meet with community organizations during LCAP development.

Provide Resources to Implement Meaningful Engagement Opportunities

The board should approve the necessary resources for the superintendent and staff to implement meaningful engagement opportunities that can reach all stakeholders. This effort includes the resources necessary to help build stakeholder capacity, including workshops for stakeholders on how to be more meaningfully engaged. This also includes staff training on topics such as effective stakeholder engagement and cultural competency. A board can also support the development of a rubric for how to meaningfully engage stakeholders. In addition, the board can approve the use of translation support services for non-English speakers, sign language interpreters, and other services that ensure access for all stakeholders.

Demonstrate that Stakeholders are Heard

All stakeholders need to be able to trust in the stakeholder engagement process if they are to actively participate and continue to provide their feedback and support. This trust is increased when a board shares how stakeholder input was considered and incorporated in the decision-making process. To accomplish this, a board can establish a district process for how staff responds to and considers recommendations, including a rationale for how final LCAP decisions

were made. In board meetings and in their interactions with stakeholders during school and community events, individual board members can encourage stakeholder participation by sharing anecdotes of how current investments were influenced by stakeholder feedback, and by respectfully and carefully listening to everyone's feedback.

Role 4: Build an Understanding of Data to Inform Board Discussions and Actions Related to the LCAP

In building an understanding of data to inform board discussions and actions, boards should learn about data analysis and its meaning regarding student achievement. Data can be a great tool for boards to make student-centered decisions and to ensure that those decisions are targeted to the students that need the most support. However, an understanding of data, the various types of data, its use, and its limitations is critical to ensure that the right decisions are made.

To build an understanding of data to inform the LCAP process, boards can take the following actions:

Create the Conditions for the Governance Team to Discuss Data

The board and superintendent need a common understanding of the use and limitations of data in order to have productive data-informed discussions. A board can accomplish this common understanding by engaging in data-focused, ongoing professional development through board workshops, study sessions, and/or external professional learning opportunities. Professional learning for staff is also important, as both the board and staff must have the capacity to review data and discuss its implications. Such staff training ensures that reports to the board include useful data updates on the progress of LCAP goals and strategies throughout the year. A board can also establish common agreements about how to discuss data, including how to ask questions about data related to LCAP goals while avoiding unnecessary or inappropriate questions. Board members can use board meeting time to discuss what the data indicates about district progress and how to respond appropriately. This includes monitoring data to determine progress, using data to make course corrections as needed, understanding root causes of problems, and considering the context and meaning behind the data.

Determine Which Data is Required

With a common understanding of data and its uses, a board can work with the superintendent and staff to determine which data is most important in making the best decisions about LCAP goals and strategies. It is important that the board

functions as a team when requesting data. To accomplish this, a board should develop protocols for requesting data from staff and ensure that requested data includes outcomes disaggregated by student groups and is related to the state and board priorities and LCAP goals. The board should also continually engage with staff about the meaning behind the data and about the various data sources that can inform decisions. In seeking professional learning opportunities, boards can look at how other districts use data in order to learn which data might be most useful for their own district.

Ensure that Data is Meaningful and Accessible

Data can be an important tool for engaging stakeholders (see Role 3). A board can help ensure that districts make data meaningful and accessible to all stakeholders by supporting district opportunities to share data at different locations and times, enabling accessibility to the community and other stakeholders (e.g., host data walks that include families, students, teachers, and bargaining units). The board can also ensure that data is presented in a consistent and uniform manner that makes it understandable to the community.

Role 5: Serve as Key Communicators and Advocates with Stakeholders About LCAP Decisions and Strategies

This role covers the responsibility of board members to communicate the contents of the approved LCAP and explain the district decisions that were made in its development to community stakeholders. Stakeholder feedback can be compiled during this process and can inform future updates to the plan.

To serve as key communicators and advocates with stakeholders, boards can take the following actions:

Develop Common Messages

A necessary first step to an effective communication strategy is to ensure that all system leaders share common messages and themes (so that they do not contradict each other). This means that the superintendent and board, as a governance team, must develop common messages about the LCAP that offer a clear and concise purpose for each LCAP goal and for key LCAP strategies. The messages should incorporate the themes of equity and continuous improvement as core principles—and share district successes and promising practices. These messages can be adapted to have a different focus for different stakeholders depending on their interests and needs. The board must also make a commitment to stay on the agreed-upon messages and speak with one voice.

Streamline Messages

The governance team should streamline its key messages so that stakeholders understand the most important points. To do this, boards can select a few goals or themes, identify why they matter, and discuss the progress being made. The terminology should be jargon-free so that board members speak in a language that all stakeholders understand. Boards can also ensure that tools are developed to make the message transparent, positive, and memorable (e.g., developing graphics for public presentations, using elevator speeches, etc.).

Ensure Outreach and Communication to All Stakeholders

With all district outreach, a focus on equity is important to ensure the message reaches stakeholders who represent the diversity of the community. To accomplish this, boards can support multiple methods of communication by the district, ensure all staff clearly understand and can communicate the message, and support liaisons from the community who can speak to different groups (such as parent/guardian liaisons for English learners and other student groups). Translation services should be approved for non-English speaking stakeholders as well as the use of other formats to make the messages accessible (such as video and audio, sign language, Braille, etc.). Board members can also participate in outreach to local, state, and federal elected officials and agencies to ensure that policies, regulations, and resources are in place for school districts to accomplish their goals (e.g., through CSBA Legislative Action Day).

Role 6: *Continuously Monitor and Evaluate Progress of LCAP Strategies and Outcomes*

A key responsibility of a school board is to hold the system accountable and ensure that progress is made toward achieving goals. Education Code 52060 requires districts to include in the LCAP the method they will use to measure progress toward achieving each goal. This means the constant monitoring of progress related to the strategies designed to meet each goal.

To monitor and evaluate progress, boards can take the following actions:

Understand and Monitor Strategies

The board should learn about the operation and structure of the specific strategies in the LCAP. This information adds context to what the data indicates about outcomes and allows each board member to better communicate with the public about the strategies. A board can accomplish this goal by requesting site visits to observe strategies in action and periodic updates from staff on particular strategies during board meetings. Board members can also inform themselves about strategies through outside sources including CSBA research and policy briefs on a range of education topics.

Have Ongoing Discussions About Outcomes and Progress of Strategies

In addition to building understanding of the operation of strategies in the LCAP, the board should regularly review and discuss related student outcome data. This review can be more effective when a board identifies and focuses on key goals and strategies within the LCAP to prioritize within a given year. Opportunities to discuss progress in key areas can include board workshops, board study sessions, and/or updates at board meetings. Moreover, key staff should be supported and counted on to provide relevant information. These conversations should be balanced and focused on both what is working and not working. The California School Dashboard is an important tool that can be used in these discussions, as are other sources of information.

Promote a Long-Term View and Work Toward Sustainability

A board can also promote continuous improvement by explicitly promoting a long-term view and working toward creating sustainable strategies within the district. To accomplish this, a board can create a safe space for staff to plan, innovate, and function at their highest levels. In addition, to ensure a sustained focus on established priorities, the board can make key LCAP goals part of the superintendent evaluation. To promote sustainability, the board should continue to encourage the engagement of stakeholders, including periodic updates on the progress toward LCAP goals to families, students, staff, and others.

Conclusion

This brief was developed by board members and superintendents. It is meant to help boards develop a clear understanding of their role in the LCAP process and governance teams to engage productively to develop and implement an LCAP that improves outcomes for the students they serve. Every district is different, and each has its own strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Successful governance occurs when boards and superintendents understand and adapt to these local circumstances and work together to achieve the best outcomes for their students.

Resources

CSBA Governance Briefs and Reports

» **The School Board Role in Creating the Conditions for Student Achievement** (May 2017). bit.ly/2TaDZPq

» **The Coherence Framework in Action: Promising Practices for Developing and Implementing LCAPs** (October 2017). bit.ly/2tkGluh

» School Board Members Get Down to Facts: Results of CSBA Survey of Trustees on Key Education Topics (October 2018). http://bit.ly/2Vu0CTc

» Local Control and Accountability Plans: A Survey of School Board Member Involvement (September 2017). bit.ly/2BAeEYB

» Promising Practices for Developing and Implementing LCAPS (November 2016). bit.ly/2x8rv2g

CSBA Professional Development Opportunities

» **Annual Education Conference and Trade Show.** CSBA's premier continuing education program delivers practical solutions to help governance teams from districts and county offices of education to improve student learning and achievement. aec.csba.org

» **Orientation for New Trustees.** A one-day orientation for new trustees that prepares them for their first 100 days of service. bit.ly/2sEef2n

» **Institute for New and First-Term Board Members.** This innovative two-day seminar is one of the best opportunities for newly elected and first-term trustees to learn about their unique role and responsibilities. http://bit.ly/2Psqjy3

» **Masters in Governance.** A comprehensive five-course program that equips board members and superintendents with the knowledge and skills to build and support an effective governance structure. http://bit.ly/2V0bqJG

   » Course 1: Foundations of Effective Governance/Setting Direction

   » Course 2: Policy and Judicial Review/Student Learning and Achievement

   » Course 3: School Finance

   » Course 4: Human Resources/Collective Bargaining

   » Course 5: Community Relations and Advocacy/Governance Integration

» **Leadership Institute.** A biennial two-day event uniquely designed to provide board members with relevant, engaging, hands-on content and critical strategies that will advance the leadership skills and capacity of their governance team. bit.ly/2S5bbKQ

» **The Brown Act: What You Need to Know.** A fact-filled workshop that covers the intricacies of the *Brown* Act. bit.ly/2U7QyuR

» **Board Presidents Workshop.** A workshop that provides current and aspiring board presidents with tools for focused leadership. bit.ly/2HzXLCO

CSBA Sample Policies

The following sample policies and administrative regulations are available to subscribers of CSBA's policy services through GAMUT at www.gamutonline.net

» BP 0000 - Vision

» BP 0200 - Goals for The School District

» BP 0400 - Comprehensive Plans

» BP 0415 - Equity

» BP/AR 0420 - School Plans/Site Councils

» BP/AR 0460 - Local Control and Accountability Plan

» BP 1100 - Communication with The Public

» BP 1220 - Citizen Advisory Committees

» BB 9230 - Orientation

External Resources

» **California Department of Education LCAP Webpage** provides an overview, template, and resources related to LCAP development and revisions. http://bit.ly/2ZwZSvX

» **California Education Code, Sections 52060-52077** includes requirements for school districts and county offices of education related to the development of and revisions to their LCAPs. http://bit.ly/2UHkQ7S

» **Data Equity Walk Toolkit** from The Education Trust-West. http://bit.ly/2XLz8pV

CSBA's California Collaborative for Educational Excellence Professional Learning Network

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Appendix

Checklist of the Six Essential Roles of School Boards in the Development and Implementation of their District's LCAP

This checklist is intended to support governance teams (the board and superintendent) in having conversations about the role the board can play in the effective implementation of their district's LCAP. Given that every district and community have different strengths and challenges, the ideal role that boards play in the LCAP development and implementation process can differ.

Role 1: Develop a Deep Understanding of the LCAP Purpose and Process

Engage in Ongoing Learning

❑ Provide Orientation for New Board Members

❑ Encourage Professional Learning for Individual Board Members

❑ Engage in Board Professional Learning Led by Experts (Staff and External)

❑ Ensure Ongoing Board Workshops or Study Sessions

❑ Ensure Periodic Board Updates on LCAP Development and Implementation

Develop a Clear Definition of Equity for the District

❑ Define what Equity (or Inequity) Means and Looks Like in the District

❑ Ensure Common Understanding of Equity Definition Among Board and District

❑ Revisit the Equity Definition Regularly

❑ Review How Well the District and Schools are Meeting Equity Definition

❑ Take Actions Necessary to Bring District Closer to Fulfilling Equity Definition

Demonstrate a Commitment to Excellence

❑ Read Relevant Materials and Ask Clarifying Questions Before Making Decisions

❑ Understand and Read Entire LCAP

❑ Review LCAP Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes to Adjust When Necessary

❑ Have Difficult Conversations about Underlying Reasons for Inequity in District

Role 2: Develop LCAP Goals and the Supports Necessary to Achieve Effective Implementation of the Strategies in the LCAP

Establish Board Priorities Aligned to the Mission and Vision of the District

❑ Discuss, Develop, and Adopt Board Priorities

❑ Ensure Priorities Focus on Student Outcomes and Closing Opportunity Gaps

Develop Aligned LCAP Goals to Meet the Board Priorities

❑ Establish Process for Governance Team to Come to Agreement on Goals

❑ Use Student Outcome Data as Starting Point to Set Student Outcome Goals

❑ Set Faster Growth Targets for Student Groups to Close Achievement Gaps

❑ Ensure All Goals Have Clear Timelines for Accomplishment

Establish a Common Understanding in the Boardroom

❑ Come to Agreement on and Define Commonly Used Terms

❑ Come to Agreement on Expectations for the Superintendent and Staff

❑ Establish a Clear Understanding of the Role of the Board

❑ Establish Agreements for Working Together and Communicating Effectively

Support Implementation by Staff

❑ Ensure Staff Have Opportunities for Professional Development

❑ Approve Policies and Resources to Meet Goals and Make Actions Sustainable

❑ Assist in Staff and Superintendent Efforts to Establish and Maintain Partnerships

❑ Stick to Goals and Messages in the Face of Opposition

Role 3: Encourage and Participate in Ongoing Engagement of a Diverse Range of Stakeholders

Ensure Opportunities are in Place to Engage all Stakeholders

❑ Establish Stakeholder Engagement Goals with the Superintendent

❑ Direct Superintendent and Staff to Engage Various and Diverse Stakeholders

❑ Ensure Process is Accessible to All Stakeholders

❑ Ensure that All Engagement Approaches are Considered

❑ Establish Agreements on the Board Role in Stakeholder Engagement

Provide Resources to Implement Meaningful Engagement Opportunities

❑ Approve Resources to Build Stakeholder Capacity

❑ Approve Resources for Staff Training on Engagement and Cultural Competency

❑ Support the Development of a Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement Rubric

❑ Approve the Use of Services Necessary to Engage All Stakeholders

Demonstrate that Stakeholders are Heard

❑ Establish Process for How Staff Responds to and Considers Recommendations

❑ Share Anecdotes of How Feedback Influenced Current Investments

❑ Respectfully Listen and Consider Everyone's Feedback

Role 4: Build an Understanding of Data to Inform Board Discussions and Actions Related to the LCAP

Create the Conditions for the Governance Team to Discuss Data

❑ Engage in Data-Focused Ongoing Professional Learning

❑ Ensure Data-Focused Professional Learning is Available to Staff

❑ Establish Agreements About How to Discuss and Ask Questions About Data

❑ Discuss What Data Indicates About District Progress and How to Respond

Determine What Data is Required

❑ Determine Which Data is Most Important (with Superintendent and Staff)

❑ Develop a Protocol for Requesting Data from Staff

❑ Ensure Requested Data Includes Student Group Outcomes

❑ Ensure Requested Data is Tied to Board Priorities and LCAP Goals

❑ Continually Engage with Staff About Meaning of Data and Various Data Sources

❑ Learn About How Other Districts Use Data

Ensure that Data is Meaningful and Accessible

❑ Support District Opportunities to Share Data at Accessible Locations and Times

❑ Ensure Data is Presented in a Consistent, Uniform, and Understandable Manner

Role 5: Serve as Key Communicators and Advocates With Stakeholders About LCAP Strategies

Develop Common Messages

❑ Develop Common Messages with Concise Purpose for LCAP Goals and Strategies

❑ Incorporate Themes of Equity and Continuous Improvement (Share Successes)

❑ Adapt Messages to Have a Different Focus for Different Stakeholders

❑ Commit to Stay on Agreed-Upon Messages

Streamline Messages

❑ Select a Few Goals or Themes and Identify Why They Matter and Progress Made

❑ Use Terminology that All Stakeholders Can Understand

❑ Ensure Tools are Developed for Transparent, Positive, and Memorable Messages

Ensure Outreach and Communication to All Stakeholders

❑ Support Multiple Methods of Communication by the District

❑ Ensure All District Staff Clearly Understand and Can Communicate the Messages

❑ Support Liaisons from the Community Who Can Speak to Different Groups

❑ Approve Translation and Other Services to Make Messages Accessible

❑ Participate in Outreach to Local, State, and Federal Elected Officials and Agencies

Role 6: Continuously Monitor and Evaluate Progress of LCAP Strategies

Understand and Monitor Strategies

❑ Request and Conduct Site Visits to Observe Strategies in Action

❑ Receive Periodic Updates on Strategies of Interest During Board Meetings

Have Ongoing Discussions About Outcomes and Progress of Strategies

❑ Select Key Goals and Strategies to Prioritize Within the Year

❑ Regularly Review and Discuss Student Outcome Data Related to Strategies

❑ Count on Staff to Provide Relevant Information

❑ Balance Conversations with What is Working and Not Working

Promote Long-Term View and Work Toward Sustainability

❑ Create Safe Space for Staff to Plan, Innovate, and Function at Highest Levels

❑ Make Key LCAP Goals Part of the Superintendent Evaluation

❑ Encourage the Engagement of Stakeholders on Progress of LCAP Goals

Special Education

California's Children and Youth with Disabilities

By Mary Briggs and Manuel Buenrostro, with contributions from Mary Cichy Grady, Maureen O'Leary Burness, and Geri F. West

Introduction

California's current funding system for public schools, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), provides board members with more flexibility in decision-making at the local level. Recognizing that local communities know their students best, the formula allows local educational agencies (LEAs)—school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools—to spend funds in ways that they believe best meet the needs of their students.

The school board's role is to ensure local policies serve all students, including those with disabilities from birth through age 21. During the 2017-18 school year, more than 770,000 students with identified disabilities in this age range were enrolled in California public schools.[1] LEAs are responsible for providing all students, including students with disabilities, with rigorous academic instruction and with improving their educational progress. To meet these responsibilities, special education funding and some services are administered through consortia known as Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs). In some instances, an individual district may be a SELPA.

This brief provides information about California's children with disabilities including infants, toddlers, school-aged children, and young adults; their various disabling conditions; the sometimes complicated challenge of accurately assessing these conditions; and the implications of identifying a child as having a disability. It is part of a series of briefs focused on the requirements and processes related to educating students with disabilities. With accurate information, board members can make the best decisions to ensure equity, transparency, and accountability in the education provided to all students.

In this brief you will find:

» An overview of California's students with disabilities;

» Information about the importance of early identification and services for infants and toddlers;

» An overview of the disabilities in school-age children (ages 3 through 21);

» Challenges in identifying specific learning disabilities;

» Issues of disproportionality in special education; and

» Questions for board members to consider.

Who Are Students with Disabilities?

Students with disabilities have learning or physical differences that may range from minor to severe. Schools provide a vital service by ensuring that all students have the opportunity to meet challenging objectives. In fact, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires LEAs to identify all students in their jurisdiction who have a disability and ensure the provision of "resources, adapted instruction, and specialized assistance to mitigate the effects of [their] disability."[2] The application of IDEA varies from infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) to school-age children and young adults (ages 3 through 21).

Early Intervention

Some children are born with a risk condition or developmental concern that is evident from birth, while others are assessed after a family member, physician, or other professional (such as a child care provider) expresses a concern about the child's development. The term *developmental delay* describes the difference between a child's development compared to peers of the same age or to a typical developmental trajectory. It encompasses a broad range of conditions and behaviors that suggest below-average progress in one or more of the areas in which children develop.

Children develop more rapidly and learn more quickly during their first three years of life than at any time afterward. During this period, a developmental delay (such as undetected hearing loss) can profoundly delay the child's ability to communicate. Early and appropriate intervention, treatment, and support have been proven to significantly lessen the long-term effects of a developmental delay, and sometimes can even resolve the initial concerns.[3] The goal of early intervention is to ensure that infants and toddlers with a developmental delay have the best possible chance to live full and meaningful lives; the earlier the intervention is started, the greater the likelihood of its positive impact on the child's development.[4]

Identification and Services for Infants and Toddlers

When a developmental delay is suspected in a child younger than 3, the LEA or Regional Center is contacted for an assessment, and a service coordinator is assigned to assist the parents through the assessment process.

If a developmental delay is confirmed, the infant or toddler and his or her family are eligible for early intervention services. The service coordinator, parents, and other appropriate professionals then work as a team to design an Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP), which outlines the services and supports that the child and family will receive.[5] An IFSP typically includes early intervention specialists, service providers and service coordinators, and the child's parents.

IFSPs remain in effect until the child turns 3 years old, the developmental concern is resolved, or the child transitions to Part B preschool services. The agency responsible for serving the child (either the Regional Center or the local school district) arranges for the provision of services such as speech therapy, occupational or physical therapy, or special instruction. According to the California Department of Developmental Services, "Local educational agencies are primarily responsible for services for infants with vision, hearing, and severe orthopedic impairments, including

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SELPAs and Regional Centers

SELPAs coordinate services for students with disabilities. In many cases, they also provide special education services. While SELPAs are often organized in regions, they are not the same thing as Regional Centers (see below). Typically, SELPAs work with school districts and county offices of education to ensure that all children and youth with disabilities within their local areas receive whatever special education-related services and supports they need from birth through age 21. SELPAs also coordinate the state and federal funds earmarked to provide those services and supports.

Regional Centers are private, nonprofit organizations that provide or coordinate services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities across their lifespans. The state's 21 centers provide some case management and contract out for other limited services, in addition to contracting with the California Department of Developmental Services. Their services are generally therapeutic and less education-focused compared to SELPAs. Regional Centers and a network of about 40 Early Start Family Resource Centers—which connect families of young children with other parents, specialists, referral services, information, and support—are spread throughout the state to help individuals and their family members find and access services. For more information, see https://www.dds.ca.gov/RC/index.cfm.

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any combination of these solely low-incidence disabilities. Regional Centers are responsible for services for all other children eligible for Early Start."[6]

Part C of IDEA, known as Early Start in California, requires an assessment of any child from birth until age 3 for whom there is a reasonable suspicion of developmental delay. To access Early Start services, parents can request an interdisciplinary assessment of their child when they have reasonable concerns. For any concern about developmental delay in an infant or toddler, parents should contact their Local Regional Center, LEA, or family resource center. The purpose of the assessment is to confirm or dismiss the suspicion of a developmental delay in one or more of the developmental domains (gross or fine motor, speech, language development, social or emotional, or self-help skills).[7]

California has a robust network of about 40 Early Start Family Resource Centers. The centers connect parents of children with developmental delays and provide them support, information, and referral services.[8] Part C of IDEA requires each

state to make Early Start services available free to every eligible family, regardless of income. A family receives services to help parents and other family members learn how to best support their child and his or her development considering the delay. The services are designed with family routines in mind rather than clinical therapies. For example, a family might receive instructions on how to manage a piece of equipment to better position a child that lacks adequate physical muscle tone or guidance on how to play with a child with a neurological disability. These early intervention services are guided by a commitment to family-centered[9] approaches within the child's natural environment—either the child's home or childcare setting.[10]

Disabilities in School-Age Children

Part B of IDEA includes more specific requirements and definitions than those in Part C. Part B requires schools to provide special education and related services to students ages 3 through 21 who have one or more identified disabilities. To be eligible and receive special education and related services, the disability must adversely affect a child's educational performance.
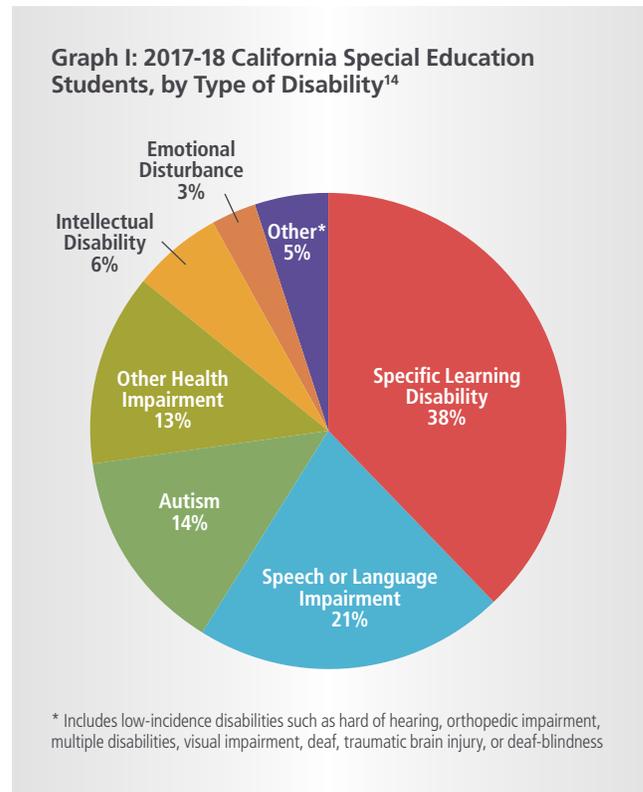
California identifies the following disability categories, which mirror those identified under IDEA.[11]

» Specific learning disability (e.g., dyslexia)

» Speech or language impairment

» Autism

» Intellectual disability

» Emotional disturbance

» Orthopedic impairment

» Hearing impairment

» Visual impairment, including blindness

» Traumatic brain injury

» Other health impairment

» Deafness

» Deaf-blindness

» Multiple disabilities

The category "multiple disabilities" encompasses a combination of impairments affecting the child's developmental and educational challenges that "cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments."[12]

During the 2017-18 school year, the disabilities of 86 percent of all California public school students identified for special education services fell into four categories: specific learning disability (38 percent), speech or language impairment (21 percent), autism (14 percent), and other health impairment (13 percent).[13]

Graph I: 2017-18 California Special Education Students, by Type of Disability[14]

Emotional Disturbance 3%
Intellectual Disability 6%
Other* 5%
Specific Learning Disability 38%
Other Health Impairment 13%
Autism 14%
Speech or Language Impairment 21%

* Includes low-incidence disabilities such as hard of hearing, orthopedic impairment, multiple disabilities, visual impairment, deaf, traumatic brain injury, or deaf-blindness

Over the past 10 years (from 2007-08 to 2017-18), the number of students identified for special education services has increased by 96,761 students. During this same period, both the number and percentage of students identified with autism and other health impairments have more than doubled, while the identification of students with a specific learning disability and speech or language impairment has dropped. There is not consensus among researchers about the explanations for shifts in identification over time, but some of these changes could be explained—at least in part—by reclassification of students as physicians, families, and educators become more knowledgeable about specific disabilities. For example, a student who in the past might have been classified as having a severe intellectual disability or emotional disturbance might now be classified as having autism.[15]

The Vast Majority of Students with Disabilities Attend Traditional Public School

In 2017-18, 85 percent of students with disabilities attended public day school, while about 7 percent attended charter schools. An additional 7 percent attended other school types, such as private schools, correctional programs, independent study, residential programs, transition programs, and higher education institutions.[16]

Services Provided to Students with Disabilities

Given the diverse needs identified as part of students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), California's students receive a wide range of services. In 2017-18, students with disabilities in the state received more than 1.8 million services, with many students accessing multiple services. Table 1 provides a breakdown of these services by type.

Table 1: Services Provided to California Students with Disabilities (2017-18)

Services	Number of Students	Percentage
Specialized Academic Instruction	635,219	34%
Language and Speech	380,265	20%
Vocational/Career	186,919	10%
Mental Health Services	150,852	8%
All Other Services	511,620	27%
Total	1,864,875	100%

Source: California Department of Education[17]

Challenges with Assessing Specific Learning Disabilities

Proper identification of students with a specific learning disability is critical for them to access the appropriate services to have the opportunity to meet challenging objectives. A specific learning disability is "an umbrella term that points to weaknesses in such areas as reading, writing, spelling, math, and other kinds of skills," because the brain processes information in a different way.[18] Researchers also note that the concept "focuses on the notion of a discrepancy between a child's academic achievement and his or her apparent capacity to learn."[19]

Some of the categories of disability represent indisputable conditions, and the path to providing services and supports is obvious. A child who is blind or who has a profound stutter has a confirmed disability. The child who is blind may, for example, receive instruction in Braille and be provided books in Braille. The child with a stutter may receive speech therapy and possible counseling for maintaining their self-esteem.

Other categories are not so clear. For example, IDEA defines "other health impairment" as "…having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that—

(i) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and

(ii) Adversely affects a child's educational performance."[20]

Many of the conditions included in this definition are certainly indisputable (diabetes, epilepsy, leukemia, etc.). But it can be challenging to accurately identify attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The second-grade boy who simply can't sit still might be, in one teacher's mind, a clear case of ADHD, while another teacher might interpret the behavior as typical normal for his age and gender. Some studies have shown that "more boys have problems with attention and focus than girls."[21] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that "there is no single test to identify ADHD, and many other problems, like sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, and certain types of learning disabilities, can have similar symptoms."[22] This can further complicate efforts to identify the disability accurately. In fact, other researchers have argued that ADHD is equally prevalent in males and females, but gender stereotypes and misconceptions about the symptoms of ADHD have led to under-identification in girls.[23]

Categories of disability also sometimes overlap. According to Harvard Medical School researcher Dr. Nancy Rappaport, half of students with attention problems also have other learning disabilities. She notes that for these students to be successful, their IEPs should address both attention issues and any other learning disabilities.[24]

English Learners

One significant challenge that professionals face when determining the presence of a specific learning disability involves children whose first language is not English. This includes students who are not proficient in English, or English

learners (ELs). While knowing more than one language has many cognitive benefits,[25] ELs can take more time to begin speaking or reading English in comparison to their English-fluent peers. Disentangling a delay related to their EL status from a possible specific learning disability is complicated, and evidence suggests that information resulting from the complex process for determining a specific learning disability may not always be accurate for ELs. Research suggests that in some cases ELs are over-identified for special education, while other studies have found that they are under-identified for special education.[26,27] Clearly, educators must proceed with caution when considering these cases. Any educator whose professional judgment indicates that an EL may have a disability must ensure that the student is appropriately and carefully assessed.

Instructional Quality and Classroom Climate

The strength of the instruction and the classroom climate are key components to ensuring that children are not misidentified. Research identifies favorable attributes that contribute to learning, such as "a positive social climate; strong instructional leadership; increased time for reading instruction; high expectations and strong accountability; continuous monitoring of student achievement; ongoing professional development based on effective reading strategies; and integral parental involvement."[28] In situations where these qualities are weak or absent, a child's inability to read may be due to the quality of instruction rather than to a learning disability.

Emotional Disturbance

Recent legislation and current statewide initiatives have placed a spotlight on the IDEA category of disability called "emotional disturbance." This attention has been prompted by increased identification of behavioral and emotional disturbances in children and youth.[29]

Early childhood trauma is emerging as one likely reason for these challenges. Abuse of any kind (physical, sexual, or emotional), physical or emotional neglect, divorce, mental illness in a parent, family violence, substance abuse, or the incarceration of a family member can all create toxic stress in a child's life. Research shows a strong connection between these kinds of experiences, the number of experiences that occur, and a child's ability to learn, regulate behavior, and get along with others. Studies indicate that six out of every 10 children in California have experienced at least one of these adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).[30] When experienced before the age of 18 and without the support of a mental health professional, ACEs can change the way a child's brain develops and disrupt learning, behavior, and lifetime health.[31]

Disproportionality and Students with Disabilities

Inequity remains a challenge for students with disabilities and their families. California is attempting to address patterns of inequity, in part through a focus on what is termed disproportionality—an imbalance in any one of the three following areas:

1. The patterns of disciplining students from any student group at markedly higher rates or in different ways than their peers (especially in instances of suspension and expulsion);[32]

2. The rates that students from any racial or ethnic group are identified as having a disability; and

3. The patterns of school or classroom placements for these students.

Discipline Disparities

Disproportionate discipline refers to disciplinary patterns that are not applied equally. In the case of racial and ethnic disparities, research has shown that "African-American students are referred to the [school] office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation" than referrals for other students.[33] And African-American males are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than white students.[34] Students with disabilities are also disciplined at higher rates than their non-disabled peers, and, among students with disabilities, the problem is compounded by racial and ethnic discipline gaps.[35] In response, the U.S. Department of Education issued a *Dear Colleague* letter with guidance to schools on providing the appropriate behavioral supports to ensure students have access to the "meaningful educational benefit" they are guaranteed under the law.[36]

Personal and school contexts also influence how a child behaves, as well as how that behavior is perceived. Inappropriate behavior can be the result of students' experience with a range of trauma and other stressors, from hunger or abuse to bullying or the illness of a family member. The official identification of emotional disturbance should not result from a few isolated incidents but requires that specifically identified behaviors are exhibited "over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance."[37]

Disparities in Identification

Identifying students for special education services can be a controversial issue. Researchers continue to debate whether certain racial and ethnic groups are over- or under-identified

for special education services. On one hand, most schol-ars have found that "children of color . . . are identified as students with disabilities at substantially higher rates than their peers."[38] Other studies using different methodological approaches report that, "among children who were other-wise similar in their academic achievement, poverty exposure, gender, and English language learner status, racial or ethnic minority children were consistently less likely than white chil-dren to be identified as having disabilities."[39,40,41]

Although researchers continue to study disproportionality and identification for special education, LEAs should attend carefully to their local data. IDEA requires states and LEAs to consistently gather data to track instances of these kinds of imbalances. LEAs found to be consistently and significantly disproportionate (as defined by the state) in any one of the three identified areas for up to three prior consecutive years[42] must find the source of the imbalance and must also spend 15 percent of their IDEA money to address the problem. For example, the LEA might use funds to provide professional development to staff, improve basic instruction, or introduce a schoolwide program of positive behavioral supports.[43]

Conclusion

Children and youth with disabilities represent a highly diverse group of individuals with an equally diverse set of needs, abilities, and educational requirements. While determining the appropriate services for these students is not always easy, it is essential for educators and school leaders to make the best effort possible to provide a challenging academic program with the necessary supports and services to ensure access, participation, and academic achievement.

Understanding the various disabilities of students in California public schools along with the challenges of identification are critical to ensure that all students get the supports they need to achieve their potential. By identifying and reaching out to students with disabilities, school professionals can have a profound impact on school climate, culture, language, and other areas. Board members can support this mission by ensuring that their LEA has a coherent system to identify and support students, families, and staff with the skills to assess, engage, and educate students with disabilities.

Questions for School Board Members

Board members can help their schools better serve students identified for special education services by answering the following questions:

1. How many students are identified as having a disability in our schools? What are the types of disabilities for which they are identified?

2. How are students with disabilities distributed through-out our schools or programs? Do some schools in our LEA have higher concentrations of students with dis-abilities? If so, is this due to a strategic coordination of resources or are there other issues at play, such as differences in how the staff approach the student study team or IEP process?

3. What are the procedures for identifying students with disabilities in our schools? Are the professionals trained at identifying and understanding the various disabilities?

4. In the assessment process, how are our staff consider-ing the possible impact of other factors, such as school environment, English learner status, etc.?

5. Are certain ethnic groups in our schools being dispro-portionately represented in special education rosters or in restrictive classrooms, such as resource specialist classes and special day classes?

Resources

Key Organizations and Agencies

» **U.S. Department of Education.** *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).* http://idea.ed.gov

» **California Department of Education.** Special Education Division. http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/

» **California Department of Developmental Services.** *Regional Centers Directory.* https://bit.ly/2v5SnAZ

» **Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF).** A national civil rights law and policy center directed by individuals with disabilities and families who have children with disabilities. https://dredf.org

Early Intervention

» **Why Early Intervention Programs Benefit Kids with Developmental Delays.** Information about early inter-vention programs from the Child Development Institute. http://bit.ly/2G3LCl6

» **Overview of Early Intervention.** Information in English and Spanish from the Center for Parent Information and Resources. https://www.parentcenterhub.org/ei-overview/

» **California Early Start.** Resource page by the California Early Intervention Technical Assistance Network. https://bit.ly/2HhLaT5

» **Together, We Make a Difference: California Early Start for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Their Families** (2014). Handbook by the Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention (ICC). http://bit.ly/2gVWbhC

» **Early Intervention.** Website for Zero to Three, which provides information about early intervention in English and Spanish for parents, educators, and policy makers. https://www.zerotothree.org/espanol/early-intervention

Identifying Students

» **Reasons for Concern When You Suspect Your Child or a Child in Your Care May Have a Disability or Special Need(s).** Resource page by the California Department of Education. https://bit.ly/2Htz9Yt

» **RTI-Based SLD [Specific Learning Disability] Identification Toolkit: Considerations for English Language Learners.** Toolkit by the National Center for Learning Disabilities. https://bit.ly/2Hvh7oK

» **The State Performance Plan Technical Assistance Project (SPP-TAP).** The SPP-TAP is funded by the California Department of Education through a contract to the Napa County Office of Education to help California LEAs address performance and compliance issues related to disproportionality in student identification and placements. It provides technical assistance consisting of training, coaching, information dissemination, and referrals of best practices. Services include: sustaining a cadre of expert Technical Assistance Facilitators; conducting webinars; designing and facilitating a community of practice; and developing and providing workshops and symposia. http://spptap.org

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9   For more about family-centered early intervention, see *Family-Centered Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities* by Nicole Tomasello, Amy Manning, & Catherine Dulmus, in the Journal of Family Social Work (2010) at https://bit.ly/2Hn9q3d

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Special Education and the Law

by Mary Briggs and Manuel Buenrostro, with contributions from Mary Cichy Grady, Maureen O'Leary Burness, and Geri F. West

Introduction

School board members are responsible for helping ensure that their districts and county offices of education (collectively known as local educational agencies or LEAs) provide students with disabilities the free and appropriate public education to which they are entitled.

To help with that process, this CSBA brief provides board members with a short history of special education in the United States and then explains the laws that govern the provision of special education and related services for children and youth with disabilities. This includes legal mandates and requirements—in particular, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Familiarity with these laws and requirements is critically important to the work of trustees, as nearly 775,000 California students from birth through age 21 receive special education and related services.[1] LEAs and their boards ensure that these students receive a rigorous education and develop socially, emotionally, and intellectually to their fullest capacity.

Given the complexity of the legal issues surrounding special education, the information included in this brief is not exhaustive and does not constitute legal advice. Board members should consult with legal counsel for specific guidance.

Background

At first, the American education system had no federal mandates or guidelines for how to educate children with disabilities. But there were parents, teachers, and other professionals (such as physicians) who recognized that regardless of any disabilities, these children were capable of learning.

In this brief you will find:

- » Information about theIndividuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including its background and evolution;
- » Details and definitions under Parts A, B, C, and D of IDEA;
- » A summary of the legal requirements that IDEA places on local educational agencies, including those under Part B and C;
- » Information about additional federal legislation affecting students with disabilities, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, The Americans with Disabilities Act, The Carl D. Perkins Act, and the Workforce Investment Act;
- » Information about how California law is aligned with and supports IDEA and other federal education requirements; and
- » Questions for board members to consider.

In the second half of the 1900s, parents of children with disabilities organized locally and advocated nationally for consistent and equal treatment for their children. At the same time, a growing interest in the rights of women and in racial equality provided a context, language, and momentum for these parents—and their advocacy efforts on behalf of children with disabilities were incorporated into the civil rights movement.[2]

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Two landmark district court rulings in 1972 guaranteed the rights of children with disabilities to an education: *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*. These cases secured important legal precedents for protecting the educational rights of children with disabilities.

Three years later, in 1975, President Gerald Ford signed into law the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, also known as Public Law 94-142. The law's original intent was (a) to ensure the rights of students with disabilities to a public education and (b) to provide resources to help states deliver on this right. The law's authors understood that it would cost more to educate children who are blind, for example, because they would need accommodations such as books in Braille, special instruction in learning to read Braille, and mobility support.

While there have been substantial shifts in its specifics, the law fundamentally remains unchanged: public schools must provide children with disabilities the proper supports, services, and accommodations to ensure these students receive a free and appropriate public education and have the same access to education as their non-disabled peers.

Schools are also required to provide this education in the least restrictive environment (LRE), which means that a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate.

The Evolution of IDEA: From Access to Meaningful Benefit

Public Law 94-142 was amended in 1986 (Public Law 99-457), expanding the rights of children with disabilities by requiring states to provide programs and services to children from birth to age 3. It was amended and renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990, amended in 1997, and then again as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA, though the law is still referred to by most as IDEA).

These reauthorizations changed the focus of the law from a basic assurance of "access" to a more challenging focus on "meaningful benefit" for students with disabilities, partly in response to persistently poor post-school outcomes. Teachers and school administrators now needed to "look to the general education curriculum as the standard for all; focus on improved outcomes for students with disabilities and not just on process; [and] support students with disabilities to obtain results in elementary and secondary school as well as access to postsecondary education and employment."[3]

Four Principal Parts of IDEA

The 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations of IDEA maintained the law's original intent: that students with disabilities were guaranteed an individually designed educational program that would allow them to learn in the least restrictive environment possible.

The fundamental principles and parts of that law still stand:

» **Part A** establishes the purpose of IDEA: "To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living."[4] Part A also includes definitions of important terms.

» **Part B** mandates certain activities in exchange for federal IDEA money. Any entity responsible for educating children and youth (e.g., school districts, county offices of education, direct-funded charter schools, and Special Education Local Plan Areas [SELPAs]) must educate students with disabilities from ages 3 through 21 (or until they graduate from high school with a regular diploma, if that happens first). Part B also spells out the guidelines for that education (see page 3 for more information on Part B). Parents are granted legal due process for the rights outlined in Part B of IDEA.

» **Part C** establishes guidelines for providing services to children from birth to 3 years of age and their families. These services—known as *Early Start* in California—include an evaluation for the presence of a disability and support for the child and the child's family through a variety of developmentally appropriate early intervention services in response to the disability or to a developmental delay. Parents are granted legal due process for the rights outlined in Part C of IDEA. Part C also charts steps to support children and families in transitioning into Part B services when the children who are receiving services turn 3 years old.

» **Part D** describes grants, programs, and activities to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities and their families. These include parent centers

that offer training and resources that make it possible for parents and family members to better support the educational needs of their children in collaboration with educators. Other activities involve professional development grants and projects to support the ongoing education of administrators, teachers, and other school staff. Additional programs under Part D are designed to support students with disabilities to successfully transition to adult life and independent living.

IDEA Requirements in Context

Children and youth identified as having a disability enter the special education system through a systematic process of evaluation. A child who enters school with a confirmed disability will most likely have been receiving services from Early Start (Part C) providers. In such cases, parents or guardians and educators will have developed a plan to transition the child from Early Start services to Part B (LEA) services at age 3. If the child did not receive Early Start services, parents will sign an assessment plan and begin the process of evaluation.

For a child who is struggling and not making educational progress, the following process is used to determine what, if any, special education and related services are appropriate:

1. A teacher, parent, or legal guardian can request that the child be referred to the school's Child Study Team or Student Support Team[5] to gather information and develop a plan of strategies for helping the child be more successful.

2. If the strategies do not result in the child's reasonable progress, the team may recommend a referral for an evaluation to determine if a disability is the cause. At any point, a parent can formally request this evaluation. IDEA gives the school district the responsibility to recommend an evaluation if there is a suspected disability.

3. When the parent consents to (or requests) this evaluation, the school staff develops an assessment plan, and an Individualized Education Program (IEP, see page 4) meeting is scheduled. The timeline must adhere to legal guidelines.

4. If the evaluation confirms the presence of a disability *and* the child's need for specialized services or supports, an IEP plan is developed and the process of providing the child with special education begins. Once the IEP plan is developed and provided to parents, they have 30 days to respond.

5. Once approved, the IEP plan is implemented and revisited at least yearly to evaluate the child's progress toward his or her annual goals; adjust goals based on that progress and on any new or unresolved needs; and determine that the supports, modifications, accommodations, and services in the IEP are reasonably designed for the child to "advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals," and when possible, "be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum."[6]

6. Schools must report on the progress the child is making toward his or her goals at each of the reporting periods in the general education calendar. The language of IDEA reads: "concurrent with the issuance of report cards."[7]

The Major IDEA Requirements: Part B

Six major requirements in Part B of IDEA shape the "what" and "how" of special education in public schools:

1. **Free, Appropriate Public Education**. The requirement of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) means that a child or youth with a disability will receive an education designed to meet his or her individual needs. These supports are written into a plan that is executed through the child's IEP. They can include such things as adaptive hearing equipment, speech and language services, or carefully scaffolded learning plans[8] if a child has a learning disability. FAPE may also include free transportation to and from school, which could require an LEA to provide a specially equipped bus that can load a wheelchair, for example (a more detailed discussion of special education funding is addressed in a separate CSBA brief: *SELPAs and Special Education Funding in California*).

    IDEA defines special education as "specifically designed instruction…to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability," while related services provide the support "required to assist a child…to benefit from" that instruction.[9] The state must provide a child with disabilities an education in conformity with the child's IEP. Determining what is "appropriate," however, has been the subject of many court cases. In its 2017 decision, *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District,* the Supreme Court interpreted FAPE as providing more than *de minimis* benefit. Instead, the Court found:

    > To meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances.[10]

2. **Assessment.** A school must assess a child if a teacher or school staff member has a reason to believe that a child has an undiagnosed disability and the child's parents give their permission. When a parent requests a special education assessment (or evaluation), a school must assess if there is a reason to suspect a disability.

This initial assessment also gathers information about the child's strengths and any specific educational needs the child may have. When a disability is identified, this and other relevant information can be used to design an IEP and guide the child's placement (see next section). Only after this initial evaluation and development of an IEP—and only with parental consent—can any special education and related service be provided to the child.

As with all effective assessments, assessment for special education services is not a "one-and-done" event. Reassessments should occur when an LEA determines that the child's need for special education or related services, including academic achievement and functional performance, need revisiting or when a parent or teacher requests it. However, reassessments should not occur more than once a year, and at least once every three years, unless the parents and LEA agree otherwise. These assessments should answer two central questions: Have the child's needs, abilities, or learning difficulties changed since the initial assessment? In what areas is the child progressing (or not progressing)?

3. **Individualized Education Program (IEP).** An IEP starts by describing the child's "present level of achievement, including explaining 'how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.'"[11] It also includes a formal plan that establishes reasonable learning goals for a child with a disability and specifies the services the school district will provide to help the child achieve these goals.

In *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District,* the Court declined to establish a particular test of appropriateness of an IEP, because it recognized that "reasonably calculated" requires the informed judgment of school officials and the input of the child's parents or guardians. For those students with disabilities who are fully integrated into the general education program, the Court wrote that the IEP should typically be designed to enable a student to achieve passing grades and advance from grade to grade.

Key people in a child's school life make up the IEP team that creates this plan. These people include, at a minimum, the child's parents; regular education teacher (if applicable); a special education teacher or service provider; an appropriately qualified representative of the LEA; an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results; other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate (at the discretion of the parent or the agency); and, whenever possible, the child with the disability.

After a formal plan is created, the team must meet annually and revise the IEP plan according to the progress the student is making toward the specified goals. Ideally, the student who is the subject of the plan will attend and participate in the IEP meeting. This participation helps to ensure that the IEP is student-centered,[12] which is particularly important as the team begins planning for the student's transition to adult living. Transition planning is a legal requirement, and formal transition plans must be in place by the time the student turns 16 years old.

4. **Least Restrictive Environment.** The requirement of educating a child in the "least restrictive environment" (LRE) means that students with disabilities should, to the maximum extent appropriate, be educated with children who are not disabled, and only removed from the general education environment when the nature or severity of the child's disability is such that education in the general education classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily with the use of additional services. This allows students with disabilities to be educated in the classroom or learning setting where they are most likely to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. Determining LRE requires careful judgment, insight, and understanding on the part of the IEP team members. It is important for LEAs to make available a continuum of placements and services so that parents and educators can fully respond to the growth and progress of each student, and the IEP can serve as a living vehicle for delivering a truly individualized education.

5. **Parental Involvement.** The legislators who crafted the IDEA understood that parents and family members know their children best and can give schools important information about their children's strengths, weaknesses, and developmental background, along with insight into family factors that may affect a child's learning. As a result, the law mandates the meaningful involvement of parents or guardians and their full participation in all decisions that affect their child's education. The school must have the consent of students' parents or guardians

to assess their eligibility for special education services, as well as to provide these services.

6. **Due Process.** IDEA mandates that states safeguard—and schools follow—certain procedures when:

   » Assessing students with disabilities;

   » Determining their eligibility for special education services;

   » Ensuring appropriate educational placements, supports, and services for special education;

   » Providing a free and appropriate public education; and

   » Handling potential disputes.

These legal protections are provided for parents and children and youth with disabilities who believe that a student's special education rights have been violated; this is called their "due process"—essentially, the processes that the law has put in place to address possible violations of a student's rights to a free and appropriate public education and to special services and supports.

Due process includes complaint-resolution strategies, including complaint procedures, dispute resolution, mediation, and a formal hearing process. IDEA established these mechanisms to help parents and school personnel find agreement when people—parents, teachers, school administrators, services providers, or other members of a student's IEP team—disagree over the contents or implementation of the IEP.

Part C: Early Start and Child Find

Research has confirmed the value of early intervention to address the effects of disabilities. The Early Start intervention and Child Find mandates in Part C of IDEA reflect a commitment to this benefit.

The law's Child Find requirement involves maintaining "a system of notices, outreach efforts, staff training, and referral processes designed to ascertain when there are reasonable grounds to suspect disability and the potential need for special education services."[13] This obligation exists even if an LEA is not providing the special services for the child.[14] The LEA is always responsible for ensuring that each child with a disability within its jurisdiction is accurately identified and ultimately receives appropriate services and education.

Infants and toddlers change and develop rapidly. Thus, the evaluation, identification, and service-delivery mechanisms

for very young children with a developmental delay or disability are different from those provided for older children. Early Start provides services that are primarily family focused, while Part B's services are more child—and education—focused and begin when the child turns 3 years old. Additionally, eligibility criteria are different for Part C and Part B. Before children who receive services turn 3 years old, they are reassessed to determine their continued eligibility for special education using the Part B criteria.

Because of these differences, IDEA encourages all people and organizations involved on either side of a child's transition from Part C to Part B services to carefully plan together so that the change in services is as seamless as possible. In California, the Department of Developmental Services (via Regional Center staff at the local level) and the California Department of Education (via public school staff) are responsible for ensuring the success of this transition, with the planning to begin no later than three months before a child's third birthday.

Additional Legislation Affecting Students with Disabilities

Federal laws enacted in the past 50 years are intended to ensure that individuals with physical, intellectual, learning, and/or developmental disabilities have the same basic legal, civil, and human rights as every other citizen.

Other federal laws also protect students with disabilities from discrimination in public schools. Most often cited are:

» **Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act.** The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112; amended in 1992) is a federal law that includes Section 504, a civil rights statute prohibiting discrimination based on disability[15] in any program or activity that receives federal funding. In order to avoid discriminating, these programs and activities must accommodate people with disabilities to the same degree it meets the needs of individuals without disabilities.

While IDEA provides supports and services for children and youth with specific disabilities through *implementation* of an IEP, Section 504 focuses on *access* to education. Students do not need to have an IEP to be covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The law addresses only physical and mental impairments that "substantially [limit] one or more major life activities," including (but not limited to) learning and behavior.[16] A person who has allergies or respiratory problems, cancer, Tourette syndrome, or a communicable disease (e.g., HIV), or someone who is in recovery from alcohol or drug addiction may be

protected under Section 504 and require an accommodation plan. The law explicitly includes what it refers to as "hidden disabilities" not "readily apparent."[17]

Section 504 requires that students be offered a free and appropriate public education in regular education classes, with necessary supplementary aids and services, to enable them to access the educational program. These may include, but are not limited to, accommodations for test taking, more time for completing assignments, modifications to the classroom environment, preferred seating, homework modifications, counseling, a behavior management plan, and/or transportation accommodations, as appropriate and based on the identified needs. Section 504 in the educational context requires procedural safeguards be provided to students and parents, and requires FAPE to be provided through an evaluation and team meeting process.

» **The Americans with Disabilities Act.** The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) primarily ensures people with disabilities have access to places, items, and information available to the public: physical access through ramps and curb cuts, for example; and informational access through the requirement that documents must be accessible through a screen reader, Braille, or large type. In all cases, schools, businesses, and public places must ensure that any person with a disability has access to their goods and services through any reasonable accommodation or modification.

For schools, the three basic concepts of ADA involve providing the following:

1. Reasonable accommodations to employees, students, and their family members with disabilities; for example, ensuring that a student in a wheelchair can get to class on time.

2. Extra aides, supports, and services that a person may need to communicate effectively and to access programs; for example, providing someone to translate the proceedings of a school board meeting into sign language for a parent who is deaf.

3. Reasonable modifications of policies, practices, and procedures; for example, making exceptions for a student who has hemophilia to a graduation requirement that all students take a physical education class that may involve student contact.

Two additional pieces of federal legislation have created systems of services and supports to prepare students with

disabilities to enter the workforce and realize financial and personal independence.

» **The Carl D. Perkins Act.** The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 (reauthorized in 2018 as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act) requires schools to inform parents of vocational education opportunities for their child by the time the child is in ninth grade. The law was initially designed to strengthen technical education in the country and to boost the economy. The authors of the law knew the workforce potential of students with disabilities and included the requirement that schools receiving Perkins money must provide vocational assessments, special services, and career and transition counseling[18] to give students with disabilities a better chance to transition into adult life, independent living, and gainful employment.[19]

» **The Workforce Investment Act.** The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 is another federal law that promotes state-delivered services for students with disabilities. The act established a system of employment and training programs for youth (aged 14–21), adults (aged 18 and above), and dislocated workers. In 2014 the law was superseded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which continues to provide employment services to disadvantaged individuals, specifically those who are low income and have "additional barriers to success," such as a disability. These programs and services help students learn both hard and soft job skills; for example, how to solder and weld and how to collaborate with others. Many of these programs are delivered through California colleges (including community colleges) and universities.[20]

California Law and Federal Law

When federal laws are reauthorized, California's Legislature commonly adjusts its statutes and regulations to align with any new or revised federal law and regulations. After the most recent reauthorization of IDEA, California introduced legislation to ensure that its Education Code aligned with the federal law.[21]

California's legal requirements for educating students with disabilities are written into the state's statutes and Code of Regulations[22] and support the requirements of IDEA.

Conclusion

The rights of children with disabilities to receive an education have evolved out of long-fought legal battles. Generations have struggled over what is the morally correct thing to

do within the framework of a democracy. The purpose of the legislation that resulted from this struggle—IDEA—is to ensure not just *access* to instruction but educational *benefit* from that instruction.

Laws typically provide only the floor of rights and services. School board members can create a higher ceiling of opportunity so that these students enter adult life with experiences of success and a vision of themselves as capable, contributing citizens—agents of their lives and active in the world.

Questions for Board Members

1. What are our plans for coordinating services and supports for toddlers with disabilities who are entering our preschool programs?

2. How are we monitoring the progress of our students with disabilities?

3. How do we include parents of students with disabilities in our LCAP development process?

4. How do we assess English learners with regard to special education and ensure that their issues are *learning* issues rather than resulting from their limited English language proficiency?

5. What are our plans for attracting and retaining staff who have the expertise to serve our students with disabilities and ensure that "every child [has] the chance to meet challenging objectives"?

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8. For more about scaffolding, see *What Is Instructional Scaffolding?* from The IRIS Center at http://bit.ly/2w7vbOS

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13. Martín, J. *Legal implications of response to intervention and special education identification.* RTI Action Network. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/1sRYuA1

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18. For more about the Perkins Act, see *Perkins Act* from the Perkins Collaborative Resource Network at https://bit.ly/2qXCDLc

19. For more about how LEAs can apply for Perkins funding, see *Perkins* from the California Department of Education at https://bit.ly/2HjGA7D

20. For more about WIOA and other programs available in California, see *Federal Grants Administration* from the California Department of Education at https://bit.ly/2HT5R5U

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SELPAs and Special Education Funding in California

by Mary Briggs and Manuel Buenrostro with contributions from Mary C. Grady, Geri F. West, and Maureen O'Leary Burness

Introduction

California's current funding system for public schools, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), provides board members with more flexibility in decision-making at the local level. Recognizing that local communities know their students best, the formula allows local educational agencies (LEAs)—school districts, county offices of education (COEs), and charter schools—to spend funds in ways that can best meet the needs of their students.

"Students" refers to *all* students, including those with disabilities from birth through age 21—one of the most at-risk populations. Schools are responsible for providing all students with the opportunity to meet challenging objectives. This goal can be difficult to meet due to the complicated nature of special education legal requirements, service delivery mechanisms, and funding.

To help board members better understand those complexities, this brief will outline how SELPAs are organized and how they deliver special education services in California. Special education funding will be discussed in detail as well.

Service Delivery Structure: Special Education Local Plan Areas

Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs) are the foundational structure for overseeing and delivering special education services within regions in California.[1] They are most often consortia of school districts and one or more COEs that band together to provide special education services in a region, although single districts can be their own SELPAs. SELPAs provide special education expertise, oversight, and resources. Their charge is to ensure that services are provided in every area of the state and that small districts can deliver

In this brief you will find:

- » Information about Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs), including their responsibilities, structure, governance, and relationship to the county office of education;

- » Information about special education funding, including state and federal sources of revenue and regulations; and

- » Questions for board members to consider.

services by pooling efforts with surrounding districts. This ability to pool resources and efforts is particularly important for serving students in small districts.

SELPA Responsibilities

The job of the SELPA, through its relationships with the school districts and COEs in a region, is to coordinate and ensure that in every region:

1. A viable system for educating students with disabilities is functioning;

2. Students are provided with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE);

3. The education rights of students with disabilities and their families are fulfilled, and;

4. An annual compliance monitoring system is implemented, with follow up that rectifies any issues.[2]

SELPAs are also responsible for supporting local districts with the following:

» Governance committees, including a Community Advisory Committee (CAC);

» Assistance with understanding compliance requirements;

» Transition planning;

» Program coordination;

» Fiscal management, including budget planning and review;

» Staff professional development;

» Curriculum development and support;

» Data management;

» Regionalized services and Program Specialists;

» Interagency coordination and memorandums of understanding (MOUs);

» Program evaluation; and

» Community awareness.[3]

To fulfill its responsibilities, each SELPA ensures that there is a regional system that identifies, assesses, and connects students with disabilities with appropriate services as early as possible. The coordination of services also requires SELPAs to collaborate with other public agencies (e.g., Head Start, the Department of Rehabilitation, and California Children's Services) as well as with private agencies, such as out-of-home placements and nonpublic schools both inside and outside of the state.

Types of SELPAs

Among the 131 SELPAs in California, there are three basic types:

1. **Single-District.** Nearly one-third (42) of SELPAs consist of a single school district, most of which have more than 20,000 students each.

2. **Collaborative.** Nearly two-thirds (84) of SELPAs are collaborative and encompass most of the state's school

districts. These districts are not large enough to be part of a single-district SELPA. Moreover, some or all districts within a county can elect to join with their COE (which typically serves as the administrative unit) in a collaborative SELPA.

3. **Charter-Only.** These SELPAs consist of multiple charter schools. There were four charter-only SELPAs during the 2016-17 school year, serving approximately one quarter of students with disabilities in charter schools.

There is also one SELPA in California that serves only students attending Los Angeles County court schools.[4]

For special education purposes, charter schools have two options. One is to remain a "school of the district." These charter schools receive special education services from their authorizing district in the same way as other schools in the district (unless agreed to otherwise). The second option is for charters to be established as their own LEAs for special education purposes. A charter school wishing to pursue LEA status must apply and be accepted into a SELPA. All SELPAs are required to have a process in place for the admission of charter schools as LEA members. However, single district SELPAs cannot accept charter LEAs into their governance structure unless they undergo a change in SELPA designation from single-district to a multi-district SELPA.

SELPA Local Plan

Every SELPA must develop a Local Plan. The specific components of the Local Plan are delineated in California Education Code and indicate, among other things, how the SELPA will (1) meet the requirements of state and federal law, (2) be governed, (3) ensure that supports and services are provided by qualified personnel, and (4) provide the public with opportunities to participate in the development of policies and procedures. The Local Plan must also be written in a language that is understandable to the public.[5]

Additionally, the Local Plan must include information about the following elements:

» How the SELPA will ensure that all related personnel providing related services are qualified, including special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and other personnel;

» Performance goals and indicators, as well as assurances that all member LEAs participate in state and district-wide assessments;

» How IDEA funds will *supplement and not supplant* state and local funds, and how it will ensure maintenance of financial effort;

» Assurance that it has provided the public with opportunities to participate in the development of policies and procedures;

» Suspension and expulsion rates;

» How the participating SELPAs make instructional materials accessible to students who are blind or visually impaired; and

» How participating LEAs are addressing issues of over-identification and disproportionate representation of different student groups.

SELPA Governance

Each SELPA has an Administrative Unit (AU)—also known as the Responsible Local Agency—which can be a member school district or COE. The AU serves as the legal entity to receive and manage federal, state, and local funds. SELPA management generally consists of a coordinated effort between the AU's business office staff and the SELPA director, who is often an assistant superintendent in the district or COE.

Multi-district SELPAs must outline in their Local Plans the entities that are part of their governance structure, which commonly include:

» A governance council or board, usually made up of the superintendents from member districts;

» A directors' council, made up of the special education directors from member districts;

» A finance committee, made up of fiscal officers and experts from member districts;

» A Community Advisory Committee (CAC), made up of parents, staff, and community members; and

» A SELPA director and support staff.

Multi-district SELPAs also sometimes choose to govern themselves through a "joint powers agreement," which is a formal, legal agreement between the member districts that outlines how the SELPA will be managed.

Single-district SELPAs are organized somewhat differently. In each, the district serves as its own AU and the governing board functions as its governing body.

Community Advisory Committees

Each SELPA must have a CAC composed of parents, staff, and community members, including students and adults with disabilities. Moreover, the majority of members must be parents of students with disabilities. The board of each participating district or COE appoints CAC members, with the selection procedure delineated in the SELPA Local Plan. Education Code 56194 states that the CAC has the following responsibilities:

» **Advise** the AU of the SELPA in the development, amendment, and review of the Local Plan;

» **Recommend** annual priorities to be addressed by the plan;

» **Assist** in parent education and recruiting parents and other volunteers who may contribute to the implementation of the plan;

» **Encourage** community involvement in the development and review of the Local Plan;

» **Support** activities on behalf of individuals with exceptional needs; and

» **Assist** in parent awareness of the importance of regular school attendance.

A SELPA should take CAC recommendations into consideration but is not obligated to make suggested changes.

County Offices of Education and SELPAs

When COEs are members of the SELPA, they are part of its governance structure and typically serve as the AU. They are also directly involved in decisions related to special education program operations, policies, and allocation of resources. The COE is responsible for the coordination of all Local Plans serving individuals with exceptional needs residing within the county and is required to approve or disapprove any proposed Local Plan (new or amended) for SELPAs within the county. In some counties with multiple SELPAs, the COE is a member of one SELPA but not others. This is most common when there is a large school district within the COE's boundaries that is organized as a single-district SELPA. The COE can also be a member of multiple SELPAs in its geographical area and can act as the AU for more than one SELPA.

Even when COEs are not part of a SELPA, they sometimes offer special education programs and services to students with disabilities in their counties. In these situations, SELPAs and their district members can contract with the COE for services. Typical COE programs and services for students

with disabilities include special education classes for students with low-incidence disabilities and those with emotional disturbances, Early Start services for infants and toddlers, and transportation for students with significant mobility impairments.
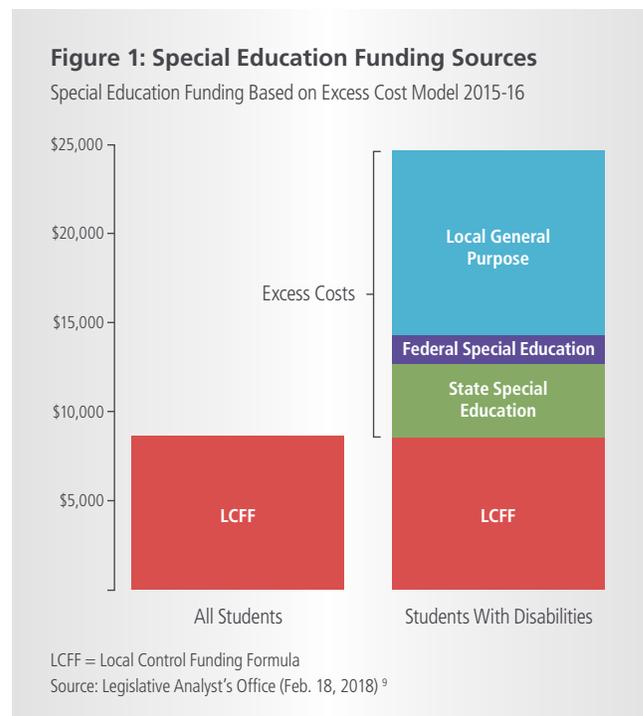
Funding Sources

Because students with disabilities are considered general education students first, LEAs support their access to general education teachers and classrooms through their general funds—as they do for *all* students. The state's LCFF provides a minimum funding guarantee for LEAs. The LCFF funding amount for LEAs is composed of a base grant determined by their average daily attendance (ADA), and supplemental grants based on the "unduplicated" count of high-need students (English learners, low-income students, foster youth, and homeless students). LEAs with an unduplicated count above 55 percent of their ADA also receive a concentration grant.

While special education status is not considered under the unduplicated student counts that generate supplemental and concentration funding, many special education students generate those funds by their other needs:

» 27 percent of foster youth have disabilities;

» 17 percent of students who are English learners have disabilities;

» 13 percent of students who are socio-economically dis-advantaged have disabilities; and

» 13 percent of homeless students have disabilities.[6]

As part of the LCFF system, Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) require LEAs to describe the goals and specific actions to achieve those goals for all students and each student group identified by the LCFF for each of the state priorities, as well as any local priorities. Students with disabilities are included within this requirement at both the LEA and school level. Therefore, LEAs should consider how they can use their available funding sources to devise strategies that best meet the multiple needs of these students and should identify these strategies within their LCAPs. The current state accountability system also explicitly highlights the performance of students receiving special education services and holds LEAs more accountable for this performance. Of the 374 districts identified for assistance from their COEs based on their 2018 California School Dashboard reports, two-thirds were identified based on their performance related to students with disabilities.[7]

In addition to LCFF funding, a combination of local, state, and federal sources is meant to cover the extra (or "excess") costs of special education services that LEAs are required to provide. "Excess costs" are the costs of providing the additional supports for students with disabilities to give them an opportunity to meet challenging objectives. SELPAs serve as the primary authority for this funding. In 2014-15, funding from these three sources amounted to more than $12 billion of special education spending in California: $7.6 billion from local contributions, $3.2 billion in state special education funding, and $1.2 billion from the federal government.[8] In recent years, the portion of excess costs paid out of LEA budgets has increased, a point discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Figure 1: Special Education Funding Sources
Special Education Funding Based on Excess Cost Model 2015-16

LCFF = Local Control Funding Formula
Source: Legislative Analyst's Office (Feb. 18, 2018) [9]

State Funds for Special Education

California allocates state categorical monies to support the education of students with disabilities. SELPAs receive state funds for special education based on total student attendance (as opposed to the number of students with disabilities or the types of services their students receive). This funding system is commonly referred to as Assembly Bill (AB) 602 (after its enacting legislation in 1998). Approximately 85 percent of the funding that the state gives to SELPAs (and thus to LEAs that are served by them) for special education is determined by AB 602.[10]

There are reasons for using this census-based approach, although it means that funding does not necessarily align with the actual costs that LEAs pay for special education. The AB 602 funding system was designed to avoid providing a financial incentive to over-identify students for special education or to place students in expensive settings such as special day classes when a less-restrictive environment (a general education classroom, for example) would be in a student's best interest.

One challenge of the AB 602 funding system arises from the fact that state per-student funding varies widely from one SELPA to another, ranging from $488 to $936 in 2017-18. According to a Legislative Analyst's Office report, this variation is because the formula established for funding under AB 602 continued the differences in spending levels among the SELPAs that existed in 1997-98. While efforts have been made to equalize this variation in state funding across SELPAs, differences remain. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimates that equalizing SELPA per-student funding would require approximately $300 million in additional funds.[11]

This variation in funding means that SELPAs have different amounts of money to spend on meeting the needs of special education needs. Therefore, the SELPAs with the greatest number of students with disabilities and/or those with the highest-cost disabilities are not necessarily those that receive the greatest amount of special education funding through AB 602.[12] CSBA continues to work on legislation to equalize and increase funding for the AB 602 funding formula.

While AB 602 funds are the largest source of state money for special education, SELPAs also receive money from other state programs. For example:

» SELPAs are responsible for funding any mental health services that are required by the IEP for a student with disabilities[13] and receive funds to help them meet these needs. Mental health services represent $360 million of additional monies to SELPAs.

» SELPAs with licensed children's institutions (such as group homes) located within their boundaries receive approximately $145 million in "Out of Home Care" funding.[14]

» California appropriates more than $70 million in state funds to programs for infants and toddlers.[15] The U.S. Department of Education also provides a grant to the California Department of Developmental Services for infants and toddlers through Part C of the IDEA. The CDE receives a portion of approximately $14 million annually, which appears in the Budget Act as a reimbursement.

California has also developed a "Necessary Small SELPAs Extraordinary Cost Pool." This program reimburses Necessary Small SELPAs that have extraordinarily high-cost single placements for mental health-related services. Necessary Small SELPAs can apply for additional funds in excess of the annual threshold amount set by the state, provided funds are available. For the 2018-19 fiscal year, the threshold amount was the "lesser of $79,050.68, or one percent of the SELPA's subtotal apportionment."[16]

Federal Funds for Special Education

Federal IDEA funds are provided through a categorical grant to states, meaning that each state can use the funds only for one category of students: those with disabilities. The state grant is determined using a federal funding formula, which considers a series of factors outlined in section 611(d) of IDEA. California passes this grant money on to SELPAs to be spent only on the excess costs of efforts to ensure and maintain services for students with disabilities. Each SELPA receives its allocation consistent with the federal formula but may determine how to distribute these dollars locally. The federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) monitors how this money is used, and SELPAs are required to provide documentation to ensure the appropriateness of that use.

Federal requirements mandate that IDEA dollars be used to pay for only the *excess costs* of special education and related services for children with disabilities and to *supplement, and not supplant*, state and local efforts to pay for special education and related services.[17] The federal government holds states to a "maintenance of financial support" (MFS), which means that they may not reduce the amount of state financial support for special education and related services. LEAs are required to demonstrate "maintenance of effort" (MOE), which means that they must spend the same or a greater average amount of state and/or local dollars on special education services each year to receive federal IDEA money.

If these spending levels are not maintained for special education, the difference must be returned to the federal government. There are exceptions, notably that if the enrollment of students with disabilities that a SELPA is serving declines, the SELPA does not have to spend the same amount; or if costly equipment represents a one-time purchase, that purchase amount does not have to be "maintained" each year.[18] Despite these exceptions, MOE has created some inconsistencies across SELPAs.

LEAs Are Paying a Greater Share of Excess Costs

Supports and services necessary to provide students with disabilities with the opportunity to meet challenging objectives are generally more expensive than those for students without disabilities. When resources designated specifically

for special education through federal and state funds do not fully cover the excess costs of special education, districts use money from their general fund to make up the difference. As federal and state special education funding fails to keep up with overall special education costs, districts are increasingly filling in the gaps with their general funds.

When IDEA was first passed, the intent was for the federal government to provide the states with 40 percent of the excess costs of providing special education and related services to students with disabilities. However, IDEA monies never reached this 40 percent threshold. According to an analysis of 2014-15 data by the Public Policy Institute of California, only 9 percent of special education funding came from federal funding, while 31 percent came from state and 60 percent from district funding.[19]

As previously mentioned, per-student funding rates vary widely from one SELPA to another. In some SELPAs, per-student funding disparities have been exacerbated by the increase in the number of children with high-cost disabilities such as autism. In many LEAs, overall student enrollment is declining, thus reducing ADA and the money their schools receive to serve all students, including those with disabilities. Furthermore, while the costs of special education services have increased, state spending on special education has not grown as fast as spending on other aspects of the education budget.[20]

Without additional state or federal special education funding, the impact on local budgets is likely to increase. Board members will need to work with their administrators to identify strategies for improving services and outcomes for students with disabilities in the context of such constraints.

Conclusion

This brief provides a general overview of special education structures and finance so that all board members have the foundational background knowledge to discuss and make budgetary and curricular decisions that effectively serve students with disabilities.

At a time when LEAs are paying a larger portion of special education expenses, the state has been focused on developing a system of "continuous improvement." Since the California School Dashboard has identified 243 California districts as needing differentiated support based on their outcomes for students with disabilities, many board members will be working with their COE to strengthen their services for students with disabilities.[21] Those LEAs not currently identified for COE support should also work with their SELPAs

and staff to improve opportunities for rich and engaging opportunities to learn.

Through informed governance, LEAs can invest in programs and services designed to foster better academic achievement, improved well-being, and positive career outcomes for students with disabilities.

Questions for Board Members

Board members can help their schools better serve students identified for special education services by answering the following questions:

Special Education Structures

1. To which SELPA do we belong, and what resources does it provide to our LEA?

2. What are we doing in our SELPA to keep high-quality teachers and specialists and to recruit and train new staff members, including paraprofessionals?

3. What data and processes are we using to monitor program efficacy once programs or services are implemented?

4. What supports do we have in place to encourage the engagement of parents of students with disabilities and to incorporate what we learn from them into our programs and policies?

Special Education Funding

1. How is special education funding structured in our LEA?

2. What special education services do we provide in-house, and what services do we contract with other providers?

3. How are we investing in services for students with disabilities, and what do we know about the effectiveness of these investments?

4. How is our district (or COE) targeting services for students with disabilities who are also included in our LCFF priority student groups (e.g., homeless students, foster youth, English learners, and low-income students)?

5. What information about special education funding and structures should we share with stakeholders including students, staff, families, and community members?

Resources

» **Disability Rights California.** http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/pubs/PublicationsIndex.htm

» **Overview of Special Education in California.** Legislative Analyst's Office. http://www.lao.ca.gov/Publications/Detail/2678.

» **Special Education Division Website.** California Department of Education. http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/

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6   California Department of Education, Dataquest. *2017-18 enrollment by ethnicity.* Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2runvWt

7   Fensterwald, J. (2018). *Ratings in updated California School Dashboard target more districts for assistance.* EdSource. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2SwSuw9

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9   Legislative Analyst's Office. (2018). *Overview of special education funding in California.* Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2Gmxeoe

10   See Endnote 9.

11   See Endnote 9.

12   See Endnote 9.

13   In 1984, Assembly Bill 3632 was passed and mandated school districts to create partnerships with county mental health agencies, which would then serve the mental health care needs of students with disabilities. In 2011, Assembly Bill 114 legally ended this mandate.

14   See Endnote 4.

15   See Endnote 8.

16   California Department of Education. *Necessary Small SELPAs ECP for mental health services.* Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2tVh8fC

17   Title 34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 300.203–300.205.

18   Title 34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 300.204.

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California's Teachers of Students with Disabilities

By Mary Briggs and Manuel Buenrostro, with contributions from Mary Cichy Grady, Maureen O'Leary Burness, and Geri F. West

Introduction

California provides special education services to more than one in 10 infants, children, and youth, a number slightly below the national average.[1] By law, local educational agencies (LEAs) are responsible for providing students with disabilities free and appropriate instruction specially designed to meet their unique needs. These services occur in a range of settings and are determined in close consultation with students' families and the educators that serve them. In 2017-18, nearly 775,000 students with disabilities were enrolled in the state's public schools and programs,[2] and their educational needs range from relatively minor to intensive interventions.

Yet, California continues to struggle to meet the needs of many students with disabilities. The state's current accountability system highlights this issue: of the 374 districts that the California Department of Education (CDE) identified for differentiated assistance due to performance on the 2018 California School Dashboard, 65 percent (243 districts) were identified based on their results for students receiving special education services.[3]

These outcomes highlight the importance of governance decisions that lead to practices and programs that better serve students with disabilities. Improving student learning is accomplished through a variety of strategies and reforms, and any sustainable effort must include attention to the education and support teachers receive. Board members can improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities by ensuring teachers have the necessary training and experience to meet their students' particular needs.

This brief provides information about teachers who serve students with disabilities: their preparation requirements and challenges, their continuing professional development

In this brief you will find:

- » Information on special education teacher preparation and credentialing;

- » Information about special education teacher shortages;

- » Best practices for the professional development for teachers of students with disabilities; and

- » Questions that board members can ask district staff to learn about special education in their local context.

needs, and what California is doing to address the shortage of qualified educators. A set of questions and resources to assist board members in discussing personnel considerations is also provided.

Special Education Teacher Preparation

Persistent and troubling achievement outcomes for students with disabilities led California to convene a Special Education Task Force that examined challenges in the field, with the goal of making recommendations for improvement to the CDE, the State Board of Education (SBE), and California's Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). The final 2015 report from the task force argued that changes to the state's teacher credentialing system would be necessary to improve special education. As a result, the CTC undertook

a multi-year, comprehensive approach to improving the preparation process for teachers to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to qualified educators.

Although evidence indicates that teachers who have participated in special education preparation programs are associated with improved learning and well-being for students with disabilities, many students with disabilities spend little time with such teachers. By 2014, almost two-thirds of U.S. students receiving special education services were spending 80 percent or more of their day in general education classrooms.[4] This inclusion-based approach is consistent with the legal requirement—and research-based best practices—to ensure that students with disabilities are placed within the "least restrictive environment" (LRE), as appropriate. While general education programs are the appropriate placement for the bulk of students with disabilities, it means that general education teachers must also be able to meet a range of student needs. Thus, the Special Education Task Force recommended the development of teacher credentialing models that better prepare both general and special education teachers to serve students with disabilities.[5]

Changes to Requirements for Teacher Preparation

Some historical context might help board members understand the direction of recent reforms to the state's general and special education credential requirements. Prior to the 1990s, California required special educators to earn two credentials in order to teach students with disabilities: a general education teaching credential and an education specialist (i.e., special education) credential.

Facing serious shortages, the state eliminated the general education credential requirement for special educators in 1996. The goal was to make the education specialist credential easier and faster to earn, in hopes of attracting more people into the profession. Despite the reduced requirements, the state's number of certified teachers in special education continues to decline while the number of students needing special education services increases.

Moreover, the degree of special education preparation required is now greater than before 1996. Although the CTC removed the general education credentialing requirement, it also increased the kinds of credentials and authorizations a person must earn to become an education specialist. By 2017, the state offered seven types of preliminary education specialist credentials and nine additional possible authorizations. These added authorizations were designed to ensure

Teacher Shortages

The demand for qualified special education teachers continues to grow, while the supply of these teachers is diminishing. A reduction in the number of candidates enrolling in preliminary credential programs as the current special education teacher workforce is aging is exacerbating these shortages. Researchers predict that more than a quarter of special education teachers who were employed in 2014 will retire by 2024, a rate that outpaces teacher retirements in all other subject areas.[6]

Today, many schools struggle to find qualified instructors, an issue that can be particularly challenging for the state's small and rural districts.[9] And the shortage has created a situation of difficult trade-offs. Because schools need teachers, thousands of substandard credentials—emergency and intern permits—have been issued, leaving some of the state's most vulnerable students with teachers who do not have adequate preparation to teach them.[10]

To address this challenge, California invested millions of dollars in efforts to increase the number of special education teachers in its public schools. However, recent estimates suggest that it will be five years or more before schools see the fruits of that investment.[7]

Other personnel shortages compound the negative impact on special education students.[12] For years, California's schools have struggled to find enough "specialized instructional support personnel" such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, and physical therapists. These unfilled positions further complicate the challenges for schools.

educators could provide appropriate supports and services for specific groups of students. However, they also placed an extra credentialing burden on all special educators, especially on those who want to work with students who have "low-incidence" disabilities, i.e., those which occur infrequently in the general student population.[8]

One consequence of eliminating the requirement that special educators earn both a general education and special education credential is that without general education credentials, education specialists are not authorized to teach general education students. This credentialing strategy limits the continuum of service options available to LEAs.[11]

Changes to Teacher Preparation: Moving to a Unified Approach

In its 2015 report, the Special Education Task Force found that once students are identified as needing special services, particularly for learning disabilities, they rarely catch up to their peers.[13] The report documented that California's students with disabilities were not only attaining significantly lower levels of school success than their peers with disabilities in other states, they were graduating from high school at lower rates and realizing poorer post-secondary outcomes (e.g., fewer employment and educational opportunities, lower earnings, and lower levels of independence).

The report also found that general education and special education had, in effect, become two systems, noting that "significant barriers to school success for students with disabilities have grown out of [the] unfortunate evolution of two separate 'educations.'" One problem of this dual system is that the teacher preparation and licensing approach restricted the ability of education specialists to serve students in general education settings—and offered inadequate special education training for general educators.

In response to these concerns, the CTC developed new standards for general education teacher preparation and approved six Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) for candidates receiving their preliminary credentials.[14] These expectations—a set of skills and knowledge for every beginning teacher—require general educators to develop a more comprehensive foundation in understanding the needs of students with disabilities and learn an array of instructional strategies that better serve students with disabilities in general education classrooms, as appropriate.

Changes to the education specialist (i.e., special education) credentials are forthcoming as well. The CTC worked to simplify the credentialing requirements for special education teachers, along with new teacher preparation program standards. The challenge is one of balance: ensuring rigor in preparation so that every teacher is highly qualified, without placing undue preparation burdens on those who want to teach students with disabilities.

In 2018, the CTC reduced the number of preliminary special education credentials to five and approved new TPEs for each credential. Like general education teacher candidates, all special education teachers must take and pass a teaching performance assessment prior to being recommended for a credential, once such an assessment has been developed and adopted by the Commission. This assessment would require that candidates demonstrate they have mastered the competencies outlined within the TPEs. Finally, the Commission announced that it will discuss and make recommendations

about issues such as revised subject matter competency requirements and field work for teacher candidates, along with updated specific credential authorizations.

New Preliminary Education Specialist Credentials

Adopted in August 2018 for Fall 2020 Implementation:

» Mild to Moderate Support Needs
» Extensive Support Needs
» Early Childhood Special Education
» Deaf and Hard of Hearing
» Visual Impairments

The CTC sought to design teacher preparation requirements that provide general education and special education teacher candidates with a common foundation (something the Special Education Task Force and the CTC refer to as a "common trunk") of knowledge and skills with the goal of promoting greater collaboration and understanding between special and general education teachers during their credential programs and beyond. The hope is that general education teachers will benefit from a program that integrates special education knowledge and skills throughout. Likewise, special education teachers will benefit from the same pedagogical knowledge as their general education peers. This approach aims to break down some of the silos that currently exist between special education and general education. Several college and university programs that prepare teachers have already merged their general education and special education preparation programs, training all teachers together.[15]

While these developments reflect important shifts in credentialing approaches, board members should note that full implementation of changes to teacher preparation programs for education specialists are not anticipated to begin until Fall 2020. Teacher preparation for general education teachers, however, has already been incorporated the addition of TPEs related to serving students with disabilities.

Professional Development

Ongoing teacher shortages raise an important issue for board members: How can districts and county offices of education better serve students with disabilities while the teacher pipeline issues are being addressed? One strategy for addressing the problems of teacher preparation and personnel shortages lies with the professionals who are already in the classroom. High-quality professional development makes it possible to reduce attrition and help teachers provide more effective instruction.

A comprehensive study of California educators found that the lack of quality professional development is one of the main reasons special education teachers leave teaching.[16] Yet, studies also suggest that too many teachers experience professional development as "episodic, superficial, and disconnected from their own teaching interests or recurring problems of practice."[17] Improving the professional learning opportunities for general and special educators will improve their effectiveness in the classroom and strengthen both teacher recruitment and retention efforts, even in schools that are hard to staff.[18,19]

Research about how adults learn also points to a clear remedy. Providing mentors (especially for new teachers), in-class coaches, professional learning communities, collaborative school-wide cultures, and concerted and visible administrative support all serve to develop the teaching professionals in a school in the best ways possible, making teachers more effective in the classroom, happier in their jobs, more willing to take risks and be creative, and generally more committed to their professions and less likely to leave.[20]

Conclusion

In response to recommendations from the state's 2015 Special Education Task Force Report, California is working to build a system of education that is unified, coherent, and able to readily field a workforce of highly qualified instructors and other special education providers. As this vision is realized, special and general educators will find themselves working together more closely to support each other in ways that help them meet the demands of their profession and, even more importantly, open doors to a brighter future for all students, including students with disabilities.

Questions for Board Members

1. How many of our education specialists are not fully or appropriately credentialed?

2. What are the strategies our district or county office of education is using to bring talented new teaching professionals to our community?

3. Do our education specialists report challenges related to their working conditions that are impacting retention (e.g., case load, assessment schedules)? Are there policies we can put in place to address some of the working conditions specific to our special education teachers' responsibilities?

4. How many of our special education teachers do we anticipate will retire within the next five to 10 years?

5. What mentoring and professional development opportunities do we provide our special education teachers?

6. What professional development opportunities do we provide for general education teachers so that they can better serve students with disabilities?

7. What opportunities do special education and general education teachers have to collaborate with each other?

Resources

» **California Department of Education.** Special Education Division. http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/

» **One System: Reforming Education to Serve ALL Students – Report of California's Task Force on Special Education (2015).** Report that highlights the key issues facing California's special education systems and recommendations for reform. This report provided the impetus for credentialing changes for general and special education teachers. https://bit.ly/2InqcQm

» **Learning Policy Institute.** Research and remedies for teacher shortages. https://bit.ly/2HkkwIO

» **Getting Down to Facts II: Teacher Supply Falls Short of Demand in High-Need Fields, Locations (2018).** Research brief on California's teacher shortage and the prevalence of teachers on intern permits and waivers. https://bit.ly/2OIWusP

» **California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.** Memo for the Commission that provides background on credential revisions and teaching performance expectations (standards) for candidates in the newly developed programs.

» **Keeping Good Teachers: Why It Matters and What School Leaders Can Do (2003).** Article by Linda Darling-Hammond on teacher retention, including recommendations for school leaders. http://bit.ly/2tCXJ5X

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15   CEEDAR (Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform) Center. *Intensive TA profiles: California.* Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2G8MQia

16   Futernick, K. (2007). *A possible dream: Retaining California teachers so all students learn.* The Center for Teacher Quality, California State University. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2I67Sv4

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Best Practices in Special Education

by Manuel Buenrostro and Mary Briggs with contributions from Mary C. Grady, Geri F. West, and Maureen O'Leary Burness

Introduction

California's current funding system for public schools, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), provides board members with more flexibility in decision-making at the local level. Recognizing that communities know their students best, the formula allows local educational agencies (LEAs)—school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools—to spend funds in ways that they believe best meet the needs of their students.

This brief focuses on best practices that contribute to positive school outcomes for students with disabilities, including appropriate educational placement. These practices include both those that are legally mandated and those that have been proven effective through research and practical experience.

Improving Outcomes: The Need for Best Practices in Special Education

Schools are responsible for educating all students, yet students with disabilities often underperform on multiple measures when compared to their peers without disabilities. Proportionally, fewer students with disabilities graduate from high school and enroll in two- and four-year colleges than their peers without disabilities, and young adults with disabilities who enroll in college are less likely to receive a bachelor's degree than their peers. Students with disabilities are twice as likely to be unemployed as adults, more likely to work part time, and more likely to work in low-wage jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement.[1] Students with disabilities are also more likely to be incarcerated than their peers without disabilities.[2]

In this brief you will find:

- » Information about the need for best practices in educating students with disabilities;

- » Information about the value of a coherent system in educating all students, including students with disabilities;

- » Best practices that address legal requirements for special education;

- » Additional best practices for instruction, school climate, and teacher support that benefit all students; and

- » Questions for board members to consider.

Yet, there is much LEAs and schools can do to improve outcomes for these students. As researchers have learned more about effective instructional and organizational practices, education leaders have responded by promoting successful strategies, services, and policies. While board members are not responsible for administrative details or implementation of strategies, they can better support their schools and the students they serve when they have a foundational understanding of best practices for students with disabilities.

The Value of One Coherent System

One unintended result of the passage of the landmark Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975,[3] was the development of what some see as a dual-education system: special education and general education. The principal reasons for this were: 1) the federal money designated for special education was separate from state general education funds, and 2) IDEA supported specific kinds of services, which generated a separate credentialing system to prepare the educators who wanted to teach students with disabilities.

A principal objective of Congress in the 1970s was to "educat[e] children with disabilities with their nondisabled peers . . . [while] providing the necessary services for making that happen."[4] Special education was intended to be the necessary services and supports that students with disabilities needed if they were to receive the full benefit of their education.

As recommended in the 2015 California Special Education Task Force report, the state has moved toward a single system for educating all students, including those with disabilities.[5] One important aspect of this coherence is that California now includes students with disabilities in its statewide accountability system.

The best practices discussed in this brief are integral to a coherent system of education for students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. Together, these practices can enable all students to grow and learn and help make it possible for special education and general education to become one seamless, coordinated system.

Practices that Address Legal Requirements for Special Education

Inclusion and Least Restrictive Environment

LEAs are required to ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. This is called the least restrictive environment (LRE). At the same time, LEAs must provide students with disabilities the supports and services they need to have the opportunity to meet challenging objectives and access the curriculum. For most students with disabilities, the LRE is the general education classroom.[6] Removing a student with a disability from the general education environment should happen *only* if the student cannot receive benefit in the general education environment, even with appropriate supportive aids and services.

The benefits to students with disabilities of inclusive classrooms in terms of post-school outcomes—particularly employment—have been well-documented.[7] A commonly cited benefit is that inclusive classrooms reflect the diversity of the post-school world, which allows students to learn from and appreciate diversity in backgrounds and perspectives, easing their transition to adult life.[8] Research has also confirmed higher academic achievement for children with cognitive disabilities who received their instruction in inclusive general education settings.[9] This may be in part because higher expectations are associated with higher achievement.[10] These classrooms may also employ peer modeling, an effective practice where students learn from each other.[11]

Educating all students together has been shown to produce better outcomes for students without disabilities as well.[12] Research indicates that this may be in part because teachers must consider a variety of ways to deliver instruction; create opportunities for students to practice skills and develop their understanding of concepts and ideas; and offer different ways for students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

Full Continuum of Services

While research confirms that inclusive settings benefit most students with disabilities,[13] some children will have more opportunities to learn in specialized settings, those that can offer the kinds of intense supports that cannot be provided in a general education classroom. In view of this, the IDEA requires that schools maintain a full continuum of placement options and that "each child's educational placement must be determined on an individual case-by-case basis depending on each child's unique educational needs and circumstances, rather than by the child's category of disability."[14]

The IDEA requires each student to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Parents, educators—and, if able, the child—work together to decide which option is appropriate for the student. These possibilities include instruction in general education classes, special education classes, nonpublic schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions.[15]

Early Intervention

Early intervention is a term most often applied to the range of services that are mandated by the IDEA[16] for babies and very young children who show signs of disability or developmental delay, as well as for their families.[17] The understanding of the importance of early intervention emerged from decades of research showing that children's earliest experiences play a crucial and lasting role in their brain development.[18] High-quality early intervention programs for vulnerable infants and toddlers can reduce the

incidence and severity of future problems in their learning, behavior, and health. The earlier these strategies are used, the better the child's chances of success.

The notion of early intervention can also be used in the context of older children. Commonly referred to as "early intervening services" when applied to older students, the same fundamental principle holds: if there is a problem, the problem is best addressed early—as soon as possible after its identification.

Parent Participation and Family Engagement

Research shows that schools and LEAs with robust family engagement protocols and infrastructures typically have better community reputations and relations than those that do not.[19] These efforts are crucial because multiple studies indicate that students with actively engaged parents perform better academically and are less likely to drop out of school.[20,21]

All LEAs are required to actively seek parent input when creating Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), including input from parents of children with disabilities, and must incorporate specific programs and strategies for parent involvement in their LCAPs. As part of this effort, California has developed guidelines for LEAs and schools to secure authentic parent engagement.

To engage parents of students with disabilities, LEAs may need to provide targeted outreach and special accommodations. One factor contributing to the need for these extra outreach efforts is the limited amount of time that parents and families of students with disabilities may have to be involved in school-related activities. Other factors may be that these parents and families may not see themselves or their children as being a part of general education, or they believe the existing disability-focused family groups, such as the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), are their sole avenue for participation.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Children with disabilities sometimes need very specific services. But what the child's parents see as necessary may differ from what school personnel understand to be needed or appropriate. In these instances, the IDEA provides procedural safeguards to parents and their children with disabilities, including the right to engage in a compliance review process and initiate a due process hearing. The IDEA encourages alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and early dispute resolution. The IDEA mandates that a voluntary mediation process be made available to parents and school staff members to resolve disputes and that the process be conducted by a qualified and impartial mediator who is trained in effective mediation techniques."[22] The trained mediator can help both the school and the family to find common ground while increasing communication, improving collaboration, preserving working relationships, and building trust. Several Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs) also have ADR options to assist LEAs and parents to reach agreement on appropriate special education and related services without engaging the due process hearing procedure.

Practices That Are Not Legal Requirements

In this section we discuss best practices for instruction, school climate, and teacher support that are not legal requirements. These practices have been shown to have great benefits to students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) is a systemic approach to leveraging all available resources to focus on using proven practices to educate all students—academically, behaviorally, and emotionally—in a tiered framework.[23] A central goal of MTSS is prevention and early intervention. MTSS strategies include: coordination and alignment of practices, policies, resources, and programs at all levels; ongoing screening and multiple tiers of interventions to provide every child the necessary targeted instruction and supports; an integrated data system to regularly gather data about student progress; continual professional development for teachers and staff on MTSS components; time for teachers to work together through collaborative teams and professional learning communities; opportunities for collaboration among staff across the system; promotion of continuous improvement at all levels (district, school, and classroom) that includes coaching, reflective practice, and program evaluation; and inclusion of parents in the decision-making process for school programs and policy.

Response to Instruction and Intervention

Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI^2) is a component of MTSS and builds on the Response to Intervention (RtI) model that was codified in the reauthorization of the IDEA in 2004. The RtI^2 process is a systemic approach to instruction designed to benefit every student. An important aspect of RtI^2 is the ongoing gathering of data to inform decisions about how best to serve struggling students and to determine who is succeeding, who needs—or no longer needs—more help, and whether further evaluation or special education services are necessary. Another essential aspect

of RtI[2] is that it requires general education teachers, special educators, and specialists to work together for the success of every child, regardless of whether the child has a disability.[24]

Research supports the effectiveness of RtI[2]: It "reduced the number of students evaluated for special education services, essentially eliminated the disproportional rate at which ethnic minority and male students were referred for special education evaluations, and substantially reduced the amount of financial resources dedicated to unnecessary special education evaluations."[25]

Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning

Key components of differentiated instruction are ongoing formative assessment and adjustment to determine and meet students' needs. Differentiated instruction includes flexibility in assignments—sometimes tailoring assignments to specific students, adapting to different ways that students learn and absorb material, and providing different ways for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Differentiated instruction is a proven strategy for finding the "hook" that secures student engagement[26]—a principal component of school success.

When embedded within the design of a curriculum, this concerted effort to teach with a wide range of student needs in mind merges with a concept known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Based on evidence from neuroscience that no two brains learn alike, the starting point for UDL is "learner variability." In UDL, all curriculum and materials (goals, assessments, methods, etc.) are first designed for the broadest range of students and then offer flexible options within that curriculum that can support students in any kind of class and for any goal.[27]

Person-Centered Planning

Person-centered planning focuses on improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.[28] The process involves the student, parents, and teachers forming a plan and structuring educational opportunities that help children with disabilities to address their own unique challenges and take advantage of strengths, including the family's cultural and ethnic heritage.[29] The most important goals of this approach are to ensure that students' personal, social, and educational needs are met. A principal tenet of person-centered planning is that the more students contribute to and engage in conversations and planning for what happens after high school and beyond, the more invested and likely they will be to realize success.

Positive School Climate

LCFF identifies school climate as one of the eight state priorities. According to California's State Board of Education (SBE), "'School Conditions and Climate' refers to the character and quality of school life. This includes the values, expectations, interpersonal relationships, critical resources, supports, and practices that foster a welcoming, inclusive, and academically challenging environment. Positive school climate and conditions ensure people in the school community feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe, supported, connected to the school, and engaged in learning and teaching."[30]

Positive school climate is recognized as an important target for improving behavioral, academic, and mental health outcomes for all students.[31] In addition, decades of research indicate that a positive school climate improves teacher job satisfaction and retention.[32]

School climate is especially important for students with disabilities. A school structure built on inclusive classrooms must develop a climate that values diversity to help students with disabilities in those inclusive settings thrive. Given that students with disabilities are victims of bullying behavior more than any other student group,[33] schools that teach and act on the values of acceptance and inclusivity—which are central to anti-bullying measures—will have a more positive school climate.[34]

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Challenging student behavior is a barrier to student engagement and achievement, a source of classroom dysfunction, and one of the main reasons that teachers cite for leaving the profession.[35] Yet spending school resources on policing, suspending, and expelling students rather than teaching them lasting strategies to improve their behavior has been counterproductive for many students with disabilities.

A tiered model of interventions—Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) creates and sustains school-wide (universal), classroom (targeted), and individual (intensive) systems of response and support. Proactive rather than reactive, PBIS creates a culture that expects appropriate behavior. Schools that implement strong PBIS programs articulate clear, simple messages about what exactly that behavior looks like. They treat appropriate behavior as something to be taught and retaught regularly to help every student succeed socially, emotionally, and academically. When implemented school-wide and with administrative support, PBIS improves school outcomes for all students, not just for those with challenging behavior or emotional

disabilities and has been shown to result in fewer suspensions and discipline referrals.[36,37]

Restorative Practices

The purpose of restorative practices is reflected in its name: restorative practices seek to restore what was damaged.[38] Rather than being punished—written up, suspended, or expelled for a behavioral offense—the offending student might meet with the person or persons harmed, a mediator, and often a teacher or school administrator, and together they find a way to make things right. Schools that integrate restorative practices into school-wide behavioral practices often report dramatic declines in school discipline problems, improved school climate, and gains in student achievement.[39] While restorative practices are being implemented in many of California's schools, in a 2017 survey, teachers indicated the need for more support in how to implement them effectively. It is also likely that all school staff need support to implement restorative practices to achieve the best outcomes for all students.[40]

Social-Emotional Learning

There is extensive brain research indicating that social-emotional issues impact the behavioral problems that plague many schools and classrooms and effect how students learn.[41] The field of social-emotional learning (SEL) also recognizes that new technologies (especially social media), mobility, fragmented family lives, and other stresses make mental health issues especially challenging for children and youth in schools today.

The SEL approach offers numerous research-proven strategies that can be coordinated and aligned[42] with other tiered structures of support (e.g. RtI[2], PBIS, and MTSS). A systemic focus on SEL in schools has been proven to diminish behavior problems and symptoms of emotional disturbance among students with disabilities.[43] These programs also help to reduce symptoms of depression among all students,[44] improve students' respect for diversity and inclusivity,[45] and reduce bullying.[46] Moreover, research has shown that SEL can help students improve their academic success as well.[47]

The benefits of SEL extend to teachers and school administrators. Attention to the social-emotional needs of adults leads to "productive, happier teachers who enjoy their colleagues and their time at work,"[48] while serving as a stay against burnout. SEL also positions teachers to be more productive collaborators[49]—an important and necessary quality as the effective implementation of new state standards and approaches benefit from teachers working together effectively (see following section).

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are small groups of teachers who share students or content areas within a school or LEA and meet regularly to learn from one another, plan together, create and share a vision together, and reflect on how they are doing and how they can enhance student achievement.[50] Research shows that when teachers work together to improve their instruction and learn as professionals, both they and their students do better.

PLCs are important for teacher job satisfaction as well. A comprehensive study of California teachers found that an important contributor to keeping teachers in the profession is the "close professional relationships" they develop with their colleagues and "a sense of team among staff."[51] Teacher PLCs are recommended for securing these close professional relationships.

PLCs provide an ideal framework for the collaboration between general and special educators that is essential for effective inclusive classrooms. And, as many proven practices benefit both students with and without disabilities, the benefits of collaboration between general and special education extends to all students.[52]

Conclusion

Boards have an opportunity to shape education for all students—including those identified for special education services. A cohesive, multi-tiered structure that focuses on the needs of each student, that provides support and opportunities for continuous improvement for educators, and that incorporates and coordinates proven practices in educating children has the potential to set every student on a path to full participation in economic, social, and civic life.

Questions for Board Members

Board members can help their schools better serve students identified for special education services by answering the following questions:

1. How is our LEA ensuring collaboration between general education and special education?

2. How are students with disabilities performing academically and socially in each of our schools?

3. What are the organizational and instructional practices being implemented in schools where students with disabilities are experiencing the most success?

4. What steps can we take to implement effective instruction and services in schools where students with disabilities are experiencing less success?

Resources

Early Intervention

» **Why Early Intervention Programs Benefit Kids with Developmental Delays.** Information about early intervention programs from the Child Development Institute. http://bit.ly/2G3LCl6

» **Overview of Early Intervention.** Information in English and Spanish from the Center for Parent Information and Resources. http://www.parentcenterhub.org/ei-overview/

» **California Early Start.** Resource Page by the California Early Intervention Technical Assistance Network. https://bit.ly/2HhLaT5

» **Together, We Make a Difference: California Early Start for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Their Families** (2014). Handbook by the Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention (ICC). http://bit.ly/2gVWbhC

» **Early Intervention.** Website for Zero to Three, which provides information about early intervention in English and Spanish for parents, educators, and policy makers. http://bit.ly/2ujJTCU

Family Engagement

» **Family Engagement in Schools Matters.** Resource developed by the California State PTA. http://bit.ly/2D6BTXP

» **Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts** (2014). A family engagement resource for school districts developed by the California Department of Education. https://bit.ly/2IX6hw1

» **Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers in California.** Parent-directed 501(c)(3) organizations funded through the IDEA and located throughout the state. Each PTI Center offers extensive resources and services for families of students with disabilities from birth through age 26, including workshops, support groups, advocacy, and referrals. http://bit.ly/2xwlXPM

Alternative Dispute Resolution

» **CADRE: The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education.** Website for a group that supports the prevention and resolution of disputes through a collaborative approach. http://cadreworks.org

Effective Instructional Practices

» **Instructing Students with High-Incidence Disabilities in the General Education Classroom.** In *Curriculum Handbook,* by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. http://bit.ly/2FgNRo3

» **Multi-Tiered System of Supports.** The CDE website with information on MTSS, which includes RtI^2 and PBIS. The page includes a primer on the MTSS framework and information on the statewide initiative, training, resources, and policy briefs. https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/

» **Universal Design for Learning (UDL).** The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) website with information about UDL. http://www.cast.org

» **Person-Centered Planning.** Information about the Person-Centered Planning approach to support children and youth with disabilities from PACER's National Parent Center on Transition Planning and Employment. http://bit.ly/2FJLY1A

Creating a Positive School Climate

» **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS).** The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center on PBIS is funded through the U.S. Department of Education. It supports schools, districts, and states in building capacity for implementing a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavioral support for students, including those with disabilities. http://www.pbis.org/

» **School Culture and Climate Topics.** Website with information and resources about school culture and climate from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. http://bit.ly/2D5LuhC

» **Improving Social Emotional Skills in Childhood Enhances Long-Term Well-Being and Economic Outcomes.** (2017). Report on social emotional learning by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. http://rwjf.ws/2uBmIGy

» **Specially Designed Instruction and Related Services for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders.**

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Rigorous & Relevant Instruction

Disproportionality in Math Placement

By Maria Salciccioli and Neal Finkelstein, WestEd

Introduction

Equitable, specific district policies are a critical safeguard to ensure that all students are in classes that will help them meet their goals in all areas of the curriculum. And while student mathematics achievement is the sum of a variety of factors, math placement—the math courses to which students are assigned over many years—is one of the key components. Math placement is less straightforward and more important than it might seem. Placement is not always correlated with past performance, particularly for low-income underrepresented students of color, and not all students have access to the most advanced courses because they are less frequently offered in schools with higher percentages of non-white students. In the end, how students are placed—and misplaced—in math courses has long-lasting ramifications.

This brief provides an overview of the issues of math placement and math misplacement, explains why math misplacement is an equity issue, includes statistics on inequitable access to courses, and discusses recent progress California has made toward addressing it. It also outlines strategies that districts have used to work toward fair placement policies. School boards can use this information, and the accompanying recommendations at the end of the brief, to partner with families, teachers, and administrators to promote equitable math placement policies.

Math Misplacement: An Equity Issue

Why Algebra I Matters

Placement into algebra is integral to postsecondary success for several reasons. Algebra I is a gateway to higher-level classes; students who take Algebra I in middle school are typically on

In this brief you will find:

- » Why math misplacement is an equity issue;
- » Recent progress toward better placement practices;
- » The role of assessments in math placement, including evaluating math proficiency for English learners;
- » Data about inequitable access to advanced math coursework;
- » How school districts and school boards can create equitable math placement policies; and
- » Recommended questions for board members to ask about math placement in their districts and county offices of education.

track to take calculus by 12th grade,[1] which in turn increases students' likelihood of acceptance into selective California colleges and preparedness for STEM careers.[2] After the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics were adopted, integrated math courses emerged as an alternative to the traditional sequence of Algebra I-Geometry-Algebra II (prerequisites for Calculus). These courses can support accelerated advancement; students who take the first integrated math course in eighth grade will be on track to take Calculus in 12th grade. This trajectory is similar to taking Algebra I in eighth grade in a non-integrated math curriculum.[3] Regardless of the course sequences adopted in a student's middle and high school, being placed in an accessible yet challenging math class boosts student confidence.[4]

Furthermore, ensuring that all students have opportunities for advanced math placement is a critical strategy for closing achievement gaps, since research suggests that providing advanced coursework for adequately prepared students may have an outsized positive impact on underrepresented students of color and low-income students.[5]

However, the solution is not as simple as placing all students in the same advanced mathematics courses, thereby ensuring everyone has taken Algebra I by the time they reach high school. Students need instruction in the earlier grades that prepares them to succeed in these demanding courses once they reach middle and high school. Students who are not proficient in seventh-grade math rarely demonstrate proficiency in algebra if they take it in eighth grade.[6] Furthermore, when these students have to repeat Algebra I in ninth grade, they typically do not perform better the second time they take the course.[7] It is important, then, to ensure that all students who are prepared for Algebra I in eighth grade have an opportunity to take it without mandating it for students who are not yet ready to do so. It is equally important to ensure that all students have the opportunity—through high-quality instruction and support—to succeed in Algebra I and beyond. Since students are consistently less successful when they repeat Algebra I, schools must provide students with the support they need to succeed the first time they take the course. Proven methods of support include offering double periods of Algebra I (either during the school day or outside of school),[8] using instructional techniques that build conceptual understanding and fluency (such as engaging students in predicting, exploring, modeling, and justifying),[9] and using visual representations to deepen understanding, particularly for English learner (EL) students.[10]

Math Misplacement

The problem of placing students into classes that are not advanced enough for their abilities and their demonstrated prior achievement is known as math misplacement. The Silicon Valley Community Foundation defines it more precisely:

Math misplacement occurs when students are held back in math even though objective measures such as grades and test scores indicate they should advance to the next course. When this happens, students are frequently derailed from being able to complete all the courses they need to be competitive applicants for California colleges and universities during four years of high school.[11]

Differences Between Diagnostic and Summative Assessments

Student performance is typically gauged by diagnostic assessments, which evaluate student knowledge to help inform teaching, and summative assessments, which are designed to assess what students have learned at the end of a lesson, course, or school year. Diagnostic assessments are focused on improving student learning and produce information about specific areas where students are struggling. Summative assessments, by contrast, are often meant to provide a more general overview of student knowledge at the end of a given time period. They do not typically produce information that allows teachers to understand exactly why students are struggling with specific concepts. Instead, they offer an evaluation of a what students have learned.[12] Summative assessments, like the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), receive significant attention because they are often used in school accountability systems, and they are also frequently used to guide student placement decisions. However, diagnostic assessments like the Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project, which is discussed later in this brief, can provide valuable insight into whether a student is prepared to succeed in a given math course, such as Algebra I. Such diagnostic assessments merit inclusion in any placement policy that includes the use of student test scores.

The issue of misplacement often arises with Algebra I in California. Research shows that many ninth-grade students are forced to retake Algebra I despite achieving high state test scores and/or passing the class in eighth grade.[13] This phenomenon of math misplacement is applied more frequently to underrepresented students of color than to their White and East Asian peers,[14] which means underrepresented students of color are more likely to fall prey to the aforementioned negative effects of math misplacement: decreased access to California postsecondary schools and STEM careers, and little likelihood of performing better in the course the second time around.

Because California educators and researchers are currently awaiting data on postsecondary math performance from the first group of students who completed high school with four years of Common Core math classes, information on the standards' impact on high school math education is limited. However, previously existing data on student placement and achievement suggest that although math misplacement is not the only—and arguably not the most significant—factor

that negatively impacts the math achievement of underrepresented students of color, it is a serious occurrence that may be applied more frequently to these students and, thus, may have a disproportionate negative effect on them. School boards would do well to adopt placement policies that eradicate math misplacement, and suggestions for how to do so are provided later in this brief.

Two studies that address math misplacement suggest that it strikes underrepresented students of color more often. The Noyce Foundation's Pathways Report examined math placement for nine school districts in the Bay Area and found that 52 percent of East Asian students advanced to ninth-grade Geometry after taking eighth-grade Algebra I, but only 17 percent of Latino students did.[15] For students deemed "successful," meaning they earned a grade of B or better, advancement was still disproportionate—77 percent of East Asian students were advanced to ninth-grade Geometry the next year, but only 66 percent of Latino students and 40 percent of Filipino students moved to ninth-grade Geometry.[1] Another study on algebra access followed students who achieved top math test scores in fifth grade. It found that just 35 percent of Black students in that group went on to take Algebra I or higher in eighth grade, whereas 94 percent of Asian students, 68 percent of Latino students, and 63 percent of White students did so.[16]

Recent Progress Toward Better Placement

Legislative Solutions

The State Legislature passed the 2015 California Math Placement Act (CMPA) to address the problem of misplacement. The act requires that:

> [g]overning boards or bodies of local educational agencies, as defined, that serve pupils entering grade 9 and that have not adopted a fair, objective, and transparent mathematics placement policy as of January 1, 2016, to, before the beginning of the 2016–17 school year, develop and adopt, in a regularly scheduled public meeting, a fair, objective, and transparent mathematics placement policy for pupils entering grade 9 with specified elements…[17]

However, this legislation is only a solution insofar as districts comply with it. Researchers found that small and rural districts were less likely to be aware of the law or to have a compliant policy by spring 2016, perhaps due in part to having fewer staff members to address the requirement.[18] Low-performing districts were also less likely to have had a policy in the 2015–16 school year than their higher-performing peer districts.[19] For districts that have policies in

place, researchers found that high-performing and large districts put more weight on student test scores and less on students' academic and career goals, and 80 percent of districts that use tests for placement use more than one test.[20] Researchers also noted that 22 percent of districts reported enrollment capacity issues, regardless of location, size, and performance, and that math misplacement occurred in response to staffing constraints.

Movement toward Equitable Placement

However, there is good news as districts work to increase equity in math placement. Across California, 86 percent of districts had a policy in place for the 2015–16 school year. San Francisco Unified School District, the sixth-largest school district in California, de-tracked math placement entirely (i.e., removing honors, traditional, and remedial math pathways in favor of providing the same rigorous courses for everyone) in an attempt to level the playing field for all students. The decision, which has been controversial with some families, came in response to a years-long policy in which all ninth-grade students took Algebra I, and many did poorly.[21] Data from the 2017–18 school year in San Francisco Unified show that students of all races were dramatically less likely to retake Algebra I after the de-tracking policy took effect, and students were taking more rigorous math courses. Underrepresented students of color, girls, EL students, students with individualized education programs (IEPs), and students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch were all taking math beyond Algebra II at higher rates than before, and AP Math enrollment had increased 96 percent among EL students. Not only has the new policy in San Francisco Unified led to greater success and increased course attainment in math, but students of all races are successfully completing a greater number of science courses, too.[22] San Francisco's strategy has focused on increasing access to mathematical content for students who might not have taken the most rigorous courses under the old system, incorporating student voice in math course decisions, and using diagnostic assessments to guide instruction.[23] Oakland Unified, another large urban school district, has taken similar steps to de-track math placement.[24]

Limited information exists regarding math placement throughout California in the years since the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics have been implemented, but it is known that some districts transitioned away from the traditional Algebra I-Geometry-Algebra II sequence in favor of integrated math courses.[2] Even for the districts that maintained the traditional sequence, the new standards

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1 There were not enough students in other underrepresented racial/ethnic groups for the study to report on the rate at which successful students from these groups advanced from eighth-grade Algebra I to ninth-grade Geometry.

2 "Integrated math pathways" refers to a sequence of integrated math courses, where math content is not separated into Algebra I-Geometry-Algebra II courses.

mean that the content that used to be covered in Algebra I is now split between eighth-grade math and Common Core-aligned Algebra I.[25] Forthcoming research will study math placement in the state's largest school district, Los Angeles Unified.[26] More research is planned, too, as data become available that will permit certified transcript panels for high school seniors who were in school for four years of Common Core implementation. These data will likely shed light on the Common Core's impact on access and opportunity in California, including whether integrated math pathways have succeeded in closing access gaps.

Access to Advanced Math Courses

As school boards await data on math placement in the Common Core era, there are other data available on access to advanced math courses (Algebra II and beyond). The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights shared the following national data from the 2013–14 school year that highlight access gaps in public schools with high percentages of underrepresented students of color:[27]

Access to Advanced Math and Science Courses by a School's Black and Latinx Enrollment[7]

	Course	
	Algebra II	**Calculus**
Percentage of Schools Offering the Course	78%	48%
Percentage of Schools with Low Black/Latinx Enrollment Offering the Course	84%	56%
Percentage of Schools with High Black/Latinx Enrollment Offering the Course	71%	33%

These gaps in access to Algebra II and Calculus are undoubtedly linked to racial gaps in the pursuit of advanced math courses, as seen in these 2014–15 data on California students in public high schools collected by the California Department of Education and aggregated by the Public Policy Institute of California:[28]

Rates at Which Students in California Take Advanced Math Courses by Race

Race	Percentage Taking Advanced Math
Asian	29%
White	17%
Black	8%
Latinx	8%
All students	13%

How Do School Districts Create Equitable Placement Policies?

California districts have pursued a variety of strategies to minimize math misplacement. This section explores some of those strategies.

Varied Opportunities for Acceleration

Much of the math placement discussion centers around placement for eighth- and ninth-grade math because districts make critical placement decisions at the transition between middle and high school, a fact recognized in the CMPA. Statewide, though, districts have taken different approaches to placement that could produce more equitable results. The K–8 Cupertino Union School District starts placing qualified students into advanced math courses in sixth grade, and each year, students are given a new opportunity to join the accelerated math track.[29] These repeated opportunities to accelerate are important because they can help serve more students well, since acceleration carries benefits for prepared students. However, acceleration that occurs too early typically results in low course grades and a poor grasp of algebraic concepts.

Similarly, San Francisco and Oakland Unified School Districts' de-tracked math pathways offer multiple opportunities for transitioning to advanced coursework. All students take Algebra I in ninth grade and Geometry in 10th grade, but there are opportunities for acceleration starting in 11th grade. Students can take a combined Algebra II/Precalculus class if they are prepared to do so, and those students would still be

able to take Calculus before college.[30] Students who remain on the traditional track take Algebra II as a standalone course in 11th grade. This placement approach is designed to provide students access to rich, integrated math instruction prior to 11th grade; at that point, students would ideally be well supported if they pursue an accelerated course. This de-tracked system means that all students will have access to rigorous courses that build strong mathematical understanding, and more students should be prepared to pursue advanced math successfully than under the prior system. Both the Cupertino and the San Francisco/Oakland systems give students extended timelines to prove themselves capable of advanced math coursework. Their varied approaches demonstrate that there are multiple ways to create a math placement policy that offers increased opportunities for success.

Minimizing Bias

Many math placement policies use teacher recommendations as part of a multi-pronged system that includes test scores. Teacher recommendations have historically been a double-edged sword—they can reward students who have demonstrated exemplary academic or soft skills,[31] but personal relationships may result in some students receiving an unfair advantage. The Jefferson Union School District in the Bay Area, like many California districts, has a policy that teacher recommendations can boost a student into accelerated math if the student's best scores would not otherwise qualify, but teacher feedback cannot be used to retain a student whose scores place them into an accelerated course.[32]

The CMPA implies that teacher feedback should not contribute to math misplacement, since teacher feedback is generally considered subjective and the law requires that placement be based on objective measures. In the words of the act, a fair policy:

> [s]ystematically takes multiple objective academic measures of pupil performance into consideration…such as statewide mathematics assessments, including interim and summative assessments authorized pursuant to Section 60640, placement tests that are aligned to state-adopted content standards in mathematics, classroom assignment and grades, and report cards.[33]

Researchers at the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) interpreted this language in the law as only permitting teacher recommendations when they help accelerate students. However, the plain text of the law does not explicitly forbid districts from using teacher recommendations to decelerate students. A 2016 survey by the PPIC found that 87 percent of districts use teacher recommendations as part of their math placement policy.[34] The CMPA requires that districts look at student test scores to see

whether underrepresented students of color were less likely to be promoted beyond Algebra I than their data would suggest. A recommendation for districts that may find differences in promotion by race and want a plan to address them—Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles—is presented below.

Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycles

Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycles, or PDSAs, are a way to test a plan for improvement. The Carnegie Foundation suggests thinking about PDSAs as miniature experiments. The first step (Plan) is to identify where change should happen, make a plan to effect change, and predict how that plan will work. Next, in the Do phase, organizations should test their plans and document what happened. The third step, Study, entails comparing predicted outcomes with actual outcomes. Finally, Act is an opportunity to decide on next steps.[35]

Balancing Variables

Districts use an assortment of tools to guide math placement. The 2016 PPIC survey found that the most common variables in math placement policies were test scores (used by 97 percent of respondents), math GPA (91 percent), and teacher recommendations (87 percent).[36] There are opportunities for equity within these variables if districts make sure schools use the right variables, give them the appropriate weight, and ensure those variables are equitable.

The PPIC survey determined how frequently certain variables were used, but not the weight they were given. Policies can give greater weight to objective measures (such as tests), relative to subjective measures (such as parental requests and teacher recommendations based on qualities like perceived motivation).

Tests can disadvantage underrepresented students in a few ways. One of these, stereotype threat, refers to the fear some groups may feel that tests will reinforce negative stereotypes about groups they belong to. This phenomenon has been proven to have a negative effect on the test-taking ability in mathematics for underrepresented students of color.[37] Underrepresented students of color may also have access to fewer opportunities to develop test-taking skills. To combat these issues, it is important that districts use tests that are aligned to student preparedness. WestEd researchers suggest the use of the Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project (MDTP) assessment in student placement as

part of a district's math placement policy.[38] Districts that use tests to drive placement decisions often (80 percent) use two or more tests, as reported on the PPIC survey, but this may be unnecessary, as the MDTP test on its own has been effective in determining whether students are ready to succeed in Algebra I.[39] The MDTP assessment in student placement is also aligned to Integrated Math I-III, so it is appropriate for use in districts that have adopted integrated math pathways. It is worth noting that the MDTP test's validity for assessing math placement for EL students has not yet been studied.

For districts that want to factor student characteristics (such as interest in mathematics, study skills, and motivation) into placement decisions, there are ways to decrease the likelihood of advantaging certain students to the detriment of other underrepresented groups. Bias in the placement process can be minimized by offering guidance on teacher recommendations to emphasize skills that are integral to algebra achievement.

Leveraging Data

The CMPA calls for districts to:

> [examine] aggregate pupil placement data annually to ensure that pupils who are qualified to progress in mathematics courses based on their performance on objective academic measures selected for inclusion in the policy pursuant to paragraph (1) are not held back in a disproportionate manner on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic background. The local educational agency shall report the aggregate results of this examination to the governing board or body of the local educational agency.

School districts must report these data, but they can also use the data to improve their practices. Districts could build Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles into their review of their math placement data based on student characteristics: identifying potential causes and possible solutions for disproportionate math misplacement in their districts, testing these ideas, evaluating the impact on math pathways, and adjusting their practices accordingly.

Conclusion: What Can School Boards Do?

Adopt Fair Math Placement Policies

There is evidence suggesting that school boards are currently more engaged in various aspects of Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) development than they were at the inception of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF);[40] that engagement has several steps and requires authentic cooperation within and across the district and community to ensure that the math placement is clear. As mandated by law, school boards must adopt a math placement policy that is fair, objective, and transparent. It is recommended that this policy be developed in consultation with teachers, counselors, administrators, and, as applicable, feeder schools to develop a well-articulated sequence of mathematics courses and consistent protocols. In addition, as school boards must review and adopt their LCAP each year, there are opportunities to review data, engage constituents, and ensure that LCAP plans incorporate math placement policies that support all students and each numerically significant student subgroup, including ethnic subgroups, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and homeless students. Findings from the data review should be used to evaluate the district's policy on math placement and its placement protocols and update them as necessary to address achievement gaps. Continued increased involvement in LCAP creation could be a key opportunity for school boards to review data, engage constituents, and ensure that LCAP plans incorporate math placement policies that support all students.

Help Families Navigate Math Placement

Math placement can be confusing to families, and there are several ways school boards can support family engagement with math placement policies. LCAP parent advisory committees, including EL parent advisory committees, should be encouraged to review math placement policies, as these policies are connected to LCAP goals. The key with forming these advisory groups is to ensure that diverse perspectives are heard. Superintendents note that it is challenging to engage parents of low-income students, EL students, and foster youth,[41] but it is worth the effort, since strong district engagement helps parents advocate for their students.

Districts have built best practices for engaging families into their LCAPs, including:

» Capacity-building activities to help families support student learning at home

» Communication in multiple languages through a variety of methods (e.g., email, text messages, newsletters)

» Formal family leadership training programs

» Cultural diversity training for staff who interact with families[42]

Parent advocacy has a fairly significant role in math placement in many districts (PPIC reports that 62 percent of districts factor parental requests into placement

decisions), and the CMPA legislates that there must be "clear and timely recourse for each pupil and his or her parent or legal guardian who questions the pupil's placement."[43] WestEd has developed a series of resources to help parents and students advocate for themselves in the math placement process. These documents can be found by accessing the link within the resources provided at the end of this brief.

Parents must know and understand their students' math placement to be able to serve as advocates. School boards can ensure that policies are in place that will help empower parents to advocate for themselves and their children.

English Learner Students and Math Placement

English learner students comprised 20 percent of California public school students in the 2016–17 school year,[44] and math placement for these students requires some unique considerations, especially given the fact that they are less likely to take advanced math courses.[45] Research on EL students and Algebra placement indicates that while it is commonly assumed that math is accessible for non-native speakers, the Common Core requires that students explain and justify their work, which puts additional language demands on EL students and their teachers.[46] A review of literature on EL students and mathematics learning produces scant results on the math placement of EL students.[47] Additional research on EL students and Algebra access would be helpful for school boards and other educators.

However, more general findings about EL students and success in mathematics do exist, and they can be applied to math placement. Language barriers impede the ability of many EL students' parents to advocate for their children at school across the curriculum. School boards can respond to this challenge by advocating for best practices that include EL students' parents, such as offering additional information about the U.S. school system, providing opportunities to have more input in their children's schooling, and providing translated communications beyond what is legally required.[48] Doing so will help EL students' parents take advantage of the CMPA's provision that allows parents and students to question math placement decisions.

Connect with Other Districts

School boards may want to connect with districts whose placement policies support equitable math placement. Reviewing these districts' policies, and learning about how they developed them, may help districts develop policies that will advance their placement goals. Some California districts that have produced fair math placement plans are:

Long Beach Unified School District. The Long Beach policy requires that schools use multiple measures to evaluate math placement, mandates that students must not be asked to retake a class they have successfully completed, gives teachers an opportunity to recommend higher (but not lower) math placement, and offers opportunities for re-evaluation and parent appeal.[49]

Sacramento City Unified School District. Sacramento provides a detailed timeline of their middle school placement process, which includes translated documents to keep parents informed; the MDTP test paired with an open-ended task; opportunities for teachers, parents, and administrators to recommend students for advanced math classes; and a process to share students' results—and areas of strength and growth—with the students themselves.[50]

San Francisco Unified School District. As mentioned above, San Francisco's policy ensures that all students have access to the same rigorous math course, so students are not put into pathways. However, the district still ensures that students who want to pursue advanced mathematics have an opportunity to take Calculus in high school.[51]

Leverage County Office of Education Expertise

County offices of education (COEs) in California can play an important role in math placement by offering guidance on increasing equity, providing training to districts and schools, and connecting districts with peers. Recent WestEd work with a statewide community of COE staff has indicated that they are increasingly connected with one another, knowledgeable about equity issues, and deeply passionate about high-quality mathematics instruction.[52] School board members can connect with COE staff, or encourage district leaders to do so, in order to understand policies that have worked in similar districts.

Bring an Equity Lens

As school boards adopt placement policies and assist families in navigating math placement, it is imperative that they approach both tasks with equity in mind. Boards can ensure that math placement policies are designed to

support all children and families and then monitor their implementation, asking questions to ensure that plans are carried out with fidelity. By taking such actions as adopting CSBA's AR 6152.1 — Placement in Mathematics Courses, engaging in continuous improvement through PDSA cycles, and working closely with families, boards can be effective advocates for students who are currently underserved. Undertaking these steps with equity in mind will ultimately help create fairer education systems.

Questions for Board Members

When adopting or reviewing math placement policies and practices, board members may consider the following questions for district or COE staff:

1. What are our current policies for placing students in mathematics courses, particularly around transitions from elementary to middle school and from grade eight to nine? Do these policies meet the requirements of the California Mathematics Placement Act (Education Code 51224.7)?

2. Do we currently review placement data annually to identify any disproportionality in math course placements?

3. Are there patterns of placement for students based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, identified disabilities, or English language proficiency?

4. When and how do students have the opportunity to accelerate their math course sequence?

5. How can we promote effective communication between our schools—or, for non-unified districts and county offices of education, between districts—particularly during transitions between grade spans?

6. How are students and parents informed of our mathematics placement practices? What is the process for addressing disagreements over placement decisions?

Resources

» **CSBA Sample Board Policies and Administrative Regulations.** BP/AR 6152.1 — Placement in Mathematics Courses: CSBA has developed a sample policy and administrative regulation that is available to Policy Services subscribers. For a limited time, these materials are also available to nonsubscribers on the CSBA website at: http://bit.ly/SampleMathPlacement

» **Math Course Pathway Guides for Parents and Students.** WestEd has developed a series of resources to help parents and students advocate for themselves in the math placement process, with guidance for both traditional and integrated math pathways. These documents, available in four languages, can be found here: http://bit.ly/CoursePathwayGuides

» **Course Placement and Sequences.** This appendix from the *Mathematics Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (2013) provides an overview of course sequence options and considerations for the California Common Core State Standards. http://bit.ly/FrameworkAppendixD

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Supporting STEM Access, Equity, and Effectiveness: STEM and CTE Work for California's Economic Future

by Eric Hoyer

Introduction

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is an important element of California education, both in high school and community college. For secondary students, CTE is a career-oriented pathway or set of courses typically taken in high school, specializing in an industry. Career-focused education has moved away from emphasizing vocations or trades, as the terminology reflects an outmoded model; namely, that students enrolled in career track courses are not interested in post-secondary education. However, the need for graduates in CTE fields shows no sign of slowing down. Approximately one-third of new jobs in California require education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree.[1] Advanced manufacturing, transportation, information technology, and health care are some of California's most in-demand fields. CTE can lead to high-quality, well-paying careers for students with minimal post-secondary preparation. When that path includes community college, this can also mean significantly less debt than is incurred with a degree from a four-year institution. A recent study showed that the returns in wages for CTE certificates and degrees ranges from 14 to 45 percent above a high school diploma.[2]

A common misperception about CTE is that it provides a remedial path for students who are not college-ready. In fact, the coursework is intensive, demanding, and, in some fields, such as engineering or information technology, requires a solid background in math and science. An additional misperception is that students who enter CTE fields from high school, community college, or vocational school do not go on to college. Evidence indicates that higher education trajectories can vary for students, depending on age, field, and family situation. A recent study from the Council of Graduate Schools posited that the trend for the future is for a lifelong education model, where students have on- and off-ramps to college, certificates, and graduate school depending on

In this brief you will find:

» The benefits of CTE for K-12 students;

» California's STEM needs that can be filled by CTE;

» How STEM and CTE complement each other;

» How CTE is funded in California; and

» Strategies for successful STEM CTE programs.

the requirements of their chosen career field.[3] For students in CTE pathways to meet entrance requirements for college or certificate programs, they need solid foundations in math and science. Students who do not have the requisite high school coursework may be forced to take post-secondary remedial courses, and research has shown that this may be a barrier to successful program completion.[4]

What are California's CTE Needs?

California expects high growth in CTE fields such as advanced manufacturing, health care, renewable energy, and information and communication technologies.[5] As a large and diverse state, California's CTE needs vary by region. In Los Angeles County, for example, aerospace engineering has been a staple industry. In the greater Sacramento area, food and beverage manufacturing have historically been high-demand career areas. Many of the current job growth categories in California require strong science and math backgrounds. Whether

programming an AutoCAD machine in a manufacturing plant or developing a watering schedule for a commercial farm, STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and math) underpin many necessary competencies in current and future in-demand careers.

Priority Career and Technical Education Sectors by Region[6]

Greater Sacramento, Northern Coastal, Northern Inland

Agriculture, Water & Environmental Technologies; Business & Entrepreneurship; Health

North Bay

Agriculture, Water & Environmental Technologies; Business & Entrepreneurship; Retail/Hospitality/Tourism

East Bay

Advanced Manufacturing; Health; Life Sciences/Biotech

Mid-Peninsula

Energy, Construction & Utilities; Health; Information & Communication Technologies/Digital Media

Silicon Valley

Health; Information & Communication Technologies/Digital Media; Advanced Manufacturing

Santa Cruz/Monterey

Health; Information & Communication Technologies/Digital Media; Agriculture, Water & Environmental Technologies

Central Valley

Advanced Manufacturing; Agriculture, Water & Environmental Technologies; Health

Mother Lode

Business & Entrepreneurship; Information & Communication Technologies/Digital Media; Retail/Hospitality/Tourism

South Central Coast

Advanced Manufacturing; Health; Business & Entrepreneurship

Los Angeles

Advanced Manufacturing; Health; Advanced Transportation & Logistics

Orange County

Advanced Manufacturing; Health; Retail/Hospitality/Tourism

Inland Empire

Advanced Manufacturing; Health; Global Trade

San Diego

Health; Advanced Transportation & Logistics; Life Sciences/Biotech

What Does CTE Look Like in K-12?

Career and Technical Education is offered at both the high school and community college level in California, as well as at many private vocational schools. While there are 15 industry sectors defined by the California Department of Education (CDE) (shown in Table 1), there are a myriad of STEM careers within many of these sectors.

About 40 percent (close to 800,000) of California's high school students were enrolled in a CTE course during the 2016–17 school year.[8] The most popular industry sectors with CTE high school students were arts, media, and entertainment; information and communication technologies; and agriculture and natural resources. California's most in-demand fields, such as manufacturing and transportation, have lower enrollment at both the high school and community college levels. Health sciences and medical technology are popular at both types of institutions. Engineering and architecture, while relatively popular in high school (7.5 percent), do not remain so in community college (3 percent).

The success of CTE is a bright spot in California education. For example:

» Graduation rates for CTE students in California were strong at 92 percent in 2017.[9]

» A recent study showed a positive correlation between the number of CTE units taken and high school completion rates as well as on-time high school graduation rates.[10]

» A Massachusetts study compared graduation rates among low-income students and found that CTE students from

Table 1: Enrollment in CTE Programs Varies Across Institutions and Industry Sectors (2016-17)[7]

Industry Sector (as defined by CDE)	Share of CTE enrollment	
	High school	Community college
Arts, media, and entertainment	20.4%	17.5%
Information and communication technologies	12.4%	7.8%
Agriculture and natural resources	10.0%	1.8%
Health science and medical technology	9.0%	11.3%
Engineering and architecture	7.5%	3.0%
Hospitality, tourism, and recreation	7.2%	3.2%
Business and finance	6.4%	12.3%
Education, child development, and family services	5.5%	12.9%
Building and construction trades	4.3%	2.4%
Manufacturing and product development	3.9%	4.3%
Public services	3.7%	9.3%
Transportation	3.7%	3.5%
Marketing, sales, and service	2.5%	3.0%
Energy, environment, and utilities	0.9%	1.2%
Fashion and interior design	0.8%	6.5%
Total CTE enrollment	**772,350 (40%)**	**414,951 (35%)**
Total high school student enrollment	**1,945,402**	**1,183,114**

low-income backgrounds showed a 21 percent gain in graduation rates over a 14-year period as compared to their non-CTE peers from similar backgrounds.[11]

In addition, students and parents express positive views about the CTE programs in which they or their children have participated. Advance CTE, a leading nonprofit advocate for CTE in the United States, recently authored a study of parent and student satisfaction with their CTE experience. They found that 92 percent were either satisfied or very satisfied with their CTE programs.[12] These researchers went further and identified three areas of satisfaction: students and parents appreciated the opportunities to learn real world skills, earn college credit, and explore different career options.

Connecting CTE and STEM

The California Department of Education adopted the latest CTE standards, called Standards for Career Ready Practice, in January 2013. CTE teachers subsequently contributed to the alignment of these standards with the Common Core State Standards in math and English language arts (adopted in 2010) and the California Next Generation Science Standards (adopted in 2013). The Standards for Career Ready Practice list the core knowledge and skills that students should obtain in a CTE pathway.[13] Below (Table 2) is a sample indicating some of the greatest alignment areas between CTE, math, and science standards.

CTE Provides Pathways with Options

Lompoc High School in northern Santa Barbara County provides an example of how a STEM/CTE pathway can give students career options. The high school has a tiered Engineering Design pathway with multiple tracks to engineering careers. The science and math courses in these tracks must be rigorous enough and provide students with adequate support to

succeed in this demanding coursework so that they can meet any post-secondary entrance requirements for their degree or certificate programs of choice. This ensures that students are less likely to have to enroll in remedial courses in community college or university, which is associated with a greater likelihood of not completing their degrees.[14]

Figure 1: Lompoc High School Engineering Design Pathway Careers and Annual Salary

Bachelor's Degree. Engineer ($65,000-$91,000)

Community College Associate's Degree. Engineering Assistant, Engineering Technician ($42,000)

Community College Certificate. Engineering Technician, Surveyor Aid, Drafting Technician ($33,500)

CTE High School Pathway. Land Surveyor Assistant, Mapping Technician ($26,030)
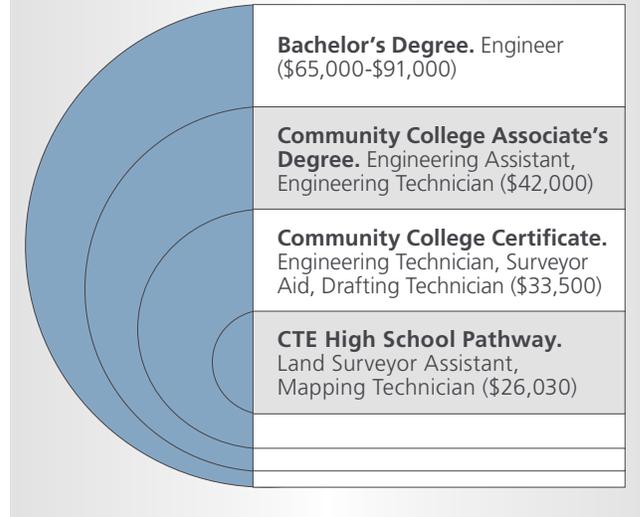
Sources of CTE Funding
State Funding

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) transformed the California funding system for K-12 education in 2013. However, a significant portion of CTE support remains categorical or has been funded through one-time initiatives. The Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (ROCP), the largest block grant for CTE funding, was eliminated in

**Table 2: Areas of Alignment Between CTE, Math, and Science Standards**

CTE Standards for Career Ready Practice	Common Core State Math (CCSM) Standards	California Next Generation Science (NGSS) Standards
Communicate clearly, effectively, and with reason	Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others	Engage in argument from evidence
Utilize critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them	Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them	Ask questions and define problems; construct explanations and define solutions
Employ valid and reliable research strategies	Use appropriate tools strategically	Analyze and interpret data

2013–14. Replacing this funding were limited-term grant funds through the CTE Incentive Grant (CTEIG) and the California Career Pathways Trust (CCPT). Proposition 51, passed in 2016, provided $500 million in one-time funding to CTE facilities improvement projects. In his final state budget, Governor Jerry Brown approved continuing the CTEIG on a permanent basis, with $150 million for 2018–19. The other state categorical program that funds CTE is the Strong Workforce Program, which allocated $164 million to K-12. This program is managed by the community colleges and allows school districts and county offices of education (COEs) to apply for funding for their CTE programs.

Federal Funding

Modern federal CTE funding started in 1984 when Congress passed the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. This act has been reauthorized three times, most recently in 2018, with the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, also known as "Perkins V." California's share of this $1.2 billion program in 2018 was approximately $110 million. The department of education in each state typically administers these funds, and California is no exception.

Figure 2: CTE Funding Sources for California Secondary Schools, 2018-19

$110 millions

$314 millions

■ Federal   ■ State
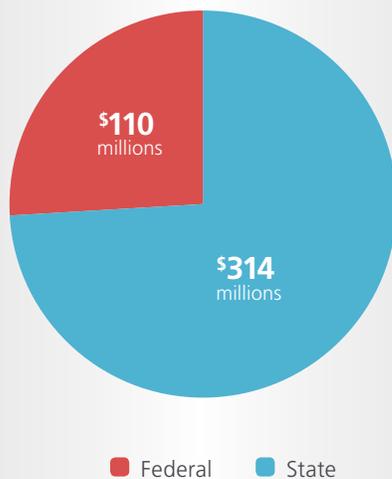
Actions that School Leaders Can Take

Advance CTE conducts extensive research on career and technical education and has a variety of resources designed for school leaders. Below are a few recommended strategies for supporting CTE from various studies.

The Message

Start messaging about CTE by seventh grade. By the time students are in eighth grade, they have most likely decided on which high school to attend. Students should be aware of what CTE offerings their public comprehensive high school has and what may only be offered at a local public technical or career-oriented high school. Guidance counselors and school leaders should be able to assist students in navigating these choices. Middle school is also the time when math and science pathways for high school are decided upon. It is essential to ensure that students who choose CTE pathways are not put into math or science course sequences that do not meet A-G requirements (University of California and California State University standards) for college admissions or that might otherwise limit their post-secondary options.

Build awareness of CTE. Research indicates that only 47 percent of prospective students and parents are aware of what career and technical education is. In contrast, vocational education is recognized by 68 percent of students and parents. The CTE brand needs a greater marketing push by districts and county offices of education so that students see all career pathways as CTE. How do districts and COEs brand CTE? In an Advance CTE study, districts in four states piloted various themes for CTE in their middle and high schools. The most impactful messages, according to parents and students, among all student groups, were: "Preparation for the real world" and "Exploring career possibilities." Students responded well to the messaging that used phrasing like "real-world skills," "mentoring," and "hands-on experience." "Being passionate about a career" is also a motif that worked well with respondents. In contrast, messages that emphasized "investment," "in-demand careers," and "workforce" were not as successful. While districts, states, and industry may think in terms of workforce supply and demand, students respond to language invoking passion for a career and work experiences.[15] Districts and COEs should examine their CTE pathways to ensure that their programs are providing the appropriate skills, mentoring, and hands-on experience and that the programs are marketed with themes that resonate with students and parents. Superintendents and site administrators can ensure that a clear vision and message are being sent out about CTE.

Know the best messengers. According to the pilot study, guidance counselors (83 percent) and teachers (78 percent) are the most effective messengers for CTE. Superintendents were near the bottom of the list at 51 percent. What does this mean for boards? Districts should prioritize learning sessions for guidance counselors and teachers on CTE. In addition, former students can connect with current students who are thinking about CTE. For example, principals developing CTE days at their school

Figure 3: Timeline of CTE Funding in California
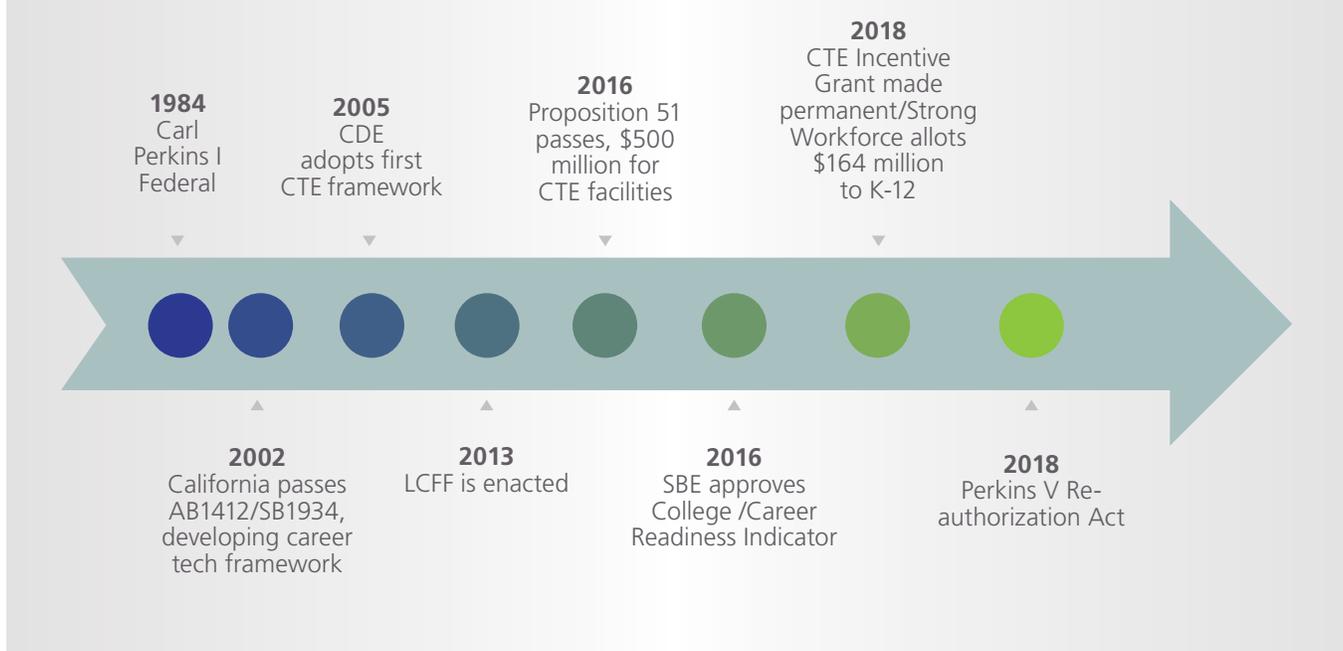
might invite former CTE pathway alumni to connect with students about career options.

The Programs

Leverage data. District and COE leadership must be knowledgeable about the regional labor market in order to develop appropriate CTE programs. In California, community colleges have regional Centers for Excellence,[16] which provide labor market data analysis and have specific recommendations for programs at area community colleges. High schools can develop programs in concert with these recommendations. Working with a neighboring community college allows districts and COEs to develop pathways and ensure students have a smooth transition to post-secondary education.

One barrier to successful CTE in California is that the state lacks a comprehensive data system to track students beyond high school. Tracking student outcomes will assist the state, local educational agencies, and schools in understanding how effective their CTE programs are in terms placement, graduate salaries, and further education. Governor Gavin Newsom has proposed allocating $10 million to develop a comprehensive K-12 data tracking system. One estimate put the annual cost of a post-secondary tracking system at $2 million.[17] States that have developed an evaluation system of their CTE

programs include Arkansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Tennessee. In addition, a comprehensive tracking system will assist research on CTE—a gap in education research discussed in a recent Getting Down to Facts II report.[18]

Support synergy between STEM and CTE. One of the myths about CTE is that students who graduate from CTE programs are not "college material." The reality is that CTE students are more likely to have a post-high school plan, which includes college, than non-CTE students.[19] In addition, CTE students can earn college credit in high school, which saves them time and money once in college. College and career readiness is not an either/or proposition.

Whether students see CTE as a pathway of possibilities, including college, largely depends upon their middle and high school experiences. Do they have the coursework in math and science to meet A-G requirements? What are the district's or COE's policies on A-G? Pasadena Unified School District requires that all students graduating high school meet A-G requirements, regardless of pathway. This model gives CTE students post-secondary options. For example, students who graduate with a manufacturing technician certificate from a community college can enter a four-year bachelor's degree path more easily if their high school experience was A-G compliant.

A further step in ensuring that CTE students have a strong understanding of STEM subjects is by ensuring that CTE

teachers are current in the Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core Math standards that are relevant to their industry sector. The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) hosts an annual "STEM Is CTE Symposium" that brings together educators, industry, nonprofits, government, and advocates to collaborate on STEM/CTE learning.

Get involved in planning. Governing board members should inquire as to the district's or COE's input on workforce planning in the region. Community colleges have Strong Workforce task forces based on industry sector (e.g. advanced manufacturing) and region. These groups include industry leaders as well as community college representatives in order to plan academic programs around the local economy's needs. Local educational agencies are typically represented at K-12 Strong Workforce Program Regional Engagement meetings.[20]

Questions for Boards Members

1. What are the top industry sectors in the area? Do high school CTE offerings align with the needs of these sectors?

2. How are students enrolled in high school CTE programs? What is the district or COE doing to ensure CTE is not designated as a remedial track?

3. What post-graduation data does the district or COE have on CTE students to assist in program planning?

4. What collaboration is happening in high schools between science and math teachers and CTE educators? Are there opportunities for greater synergy so that CTE teachers can reinforce the standards-based math and science curricula?

5. What is the district or COE doing to promote STEM careers through CTE pathways? Are STEM/STEAM nights inclusive of those careers?

6. What collaboration is happening with area community colleges to make sure students are ready for the next wave of job growth?

Additional Resources

Dos and Don'ts for Engaging Students and Parents around CTE: https://bit.ly/2GdtpDP

Making a Winning Case for CTE: How Local Leaders Can Communicate the Value of CTE:: https://bit.ly/2MDOiZS

Summary of Messages to Engage Parents & Students: https://bit.ly/2G8HORr

The Value and Promise of Career and Technical Education Fact Sheet: https://bit.ly/2zxJZfP

State Profiles from the Association of Career & Technical Education: https://bit.ly/2BaVEzA

Best Practices in CTE Program Planning and Evaluation: https://bit.ly/2TluVrd

Rural CTE Strategy Guide: https://bit.ly/2BbUhAv

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Ethnic Studies: School Board Member Attitudes and Recommendations for Implementation

By Russell Castañeda Calleros

Introduction

The United States is an exceptionally rich and diverse nation, and its prosperity is strongly connected to its diversity. For generations, people from all over the world have contributed their ingenuity, hard work, and capital to build new enterprises and expand existing ones. Essential to this diversity are the native people who were here before Europeans came, the Africans and their descendants who did not come here willingly, and immigrants from countless nations.

California epitomizes this culturally rich mix and this diversity is foundational to the state's economy, which is the nation's most prosperous and the fifth-largest in the world. Yet, when we look at curricula in classrooms across the state, a broad perspective including the history, languages, and accomplishments of people from all heritages has long been missing. This means that students of color do not see themselves fully represented in their school curriculum—and their peers do not learn the rich histories and contributions of these communities either. Ethnic Studies is a critical way to change that dynamic and make sure that all students see themselves and their stories reflected in the school curriculum.

The Case for Ethnic Studies

Research has shown that students who do not see themselves and their families reflected in the curriculum may have a weaker connection to school or disengage from learning—factors associated with poor achievement and leaving school before graduation.[1,2] The good news is that this can be mitigated when students see themselves, their families, and their histories represented in a positive light in school curricula. The inclusion of the histories and contributions of people from all

In this brief you will find:

» Background research on positive effects of Ethnic Studies on student outcomes;

» Results of a study on school board member attitudes about Ethnic Studies;

» Recommendations for school districts considering implementing Ethnic Studies;

» A link to resources for school districts considering implementing Ethnic Studies; and

» Questions for board members to consider.

backgrounds—including those who have traditionally been left out of school curricula—is the central goal of Ethnic Studies. Research has shown positive effects for students of color who take Ethnic Studies courses. These include:

» Increased levels of academic success, civic participation, and academic engagement in school districts that have included Ethnic Studies as either an elective or graduation requirement;[3,4]

» A consistent, significant, positive relationship between participation in an Ethnic Studies program and improved academic success and graduation rates;[5]

» An increase in ninth-grade student attendance, grade point average, and number of credits earned for students who take Ethnic Studies courses;[6]

» Higher graduation rates and increased likelihood of attending college for students who learned about race, racism, and cultural identity—features of Ethnic Studies curricula;[7] and

» Higher scores for students of color on state reading, writing, and math exams for those enrolled in a social justice and Ethnic Studies project than their unenrolled peers.[8]

School boards can play a role in mitigating the negative consequences that may occur when students do not see themselves reflected in school curricula—and in promoting the potential for positive outcomes when they do. Board members are responsible for approving curricula for school districts and county offices of education. These choices reflect the vision and goals that boards have for the students they serve. By the curricular choices they make, boards can widen the perspectives and information reflected in the textbooks and materials their students use in the classroom.

Recent state legislation provides for the development of guidance which can be used by school districts and county offices of education that wish to offer Ethnic Studies. This legislation—passed and signed into law in 2016—requires that the state create a model Ethnic Studies curriculum for school districts that choose to offer these courses. The work to develop this curriculum, along with the public review and editing process, is underway. When complete, these guidelines will assist school districts and county offices of education (local educational agencies or LEAs) that choose to include Ethnic Studies in their course offerings.

A Study of School Board Member Attitudes and Beliefs about Ethnic Studies

In the spring of 2017, a study was conducted to explore high school district board members' perspectives on Ethnic Studies curricula and the extent to which these perspectives inform policy in their school districts. The study focused exclusively on high school district board members in California, given its unique status as a bellwether state and the birthplace of Ethnic Studies. These trustees were CSBA members drawn from the Association's database.

The study, conducted by the author of this brief as part of his doctoral dissertation research, was conducted in two phases: a survey, which gathered quantitative information about attitudes toward Ethnic Studies and a set of semi-standardized interviews that generated qualitative data from a sample of participants. Almost 100 board members completed the survey (26.5 percent response rate). Of the board members who indicated their willingness to

participate in a follow-up interview, 11 were chosen. These 11 were selected with a range of perspectives toward Ethnic Studies, as well as varied geographic location, gender, ethnicity, and length of school board service.

Most School Board Members Support Ethnic Studies as an Elective

The findings revealed that most of the surveyed school board members were supportive of Ethnic Studies as an elective, but less supportive of it as a graduation requirement. Most of those who were supportive had taken Ethnic Studies themselves at some point. The survey scale placed board member perspectives on a continuum from complete opposition to complete support. Board members identified as change agents (those in complete support, based on the survey results) had already taken steps to establish Ethnic Studies in their districts and were working to alter school district culture to further advance the program.

During follow-up interviews, participants were asked to identify why they supported or opposed Ethnic Studies. The majority of supporters cited five distinct yet interrelated reasons for support, including that they promote:

» Inclusivity of other cultures;

» Global citizenship;

» Enhanced self-awareness;

» Understanding of societal power dynamics; and

» Improved academic performance.

The interviewed board members who were less supportive of Ethnic Studies expressed concern that adoption could be seen as:

» Limiting the course schedule;

» Being divisive/exclusive;

» Eroding local control if mandated;

» Contrary to American culture; and

» Not defined well.

These potential negatives can be mitigated through sensitive and inclusive planning. When an LEA develops a strategy for Ethnic Studies, it should reflect local demographics and conditions, and craft a customized implementation which reinforces the idea that adoption is a byproduct of local choice rather than a state mandate. LEAs should also be sure to highlight the contributions of multiple cultures and their relationship and contributions to the overall American fabric, while emphasizing that all students and all Americans

benefit from a richer understanding of the nation's diverse history and peoples.

Concerns about racism or race-related dynamics was another issue that surfaced in comments of board members who were opposed to Ethnic Studies. These concerns were also expressed by board members who had advocated for Ethnic Studies and had encountered opposition. Comments about experiences with this issue from the latter group focused on colleagues' reluctance and fear of honest dialogue on race; an attitude that racism is no longer a concern in the U.S.; and encounters with blatant or subtle racism in their districts or in their communities.

In an analysis of the characteristics of surveyed board members, their support or opposition to Ethnic Studies did not seem to be affected by their gender, educational attainment, number of languages spoken, or school district demographic description.

How to Encourage Consideration of Ethnic Studies at the Local Level

When asked what might encourage a positive attitude toward Ethnic Studies and openness to the possible inclusion of these courses in the local curriculum, survey participants cited several strategies that were the most and least likely to be effective in advocating for Ethnic Studies.

The top five strategies that board members recommended to encourage support for Ethnic Studies were:

- » Citing studies that show how Ethnic Studies helps students develop skills that contribute to academic success;

- » Fostering inclusivity through building awareness of broad, balanced alternative histories and different cultures;

- » Demonstrating how A through G requirements (those required for admission to University of California and California State University schools) can be addressed by Ethnic Studies courses;

- » Sharing templates of existing courses with other high school districts; and

- » Starting with Ethnic Studies as an elective before moving toward implementation as a graduation requirement.

Board members also addressed reasons why Ethnic Studies might be seen as less appealing. They noted that when considering Ethnic Studies as a possible promising practice for

encouraging student engagement and achievement, the following approaches should be avoided:

- » Overemphasizing differences across race and ethnicity;

- » Mandating Ethnic Studies, which erodes local control;

- » Exclusion or separation of groups;

- » Making false assumptions about individuals or groups; and

- » Blaming certain groups or individuals.

Some of the concerns expressed by board members related to Ethnic Studies are precisely why these courses have potential for students and the school systems that serve them. Geneva Gay, an expert in culturally responsive teaching, noted: "Unfamiliar groups can produce anxieties, prejudices, and racist behaviors among those who do not understand the newcomers or who perceive them as threats to their safety and security." This is why it is essential to "develop[ing] institutional programs and practices [that can] respond positively and constructively to diversity."[9]

Recommendations Based on Board Member Survey and Interview Responses

In these surveys and interviews, board members expressed their ideas about how to learn from students and local communities about their views of Ethnic Studies, how to build support for the program, and how to ensure the quality and effectiveness of these courses and curricula. Their suggestions included:

Listen to students

Inviting students to provide testimony on the benefits of Ethnic Studies can increase the comfort level for those who may not be as familiar with it. There is additional intrinsic value in placing students at the center of an advocacy strategy, since the process of taking an Ethnic Studies course, reflecting on growth, preparing remarks, presenting in front of others, and answering questions can be empowering for students.

Embrace collaboration

For Ethnic Studies programs to persist longer than the terms of individual board members, board members need to work with their superintendents to engage with a variety of local entities and individuals. One board member described this process as meeting with the superintendent, creating a taskforce charged with exploring Ethnic Studies,

and soliciting feedback from the community. These steps are supported by the research of Paolo Freire, a world-renowned leader in community involvement and action, on what he called the co-participation process in which educators work closely with communities. The dialogue that results from this co-participation helps elevate the community's awareness of Ethnic Studies.[10]

Foster community dialogue

Robust dialogue can identify common ground and contribute to a well-informed policy. Since dialogue is central to overcoming the fear that can be associated with opposition to Ethnic Studies, it is important that board members urge superintendents to host community dialogues with teachers, students, parents, and other interested stakeholders. California school districts and county offices of education have structured opportunities to host such dialogues as part of regular community input sessions that are part of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) development process.

Disseminate literature regarding Ethnic Studies curricula

Given that the strategies identified as most effective include citing research, highlighting academic benefits, and publicizing best practices, it would be helpful for statewide educational organizations to solicit, publish, and distribute Ethnic Studies materials to school districts, county offices of education, educational nonprofits, and elected officials. This widespread distribution, particularly to school board members, increases awareness of Ethnic Studies, understanding of its benefits, and appreciation for models of existing Ethnic Studies electives or graduation requirements that have contributed to student success.

Create an Ethnic Studies clearinghouse

A statewide clearinghouse that could be accessed by school districts with Ethnic Studies programs would enable districts to research current practices, learn about the benefits to students, and make resources available for school board members, superintendents, administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students.

Employ appropriate policy drivers

As policymakers, board members can use proven strategies for positive educational change, such as capacity building, collaboration, and research-based pedagogy.[11] Understanding local district culture and identifying situations that could lend themselves to advancing Ethnic Studies can foster the identification and use of appropriate policies. Board members can promote the inclusion of the stories of all peoples in classroom curricula by working together to promote Ethnic Studies policies that work for their LEAs.

Future Steps

The findings of this study highlight the importance of Ethnic Studies as a way to support the increased academic achievement of all students. Board members committed to implementing Ethnic Studies curricula can discuss the benefits with colleagues and advocate for its implementation. This dialogue is especially important given that a lack of understanding of Ethnic Studies and concerns of what it might be and do was a common factor among those who were opposed to the concept. Involving a wide variety of community members in a collective effort to build Ethnic Studies programs can encourage high school districts to keep an open mind, and if necessary, slowly roll out classes. Another effective strategy is to introduce an Ethnic Studies pilot program at one high school site and track results to help supporters make the case for replication elsewhere.

School board members who are interested in learning how to best implement Ethnic Studies curricula should consider several factors. Regardless of whether board members decide to approve a single elective or a graduation requirement, the common ingredient needed is an instructor with the interest in developing curricula and the experience or skills to teach that curricula. Board members can read Geneva Gay's research to learn how to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy across various disciplines.

Furthermore, school board members can consult school districts in California that have already adopted Ethnic Studies electives or graduation requirements. These districts can offer guidance on professional development, instructional strategies, course curricula, and other resources crucial to Ethnic Studies. One district doing this work is the El Rancho Unified School District (ERUSD) in the city of Pico Rivera. In 2014, ERUSD became the first school district in the nation to mandate Ethnic Studies as a high school graduation requirement. Each year, ERUSD hosts open houses for school districts interested in learning more about the impact of Ethnic Studies on students and about how district officials designed and implemented the requirement. For a list of school districts that have passed Ethnic Studies graduation requirements, board members can visit the Ethnic Studies Now Coalition website at www.ethnicstudiesnow.com.

Conclusion

Ethnic Studies promotes a history that includes all peoples and can open doors to new possibilities and awaken minds to histories and accomplishments of those from their own backgrounds—as well as others—they did not know existed. The enduring influence of Ethnic Studies was documented in the responses of board members who participated in the 2017 study, who described how Ethnic Studies inspired them to run for office, pursue higher education, and share what they had learned with their children and grandchildren.

Questions for Board Members

1. How can Ethnic Studies be part of a strategy to increase the engagement of students of color in your LEA?

2. What are the views of your fellow board members, staff, and other stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, community members) about Ethnic Studies?

3. Which teachers in your LEA, if any, have the capability and desire to teach Ethnic Studies?

4. What steps can your board to take to explore adopting (or expanding) Ethnic Studies in your LEA?

Resources

For a list of school districts that have passed Ethnic Studies graduation requirements, board members can visit the Ethnic Studies Now Coalition website at www.ethnicstudiesnow.com.

For CSBA Gamut subscribers, the following sample policies and administrative regulations can be accessed through gamutonline.net:

»   BP 6142.94 - Social Sciences Instruction

»   AR 6143 - Courses of Study

Endnotes

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Shifting K-5 Science Instruction With Next Generation Science Standards Curriculum Adoption

By Margaret Harte

Introduction

A Framework for K-12 Science Education provides a foundation for the future of K-12 science education in the U.S. First released in 2011, the framework is structured to "ensure that by the end of 12th grade, all students have some appreciation of the beauty and wonder of science, the capacity to discuss and think critically about science-related issues, and the skills to pursue careers in science or engineering if they want to do so."[1] For elementary school teachers who have, over the last 20 years, been provided very limited support for developing scientific literacy in their students, the framework and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) that followed required a significant shift in how teachers approached science instruction.

The Science Framework for California Public Schools, adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE) in 2016, was a departure from prior frameworks in that it focused on what students should be able to do with their understanding of science and engineering principles and practices, rather than simply what students should know. "The new framework is designed to help students gradually deepen their knowledge of core ideas in four disciplinary areas over multiple years of school, rather than acquire shallow knowledge of many topics. And it strongly emphasizes the practices of science—helping students learn to plan and carry out investigations, for example, and to engage in argumentation from evidence."[2] The California NGSS Framework requires students to engage in sense making, becoming active participants in their own discovery of how the world works.

These new standards bring with them an increased challenge for K-5 teachers. Many elementary teachers do not feel prepared to make this transition, having little background in science instruction themselves. In a recent national study, only

In this brief you will find:

» The significance of the shifts in Next Generation Science Standards curriculum and instruction;

» Steps that can help local educational agencies determine which publisher suits the needs of their district or county office of education;

» Ways to support both teachers and students in the transition to NGSS to ensure equity and access for all students; and

» Questions for board members to consider.

33 percent of third- through fifth-grade teachers felt that they were "very well prepared" to teach science.[3] The national and California NGSS frameworks contain not only scientific concepts, but also sense-making practices to explain scientific phenomena. To implement these new standards and practices, K-12 teachers will be required to shift their thinking about how they approach science instruction, reframing instruction to have a more student-centered rather than teacher-directed approach. To make these instructional shifts, elementary teachers will require a different model for professional learning than their single-subject peers.

The goal of this governance brief is to inform school board members of various ways to engage in the adoption process by thinking about essential questions to ask and by considering proven approaches to curriculum adoption and teacher development.

Shifts in CA NGSS Instruction

In looking at science curriculum adoption, it is important for board members to understand that with the new standards comes a new model for exploration and instruction for students and teachers alike. These instructional shifts highlight the need to place students at the forefront of every lesson as the ones engaging in scientific inquiry. Gone are the days of teacher lectures or students reading out of the text as the primary models for science instruction. As instructional material is reviewed by local educational agencies (LEAs), there are some key shifts in instruction to look for in the new science curriculum:

» **Students engage with anchoring phenomena** (observable events in nature). They use these phenomena to generate questions and explore lessons that assist them in answering these questions. Lessons are learner centered, not teacher centered.

» **Students engage in science explorations** as a way to make sense of the world. They explain their understanding of these explorations through various modes (written, oral, visual).

» **Students are given time to design investigations** to explain the phenomenon, not to engage in activities that simply reaffirm an already known outcome.

» **Students have time to engage in scientific discourse** to explain their own ideas and challenge those of their peers. The materials reflect the teacher's role in facilitating argumentation, discourse, and reaching consensus.

» **Diverse examples of "those who do science"** are used so students see themselves reflected in these portrayals.

From Professional Development to Professional Learning

Professional learning needs to be "embedded in science content, giving teachers an experience in grappling with the science."[4] Before adopting new curriculum, as part of stages one and two of the NGSS implementation process (Figure 1), teachers will need professional learning opportunities to dig deeper into NGSS, its pedagogical and instructional shifts, and have time to reflect on their own practices. Without understanding why instructional shifts were necessary to prepare all learners for a 3D model of learning, districts and county offices of education run the risk of purchasing new textbooks without changing instructional practices of teachers or learning opportunities by students. Before LEAs ask teachers to pilot CA NGSS-adopted programs, professional learning opportunities

on the pedagogical and instructional shifts will be needed to improve instruction and help foster more equitable outcomes.

The statewide rollout of NGSS has occurred as a phased-in process since 2014. Most LEAs are still in stages one or two. Even the best curriculum will not have everything that is necessary for teachers to transition to stage four of NGSS implementation.[5] Many teachers lack confidence in their own scientific understanding to fully engage students in the NGSS. Thus, ongoing professional learning opportunities will be important in supporting equitable access to all students. "Professional learning refers to planned and organized processes that actively engage educators in cycles of continuous improvement guided by the use of data and active inquiry around authentic problems and instructional practices."[6] Current research shows that ongoing long-term collaborative learning opportunities are what are necessary to truly change the practices of teachers.

Figure 1: The CA NGSS Implementation Pathway

Source: San Diego County Office of Education

Just as there are significant shifts to how students approach the learning of scientific concepts embedded within CA NGSS, the instructional shifts required of teachers is just as great. For many elementary school teachers, this transition will require a tremendous amount of collaboration, planning, and professional learning opportunities (stage three). Having limited exposure during pre-service course work to NGSS pedagogy, narrowed experience with scientific content in undergraduate work, and less and less time in class to develop science instructional methods and practices, elementary school teachers' professional learning needs are unique when compared to science-specific content teachers in middle and high school.

California has many models for what these types of collaborative, ongoing professional learning projects could look like. Tapping into ongoing learning opportunities through the state's University of California and California Subject

Matter Projects can be a good place for LEAs to start. For example, the UC system, Sacramento Area Science Project (SASP), and partner districts developed multi-year professional learning models to support teachers as they implement NGSS through projects like iStar (a collaboration between UC Davis, the SASP, and Davis and Dixon Unified School Districts) and iSEE (a collaboration between SASP, Elk Grove Unified School District, Folsom Cordova Unified School District, and Sacramento State University).

There are also ongoing countywide programs, such as the San Diego County Elementary Science Academy, whereby, over multiple years, teachers "continue to deepen their understanding of the instructional shifts of NGSS while implementing phenomena-based lessons with an emphasis on student discourse." Countywide programs allow teachers to "plan with grade-level colleagues across the county, collect and analyze student work, and apply their learning in the classroom."[7] Reaching out to and accessing regional colleges, subject matter projects, and county offices of education can allow smaller LEAs to pool resources when looking at longer-term professional learning models.

Table 1: Instructional Shifts—Utilizing Professional Learning Opportunities (Stage 3—pre pilot)

Moving From	Moving Toward
Teaching of discrete facts	Exploring and explaining new phenomena using explanatory models
Teacher explaining the content	Students exploring and investigating phenome-na to come up with their own explanations
Reading and learning about science alone	Engaging with scientific practices to explain phenomena
Assessing students' recall of discrete facts	Assessing students using the 3D model, looking at students' ability to explain ideas and argue from evidence

Adapted from 2016 California Science Framework

As LEAs look for ways to support teachers through ongoing professional learning opportunities, it is important to ensure that key instructional shifts in curriculum are reflected in professional learning.

While there are many teacher professional learning programs for NGSS, board members should prioritize those that (1) engage educational staff in a cycle of continuous improvement by using multiple data sources and active inquiry, and (2) reflect continuous professional learning through follow-up, feedback, and reflection to support implementation in the classroom.

Determining Criteria for Decision Making

As part of the state curriculum standards revision process, the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) is tasked with reviewing instructional materials for alignment with state standards. The Commission's recommendations are then forwarded to the SBE for approval. In 2018, the SBE determined that 29 out of the 34 science curriculum programs submitted for review met the following criteria:

1. Alignment with CA NGSS Three-Dimensional Learning (i.e., scientific practices, disciplinary core ideas, crosscutting concepts)

2. Program Organization

3. Assessment

4. Access and Equity

5. Instructional Planning and Support[8]

One of the main requirements for instructional materials meeting the SBE criteria was aligning with the three dimensions of NGSS. The three dimensions are the pillars that make up the foundation for the performance expectations or standards (Figure 2). The scientific practices, disciplinary core ideas, and crosscutting concepts reflect the three dimensions that students will engage with as they work toward the performance expectation.

Figure 2: NGSS Three-Dimensional Model
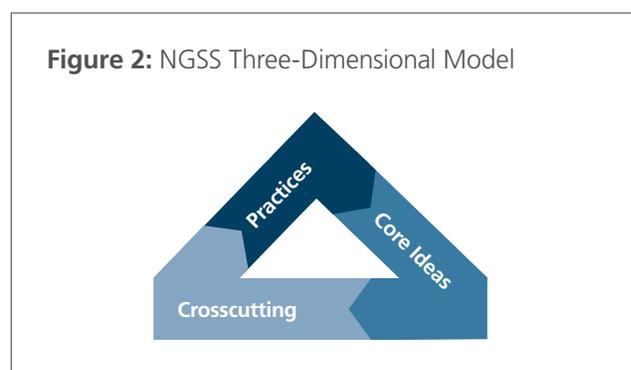
Source: Next Generation Science Standards

It is important to note that the IQC team was not tasked with determining the suitability of the programs for LEAs or how well each program aligned with each of the five categories outlined. To determine which publisher(s) to pilot, the LEA will need to engage with all relevant local stakeholders to develop an adoption process. Under LCFF, if an LEA wishes to adopt instructional materials outside of the 29 approved programs, it may do so without a waiver from CDE.

As a way to support LEAs in this process, in December 2018, the NGSS Collaborative (comprising the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association-Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee Science Subcommittee, California Science Project, California Science Teachers Association, K-12 Alliance @ WestEd, CDE, and State Board of Education) introduced the California Tool for Instructional Materials Evaluation (CA TIME). Many county offices of education have and continue to offer trainings to district leaders as they move forward with NGSS-aligned curriculum adoptions. The process and recommended toolkit can be found in the resources section of this brief. It is important, before beginning the adoption process, that LEAs review their goals and focus on what priorities have been identified before beginning the NGSS adoption process.

Figure 3: California Tool for Instructional Materials Evaluation steps

Development of Local Educational Agency Lens

Inclusion of Stakeholders

Ensuring teachers have adequate resources based on local identified needs in order to support student transition to

CA NGSS is essential. To that end, LEAs should first reach out to their community to form a committee of stakeholders, composed predominantly of teachers, as they move forward in the adoption process. Each LEA is different and has unique strengths and needs. The strengths and needs of students, teachers, parents, and the community will need to be explored, identified, and taken into consideration when looking at any new adoption. The focus of developing an LEA lens may begin by looking at what the committee feels students will need to engage in NGSS learning. Committees may ask questions such as, "What kinds of talk, tasks, and tools do students need in order to fully engage in meaningful forms of science learning?"

It is important for LEA adoption committees to take their time during this process, as it will help in determining what teachers and students need from the curriculum and beyond. LEAs should ask themselves questions such as, "What elements do we feel are essential in new science curriculum?" and "What supports do we think our teachers and students will need for the curriculum?" No one adoption will fulfill every need or goal, but this process can be an effective way to focus the committee's attention, as well as identify elements that may need to be supported in other ways outside of the adoption process. Once the LEA's vision and priorities have been highlighted, a rubric can be developed to focus on those priorities. The committee should also determine how various elements will be weighed in its decision-making.

Focus Resources

When developing an LEA lens, adoption committees should look at what resources are available compared to the list of priorities made as part of the curriculum adoption process. According to Achieve, a nonprofit group tasked with leading the development of the standards by the states, "eighty-six percent of teachers identified instructional materials as a resource critical for implementing the standards... providing teachers with the resources they need will be critical to meeting the promise of the NGSS to improve science education for all students."[9] Curriculum adoption materials needs and professional learning plans should be included in the Local Control and Accountability Plan revision process, keeping in mind that this adoption will be with the LEA for eight years.

When considering the adoption of new instructional resources, LEAs need to consider more than just materials available for hands-on projects. For example, if the integration of the English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework and NGSS is a priority, adoption committees might ask questions such as, "Does the LEA have the reading material to support that type of integration?" ; "Does the

staff have the necessary support and training to plan cohesive storylines around that type of integration?"; and "How much time and support will teachers be given for collaboratively planning a cohesive and comprehensive program?" The need for training and materials in an LEA that is in stage three, or planning instruction (Figure 1), around CA NGSS with staff who have been attending professional development and working collaboratively over time will be much different than LEAs who are in stages one or two and are still focusing on deepening their understanding of the shifts necessary to fully implement NGSS. Knowing what resources teachers already have and what types of supports are available is critical in determining planning and implementation needs going forward.

LEA Data to Determine Strengths and Needs

Achieve recommends reviewing student data longitudinally and among subgroups to look for achievement gaps. The sets of data that an LEA decides to use will be determined by that district's or county office of education's lens and identified priorities. The data collected from the California Science Test (CAST) 2017–18 field test will be limited in that it will give LEAs "preliminary indicators"—an initial baseline as to how students are performing in their application of CA NGSS—but which should not be used alone in determining the needs of an LEA or student performance. Several years of CAST operational testing will be needed to be able to draw reliable conclusions about students' science mastery. Looking at how various subgroups performed in previous years on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress in English language arts (ELA) and math will be important as LEAs consider what types of supports teachers and students will need. Are there needs based on the LEA's analysis that may be unique as evidenced by the data? What supports will be put in place, based on the ELA/math scores, to ensure equitable access to science instruction?[10]

Determining Which Publishers to Pilot

Once the LEA has determined its lens, identified resources, and reviewed data, a timeline can be set for paper screening of adopted curriculum. LEA administrators should request representative samples from each of the publishers and begin a paper screening using the rubric designed based on the identified needs, priorities, and resources (available and needed) determined by a review of the data. The rubric will be used to narrow down the criteria for each curriculum to determine which publishers to pilot. The paper screening process should highlight the priorities of various stakeholders as teachers, administrators, parents, and community members come together to review the proposed adoption. In addition to looking at instructional supports for various demographics,

committee members should also review how well each publisher allows students in their LEA to engage in the scientific practices highlighted in CA NGSS. As stated earlier, the state adoption review committee did not determine the quality of the resources, but rather the evidence that the curriculum is aligned with the CA NGSS. In addition to supporting the unique needs of the LEA, adoption committees should also look at how well they feel each publisher supports the instructional shifts and practices that align with CA NGSS 3D instruction.

Practices for K-12 Science Classrooms[11]

1. Asking questions (for science) and defining problems (for engineering)

2. Developing and using models

3. Planning and carrying out investigations

4. Analyzing and interpreting data

5. Using mathematics and computational thinking

6. Constructing explanations (for science) and designing solutions (for engineering)

7. Engaging in arguments from evidence

8. Obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information

*From the CDE's *Science Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*

Equitable Access

The achievement gap between various demographic groups in STEM subjects, as well as access to quality STEM instruction, continues to be an ongoing issue in California schools. In many cases, the gap in instructional opportunity and quality becomes more dramatic when looking at access to scientific literacy instruction when compared to other subjects. To implement the instructional shifts necessary for scientific literacy development in students, many schools have found that the time dedicated to science instruction needs to be increased. The more time dedicated to science, the more likely students are engaged in inquiry.[12] When given limited amounts of time, or limited freedom to extend time when needed for an investigation, teachers are more likely

to revert to old modes of science instruction. More often than not, schools that have limited access to quality science instruction are also the same schools that have student populations not represented in STEM fields. Given the need for quality materials and teacher development, equitable access to high-quality science instruction needs to be a priority for an LEA. A plan in keeping with the board's wishes for how to ensure that all students have access to a fully implemented CA NGSS program needs to be articulated.[13]

The focus on shifts necessary for scientific literacy requires teachers to commit more time to science instruction. The amount of time extended to elementary students is a matter of equity and access. For these students, limiting early science learning opportunities leaves them unprepared for science courses in middle and high school, which can exacerbate future inequities in interest, course-taking, and achievement in STEM.[14] Attending to time committed, both in the daily schedule of classrooms as well as professional learning opportunities for educators, will be an important factor for districts and county offices of education.

Conclusion

During this period of transition and adoption of both the CA NGSS standards and curriculum, school districts and county offices of education have a wonderful opportunity to increase student engagement and learning by implementing key shifts in instructional practices. The process of determining an LEA vision, diving deep into student data to look at needs, and focusing on equity and access will allow school districts and county offices to focus on steps for developing more student-centered science classrooms. Building capacity among the teaching staff is one of the most consequential steps in that implementation process. Once fully implemented, the CA NGSS will help ensure that all of California's students are able to think critically and appreciate the beauty in the world around them.

Questions for Board Members

LEAs are able to allocate money toward new instructional materials adoptions and professional development based on goals as determined by the LCAP. Currently, there is no timeline by which LEAs must adopt CA NGSS-aligned curriculum, nor is there extra funding allocated to do so. LEAs will need to keep in mind that any adoption decision made will

have an impact on the LCAP as well as classroom instruction that will last for years. As LEAs move forward toward full implementation of CA NGSS, board members should ask:

1. What stage of NGSS implementation is the LEA in?

2. What has been the focus of professional learning opportunities for grades K-5 teachers to prepare for this transition and what professional learning opportunities will be ongoing?

3. What type of facilitated collaboration (e.g. professional learning communities) has been established to support teachers in making these instructional shifts?

4. What is the timeline for NGSS-adopted materials in the LCAP? Does the LCAP need to be updated? How will that impact the budget?

5. What site-level data is being used to make decisions about priorities around science?

6. Is the LEA in Williams Compliance? (The Williams Act ensures that all students have equitable access to a quality education, i.e., textbooks, decent facilities, trained teachers.) How will students access content at home? Is this method available to all students? Will the LEA require a change in policy regarding Supplemental Resource Approval?

Additional Resources

Next Generation Science Standards: https://bit.ly/2QiaRay

Understanding NGSS—San Diego County Office of Education San Diego https://bit.ly/2moXFnF

2016 California Science Framework https://bit.ly/2pwdaIk

National Framework for Science Education (2011) https://bit.ly/2n0u0l7

Instructional Materials Resources from CDE https://bit.ly/2nWcbUl

CDE Science Report https://bit.ly/2ozZBdw

Instructional Shifts- More of this, Less of this https://bit.ly/2olezyl

NGSS Adoption and Implementation Workbook https://bit.ly/2xOGJLW

California NGSS Toolkit for Instructional Materials Evaluation (TIME) https://bit.ly/2oCCbEl

Elk Grove Unified School District—iSEE Program https://bit.ly/2na1rBD

Endnotes

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5   San Diego County Office of Education. Science Professional Development. Downloaded on September 30, 2019 from: https://bit.ly/2oCnroZ

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7   See Endnote 4

8   See Endnote 5

9   See Endnote 5

10 See Endnote 1

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12 Achieve.org. (2017). *Lessons Learned from Early Implementers.* Retrieved from: https://bit.ly/2nU11zk

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16 See Endnote 2

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2018–19 CAASPP Results for English Language Arts and Mathematics

By Manuel Buenrostro

Introduction

In October 2019, the California Department of Education (CDE) released the results of the 2018–19 Smarter Balanced (SBAC)[1] English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics assessments. Compared to the 2017–18 results, all student groups performed slightly better. However, significant achievement gaps remain between student groups.

This brief examines California's overall student performance in the fifth year of SBAC testing for ELA and mathematics.[2] The achievement data can help governance teams consider their scores and progress in view of statewide results. This brief also includes questions that board members can ask about their local data to help them understand the progress of students in their schools, as well as resources they can share with their communities about assessment results.

Fifth Year of Smarter Balanced Assessments

In 2015, California transitioned from the paper-based, multiple-choice Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) exams to the computer-adaptive SBAC for ELA and mathematics. The SBAC tests are based on the Common Core State Standards, which represent a significant change in teaching and learning for California's classrooms. The SBAC tests are part of the broader California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) system, which also consists of the California Science Test (which was fully administered for the first time in 2018-19), Standards-based Tests in Spanish, and the California Alternate Assessments (in ELA, mathematics, and science) for students who have the most significant cognitive disabilities.

In this brief you will find:

» An analysis of the statewide 2018–19 ELA and mathematics test results, including:

- A comparison of the 2018–19 results to those from 2017–18;
- Results by student group, including achievement gaps; and
- Results for 11th-grade students, and implications for college readiness.

» Questions for board members to consider when analyzing local results.

» Resources available to communicate results with parents and teachers.

SBAC results are a critical component of the California School Dashboard. Specifically, ELA and mathematics results for grades 3-8 are used as indicators of academic achievement. In addition, California State Universities and many community colleges use 11th-grade SBAC results to signify readiness for college-level coursework, and SBAC scores are some of the measures used to calculate school and district performance for the College/Career Indicator on the Dashboard.
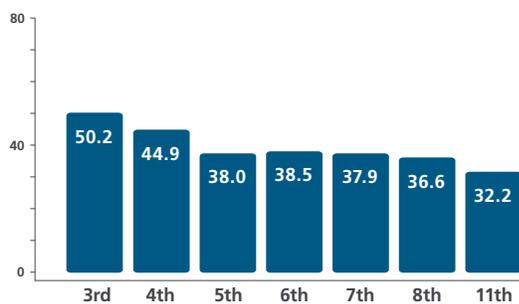
California Student Performance in ELA and Mathematics

In spring 2019, nearly 3.2 million California students took the SBAC assessments for ELA and mathematics. Half (50.1 percent) of students in grades 3-8 and 11 met or exceeded grade-level standards in ELA. Performance was considerably lower in mathematics—39.7 percent of students met or exceeded grade-level standards.

Figure 1: 2018-19 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by grade

Grade	Percentage
3rd	48.5
4th	49.5
5th	51.7
6th	48.5
7th	51.4
8th	49.4
11th	57.3
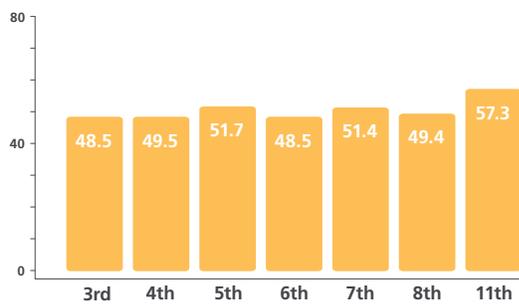
Figure 2: 2018-19 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in math, by grade

Grade	Percentage
3rd	50.2
4th	44.9
5th	38.0
6th	38.5
7th	37.9
8th	36.6
11th	32.2

Comparing Performance from Previous Years: A Snapshot, Not Growth

This is the fifth year of implementation of the SBAC tests, providing districts, county offices of education, and schools with several years of data to analyze. It is important to note that scores from each year represent a snapshot of student performance. Changes from one year to the next do not consider differences in the composition of cohorts of students.

Therefore, while these scores are useful at evaluating how students from any given year performed in comparison to those in prior years, they do not measure growth in student learning. Such a measurement would require a state-adopted growth model, which would look at how much students in the same cohort (grade level) have grown from one year to the next. California and Kansas are the only two states in the nation that do not calculate and report student outcomes with a growth model. However, the State Board of Education has been evaluating options for a growth measure, with the possibility of including it in the California School Dashboard as early as December 2020.

It is important to note that these results represent just one indicator of student outcomes. Change takes time and thoughtful monitoring, and community engagement can help districts and county offices of education stay focused on their priorities and refine strategies as necessary. Board members play a critical role in the improvement process by articulating a clear vision and goals for student success and supporting investments in strategies for closing opportunity gaps.

## Performance by Student Group and Achievement Gaps

The state's achievement gaps—the result of long-standing disparities in educational opportunities—remain troubling. Districts and county offices of education must continue to invest in strategies that support historically underserved students. These investments are a central part of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which provides supplemental and concentration funding for English Learners (ELs), economically disadvantaged students, and foster youth.

Ethnic Groups

In ELA, 76.9 percent of Asian students, 71.4 percent of Filipino students, and 65.4 percent of White students met or exceeded grade-level standards. In contrast, only 40.6 percent of Latino, 38.2 percent of Native American, and 33 percent of African American students met or exceeded grade-level standards. There is a staggering 24.8 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and White students, and a 32.4 percentage-point achievement gap between African American and White students—a slight decrease compared to the 2017–18 gaps. These gaps persist across all tested grades, comprising 3-8 and 11 *(Figure 3)*.

Students did not perform as well in mathematics, where the gaps are even wider. While 74.4 percent of Asian, 59.5 percent of Filipino, and 54.2 percent of White students met or exceeded grade-level standards in mathematics, only

Figure 3: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by ethnicity
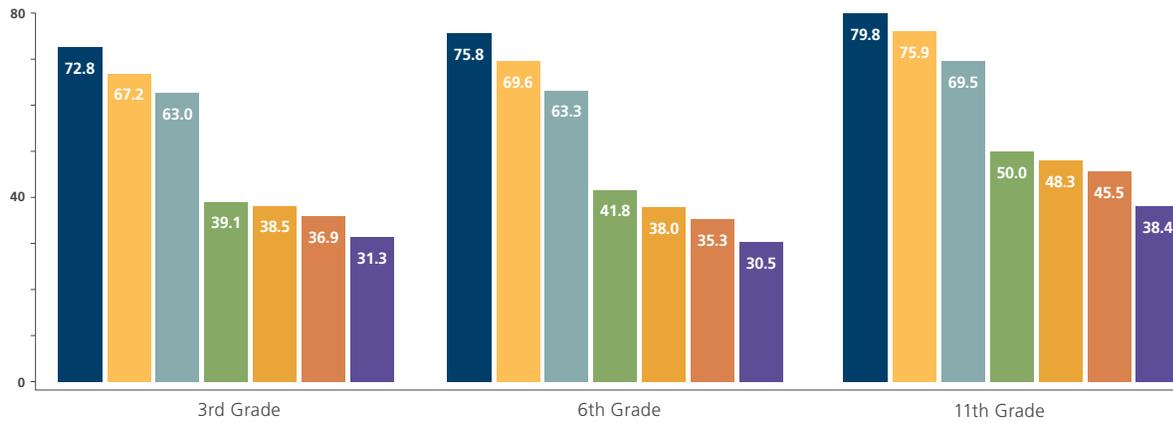
Figure 4: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by ethnicity
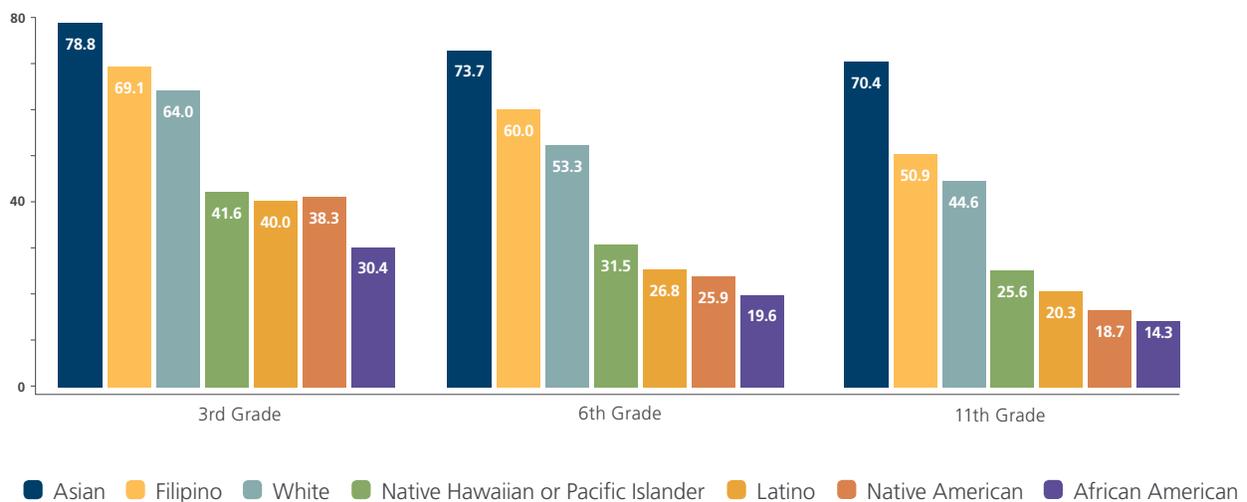
28.1 percent of Latino, 26.6 percent of Native American, and 20.5 percent of African American students did the same. These results represent a 26.1 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and White students, and a 33.7 percentage-point gap between African American and White students—a slight decrease compared to the 2017–18 gaps *(Figure 4)*.

English Learners

The academic achievement of California's 1.2 million ELs is a policy priority within the LCFF. Therefore, district and county boards should have a clear understanding of the level at which ELs are achieving in their schools. The EL student group is unique in that new students move into the EL category as they enter school and out of the category as they achieve English proficiency. Moreover, while the English learner academic indicator on the California School Dashboard combines ELs and reclassified fluent English proficient students (RFEPs) within the past four years, boards should consider the achievement of ELs and RFEPs separately to more accurately monitor the progress of each group, and to ensure that the progress of RFEPs does not fall off once they are reclassified. When compared to most other student groups, a lower proportion of ELs met or exceeded grade-level standards in both ELA and mathematics.

ELs who have been in U.S. schools for 12 or more months are required to take the ELA test. By definition, ELs are not proficient in English; thus, it is not surprising that only 12.7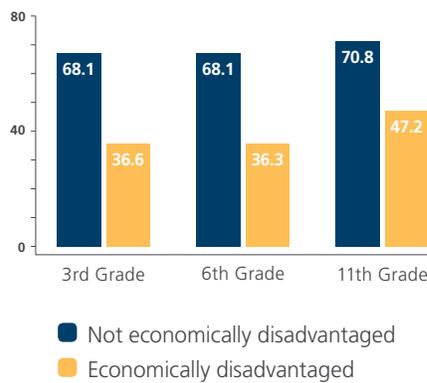 percent met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 56.2 percent of English-only students, and 59.8 percent of RFEP students. This represents a 43.5 percentage-point gap between EL and English-only students—a slight widening for the second consecutive year and compared to the 2017–18 gap.

All ELs—including those who have been in U.S. schools for less than 12 months—are required to take the mathematics test. Only 12.6 percent of ELs met or exceeded standards in mathematics compared to

44.4 percent of English-only students, and 43.1 percent of RFEP students. This represents a 31.8 percentage-point gap between EL and English-only students—a slight increase in the gap compared to 2017–18 and widening for the second consecutive year *(Figure 6)*.

A positive note from the results is the performance of students who come from a household where a language other than English is spoken and who demonstrated English proficiency upon entering school. These are students who have grown up bilingual. In both ELA and mathematics, and in all tested grades, a significantly larger proportion of these initially fluent English proficient (IFEP) students met or exceeded standards than their English-only peers.

Figure 5: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by English language status
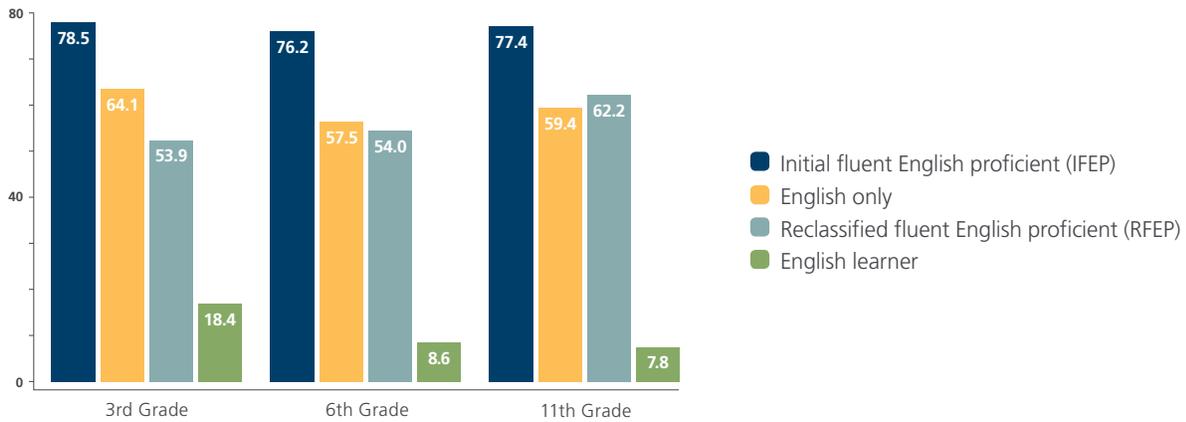
Figure 6: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by English language status
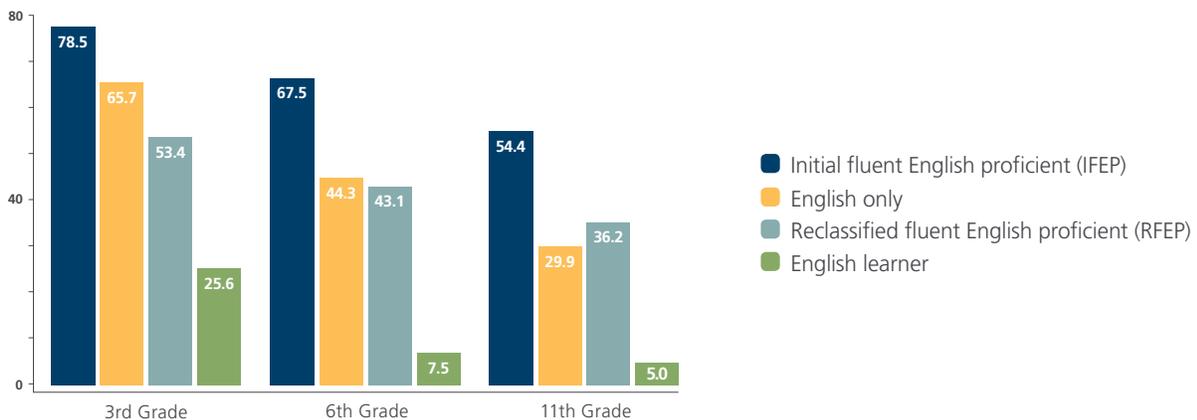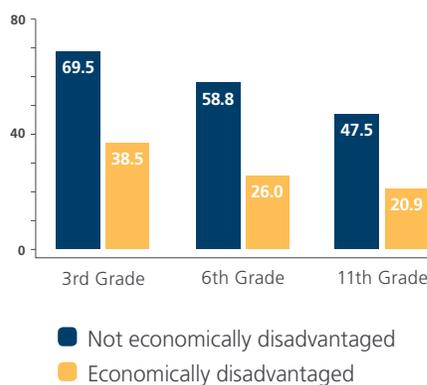
Economically Disadvantaged Students

Also prioritized under LCFF are the state's more than 3.7 million economically disadvantaged students, defined as students who are eligible for the free and reduced-price meal program. Unfortunately, only about half as many economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards as their non-economically disadvantaged peers.

Figure 7: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by economic status

- Not economically disadvantaged
- Economically disadvantaged

In ELA, 39 percent of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 69.5 percent of non-economically disadvantaged students. This represents a 30.5 percentage-point gap, a narrowing of the 2017–18 school year gap and a reduction for the second consecutive year *(Figure 7)*.

Figure 8: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by economic status

- Not economically disadvantaged
- Economically disadvantaged

In mathematics, 27.5 percent of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 58.9 percent of non-economically disadvantaged students. This represents a 31.4 percentage-point gap and a slight narrowing of the gap from the 2017–18 school year *(Figure 8)*.

Students with Disabilities

During the 2018–19 school year, California served more than 795,000 children and youth with identified disabilities (birth to age 22). While LCFF does not provide additional funding specific to students who receive special education services, many of these students are also economically disadvantaged, ELs, or foster youth. Moreover, the California School Dashboard is designed to hold schools, districts, and county offices of education accountable for improving outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. In fact, two in three districts identified for differentiated assistance in 2017–18, were identified, at least in part, due to their performance with students with disabilities.

Figure 9: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by disability status

- Students with no reported disability
- Students with disabilities
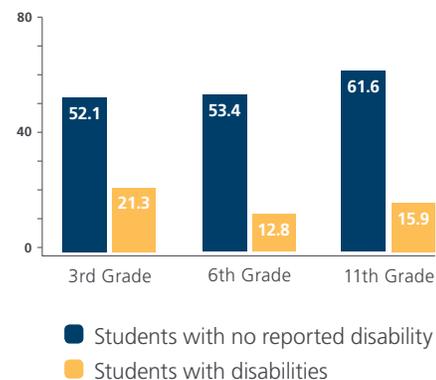
In ELA, only 16.3 percent of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 55.4 percent of students with no reported disability. This represents a 39.1 percentage-point gap, a slight narrowing from the previous year *(Figure 9)*.

In mathematics, only 12.6 percent of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 43.3 percent of students with no reported disability. This represents a 30.7 percentage-point gap, a slight widening from the previous year *(Figure 10)*.

Figure 10: 2017-18 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by disability status

- Students with no reported disability
- Students with disabilities
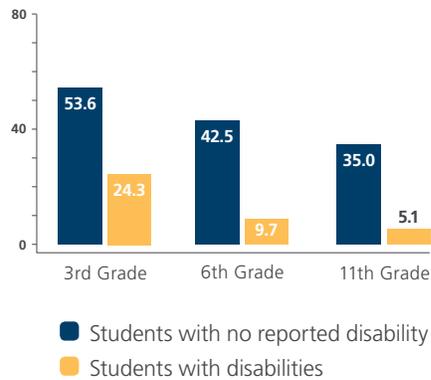
College Readiness

As mentioned earlier, California State Universities and many community colleges use 11th-grade SBAC results to signify readiness for college-level coursework, and SBAC performance is one of the measures used to calculate school and district performance for the College/Career Indicator on the Dashboard. Therefore, it is particularly important that districts and schools monitor how all student groups perform on this measure.

In ELA, 11th-grade scores indicate that nearly three of five students met or exceeded grade-level standards, and thus are deemed to be ready or conditionally ready for college-level coursework, while more than two in three are not ready *(see Figure 1)*. Results for some student groups show significant gaps between their scores and those of the highest-scoring groups. For example, only 50 percent of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 48.3 percent of Latino, 45.5 percent of Native American, and 38.4 percent of African American 11th-grade students met or exceeded standards *(Figure 3)*. Far fewer students with disabilities or ELs met standards, approximately 15.9 percent and 7.8 percent respectively *(Figures 5* and *9)*, while less than half of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded standards.

In mathematics, 11th-grade scores are significantly lower—approximately one in three students met or exceeded grade-level standards, and thus are deemed ready or conditionally ready for college-level coursework, while two in three are not ready *(Figure 2)*. Again, we see significant gaps between Asian, Filipino, and White students and other student groups. While 70.4 percent of Asian, 50.9 percent of Filipino, and 44.6 percent of White students met grade-level standards—only 20.3 percent of Latino, 18.7 percent of Native

American, and 14.3 percent of African American students met these standards *(Figure 4)*. Far fewer students with disabilities or ELs met standards, approximately 5.1 percent and 5 percent respectively *(Figures 6* and *10)*, while only one in five economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded standards.

Questions for Board Members

This brief focuses on statewide data. When looking at local data, boards can ask questions about results in their own districts or county offices of education that can help them understand the progress of their students:

Comparisons

1. How do our 2018–19 results compare with our performance from previous years?

2. What patterns do we observe when looking at performance at the district or county office's individual school sites?

3. How does our performance compare to the performance of similar districts or county offices and similar schools?

Closing Gaps

1. Which student groups have the largest achievement gaps in our district or county office? How does the performance of these student groups in our district or county office compare to their performance in the state, county, and similar districts or county offices and schools?

2. How are we using LCFF funds and other resources to support our lowest performing student groups? Are adjustments to our goals or budget appropriate?

3. If gaps narrowed or widened within our district or county office, what additional information would help our governance team better understand why?

4. Are there schools within our district or county office—or our peer schools or districts—that achieved better performance for similar student groups? How can we learn from what these schools and districts or county offices have achieved?

Planning and Communication

1. How can we use our SBAC results to inform our 2020 Local Control and Accountability Plan? What additional information would we need to use this data to make strategic decisions?

2. How can we share these results with the community in a way that will increase stakeholder engagement, involvement, and support for student achievement efforts?

3. In communicating results, what are the areas of most concern to the community that might warrant further analysis? What are some areas that should be highlighted and celebrated?

Conclusion

Board members should understand the performance of all of the students in their schools, note where achievement gaps exist, and clearly communicate with their communities about progress, challenges, and strategies for improving outcomes. Statewide results can help in these efforts by adding context to the performance of students locally. Ultimately, the goal of using education data should be to support a culture of trust and continuous improvement, where challenges are openly acknowledged and responsibility for progress is shared among the board, superintendent, staff, and the community.

Resources

Official CAASPP Site with Results for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Allows users to compare test scores across counties, districts, schools, or the state on a single screen. It also allows users to view results for previous years. http://bit.ly/35q4arI

EdSource's 2019 Smarter Balanced Test Results Page. Provides a searchable resource for exploring 2019 CAASPP results. http://caaspp.edsource.org/

Assessment Fact Sheet. A one-page fact sheet about the SBAC summative assessments, developed by the CDE for families. https://bit.ly/2F7bWxV

Online Practice Tests. Provides teachers and students access to online practice tests. https://bit.ly/1nMHWZR

Smarter Balanced Digital Library. Offers educators subject- and grade-specific resources for formative assessment during daily instruction. The site also allows users to rate materials and collaborate with their peers across the country. It is available to all local educational agencies serving grades K-12. https://bit.ly/2Pgue4o

CDE Smarter Balanced Resources. Includes information about accessibility and accommodations, and resources such as presentations, frequently asked questions, and fact sheets. https://bit.ly/2PLbPfk

Endnotes

1   *The full SBAC acronym stands for Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium*

2   *All data for this brief is based on a CSBA Analysis of: California Department of Education, California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. 2018-19 California statewide research file. Retrieved on Oct. 9, 2019 from http://bit.ly/2q2C0TI*

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Critical Issues

Why Schools Hold the Promise for Adolescent Mental Health

By Deborah Anderluh

For schools looking to educate and nurture the latest generation of American children, the most recent data on adolescent mental health trends is reason for alarm. American youth are struggling with depression and anxiety in steeply rising numbers. The number of children and teens hospitalized for thoughts of suicide or self-harm more than doubled from 2008–15.[1] Suicide rates among teenage girls have hit a 40-year high.[2] According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), middle schoolers are now as likely to die from suicide as from traffic accidents.[3]

But research also gives us cause for hope. The advances in recent decades in our understanding of mental health and well-being, and the role of treatment, education, and community in that equation, tell us this is not an intractable problem. These trends can be addressed and reversed. And schools have a central role in the solution.

As community leaders, school board members are in a unique position to influence the curriculum, policies, and community partnerships that shape the school environment. Board members' decisions can determine whether schools are helping, hurting, or having no impact when it comes to the mental health of our youth and their potential for resilience. It's a weighty responsibility, and the goal of this policy brief is to offer context on why schools have become a vital link in supporting adolescent mental health, guideposts for best practices, and key resources to help districts get there.

What the Numbers Tell Us

Let's start by going deeper into the statistical trends that have sparked serious concern among medical researchers in recent years.

It's not a new concept that mental illness tends to take root in childhood and adolescence. Longstanding research shows 50 percent of serious mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, manifest by age 14, with an even higher

In this brief you will find:

» Trends in adolescent mental health;

» Leading theories on the "why" behind those trends;

» Why schools are an effective community hub for mental health services;

» Best practices for providing those services; and

» Questions to help board members determine mental health services and needs in their LEAs.

rate of 75 percent by age 24.[4] The CDC estimates one in five American children ages 3-17 will have a diagnosable mental, emotional, or behavioral condition in any given year.[5]

But the last decade has brought a notable spike in diagnoses of depression and anxiety among children and teens, as well as a rise in fatal and destructive behavior associated with mental distress. Consider these findings:

» According to the CDC, the suicide rate for young people, ages 10-17, rose 70 percent from 2006 to 2016 and suicide is now the second-leading cause of death among U.S. teenagers, behind accidental death and ahead of homicide.[6]

» In the five years from 2010–15, the rate of teenage suicide attempts rose 23 percent, according to researcher Jean M. Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University. Twenge and her colleagues charted acute increases in depression, suicide, and attempted suicide

during that time frame that spanned income, race, ethnicity, and almost every region in the country.[7]

» The rate of adolescents reporting a recent bout of clinical depression rose 37 percent from 2005–14, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.[8]

» A 2018 analysis by Blue Cross Blue Shield found diagnoses of major depression have jumped 65 percent since 2013 for girls ages 6-17, and 37 percent for boys in that age group.[9]

» According to the National Survey of Children's Health, from 2007–12, diagnoses of anxiety in youth ages 6-17 spiked 20 percent, and anxiety is now the leading cause of mental distress among American children.[10]

» A study of 10,000 youth found that two-thirds of adolescents who developed alcohol or substance use disorders had also experienced at least one mental health disorder.[11] There is a clear connection between several mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, and substance use.

» Intentional nonsuicidal self-injury behaviors such as cutting, burning, pulling hair, and other physical self-harm can occur in the early grades, though it typically begins in middle-adolescence. While studies find that between 12–24 percent of young people have self-injured, about one in four report injuring themselves only once. About 6–8 percent of children and young adults experience it as a chronic issue.[12]

» Prior to 2009, American girls ages 10 to 14 sought emergency room treatment for self-inflicted injuries at a relatively stable rate. Since 2009, however, the rate has increased by 19 percent per year, surpassing the pace for any other group.[13]

Small Shoulders, Mounting Pressures

Why are so many young people in emotional crisis? Researchers cite a web of factors that contribute to a uniquely stressful environment for this tech-savvy generation.

For some children, the answer lies partly in genetics. Just as with many forms of physical illness, genetic factors can make a child more likely to develop a serious brain illness, and more susceptible to environmental triggers for that illness. Even then, genetics do not have to define the ultimate course of the illness. With early diagnosis and appropriate treatment, young people can learn to live with and manage a serious mental illness, much like many other serious physical conditions. But research also shows causal links that go beyond genetic predisposition. The following is a brief summary of the leading theories about the environmental and sociological factors contributing to the growing mental angst of young Americans.

ACEs: Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, is a robust area of study that has found a direct correlation between chronic adversity in childhood and later onset of physical and mental illness.[14] Children raised amid violence, traumatic loss, abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and addiction—without a supportive adult buffer—can find their brains "rewired" by toxic stress. Chronic stress causes their young bodies to release a cascade of hormones and chemicals that, if sustained over time, can trigger changes in the brain and immune system.

Types of ACEs		
Abuse	**Neglect**	**Household challenges**
Emotional Physical Sexual	Emotional Physical	Mother treated violently Substance abuse Mental illness Separation/divorce Incarcerated household member

The more intense and prolonged a child's exposure to adversity under age 18, the greater the chances he or she will undergo physical changes that impede the ability to regulate behavior and emotion, triggering anxiety, depression, and cognitive impairment. Over time, these same changes can fuel development of serious physical ailments, including heart disease, asthma, and cancer.

Children growing up in urban neighborhoods plagued by crime and violence, as well as those raised in impoverished rural stretches, tend to face more ACEs, and the collective fallout can be more pervasive in schools serving those communities. These outcomes may range from behavioral challenges in the classroom to chronic absenteeism, which impacts student learning. A 2017 study of almost 60,000 children ages 6 to 17 found that having one or more ACE was significantly associated with chronic absence, and the association is stronger for those with two or more ACEs.[15] The good news? With early intervention and appropriate treatment, children exposed to toxic stress can heal. The damage can be reversed.

Rise of the smartphone: Jean M. Twenge, the noted San Diego State psychologist mentioned above, is among the researchers who see a clear link between the rise of the smartphone and a decline in adolescent mental health. Twenge for years has tracked national surveys that chart attitudes and behaviors of American youth, and was struck by a sudden and sustained uptick, starting in 2012, in the

percentage of teens whose responses reflected symptoms of depression: a sense of hopelessness, loss of purpose, and a belief they can't do anything right.[16]

Her deeper dive into the numbers uncovered parallel trends: A significant decline in teens who reported feeling happy and a significant rise in those who reported feeling lonely. A 50 percent increase from 2011–15 in teenagers who demonstrated signs of clinical depression; a 31 percent jump in suicides among 13- to 18-year-olds; and a 23 percent rise in attempted suicides.

Twenge and her colleagues dug into the "why," and believed the shift could not be attributed to the economy—which was improving—or a sudden increase in academic pressure. Instead, they settled on another pivotal statistic: 2012 was the year the percentage of Americans who owned smartphones crossed the 50 percent threshold.

Her subsequent analysis found teens who spent more time on screens were less happy, more depressed, and had more risk factors for suicide, results since echoed by other studies.

Twenge and others say the correlation isn't hard to understand.

"Teens are spending more time on screens but less time in real life with other people," said Jacob Towery, a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Palo Alto and author of *The Anti-Depressant Book; A Practical Guide for Teens and Young Adults to Overcome Depression and Stay Healthy.* "Connecting on screen is not nearly the same as being in real life with someone."

In addition, social media vastly expands the arena—and audience—for bullying. It plays on adolescent insecurities by creating a platform for communication measured in likes and shares—one that makes acutely clear who is being left out. Finally, the lure of 24/7 connection keeps some kids on screen and sleepless late into the night, a major risk factor for depression.

Twenge and other researchers are quick to note that smartphones also have opened children's worlds in positive ways and that not all screen time is bad. Research shows limiting phone use to about an hour a day is not associated with the unhealthy impacts cited in the studies.

Unrealistic expectations: A third broad body of reasoning for the rising tide of depression and anxiety is the recognition that today's children are being raised in hypercompetitive environments. Being on the college track increasingly means taking a heavy load of Advanced Placement courses and the hours of nightly homework that come with them. Excelling at sports means making both the school team and club team. What used to be unstructured downtime is now crowded with extracurricular activities.

And all that time on screen adds to the pressure: Social media can feed on students' insecurities by barraging them with updates on the activities and accomplishments of peers that often seem unrelentingly rosy when viewed from the outside.

The thinking here—similar to the ACEs research—is that the sustained accumulation of stress is having long-term effects on developing young brains. And that the impacts are exacerbated by the caffeinated drinks and other stimulants some high achievers are using to get through the day.

Here, too, researchers say lack of sleep—in this case associated with packed schedules and late nights of homework—is undermining student mental health.

"We know much more about sleep and its connection to mental illness than ever before," said Denise Pope, a senior lecturer at Stanford University and co-founder of Challenge Success, a research organization that works with schools and families to create a more balanced approach to learning. "We always knew if you had depression or anxiety, you had trouble sleeping. Now we can show a bilateral relationship. Students are more likely to have suicidal thoughts [with] sleep deprivation."

Further complicating the dynamic: Even as kids feel compelled to compete at higher levels, researchers say many teens today lack the coping skills to deal with setbacks.[17] Experts cite various reasons for the shift, from adults who do not adequately prepare children for how to handle setbacks to—yet again—the social media-fueled perception that one's peers are somehow happier and more successful. For this group, when setbacks do come, they can feel overwhelming.

Why Should Schools Get Involved in Mental Health?

So, where do schools fit into all this? And can they really take on mental health, given all the other responsibilities? These are natural questions for those dedicated to ensuring the education of a diverse and dynamic student body.

With the passage of Assembly Bill 114 (2011), school districts became solely responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities receive special education and related services, including mental health services. A student may qualify for special education services under the category of emotional disturbance when a student exhibits a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression over a long period of time and to a marked degree such that it adversely affects a child's performance (Cal. Ed. Code § 56026; Title 5, CCR § 3030). For Lisa Warhuus, interim director of Alameda County's Center for Healthy Schools and Communities, the answer is equally straightforward:

"Research shows that mental health, social-emotional health, and wellness impact learning. When youth are healthy and resilient, they are more prepared to access their education. They are able to learn," said Warhuus, whose county-run department partners with school districts throughout Alameda County to provide a full array of mental and physical health services on campus.

"The other thing positive mental health does is impact the school environment," she said. "When youth and families are in a good state of mental health, that gets reflected in the environment. Students are happier and healthier. Teachers are happier and healthier—because teachers struggle when their students have poor mental health."

That sentiment is echoed by researchers with the University of Maryland's Center for School Mental Health (CSMH). Students with unmet mental health needs often struggle with their schoolwork and negatively impact the classroom environment. With an estimated one in five students living with a mental illness and one in 10 experiencing challenges because of a mental health issue, the CSMH's researchers argue, schools have a real stake in ensuring their health needs are met.[18]

As it is, only a third of children and teens diagnosed with mental illness receive treatment, according to research compiled by the center. And 70 percent of youth who do receive treatment do so in a school setting.[19]

The CSMH, which works to identify and disseminate best practices in school mental health programs, cites reams of research findings that support the integration of mental health into education, as part of a broader community partnership. Among them:

» Mental wellness is a key factor in academic success;

» Educating staff, students, and parents in the signs and symptoms of mental illness is key to both early intervention and dismantling the stigma that still shrouds brain health;

» Students often spend more awake time at school than home, meaning staff are often in the best position to identify an emerging mental health issue;

» Students are more likely to follow through with mental health services in school settings;

» Bringing mental health services onto campus enables easier communication among providers, parents, and teachers; and

» Schools that put in place comprehensive mental health systems register improved academic performance, fewer special education placements, decreased disciplinary actions, and higher graduation rates.

Gustavo Loera is board chair of the California chapter of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), a national organization that aims to inspire students to pursue careers in health professions. This year, Cal-HOSA launched a pilot project in 10 schools around the state designed to educate students and staff about the risk factors for mental illness, strengthen partnerships with community mental health providers, and involve student leaders in combatting stigma. Schools serve as a natural hub for mental health education and services, Loera said, given the dominant role they play in family and community life.

School leaders, he said, can "influence the curriculum to introduce mental health in ways that are not stigmatizing, that allow students to examine the societal and economic issues. And we are able to recognize potential risk factors and deal with them before they become a crisis that makes it more expensive to deal with."

Best Practices in Student Mental Health

Incorporating mental health education and services into schools takes planning and work—but not reinvention. There is a basic model that most experts point to as the gold standard for school-based care: using the "multi-tiered system of supports," or MTSS approach.

To get a sense of how MTSS works in the mental health context, picture a pyramid of care divided into three horizontal levels. The broad bottom base equates to strategies that benefit the whole school community. The middle tier is group intervention for at-risk students. And the top tier involves targeted intervention and referrals for individual students with urgent mental health needs.

Figure 1: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in a Mental Health Context

Individual Intervention and Referrals

Small Group Intervention

Whole School Strategies
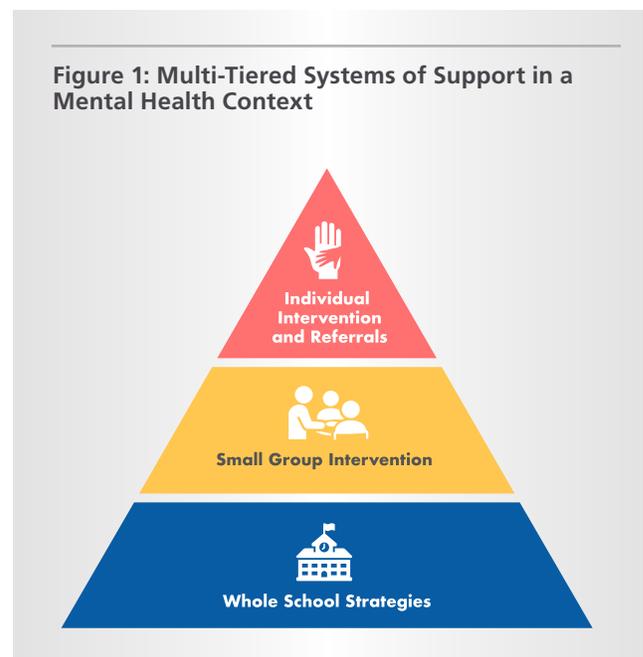
So, what might that bottom tier look like? This can encompass a broad range of practices that shape the school climate. Among them:

» Staff training on the risks associated with childhood trauma and how that might affect classroom behavior;

» Infusing the curriculum with social-emotional learning—lessons that teach students to understand and manage emotions, as well as build empathy;

» An approach to discipline that focuses on personal growth and reparation rather than punishment;

» Training staff and students on the symptoms and risk factors of mental illness, as well as the terrific potential for recovery;

» Incorporating mental health into the health education curriculum throughout the grade span (The state is in the process of revising the 2009 health education framework to incorporate more mental health components.);

» Having an appropriate process for referrals for 504 plan and/or special education assessment;

» A strict anti-bullying policy that encompasses social media use;

» Adjusting school activities and homework loads to reflect the research that shows children need far more sleep than current schedules support;

» Ensuring every student has at least two adult staff regularly checking in with them; and

» Restricting cell phone and social media use during the school day.

The shape the two upper tiers take can vary, depending on a school's staffing and the nature of its community partnerships. Tier 2 might encompass group counseling sessions for grief support, building social skills and conflict resolution, as well as group interventions designed to build self-esteem and empowerment. Tier 3 involves intensive mental health interventions, often including assessments for 504 Plans and/or special education and/or outside referrals, tailored to an individual student.

Key to the model is a point person, or ideally a multidisciplinary team, that can regularly review and coordinate all referrals for service.

Though program details and staffing models may vary, the experts who design or operate school-based mental health programs point to two basic guiding principles as schools, county offices of education, and districts work to build that pyramid:

1. Don't try to do this alone. Partnerships with the county or community mental health organizations are key to the model's success. Educators are not therapists and don't have time to be. In addition, county and community mental health providers have access to diverse streams of government funding and grants that schools do not, and they can leverage that funding to hire key staff who specialize in mental health and casework.

2. Investing in Tier 1 (school-wide prevention) and Tier 2 (targeted group intervention) is just as important as investing in crisis mental health services. The first two tiers lay a foundation for prevention and early intervention, so schools are reaching kids before a situation escalates to crisis stage.

In the ideal models, schools with capacity provide the space for on-campus services and a supportive network of trained staff that includes a school social worker and counselors. They partner closely with county mental health or community service providers who can offer more specialized staff and services.

Lisa Eisenberg is policy director with the California School-Based Health Alliance, a nonprofit organization that works closely with school districts to develop health care programs. Her advice to school officials looking to launch a school-based partnership for mental health care: Do some homework up front and make an initial investment.

"If a school just goes to a county and asks, What can you provide?, that's not very collaborative", Eisenberg said. "A better approach: 'We have invested in training teachers; we have referral protocols; we've invested in these support groups. Here is the need we can't meet. What can you help us with?'"

Alameda County is widely considered a national model for what such community partnerships can look like. Over the past two decades, the county's Center for Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) has built a system of integrated mental and physical health care that now encompasses 18 school districts and 170 schools. The county contracts with community providers to operate on-campus wellness centers in 29 schools accessible to more than 35,000 students.

Of the more than 14,000 students who visited the campus health centers in 2014, about 30 percent were treated for behavioral health issues. And about a quarter of the students who came in for medical visits or health education took part in psycho-social screenings to identify young people in need of further support.

The partnership goes beyond medical services. The county provides regular workshops, training, and on-site support

to promote cultural understanding, family engagement, and other programs that help create a more nurturing environment from elementary school through high school.

"Districts like to be able to contain things within their own systems. It's always more attractive to do things yourself because partnerships can be challenging," said Warhuus, the program's interim director. "But none of our districts have resources to fund even basic education. School counseling is in crisis in this country, and counties and nonprofits have access to resources that districts don't have access to…We can leverage state and federal funding streams."

The CHSC's programs are informed by annual evaluations that aim to answer three core questions: How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?

Recent evaluations conducted by UC San Francisco researchers have found consistent benefits for children who take part in the Healthy Schools programs.[20] These include overwhelmingly positive reviews from young people who said the services made them feel they had an adult they could turn to for support, that they were better equipped to deal with stress, and that the services would keep them from using drugs and alcohol or engaging in fights.

The 2017 evaluation credits the centers with influencing gains on key measurements of school success: Improved academic performance, lower rates of suspensions and absenteeism, higher graduation rates, and greater participation in school activities.

The University of Maryland's CSMH has tracked similar results nationwide for schools that have put in place comprehensive mental health systems.

What are next steps for district and county office of education leaders interested in developing a coordinated mental health services program? Remember, there is no need for reinvention. There are multiple professional organizations and research institutions that specialize in helping schools design and implement mental health programs tailored to individual districts or schools.

Resources to Support Best Practices

ADAP, Johns Hopkins Medicine: The Adolescent Depression Awareness Program is designed to educate high school students, teachers, and parents about adolescent depression and associated risks for suicide. The program includes school-based curriculum, staff training, and community presentations. Training and materials are provided free of charge. bit.ly/2FE82uF

California School-Based Health Alliance: The Alliance is a statewide nonprofit organization that works closely with schools and districts to develop and implement health care services. The organization provides a full range of support, from consultation and program design to ongoing technical assistance and evaluation. www.schoolhealthcenters.org

Cal-HOSA: This is the California chapter of HOSA, a national organization that helps students develop leadership skills and encourages them to pursue careers in the health professions. The organization is working with 10 schools in California to develop programs that expand mental health awareness among staff, students, and community members, while growing access to services. The goal is to replicate successful models across 200 California schools. cal-hosa.org

Center for Healthy Schools and Communities, Alameda County: The Center for Healthy Schools and Communities, a division of the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, is regarded as a national model. The center is partnering with 18 districts and 170 schools in Alameda County to provide a full continuum of physical and mental health care services, accessible to students on school campuses. Leveraging a range of funding streams, the center contracts for professional health care services, as well as providing technical support, staff training, and community programs that promote cultural understanding and engagement. achealthyschools.org

Center for Youth Wellness: The Center for Youth Wellness has played a leading role in drawing attention to ACEs research and recovery. The center's website is a rich repository of research and video explaining the science behind ACEs, potential impacts, and treatments. Center staff are available for consultation and presentations. centerforyouthwellness.org

Challenge Success: Challenge Success partners with schools to develop strategies that promote student well-being and engagement. The team, based in Stanford, California, has worked with hundreds of schools across the nation to design curriculum, class schedules, homework policies, and assessment strategies that help students and families find a healthy school–life balance. www.challengesuccess.org

Child Mind Institute: The Child Mind Institute is a national nonprofit dedicated to research and care that advances the science of brain illness in children and youth. The organization's website offers a wealth of data, research, and treatment options related to child mental health, including strategies for educators. Its 2018 mental health report focuses on the rising incidence of anxiety in children and teens. childmind.org

Mental Health America: Mental Health America is a national nonprofit that advocates on behalf of people living with mental illness and promotes prevention and early intervention, services, and education. Each August, it publishes an annual Back-to-School toolkit to guide educators in raising awareness about mental illness. www.mentalhealthamerica.net/back-school

Palix Foundation: The Palix Foundation is the driving force behind the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative in Canada. The initiative has produced a host of training materials, online courses, and engaging videos to explain brain science and dispel myths around mental illness. The materials aim to both raise awareness about mental health risks and treatment and promote strategies for prevention and early intervention. www.albertafamilywellness.org

University of Maryland Center for School Mental Health: The Center for School Mental Health is a nationally recognized leader in the evaluation and development of effective school mental health programs. The center houses extensive online resources for schools and parents and offers intensive professional development through online courses and conferences. csmh.umaryland.edu

Youth Mental Health First Aid: This is a widely acclaimed, evidence-based training in recognizing and responding to signs of mental illness in children and teens. The eight-hour training is geared toward adults who work with children, as well as family members. www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/take-a-course/course-types/youth

Questions for Board Members

1. What professional learning to help teachers and staff recognize mental health issues does your local educational agency (LEA) provide?

2. What partnerships does your LEA have to help meet students' mental health needs?

3. Does your LEA have a clear and consistent anti-bullying policy? What does district data (e.g., student climate surveys) indicate about the effectiveness of our existing policies and practices?

4. What social-emotional learning programs does your LEA provide and at what grade levels?

5. What are your board's priorities for supporting students' mental health?

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The Importance of Early Childhood Education Programs

By Susanna Cooper

Introduction

Increasingly, school districts and county offices of education that once considered early childhood education programs to be outside their core mission are expanding their focus and investment in the early years. Many are motivated by a realization that achievement gaps are best addressed before children enroll in kindergarten.

An established and respected body of research underscores the importance of early learning to children's later success in school and life. Additional evidence indicates that the implementation and expansion of early learning programs are feasible. In the words of Deborah Stipek, a Stanford University scholar who has studied the early learning landscape in California for decades: "There is strong evidence that early intervention can be done at scale with long-term benefits—both for the participating children and for society."[1]

From the California State Preschool Program to Head Start to transitional kindergarten and beyond, a variety of opportunities and funding streams make it possible for California school districts to play an active role in helping children get a strong start in elementary school.

California's 2019-20 budget, passed in June 2019, includes significant new investments to improve and expand access to care and education for young children. This includes $300 million to build more kindergarten classrooms in order for districts that provide part-day programs to shift to full-day kindergarten. The budget also invests an additional $1.8 billion to expand access to preschool to an additional 10,000 more low-income 4-year-olds and subsidized childcare to an additional 21,000 children. The budget also invests $195 million in workforce professional development and education for early education programs. CSBA will

In this brief you will find:

» An overview of the various early childhood education programs in California;

» A primer on the evidence of quality early childhood education and later success in school;

» An overview of the return on investment offered by early childhood education;

» A review of the importance and key elements of quality in effective early childhood education;

» Information about the unmet need for early childhood education in California; and

» Questions designed to spur productive conversations among school board members and their governance teams.

continue to monitor how these investments impact school districts and county offices of education.

The Early Childhood Education Landscape in California

For the purposes of this brief, early childhood education includes transitional kindergarten (TK), expanded transitional kindergarten, the California State Preschool Program, Head Start, general child care and development programs adhering to state Title 5 regulations, Title I-funded preschool programs, and private preschool programs that serve 3- and 4-year-old

children. The array of early childhood education programs available in California is sometimes referred to as a system, though it could more accurately be called a patchwork, given the variety of funding streams, eligibility requirements, and administering agencies.

What follows is a more detailed description of the publicly funded programs in California:

» **Transitional Kindergarten.** A school-based, publicly funded program year for children who turn 5 between September 2 and December 2, TK is considered the first year of a two-year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum. There is no means testing or income threshold to qualify for TK. Prior to the advent of TK, these children were formerly admitted to kindergarten. All California districts that provide kindergarten are required to also offer TK to eligible children. The same credentialing requirements that apply to kindergarten teachers apply to TK teachers. In addition, TK teachers hired after July 1, 2015, are required to have completed 24 units of Early Childhood Education/Child Development; to have comparable professional experience with preschool-age children, as determined by the school district; or to hold a child development teacher permit issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.[2]

» **Expanded Transitional Kindergarten.** As part of the 2015–16 state budget, the Governor and Legislature authorized districts to expand their TK programs to enroll children that turn 5 after the December 2 cutoff. When children turn 5, they begin generating Average Daily Attendance dollars for their school district.[3] Several school districts have expanded TK to younger children, including Alum Rock, Los Angeles, and Pasadena.[4]

» **California State Preschool Program.** The part-day or full-day program for 3- or 4-year-old children from families whose income is at or below 70 percent of the California State median income, which is recalculated annually.[5] Other eligible children include those experiencing homelessness or receiving protective services.[6] The program provides preschool curriculum as well as meals and snacks to children, education for parents, and referrals to health and social services for families.

» **Head Start.** The federal program for children from families who earn less than $24,250 annually (for a family of four).[7] It provides preschool and nutrition for 3- and 4-year-olds and support services for their families and is administered by a variety of local agencies, including school districts.

» **General Child Care and Development.** State and federally funded programs that provide education, nutrition, and care to income-eligible children from birth through age 12 in centers and family child care home networks administered by public or private agencies and local educational agencies.[8]

» **Title I-funded Preschool:** Federal Title I supplemental funds, allocated to school districts based on counts of low-income children, may be used to fund kindergarten-readiness programs. A number of California school districts invest Title I funds in early childhood education.

Link Between Quality Early Childhood Education and Later Success in School

The period before children enroll in kindergarten is one of dramatic brain growth and development. Appropriate and nurturing stimulation is essential for children to build the neural pathways, social skills, and self-confidence that will later help them succeed in school.

The foundation children bring with them to school is incredibly important, but not all of them start on the same footing. Researchers report that by age 3, for instance, children from high-income families have double the vocabulary of same-age children from low-income families.[9]

Stanford researchers note that California has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation, and that its low-income students appear to have fewer opportunities to prepare for kindergarten than similar children in other states. These scholars suggest that "California's poor performance relative to that of other states lies not in the gains students make from third grade on, but in the disproportionate achievement gap when children enter kindergarten. Efforts to close the achievement gap clearly need to begin long before school entry."[10,11]

Research shows that quality early childhood education programs—using a curriculum that emphasizes play, along with purposeful teaching to build social-emotional and readiness skills—can help narrow those gaps, and that children who have access to these programs enjoy an advantage over those who do not.[12] Indeed, rigorous studies show that quality early childhood education helps build a stronger foundation in language, literacy, and numeracy (early math) skills. Researchers studying New Jersey's exemplary Abbott preschools, for example, found that disadvantaged children who participated in two full years of early childhood education had significantly higher vocabulary and math skills than

children who did not participate.[13] California researchers report particularly strong impacts for Latino children and children of immigrant parents—two groups strongly represented in many California school districts.[14,15]

Equally important, children in early childhood education have the chance to develop the social and self-regulation skills that are essential for success in school, such as interacting with teachers and peers in positive ways, solving problems with increasing independence, and learning to focus their attention.[16]

Further, studies show that a child who does not have the opportunity to participate in quality early childhood education is 25 percent more likely to drop out of school,[17] 40 percent more likely to become a teenage parent,[18] and 70 percent more likely to commit a crime,[19] compared to socioeconomically similar peers who had the opportunity

"The skills gap found at kindergarten entry suggests that California's lag in academic achievement arises before children even enter the schoolhouse door."

—**Sean Reardon,** *Professor of Poverty and Inequality in Education, Stanford University*

to attend quality early childhood education.

Link to Success for Dual Language Learners

More than a third of California children enter kindergarten speaking a primary language other than English, and their proportion of the school population is growing.[20] Their status as dual-language learners brings advantages but also challenges, with many entering kindergarten behind their peers on measures of readiness and lagging in reading achievement at the end of first grade.[21]
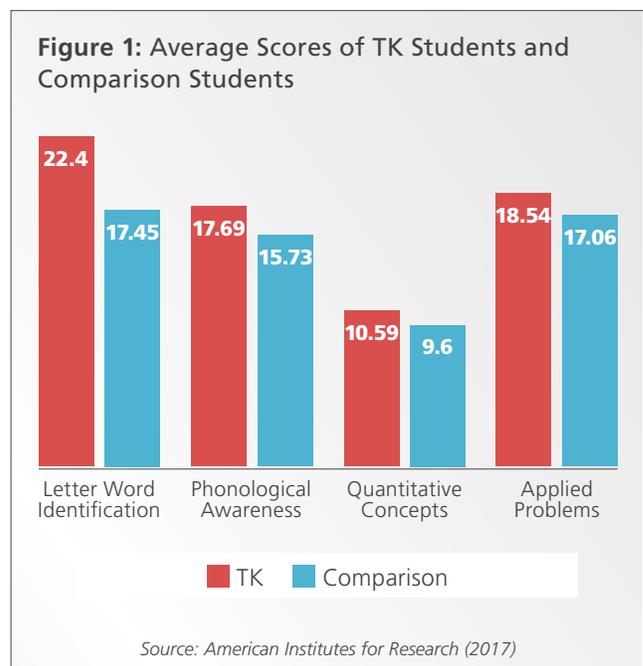
Quality early childhood education is a sound strategy for addressing these challenges early. Children from non-English-speaking homes who attend early childhood education have significantly better prereading skills compared to their peers who do not. Research also indicates that programs that support children's home language in the early years are more successful than English-only programs.[22] Early childhood education programs that are most successful with dual-language learner children have at least one adult

in the classroom who can speak the home language and have general staff who can support the culture of the home. This underscores the importance of a diverse and culturally competent teacher workforce, as well as linguistically appropriate programs and practices, in early childhood education settings.[23]

Findings on Transitional Kindergarten

In 2017, an American Institutes for Research (AIR) team reported significant benefits for children enrolled in TK programs in California.[24] This rigorously designed study found that TK has a positive effect for children enrolled across all language, literacy, and mathematics outcomes at kindergarten entry, compared to their control-group peers who were not enrolled.

The largest positive effect was related to a better ability to identify letters and words in kindergarten (equating to a six-month learning advantage) and problem-solving skills in math (a three-month learning advantage). This advantage was more pronounced for English learners, who had a 7.5-month advantage in word and letter identification and a six-month advantage in problem solving upon entering kindergarten. And while overall, non-TK students appeared to catch up with their TK peers on most measures (except for letter and word identification) at the end of kindergarten, the impact of TK on the literacy and mathematics skills of low-income and Latino students persisted through kindergarten. To add context as to why non-TK students appeared to catch up, the authors note: "It is not

Figure 1: Average Scores of TK Students and Comparison Students

Letter Word Identification: TK 22.4, Comparison 17.45
Phonological Awareness: TK 17.69, Comparison 15.73
Quantitative Concepts: TK 10.59, Comparison 9.6
Applied Problems: TK 18.54, Comparison 17.06

Source: American Institutes for Research (2017)

unexpected that non-TK students will 'catch up' in kindergarten, as teachers may focus their attention on students who need the most support to be ready for first grade."

The AIR researchers also found little difference in the impact of TK by classroom characteristics (standalone versus combination classrooms or half-day versus full-day programs) or instructional characteristics (the assessed quality of teacher–child interactions). According to the researchers: "These findings suggest TK's positive impact for students may be driven by the characteristics that TK programs have in common (and that make TK a unique approach to early childhood education): credentialed teachers with bachelor's degrees, close alignment with kindergarten, and inclusion of students from all income-levels."

Return on Investment of Early Childhood Education

The majority of research makes clear that the academic and social benefits of quality early childhood education are far reaching. For school board members, the fiscal benefits may be just as important. Quality early childhood education can reduce the need for later remediation or special services that are costly to both schools and children. For example, researchers at Duke University followed a group of children enrolled in a high-quality early childhood education program in North Carolina as they progressed through elementary school. By third grade, the early childhood education group had 39 percent fewer special education placements compared to similar children who did not attend the early childhood education program.[25]
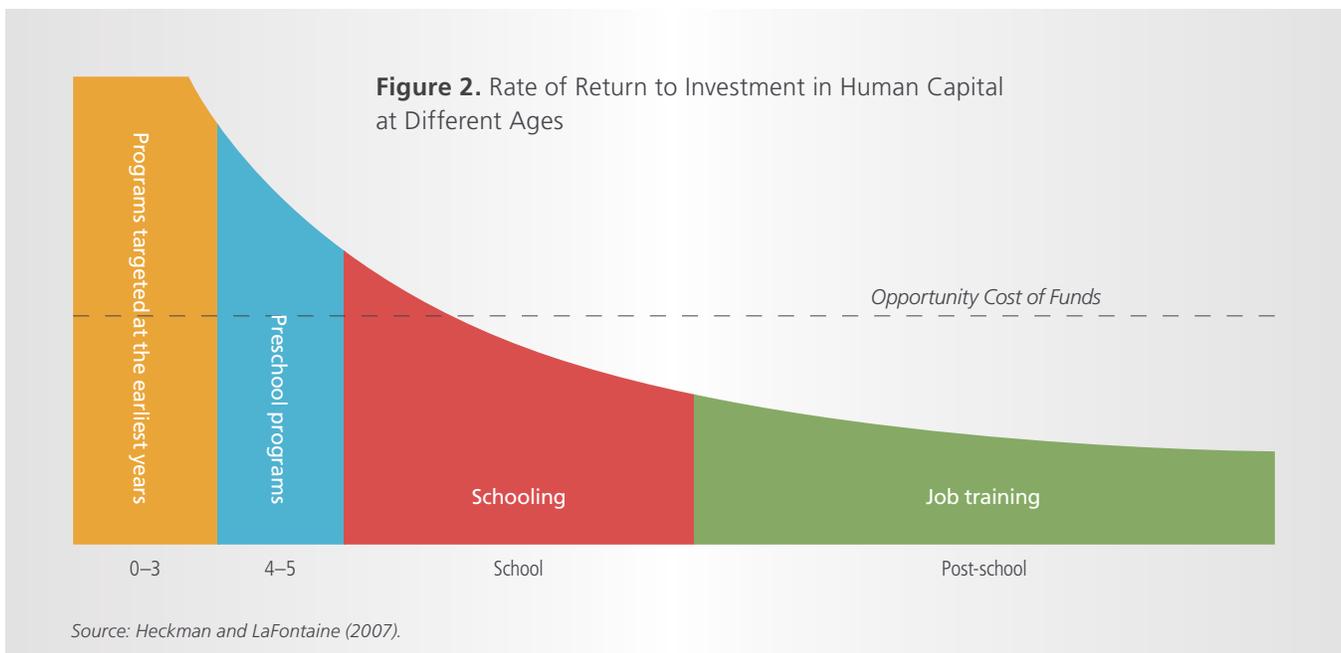
"Early childhood development is perhaps the strongest investment we could make on a raw return-on-investment basis."

—James Heckman,
Nobel Laureate in Economics

These benefits, along with the broader benefits to society described earlier, add up to savings of $8 for every $1 invested up front.[26] Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman has documented these returns, illustrated in the graphic below, to show that quality early childhood education programs are among the most cost-effective education investments that schools and society can make.

Additional Benefits to School Districts

Early childhood education programs can help better engage families in school life and education. Those districts that offer the strongest and most accessible early childhood education options have early learning advantages over district, charter, or private schools without such programs. Those advantages, in turn, can add up to significant accrual of Average Daily Attendance over time, as families enrolling their children in early childhood education build relationships with schools and fellow parents, and ideally with the school district.[27]

Figure 2. Rate of Return to Investment in Human Capital at Different Ages

Programs targeted at the earliest years

Preschool programs

Schooling

Job training

Opportunity Cost of Funds

0–3   4–5   School   Post-school

Source: Heckman and LaFontaine (2007).

In addition, school districts that establish strong TK and State Preschool programs have an opportunity to focus squarely on alignment across programs from early childhood education through third grade, so each year of learning is connected to and builds upon the prior year, and early gains can be sustained or strengthened as children progress through the primary grades.[28]

The Importance of Quality in Early Childhood Education

Research on the benefits of early childhood education strongly underscores the importance of quality in achieving positive results for children. Positive and engaging interactions between children and teachers and caregivers are the most important contributors to gains in language, literacy, math, and social skills.[29] Children benefit most when teachers build on children's interests, provide related learning opportunities, and engage in back and forth conversations—known as verbal serve and return—to discuss and elaborate on a given subject.[30] While many model preschool programs feature teachers with a bachelor's degree, early childhood experts note that other effective early childhood education programs do not. They explain that, most importantly, teachers need a particular set of skills, including the ability "to relate well with very young children who are rapidly changing across multiple domains of child development and know how to embed play with learning. In order to do that, teachers need to understand child development and know what children are like as they grow from infants to preschoolers."[31]

More easily measured structural features of quality, such as class size, child–teacher ratios, and teacher qualifications create the conditions for stimulating and supportive teacher–child interactions—but do not guarantee them. The Learning Policy Institute recommends 10 important elements of high-quality programs that are supported by a substantial body of research.[32] These elements offer school board members and district administrators important insights about effective programs. They include:

1. Well-prepared early childhood education teachers who provide engaging interactions and classroom environments that support learning;

2. Ongoing support for early childhood education teachers, including coaching and mentoring;

3. Comprehensive early learning standards and curricula that address the whole child, are developmentally appropriate, and are effectively implemented;

4. Assessments that consider children's academic, social-emotional, and physical progress, and contribute to instructional and program planning;

5. Support for English learners and students with special needs;

6. Meaningful family engagement;

7. Sufficient learning time, including full-day, year-round programs over multiple years;

8. Small class sizes with low student–teacher ratios that facilitate meaningful teacher–child interactions. A class size of 20 with a student–staff ratio of 10:1 is the largest acceptable by general professional standards;

9. Program assessments that measure structural quality and classroom interactions; and

10. A well-implemented state quality rating and improvement system that establishes quality standards and supports continuous improvement efforts.

It is important to note that not all of the laws and regulations governing California's public early education programs require adherence to the best practice quality standards recommended above. Some school districts and local First 5 Commissions have chosen to invest local or federal dollars to enhance quality beyond the level now required by the state.

Outcomes Depend on Quality and Alignment

The importance of quality and alignment with other systems to sustain benefits is reflected in outcomes for students, as not all early learning programs have shown uniformly strong results. An examination of Tennessee's state-funded preschool program, for example, showed that gains made before starting kindergarten faded by the time participating children reached third grade.[33] A key takeaway from the Tennessee program may be that good results for children are difficult to produce in programs that lack key aspects of quality, or that lack alignment with quality primary education. The Tennessee program did not have all of the high-quality standards supported by research, nor alignment with expectations of the primary grades.

New California research underscores that alignment between early childhood education and K-12 in California is very much a work in progress.[34] The state has several

strong foundational elements in place that increase its likelihood. For instance: Well-regarded, state-developed and approved standards—known as the California Preschool Learning Foundations—and accompanying curriculum frameworks have been created and aligned to the state's academic standards for K-12. These foundations and frameworks are used by all State Preschool programs and in some TK programs.

Professional Development in Support of Quality

Like their peers in the K-12 system, early childhood education teachers, staff, and program leaders benefit from job-embedded professional learning opportunities. In the early childhood education setting, coaching and mentoring have been identified as effective strategies to build educator capacity and reduce teacher turnover.[35,36] In addition, collaborative professional development that brings together educators from early childhood education and early elementary grades can develop and deepen a shared understanding of child development and school readiness expectations.[37,38,39]

School districts can use local and federal funds to support professional learning opportunities. State educator effectiveness funds, federal Title I and Title II funds, and the Local Control Funding Formula may all be used to support professional development.

Link Between Quality and Full and Fair Funding

The connection between preschool quality and student outcomes is further highlighted in a recent report by the Learning Policy Institute. Given that it is well-established that high-quality preschool improves a range of outcomes for students, the essential question is "how to design and implement programs that ensure public preschool investments consistently deliver on their promise."[40] The report further points out that implementing high-quality preschool programs is both complex and expensive and that sustained benefits likely require investments in children and their families that also persist from preschool through grade school and beyond."[41] This report indicates that the conversation about quality in preschool goes hand in hand with a conversation about full and fair funding for public schools, from early childhood education through 12th grade.

Unmet Need for Early Childhood Education in California

Despite mounting evidence of developmental and fiscal benefits, and despite encouraging state and local reinvestment following the Great Recession, many children from low and middle-income families still lack access to quality early childhood education in California. The American Institutes for Research reported in 2016 that some 33,000 eligible 4-year-olds (16 percent) did not have a space in the subsidized programs for which they were eligible. Roughly four times as many 3-year-olds (about 137,000 or 40 percent) who were eligible did not have a space in subsidized programs.[42] Moreover, many middle-class families are ineligible for subsidies and struggle to afford quality private early childhood education, which can cost more than $10,000 annually for a part-day program.

Linking Resources to Expand Access

While a subsequent brief will focus on strategies for expanding access to preschool, there are several actions that districts can consider. For example, many districts have moved to deliver and improve early learning by making smart use of federal, state, and local resources. The most creative among them are stitching together these funding streams to create full-day opportunities that make the most sense for working families. School districts can, for example, serve the same low-income child in a morning TK program and an afternoon California State Preschool Program classroom, so long as the programs are delivered subsequently and not simultaneously.[43]

For districts that operate both expanded TK programs and State Preschool, the enrollment of larger numbers of 4-year-olds in TK opens the opportunity to serve more low-income 3-year-olds in State Preschool. Provided the programs are geared to the developmental needs of younger children and are of high quality, this creates an optimal early childhood education continuum for low-income children.

Questions for Board Members

As board members and district and county office of education (COE) staff focus on early learning, understanding the school district's baseline for such learning is important. To establish this context and encourage an informed discussion among the governance team, several key questions are important to ask.

1. How many children are enrolled in our district in TK (4-year-olds), CSPP (3- and 4-year-olds), and Head Start (3- and 4-year-olds), and how many are on waiting lists for these programs?

2. Have we done any fiscal modeling of what it would cost to invest more significantly in early learning? What could we save over time by doing that?

3. What is needed in the district to increase access and quality in early childhood education?

4. How does the district/COE ensure high quality in all the early learning programs we provide?

   » What are the adult–child ratios and class sizes in TK? Have we considered investing local or federal dollars to improve them?

   » Do we use developmentally appropriate curriculum for 4-year-olds in TK?

   » Do we go beyond minimum state permit requirements when we hire teachers for our California State Preschool Program? Do we pay them a livable wage?

5. Do our early childhood education teachers, staff, directors, and principals engage in early learning-focused professional development on a regular basis, comparable to the quality and frequency of PD that is available in K-3?

6. What are we doing to promote alignment of our early childhood education to third grade programs?

7. Do we have good relationships and communication with our COE and private and nonprofit early childhood education and childcare providers in our community?

8. How do we coordinate with non-district providers, including Head Start and First 5, on school readiness activities, especially in providing opportunities for collaborative professional development?

   » Could we convene them in a joint conversation about our mutual roles in promoting kindergarten readiness?

9. Do we address pre-kindergarten in our Local Control and Accountability Plan?

Conclusion

Given unmet needs and the movement toward expanding access to early childhood education by Governor Newsom, school districts and COEs have an important opportunity to support the kindergarten readiness of early learners. Board members also play an important role by asking questions, setting goals, and approving resources that expand access to quality early childhood education programs in their communities. To support these efforts, subsequent briefs will focus on the specific topics of expanding access to preschool and kindergarten, including an overview of the landscape in California, recommendations for districts and county offices of education to consider, and opportunities to look forward to in the near future.

Resources

» **GAMUT Online.** CSBA's policy tool includes sample policies and administrative regulations for subscribers, available at www.gamutonline.net

   » BP/AR 5148—Child Care and Development
   » BP/AR 5148.3—Preschool/Early Childhood Education
   » BP 6170.1—Transitional Kindergarten

» **Meeting California's Challenge: Key Ingredients for Student Success (2017).** CSBA report highlights eight research-supported investments that can support students in achieving their potential, including investing in early support and services. Available at https://bit.ly/2DKN5Ny

» **Untangling the Evidence on Preschool Effectiveness: Insights for Policymakers (2019).** Learning Policy Institute report that includes reviews of evaluations of 21 public preschool programs, finding that quality preschool programs improve student success. Available at https://bit.ly/2Iu6A1n

» **Early Childhood Education in California (2018).** Stanford brief on California's ECE landscape, part of the new Getting Down to Facts II studies. Available at https://bit.ly/2RorbDv

» **The Impact of Transitional Kindergarten on California Students (2017).** American Institutes for Research study on the impact of TK in California. Available at https://bit.ly/2HDbf0f

» **The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs (2016).** Learning Policy Institute brief on elements of quality programs. Available at https://bit.ly/2GcgHFl

» **California Preschool Learning Foundations.** California state standards for preschool programs. Available at https://bit.ly/2FVrlkg

» **Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning (2009).** CDE resource guide to support preschool English learners. Available at https://bit.ly/1SWlyYF

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