

THE EDUCATION TRUST–WEST  
2014 POLICY AGENDA:  
TECTONIC SHIFTS IN CALIFORNIA'S  
EDUCATION LANDSCAPE



LOCAL CONTROL FUNDING  
FORMULA

COMMON CORE STATE  
STANDARDS

LOCAL CONTROL ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS

NEW ASSESSMENTS

BLENDED LEARNING



The Education Trust–West

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

The past several years have jolted California's education system like never before. Seismic shifts in school finance, standards, curriculum, and instruction sent shockwaves through our state's education policy landscape. Long-familiar landmarks in school finance, accountability, and assessment were replaced by a host of new initiatives, including the Local Control Funding Formula, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, Common Core State Standards, and Next Generation Science Standards.

In the coming years, as they ripple through our education system, these new initiatives have the potential to shift California's focus more towards equity and close our state's achievement and opportunity gaps. But we also know that without close attention to equitable implementation, these initiatives could widen existing gaps and create new fissures between our highest need students and their more advantaged peers. In our 2014 policy agenda, we recommend steps that policymakers should take in four core policy areas to ensure that students of color, low-income students, and English learners benefit from the changes in our education landscape. These steps are:

- 1. Equitable Access to Rigorous Standards, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessments:** For students to gain the deeper knowledge embedded in the new standards, districts must support teachers in transforming their instructional practices and must ensure every student is taught using rigorous, high-quality instructional materials. For every child to succeed in our increasingly technological world and succeed on new computer-adaptive assessments, district and state leaders must secure the technology for the Smarter Balanced assessments, close the digital divide, and expand access to promising new instructional strategies such as blended learning. In the coming year, education leaders must inform families and other stakeholders in California's many diverse communities about the new education standards, and the state must evaluate and monitor the implementation process.
- 2. Adequate and Equitable Funding:** As districts and communities begin implementing the Local Control Funding Formula, the state must ensure the new law is not just about local control and flexibility, but also—and most importantly—about educational justice. The supplemental and concentration grants must be used to increase and improve services for low-income, English learner, and foster youth students at their school sites. Districts must engage parents as true partners in spending decisions and report expenditures down to the school level in a way that is transparent to all stakeholders.



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**3. Equitable Access to Effective Teachers:** California must incentivize its best college graduates, particularly in fields such as science and math, to select teaching as a career. To close gaps in students’ access to great teachers, we must ensure that districts attract and retain our very best teachers in our highest need schools. To transform the teaching profession, district and state policies must guarantee that every teacher receives a high-quality, multiple-measure evaluation every year. And state policymakers must eliminate bureaucratic laws such as seniority-based layoffs that ignore teaching effectiveness and disproportionately destabilize high-need schools.

**4. Accountability for Student Results:** State leaders must streamline our systems of accountability and maintain a focus on strong student results. An accountability system that is fragmented, that contains too many indicators, and that drifts away from a focus on student academic achievement will risk confusing stakeholders and fracturing the public’s understanding of school success.

Every day, our children come to school with hopes and dreams of college and career success. Their racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity represent our state’s greatest advantages in our increasingly competitive and globalized economy. More than any generation that preceded them, their future career success hinges on their prospects of attending college and completing a degree.

In 2014, we once again look forward to working to create the policy changes necessary to transform our children’s dreams into realities.

Arun Ramanathan, Ed.D.  
Executive Director





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# 1

ALL STUDENTS MUST HAVE  
EQUITABLE ACCESS TO

## RIGOROUS STANDARDS, CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENTS

When California adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010, it signaled a tectonic shift in the education landscape. The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), adopted in 2013, are a far cry from the mile-wide, inch-deep standards of yesterday. These new standards set college and career readiness as the goal for all students, and they hold the promise of bringing rigor and relevance into the classroom. To realize this promise, our state must support educators, students, and parents in every district and community as they begin implementation. Without a focus on equity during this transition period, implementation of the standards may widen existing gaps in academic access and opportunity rather than close them.

To equitably implement the new standards, we must provide high-quality professional learning opportunities for all staff, provide rigorous instructional materials to classrooms, secure technology for new assessments and 21st century instruction, educate families and other stakeholders about the benefits of the new standards, and evaluate and monitor the implementation process. Taken together, these components will ensure all students in our state get access to the rigorous instruction and assessments that will prepare them for both college and career success.

In order to ensure equitable access to rigorous standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments, we recommend that state leaders:

**1** **Ensure equitable and effective implementation of the new standards, including the Common Core English-language arts (ELA) and math standards, NGSS, and English-language development (ELD) standards.**

In the next several budget years, the state should increase funding for professional development, technology, and instructional materials; oversee the effective use of these funds; and study high-leverage investments made with the dollars. Further, it should provide separate, targeted funding to specifically support professional development on the ELD standards and the Accessibility and Accommodations guidelines to ensure that English learners and students with disabilities have full access to the new standards. Finally, the state should broaden its communication activities to ensure that parents and the broader public are fully and accurately informed about the new standards.

**2** **Expand access to high-quality instructional materials.**

Educators need access to well-vetted instructional materials aligned with the new standards, including materials that address the unique needs of English learners and students with disabilities. The state should promptly release ELA and math frameworks and support districts in training their teachers and leaders to adopt the practices outlined in the frameworks. It should also review and disseminate supplemental and/or district-created instructional materials across the K-12 continuum, building upon the guidance that has already been developed for materials at the K-8 level. The state's Brokers of Expertise site should be updated and improved to organize more high-quality Common Core resources. A statewide system should be instituted for users to rate and comment on supplemental and electronic materials.

**ONLY 50%** of districts have identified strategies and resources to support English learners' transition to the Common Core.

—According to a 2013 Common Core implementation survey conducted by California County Superintendents Educational Services Association

**3** **Invest in instructional models that promote deeper, interdisciplinary learning with the explicit goal of college and career success.**

The new standards define what students ought to learn, but they do not describe how they must be taught. Therefore, implementation of the standards must be paired with ongoing investments in high-impact instructional strategies that bring the standards alive for all students and allow schools to extend learning time beyond the traditional school day and year. Building on the state's investments in Linked Learning at the high school level, California should support instructional approaches at the middle and elementary levels that enable students to develop the deeper critical thinking, analytic, collaboration, and problem solving skills that they need to master the new standards. In recognition of the increasing role of technology in the classroom, the state should incentivize districts and schools to pilot and implement high-quality blended learning models, building upon promising practices from the field. These models should focus on closing achievement gaps, increasing efficiency, and closing the digital divide. The state should also remove policy barriers to the implementation of innovative instructional models at the local level, including requirements that students spend a defined amount of time in physical seats and classrooms in order to generate per-pupil funding for their districts.

**4** **Support a transparent, swift, and equitable transition to new assessments.**

As the state field tests Smarter Balanced assessments in 2014 and then administers the first official tests in 2015, it should continue to provide feedback to stakeholders, including district and school leaders, the school community, and the public. We recommend that even during the field test year, the state deliver results in the aggregate so local stakeholders can learn how students are doing with the new test format and content. State education leaders should develop a clear plan for supporting districts in effectively administering the field test, particularly those districts that are not equipped to meet the technology demands of Smarter Balanced. The state should also systematically collect information about what improvements need to be made in districts and schools to be prepared for the full roll out of assessments in 2015.

In addition, the state should rapidly develop and pilot assessments in subjects and grades beyond those covered by the Common Core, including science, tests in students' primary languages, a Common Core-aligned replacement for the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), a Common Core-aligned English-language development test, and aligned assessments for students with severe cognitive disabilities.



# 2

ALL STUDENTS MUST  
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## ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE FUNDING

In July 2013, California dramatically reformed the way it funds school districts. The new finance system, called Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), provides districts with increased base funding and additional supplemental and concentration grants targeted to support the needs of low-income students, English learners, and foster youth.

LCFF will only improve educational outcomes for California's most underserved learners if the law is implemented equitably. We must ensure that supplemental and concentration funds reach the schools and classrooms serving the 3.7 million California students who are low income, learning English, or in foster care. We must also ensure that this funding is invested

in effective strategies to close opportunity and achievement gaps.

In the first years of LCFF implementation, parent and student groups, educators, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders will be critical to local implementation of the law, starting with the development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). This year, we will be working with partners throughout the state to make sure the promise of LCFF becomes a reality at the local level. At the state level, we will work with the Legislature and the State Board of Education to ensure that the final regulations for LCFF truly balance local flexibility with equity.



When LCFF is fully implemented, school districts will receive an average of **\$3,000** more per pupil than they received in 2012-13.



In order to ensure that California's students have equitable access to school funding, we recommend that state leaders:

**1** At the state level, report base revenues separate from supplemental and concentration grants.

Unfortunately, the public does not yet have the full fiscal transparency necessary to see how LCFF funding flows from the state to districts. The state should appropriate LCFF funding as multiple line items, with supplemental and concentration grants, at minimum, coded and reported separately from other funds such as base grants and grade-level add-ons. This will offer the public full transparency into how much LCFF funding each district is generating and for what purposes. To support this, the California Department of Education should make the necessary changes to school accounting codes. These codes will also help districts track and report LCFF expenditures for high-need students.

**2** Make school expenditures and plans transparent to the public.

Because LCFF funds are taxpayer dollars, the public has the right to know how they are appropriated and spent at each school site. Although districts are only required to report LCFF spending districtwide, district leaders should go further by reporting total LCFF funding by school, along with details on school-level services and programs supported by supplemental and concentration grants. To ensure that data are reported accurately and fairly, districts should account for actual teacher salaries rather than issuing reports that assume each teacher earns the average district salary.

**3** Centralize and share LCAPs and budgets at the state level.

The California Department of Education is statutorily required to post links to all LCAPs on its website. We recommend that, along with these plans, the Department post links to accompanying budgets. We support the State Board of Education's plan to develop future iterations of the LCAP template as a standardized electronic form, and we encourage them to do this swiftly and to also make these data accessible through a searchable online database.

**4** Assess parent and community involvement in the LCAP and budget processes and disseminate best practices.

California should monitor and assess the effectiveness of legally required parent and community engagement during the early years of LCFF implementation. As part of this, the state should fund and conduct a comprehensive study of parent and community involvement in the LCAP and budget planning processes in a sample of districts and counties across the state to identify best practices and areas for improvement. Based on the results, the Legislature and State Board of Education should refine guidelines and regulations for meaningful parent and community involvement.

**5** Hold districts accountable for spending dollars effectively and equitably.

LCFF will be a success if and when student achievement and other related outcomes improve. In 2014, state leaders must develop the elements of the law's accountability, support, and intervention mechanisms. By October 2015, the State Board of Education must adopt evaluation rubrics that: 1) allow districts to self-assess their strengths and weaknesses, 2) allow County Offices of Education to determine whether districts have met their targets or instead need support, and 3) allow the State Superintendent of Instruction to determine if a district is persistently failing and needs intervention. We recommend that these rubrics, especially the intervention rubric, include strong standards for performance and prioritize academic achievement and progress for all student subgroups. In the cases where districts are assigned support through the California Collaborative for Education Excellence, a newly formed entity created by the LCFF law, state priority areas related to academic achievement should be prioritized.



# 3

ALL STUDENTS MUST HAVE  
EQUITABLE ACCESS TO

## EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

California's most vulnerable students are disproportionately taught by less effective teachers, and they often attend schools with a revolving door of teachers and administrators. This is no accident. State laws promote unfair local practices such as seniority-based layoffs, which force districts to lay off the most recently hired teachers when reductions are necessary. Laws like this protect the status quo to the detriment of high-poverty students and communities.

For several years now, there has been heated debate in Sacramento around whether and how these laws, as well as laws governing the teacher evaluation system, should be fixed. Too often, opinion-makers characterize these discussions as pitting adult interests against student interests. We believe that changes to one-size-fits-all laws that mandate bureaucratic processes such as seniority-based layoffs are in the interests of both students and teachers.

Both our research and a rising chorus of teacher voices tell us that educators want to improve their craft and stay in the profession and that they welcome the implementation of multiple-

measure evaluation systems. We also believe that many educators want to work and stay in our highest need schools and neighborhoods.

Our state and district leaders should build upon this enthusiasm. California should reform our state's teacher evaluation laws and incentivize our most effective teachers to work in our highest need schools and communities. Particularly as baby boomers retire, state and district leaders must draw new college graduates into teaching careers. In our increasingly diverse state, they must, in particular, focus on attracting our best and brightest college graduates of color into teaching. Education leaders must improve working conditions in high-need schools by creating stable, supportive, and collaborative work environments. To that end, state leaders must stop forcing district leaders to send pink slips to great but less experienced teachers while retaining less effective teachers with more seniority. And our laws that make it nearly impossible to dismiss even a grossly ineffective teacher must be changed.

In doing so, we can offer every student access to great teachers.

 **74%** of teachers piloting multiple-measure evaluation and support programs agreed that the new evaluation process is useful to them.



In order to ensure equitable access to great teachers, we recommend that state leaders:

**1** Create incentives for teachers to enter the profession, work at high-poverty schools, and teach hard-to-staff subject areas.

Although California is producing enough new teachers each year to fill vacancies, there are breaks and leaks in the pipeline. Many high-poverty schools face shortages of teachers, and some subject areas such as special education and the science, technology, engineering, and math (“STEM”) fields are particularly hard to staff. California needs to invest in building a stronger teacher pipeline, with a focus on bringing effective teachers and those with specialized content knowledge into the neediest neighborhoods. Expand programs like 100Kin10, a national effort to increase the supply of STEM teachers by securing commitments from partner universities and organizations. Expand the availability of scholarships, stipends, loan cancellations, and other support for teacher candidates who commit to teach in underserved communities. Offer incentive bonuses to teachers who wish to transfer to high-need schools. Expand teacher induction and loan-forgiveness programs for new teachers, especially those entering our neediest schools, even when those teachers may be entering the profession with a temporary credential. Focus particular attention on recruiting students of color into our teacher credential programs, as teachers of color are significantly under-represented in our schools.

**2** Provide teachers with rigorous and ongoing evaluation, development, and support.

We must build work environments in our highest poverty schools that are designed to retain and support teachers, particularly early career teachers. This begins by staffing our neediest schools with top leaders. To achieve this, the state must improve principal recruitment, preparation, support, and evaluation. The state must also incentivize districts to assign the most effective principals to the highest need schools. In addition, every teacher should receive meaningful feedback every year. California should develop a statewide framework to guide districts’ adoption of improved teacher evaluation systems based on multiple measures of performance. State leaders can build off the many promising models already being implemented in California districts and charter management organizations. This evaluation system should be coupled with a system of individualized and ongoing professional development that provides teachers with the strategies, mentoring, and support they need to grow as professionals. Finally, we should develop career pathway programs that allow our most promising and accomplished teachers to step into mentor or master teacher roles so they can take on more responsibilities while staying in the profession.

**3** Require that districts ensure the equitable distribution of effective teachers, and offer district leaders the flexibility they need to achieve this.

The state should demand that districts provide every student and school equal and increased access to great teachers. Districts should be required to develop systems for monitoring the distribution of teachers by effectiveness, not just experience and credentials, and they should be required to incorporate these data into their Local Control and Accountability Plans as part of the “basic services” priority area. In order to ensure a fair distribution of high-quality teachers, the state should remove provisions in state law that require districts to base staff placement, layoff, and tenure decisions solely on years of experience. Districts should be tasked with developing multiple-measure evaluation systems, and they should use the resulting teacher effectiveness data in place of seniority alone when making layoff and other personnel decisions. Finally, the state should streamline the dismissal process so that principals and district leaders can remove grossly ineffective teachers.



# 4

## OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM MUST BE SUPPORTED BY

### ACCOUNTABILITY FOR STUDENT RESULTS

No policy area has experienced greater tectonic shifts over the past year than districts and school accountability. For over a decade, California has operated under a dual accountability model. Parents, educators, policymakers, and even realtors have measured school quality using the state's Academic Performance Index (API), a tidy three-digit score ranging from 200-1000. Meanwhile, the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)—a central component of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—has determined whether or not a school or district is “failing” based on English and math results and graduation rates. Failure to meet AYP results in a series of escalating interventions called “Program Improvement.”

In 2013, this two-part system experienced tremendous upheaval. Local, state, and federal policies altered and further divided the system, creating four distinct school and district accountability systems.

Let's first address what happened at the state level.

In 2012, education leaders and advisers committed themselves to introducing college and career readiness measures to the API, as legislated by State Sen. Darrell Steinberg's

Senate Bill 1458. Then, in 2013, the Legislature passed Assembly Bill 484, a law that managed, in one fell swoop, to transition the state to Common Core-aligned assessments, abandon a host of existing assessments, and pause reporting of the API. The API will likely come back online after the state has fully transitioned to the new Smarter Balanced assessments, but it will not look the same. Currently, state leaders are at an impasse, uncertain as to what data the API will contain, although new measures will include, at minimum, graduation rates and college and career readiness information.

A month before signing AB 484, Gov. Brown and the Legislature passed the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Districts are now required to develop Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) that map their goals and plans against eight priority areas. The state also created a new entity, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), to advise and assist school districts in improving performance and to help them achieve the goals set forth in their LCAPs. In some cases, the CCEE can also intervene in failing schools. With these accountability changes introduced by LCFF, it is unclear whether the API could or should serve the same purpose as it did before.



### CALIFORNIA'S 8 STATE PRIORITY AREAS

1. Student achievement
2. Student engagement
3. Other student outcomes
4. School climate
5. Parental engagement
6. Basic services
7. Implementation of standards
8. Access to courses

Meanwhile, the federal system experienced similarly dramatic shifts.

With NCLB long overdue for reauthorization the U.S. Department of Education offered states the opportunity to apply for waivers from key provisions of the law. Early in 2013, the Department rejected California's request for a waiver. The following month, a consortium of school districts participating in the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) announced they would seek their own waiver, which they were granted in August 2013. These eight unified districts (Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Sanger, and Santa Ana) are now constructing their own system

of accountability to replace AYP. They will measure their schools on a host of indicators and support them through peer coaching, collaboration, and communities of practice. The hundreds of California districts that are not in CORE are still required to follow the federal AYP model.

With all this as a backdrop, we recommend state leaders streamline our systems of accountability and maintain a focus on strong student results. An accountability system that is fragmented, that contains too many indicators, and that drifts away from a focus on student academic achievement will risk confusing stakeholders and muddying the definition of school success.

## In order to ensure that California's education system includes strong accountability for results, we recommend that state leaders:

### **1 Create clear alignment between California's multiple accountability systems.**

Create a comprehensive vision for accountability, including a framework that describes the relationships between the LCAP and the API and between the CCEE and the current system of Program Improvement. This framework should also address how public reports, such as the School Accountability Report Card (SARC), support and complement this vision. This type of framing would help guide and focus the work of California's educators and would create transparency for the public.

### **2 Develop an accountability system that includes multiple—but not too many—measures of student results.**

We support the expansion of the API to include measures of college and career readiness and agree that we are long overdue in making graduation rates part of our accountability system. And as the state transitions to new assessments, we urge leaders to use the opportunity to introduce measures of both student achievement at one point in time and also student growth over time. However, we urge restraint around combining too many measures within the main accountability system. Instead, we suggest measuring and reporting a number of other related indicators through separate indices alongside the student results data. These measures include student attendance and absenteeism; school climate and safety; English learner reclassification and long-term English learner rates; suspension and expulsion rates; and college and career supports, including FAFSA and Cal Grant application rates. Certainly, there

are many factors, such as the ones listed above, that make a school successful, and it is helpful to measure the most important ones. But mixing them all together into a single index does not acknowledge this complexity; it glosses over it. Further, ensure that any indicator in a state priority area is valid, reliable, and comparable between districts.

### **3 Ensure that the accountability system drives improvement. In order for our accountability system to change outcomes for students, it must include targets that are rigorous but attainable.**

California should establish clear statewide goals by subgroup for a focused set of valid, reliable measures that include academic achievement, graduation, and a-g rates, and publicly report progress toward these goals. District goals, such as those included in LCAPs, should be tied to these state goals. Schools and districts that fail to make sufficient progress toward these goals should receive escalating assistance and interventions. In cases where schools and districts persistently fail to achieve goals, the state should take swift action.

Please join us this spring for our first annual dinner!  
Specific details will be forthcoming.

TO LEARN MORE, PLEASE VISIT  
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