

2013



The Education Trust–West
Policy Agenda

ACHIEVEMENT COLLEGE READINESS
CAREER READINESS
EQUITY
CALIFORNIA
EDUCATION
ACCESS
STUDENTS
diversity
transparency
community
opportunity
excellence

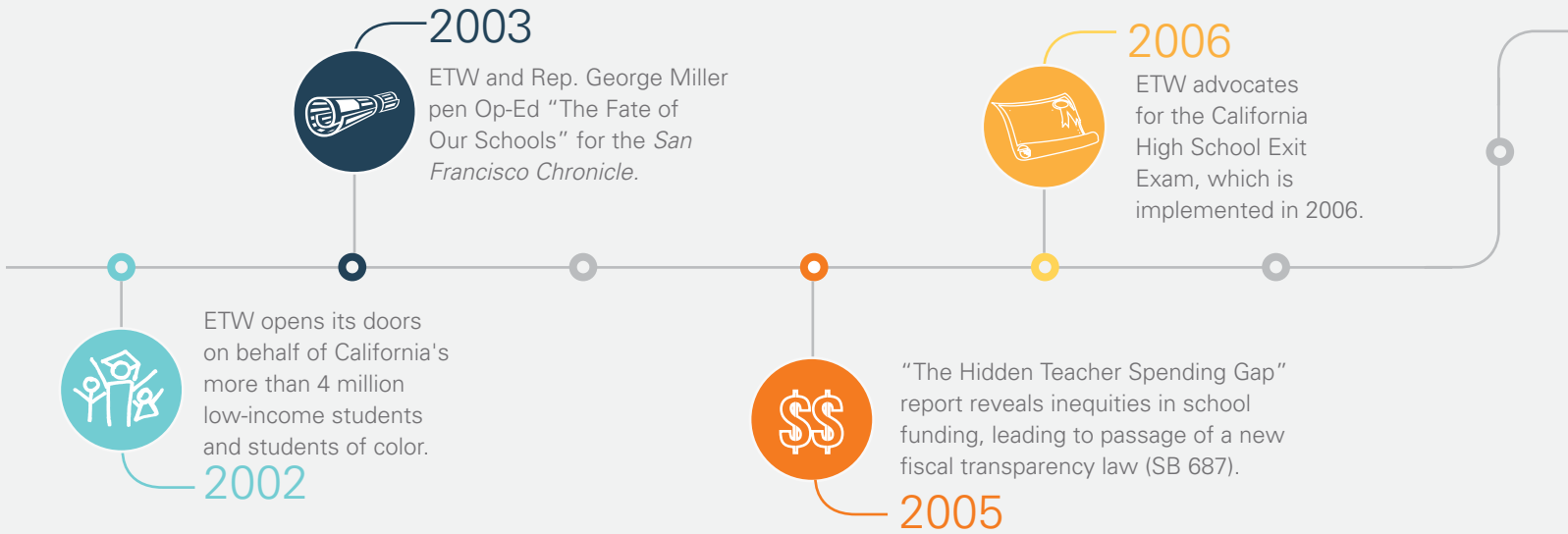


The Education Trust–West

www.edtrustwest.org

The Education Trust–West looks back on 10 years of results:

- We have been a resource for national, state, and local policymakers, providing testimony, serving on statewide committees and councils, and offering guidance behind the scenes.
- Our reports have made national and state headlines for exposing education inequities and identifying promising solutions, and our research has led to changes in state law.
- Through partnerships with districts and communities, we have expanded access to rigorous college and career readiness “a-g” curriculum for over 1 million California students.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The year 2013 will be a pivotal one for education reform in California. In the coming months, our education leaders will be asked to grapple with efforts to improve teacher evaluation; the state’s education finance system; the implementation of new, more rigorous standards; and district and school accountability systems.

Each of these decisions represents an opportunity to further the larger goal of educational equity. Our state leaders, including dozens of newly elected legislators, have a chance to transform the lives of our students and build a foundation of prosperity for California’s next generation. They cannot achieve these goals without fundamentally changing the education trajectories of the students of color and low-income students who comprise the vast majority of our student population. Of our 6 million students, only a privileged few are graduating from high school with the skills necessary to succeed in college. Based on current data, only one in 20 African-American and Latino students enrolled in Kindergarten will graduate from high school and receive a degree from a UC or CSU campus.

The Education Trust—West works relentlessly to change these odds by advocating for the strategies necessary to close persistent opportunity and achievement gaps. With the support of parents, students, advocates, and educators, we are building

a stronger public education system—one that allows all students to realize their college and career dreams. Our ambitious policy agenda is designed to answer the following questions:

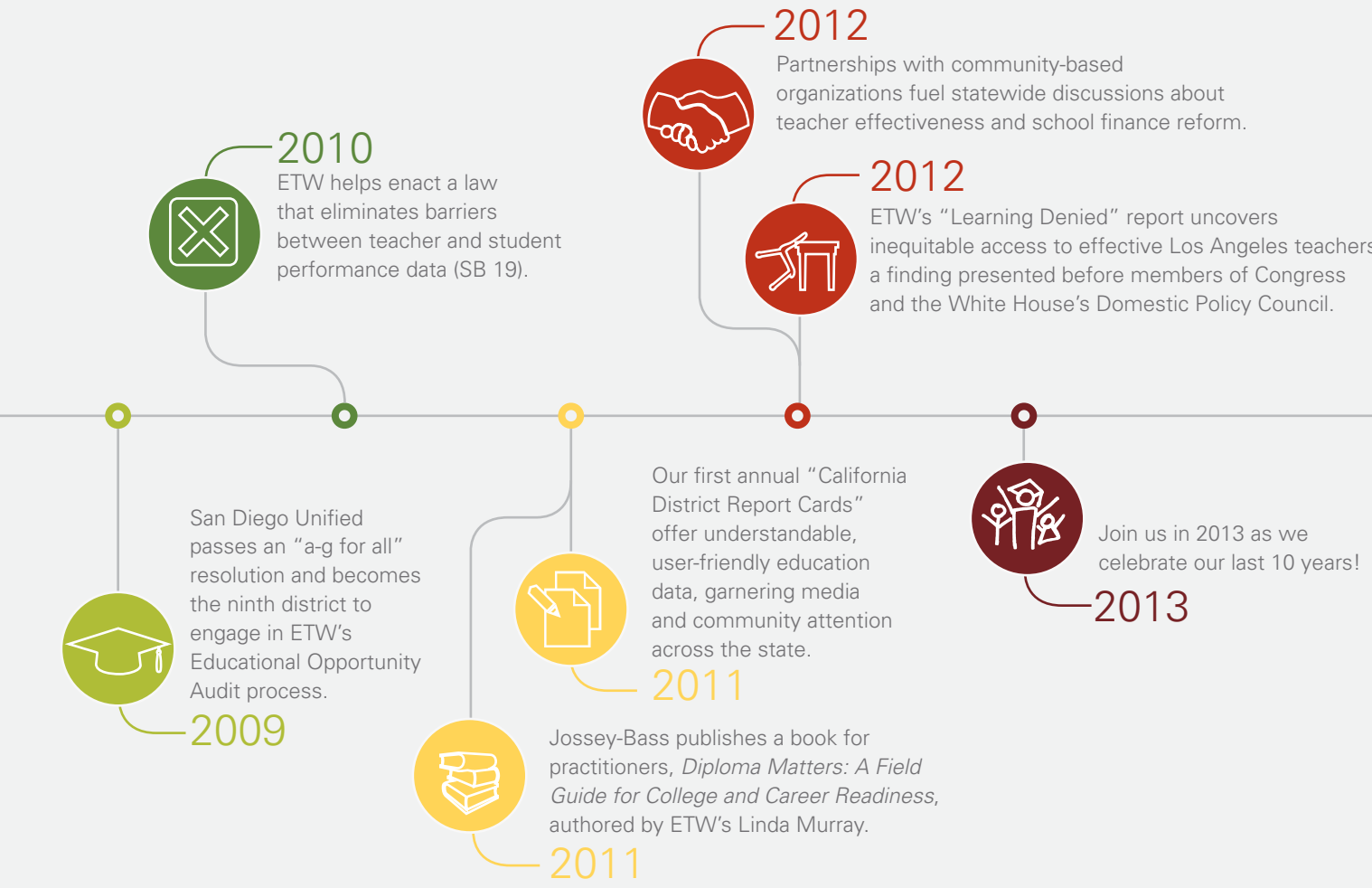
How can California’s education system ensure that ALL...

1. students are taught by effective teachers?
2. schools receive adequate and equitable funding?
3. students have access to rigorous standards, curriculum, and instruction that prepare them for college and career success?
4. schools and districts are held accountable for student learning while receiving the supports needed to improve?

California’s students deserve a better tomorrow, and that begins by building a more equitable education system today. We encourage you to join us in this effort.

Sincerely,

Arun Ramanathan, Ed.D.
Executive Director



MISSION

The Education Trust–West works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-k through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.

CORE BELIEFS

- Education has the transformative power to close the opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other young Americans.
- All students will learn at high levels when they are taught at high levels.
- Great school leaders and highly effective teachers play the most important roles in closing opportunity and achievement gaps.
- All educational decisions must be made in the best interest of our highest need students to achieve equitable outcomes.
- The cultural and linguistic diversity of California's students and communities will fuel the next generation of state growth and prosperity.

WHAT WE DO

- We identify and analyze data related to the opportunity and achievement gaps separating students of color and low-income students from other California students. We work to expose these gaps and their underlying causes. We translate complex education data into easily understood and actionable information for education advocates.
- We work directly with schools and districts to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of reform strategies intended to reduce and eliminate achievement and opportunity gaps. We seek real world examples supported by evidence at the district, school, and classroom levels, and we explore ways in which success can be replicated at scale.
- We seek to influence education policy in California by engaging key education stakeholders, including policymakers, thought leaders, practitioners, community groups, civic organizations, parents, and youth. Our goal is to drive a state and national conversation about how our education system can better serve all students.

1

How can California's education system ensure that...

All students are taught by **Effective Teachers?**

Highly effective teachers have the potential to dramatically accelerate the academic performance of their students no matter what their starting point. But effective teachers are inequitably distributed, and low-income students are much less likely to get a successful teacher than higher income ones, as our case study on Los Angeles Unified, "Learning Denied," demonstrated.

It is impossible to know whether this troubling trend holds true across California, because the state lacks meaningful information about teacher performance. Our state does not require districts to evaluate teachers in a way that accurately and reliably identifies both effective teachers and those who

are failing to raise student performance year after year. Without this information, districts are forced to make key employment decisions based on factors that have little to do with effectiveness in the classroom. Further, districts are often prevented from matching their most effective teachers with the schools and students who need them the most. And without regular and meaningful evaluations, teachers miss out on a critical source of ongoing feedback, support, and professional development.

This year, state policymakers should improve systems of teacher evaluation and support by passing legislation that targets student achievement and ensures equity.

"I give my students specific feedback when I assess their progress and I offer multiple opportunities to practice. Teachers learn and grow the same way as our students! That's why clarifying and productive evaluation is so important for teachers."

– CHRISTI CARPENTER, A TEACHER AT UNITED FOR SUCCESS ACADEMY IN OAKLAND AND A POLICY FELLOW WITH GREAT OAKLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS



California needs new evaluation systems that help promote effective teaching and the equitable distribution of effective teachers. We recommend that policymakers:

1 Develop a statewide framework to guide districts' adoption of improved teacher evaluation systems.

Teacher evaluation systems should be consistent, transparent, timely, meaningful, and fair. Such systems will help all teachers improve their practice, regardless of their starting point, and as a result will help all students achieve at high levels. They should include the following requirements:

- a. Teachers should be evaluated against clear, rigorous standards and criteria based on multiple measures of student learning. Measures must include evidence of a teacher's impact on student achievement based largely on student growth, along with evidence of a teacher's instructional practice from at least two classroom observations, and surveys from students, families, and/or peers.
- b. The teacher evaluation cycle should be clear to both teachers and evaluators so they understand when, where, and how teachers will be assessed. Trained evaluators should conduct annual performance evaluations of all teachers.
- c. Evaluators should provide teachers with ratings and quality feedback that reflect their performance. Evaluation ratings should differentiate among teacher effectiveness using at least four categories (such as highly effective, effective, needs improvement/developing, and unsatisfactory/ineffective). Feedback must be timely, evidence-based, and specific about actions teachers can take to improve their practice.

2 Ensure that the results of teacher evaluation ratings are used to make a wide range of staffing decisions.

Teacher effectiveness must be considered for decisions related to hiring, assigning, professional development, compensation and recognition, and retention. State law should require that:

- a. Districts develop and implement a detailed, coherent set of activities to ensure that high-need students have equitable access to effective teachers.
- b. Professional development opportunities are aligned with teachers' needs and progress.
- c. Teachers are compensated and recognized primarily for their effectiveness, not just their years of service or degrees and credits accrued.
- d. Teachers who receive an overall unsatisfactory rating get one year to improve their performance, with remediation provided, or return to probationary status.
- e. Teacher layoffs (if necessary) are based on school and subject-matter needs and teachers' effectiveness, without regard to their years of service.
- f. Teachers who consistently fail to effectively educate their students are dismissed in a timely, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

2

How can California's education system ensure that...

All schools receive **Adequate And Equitable Funding?**

2013 has the potential to be a banner year for school funding and finance reform. The passage of Proposition 30 is expected to offer some relief to school budgets after five years of devastating cuts. And school finance reform, which Governor Jerry Brown championed in his state budget proposal, could begin to correct profound inequities in the way the state currently funds districts, schools, and students.

While the initiative raises minimum funding levels for K-12 schools, the levels are still inadequate: California ranks 49th nationwide in per-student spending. It would cost \$17.3 billion annually to bring the state up to the national average—almost three times the amount raised each year through Proposition 30.

Making matters worse, California funds its more than 1,000 school districts in an inefficient and inequitable way: the highest poverty districts receive \$620 less per student from state and local sources

than the state's wealthiest districts. Once those funds reach a district, per-pupil spending can range considerably, depending on which school a student attends. But this variation in spending is not clearly targeted to the needs of students.

We encourage the state Legislature to follow through on the Governor's student-based model of school funding—what he calls the "local control funding formula"—because it would remove layers of funding requirements, distribute money more simply and transparently, and get funds to districts based on the needs of its students. In addition, the new formula must be accompanied by strong requirements and vigorous oversight to ensure that the additional dollars generated by high-need students are spent on their educational needs.



To ensure that districts and schools, especially those serving the most disadvantaged students receive adequate and equitable funding, a student-based model of school funding must be implemented along with the following guidelines:

1 Ensure that additional funding targeted for high-need students supports their educational needs.

Lawmakers should require that districts deliver a significant majority of education funding directly to school sites, and ensure that any additional or “weighted” funds generated by high-need students are used to support their educational needs. Currently, the state delivers education funding to districts, which then distribute it to schools. As a result, money can get diverted to other district-level priorities that do not directly benefit the highest need students.

2 Develop a statewide system for school-level financial reporting.

The state should require districts to report to the California Department of Education how much money was received and spent by each of its schools. This information should be housed in an easily accessible and searchable database so that parents, community members, and taxpayers know whether funds are reaching the intended students. The state must develop common data definitions for school-level revenues and expenditures, including actual (not average) teacher salaries, so that stakeholders can make sense of them, and derive accurate, meaningful comparisons about school spending across districts.

3 Involve communities in local spending decisions.

Decisions about school-site spending should be made with input from families, teachers, and administrators from their respective communities. These stakeholders should know how their schools’ dollars are being spent, and could also help ensure that schools’ activities and spending are aligned with their unique needs and goals. The state should preserve and enhance the role of school site councils and other parent committees, as well as offer incentives, such as grants, to encourage site-based budgeting practices to help support community engagement, especially among parents and guardians representing disadvantaged students.

4 Hold districts accountable for spending dollars effectively.

Moving to a student-based funding formula would remove spending restrictions currently tied to categorical program funding. In return for this increased spending flexibility, as well as the influx of new dollars, the state should hold education leaders accountable for using funds in ways that promote student learning. The state should publish school spending data alongside student achievement results to provide information about how effective their investments are at improving outcomes.

3

How can California's education system ensure that...

All students have access to **Rigorous Standards, Curriculum, And Instruction** that prepare them for college and career success?

To succeed in college and today's workplace, students must have access to rigorous coursework, high-quality instruction, and college-preparatory and career-preparatory opportunities. While these may be the standard in some schools, low expectations and academic tracking are the norm in far too many others, especially those educating our state's low-income, African-American, and Latino students.

California schools must squarely focus on the common goal of ensuring that all students have the skills and knowledge

necessary to succeed after high school. Full support for teachers and students in order to meet the enhanced expectations of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the forthcoming Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) will go a long way toward meeting that goal. In addition, schools should end the backward practice of tracking low-income, African-American, and Latino students into easier classes, while advantaged students receive college-preparatory courses.

"When school is more challenging, you can reach your goals."

—A JUNIOR IN ALVORD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT,
WHICH IS CONSIDERING RAISING ITS GRADUATION STANDARDS

To make sure all students access rigorous standards and instruction, California policymakers should do the following:



1 Ensure high-quality implementation of new standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science.

California policymakers acknowledged the need for a new set of education standards and assessments aligned with measures of college and career readiness when it joined 45 other states in adopting the CCSS in English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2010. The potential of these new standards, along with the new science standards, will only be realized if the state accelerates and improves implementation efforts. Toward that end, California's state education leaders should take the following steps:

- a. Effectively articulate and promote the shift in standards and expectations to administrators, teachers, parents, and community members. This will be especially important once the related tests are administered beginning in 2015.
- b. As local school systems develop professional development plans in alignment with the new English language arts, mathematics, and science standards, identify and share the best of these with other districts across the state so that all California teachers can benefit. In addition, certify professional development providers that can help educators teach toward deep learning of the new standards.
- c. Share the cost of CCSS implementation with other states that have adopted the standards, use cost-saving technologies, and acquire funding through public-private partnerships or a statewide school bond focused on technology.
- d. Commission independent evaluators to examine the extent to which the CCSS are being effectively and equitably implemented in the state's schools.

At the same time, state leaders should continue a number of actions already underway, partnering with parents, community advocates, and educators to see that issues of access and equity are addressed. They should:

- a. Ensure that the new instructional and supplemental materials are fully aligned with the CCSS; address the needs of California's diverse learners, including English-language learners; and are swiftly made available to all districts and schools.
- b. Make certain that teacher preparation programs prepare future teachers to teach to the CCSS.
- c. Adopt and swiftly implement the NGSS once they are completed in early 2013, and develop assessments that test student mastery of these standards.

2 Establish college and career-preparatory graduation standards.

California must strengthen its requirements for a high school diploma even as it transitions to the Common Core Standards. Toward that end, we recommend that:

- a. All students are offered the full set of "a-g" courses needed to be eligible for admission to California's public universities.
- b. All high school graduates demonstrate that they have learned the content outlined in the CCSS. This may include better aligning the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) with the CCSS or replacing it with the CCSS high school exams—provided students have sufficient opportunity to take and pass the test, as they do with today's CAHSEE.
- c. The state develops the definitions, assessments, and/or tools needed to determine whether students are graduating with adequate career preparation.

3 Offer a wide array of opportunities and supports to ensure high school students can access and succeed in college and careers.

In order to prepare all students for 21st century careers, we must engage and support more students so that they will complete high school and transition to college and other postsecondary opportunities. We should offer meaningful workplace experiences and integrated college and career-preparatory coursework. This includes expanding high-quality Linked Learning programs and strengthening connections between the K-12 system, business and industry partners, and postsecondary institutions.

Further, we should ensure that students who choose to go to college have the supports and resources they need to attend. These include sound college counseling, which would include support to navigate the application and matriculation process, as well as access to financial aid. In addition, the state could offer incentives to districts and schools to encourage the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and provide helpful data on financial aid rate usage to schools and districts. Too many academically qualified, low-income students fail to benefit from federal and state financial aid simply because they do not apply for it.

4

How can California's education system ensure that...

All schools and districts are held **Accountable For Student Learning** while receiving the supports they need to improve?

Teachers and schools improve student achievement; accountability systems do not. But a strong accountability system gives schools and districts common goals to work toward. It provides schools with incentives for improvement, supports them in achieving success, and offers parents and other interested community members an important lever to work more productively with their schools.

In the coming year, California policymakers will be tasked with reauthorizing the state assessment system, revising the Academic Performance Index (API), and addressing the requirements and regulations set forth by the U.S. Department of Education. Through this convergence of state and federal efforts,

our leaders now have the opportunity to rethink our approach to accountability. This is needed, because while our national and state school accountability systems have focused sharp attention on achievement gaps between different groups of students, these same systems have grown cumbersome, confusing, and dated.

California needs to build a new accountability model that focuses on college and career readiness, academic improvement, and a broader range of performance indicators. It must use this information to publicly recognize and reward schools and districts that are excelling and meaningfully support those that are not.

"Parents want to know that their children are receiving an education that prepares them to succeed academically. As a parent and advocate, I demand to know how my local schools are performing so that I can make informed decisions."

—FELICIA JONES, PARENT AND DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY, FAMILIES IN SCHOOLS



O In the context of current, pending, and future state and federal laws governing school accountability, we recommend that California leaders do the following:

1 Build an accountability system that highlights how schools are preparing students for college and career and incentivizes them to do so.

While there are many indicators of how well schools are doing, the state should prioritize measurements that are most directly tied to the goal of preparing students for college and career. This means tracking academic achievement and improvement data (including closing gaps between student subgroups), high school graduation rates, and college and career-readiness rates. These indicators should be the ones considered when rating schools or making accountability decisions. State leaders must carefully weigh these components so that schools are incentivized to prepare all students for college and career.

At the same time, the state should not discount other important measures of quality, such as data about school climate and safety, student and teacher attendance, suspension and expulsion, student and parent satisfaction, and expenditures. These measures should be publicly reported alongside achievement results so that communities can hold their schools accountable for providing quality educational opportunities for all students.

2 Ensure data used in the state's accountability system meets rigorous quality standards.

Data used to make high-stakes decisions must be valid, reliable, and stable. Some indicators already meet this standard, such as statewide standardized tests and four-year cohort dropout and graduation rates. Other measures, such as “a-g” course completion and postsecondary enrollment rates, could meet those criteria with improved data collection strategies and more rigorous protocols to verify accuracy. However, valid and reliable measures of pupil preparedness for success in the workplace are a long way off. To ensure validity and reliability for all measures, the state must continue to fund, develop, and implement the state's data system, CALPADS.

3 Set goals to improve achievement outcomes and close long-standing gaps between student groups.

State leaders must establish ambitious, achievable long-term goals and interim targets for each indicator used to make accountability decisions. For example, the current statewide goal of reaching 800 on the API is not ambitious enough since schools can meet this goal even if a substantial percentage of their students are not performing at grade level. When setting these goals, the yardstick must be increased achievement for all student subgroups and consistent progress over time. The approach needs to be predicated on the fact that most schools need to improve faster than they have in recent years, particularly when it comes to the performance of their low-income students and students of color.

State leaders may choose to set additional goals around measures that do not factor into a school or district's accountability rating, such as suspension and expulsion rates. The state could incentivize districts and schools to reach these goals by offering grants or public recognition.

4 Clearly define district versus state roles and responsibilities in the school improvement process.

In most cases, districts can and should serve as a first-line of support for schools that need extra help in meeting their targets. District leaders, in partnership with school community and support providers, are best suited to diagnose and address a school's unique challenges, but state leaders must take decisive action to improve persistently low-performing and slowly improving schools. California policymakers should levy meaningful consequences, such as the loss of accreditation, eligibility for school turnaround, conversion, closure, or other systematic reforms. The state should also identify and recognize the highest achieving and fastest improving schools and districts by giving them more decision-making autonomy.



2013

Celebrate with us.

Join us in 2013 as we
celebrate our last 10 years!

As details develop for a
commemorative celebration,
we will update our website.

To learn more, please visit:
www.edtrustwest.org



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