



August 15, 2005

Achievement in California 2005: Where Are We Now, How Far Have We Come and How Far Do We Have Left to Go?

Today's results from California's 2005 Standardized Testing and Reporting Program (STAR) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) show encouraging gains in the achievement of California's students at every grade level, 2 – 11. This progress puts to rest the notion that low achievement is inevitable – expectations have increased, and students, teachers and administrators are rising to the challenge.

While we acknowledge the hard work and progress that's been made in California's public schools, we must also remember that some progress is not enough progress. Underneath the improving statewide averages, there are still too few students reaching grade-level proficiency and worse yet, huge achievement gaps persist at every level between low-income students, students of color, and their more affluent and advantaged peers.

2005 California Standards Test Overall Results

There's good news. Compared to last year, more students on average at every grade level, grades 2 thru 11, are reaching proficiency in math and English/language arts – not a lot more, but more nevertheless. In English, the biggest gains are seen in some elementary grades and especially at the secondary level: In grades 2, 4, 7, 8 and 9 the percentage of students reaching proficiency increased by at least 5 points. In math, similar gains of at least 5 points were seen in the percentages of students proficient throughout elementary school, grades 2 thru 6.

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In these pages, we look more deeply into statewide averages in the 4th, 8th, and 11th grades in both math and English. And we look underneath those averages to get a picture of what's happening with California's low-income, Latino and African American students.

Progress:

At the 4th grade, the percentage of students reaching proficiency or above in English increased from 39% in 2004 to 47% this year. Students in middle school and high school also did better in English in 2005: 39% of 8th grade students reached proficiency, up from 33% in 2004. In 11th grade, the percentages of students at or above proficient increased from 32% in 2004 to 36% this year.

2005 STAR Results by Race, Income, Language

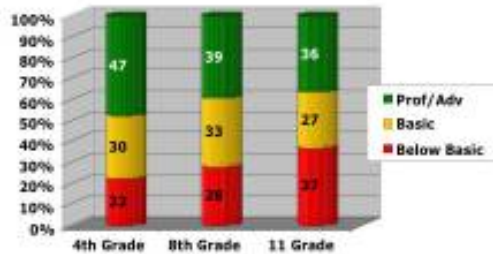
Despite the gains made by California's students in 2005, the less encouraging story is the one we see when we break down the averages by race, income and language status. The achievement gaps that separate Latino, African American, English learners and low-income students from their peers are apparent in every grade and every subject. The litany of sad statistics is sobering.

At 4th grade:

- White, Asian and middle class students are about two times more likely than Latino, African American and low-income students to reach proficiency in 4th grade English.
- Conversely, Latino, African American and low-income students score at below basic or far below basic at about three times the rate of their White, Asian and more affluent peers. Indeed, a full 30% of low-income, Latino and African American students have not even been taught to the basic level.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CST All Students 2005

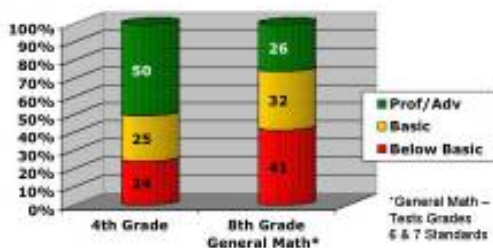


Source: California Department of Education, 2005

Students also did better in math, both in the elementary and upper grades. This year, half (50%) of all students are proficient in 4th grade math, up from 45% in 2004. High school math achievement is holding steady. About a quarter of all students are proficient in General Mathematics at the 8th grade and the percentage of students (in grades 8-11) taking Algebra 1 who scored at or above proficient increased from 18% in 2004 to 19% in 2005.

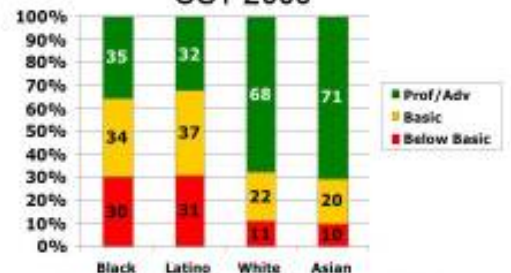
Still we have a long way to go. We remain far from our goal of proficiency for *all* students. At least half of all students in 4th, 8th and 11th grades are still performing at or below the basic level in both English and math.

MATH CST All Students 2005



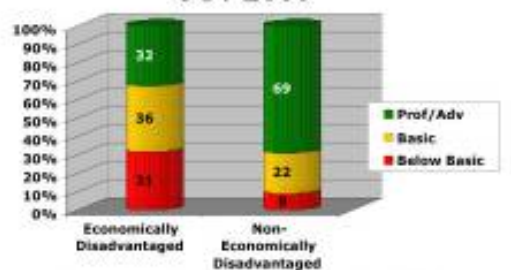
Source: California Department of Education, 2005

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 4th Grade, By Ethnicity CST 2005



Source: California Department of Education, 2005

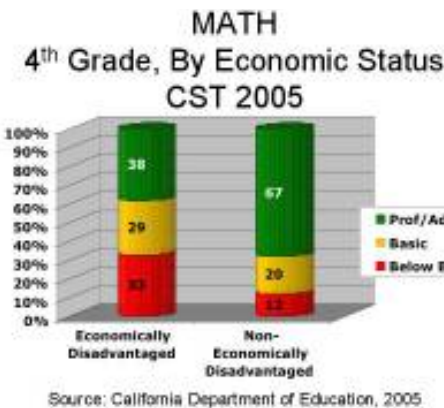
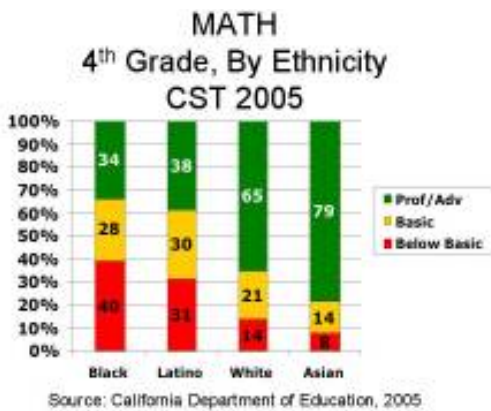
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 4th Grade, By Economic Status CST 2005



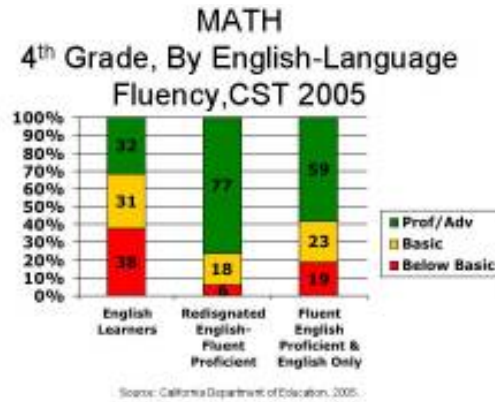
Source: California Department of Education, 2005

The same patterns hold true in 4th grade Math, but the problems are even more severe:

- Asian students are about twice as likely as Latino and African American students to be proficient in 4th grade mathematics.
- A full 40% of African American and 31% of Latino 4th graders are still below or far below basic compared to 8% and 14% of Asian and White students.



- Only about 1/3 of English learners are proficient in 4th grade math. The good news is, a full 77% of students who have been redesignated fluent English proficient (students who were not originally fluent in English, but who have been determined to have English language proficiency in the last census year) are proficient in 4th grade math.



At middle and high school:

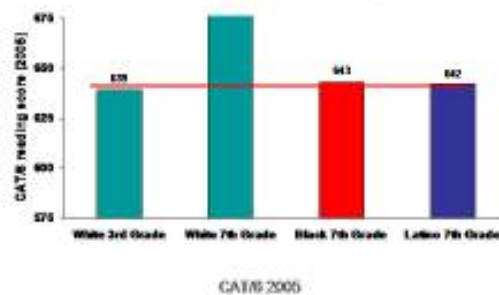
In middle and high school, fewer students in every subgroup are proficient and the gaps between subgroups grow even wider.

English/Language Arts:

- By middle school, the gaps separating Latino and African American students from their White peers are quite large. Indeed, 7th grade Latino and African American students are reading at about the same level as White 3rd graders according to the 2005 CAT-6.

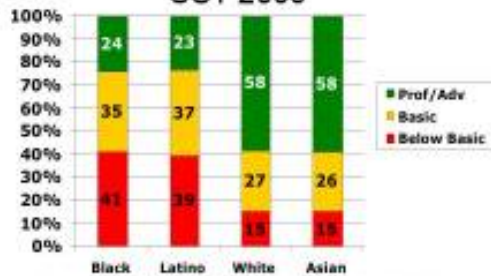
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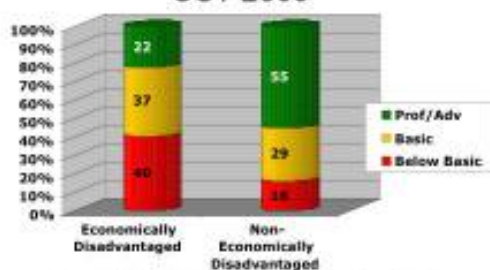
- In 8th grade English, African American, Latino and low-income students reach proficiency on the CSTs at less than half the rate of White, Asian and middle class students.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
8th Grade, By Ethnicity
CST 2005



Source: California Department of Education, 2005

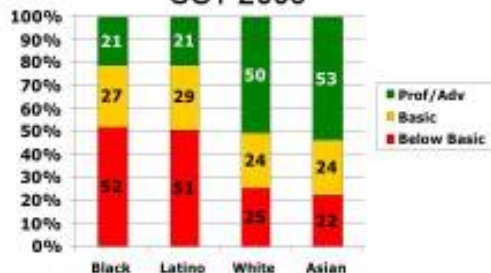
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
8th Grade, By Economic Status
CST 2005



Source: California Department of Education, 2005

- The situation is even worse in high school: more than half of Latino and African American students are below or far below basic in 11th grade English.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
11th Grade, By Ethnicity
CST 2005

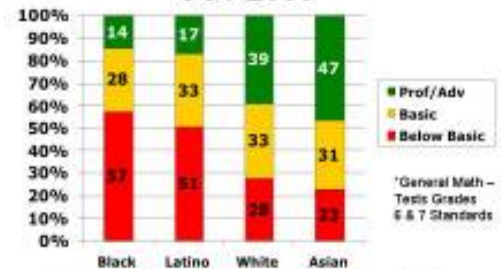


Source: California Department of Education, 2005

Mathematics:

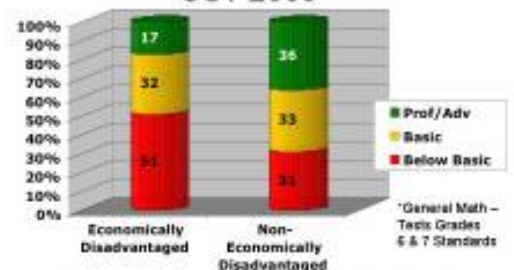
- In 8th grade General Math, which tests 6th and 7th grade standards, only 14% of African American students, 17% of Latino students and 17% of low-income students are proficient. More than half of Latino and African American students haven't even been taught to the basic level.

MATH*
8th Grade, By Ethnicity
CST 2005



Source: California Department of Education, 2005

MATH*
8th Grade, By Economic Status
CST 2005

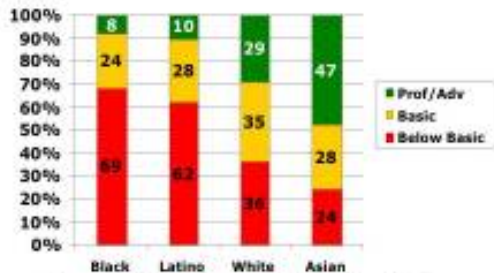


Source: California Department of Education, 2005

- Although more students are taking Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II classes than five years ago, the low achievement levels in these college-prep courses overall, and for Latino and African American students in particular, is alarming. Only 8% of African American and only 10% of Latino students who take Algebra I in grades 8-11 reach proficiency, while 47% of Asian students are proficient.
- In Geometry we see similar patterns: Asian students reach proficiency at more than five times the rate of African American students.

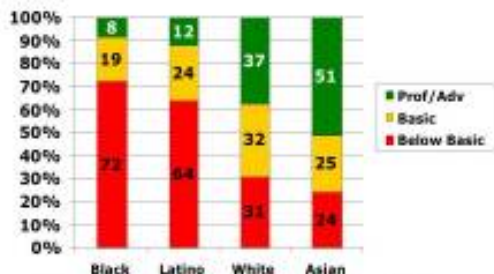
- A full two-thirds of Latino and African American students that are enrolled in Algebra and Geometry are still performing at the below or far below basic levels.

**ALGEBRA I CST (Grades 8-11)
By Ethnicity 2005**



Source: California Department of Education, 2005

**GEOMETRY CST (Grades 8-11)
By Ethnicity 2005**



Source: California Department of Education, 2005

Research is increasingly clear that students need higher math courses (e.g., Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II) if they are to be adequately prepared for college or the workforce. Not enough students take these courses to begin with – only one in six California school districts offer California’s college-prep curriculum to all their students, and access is even more limited for low-income, Latino and African American students. But these achievement data show that even when students do have access to the courses, not nearly enough of them are succeeding and some students are failing at much higher rates than others.

High Stakes Results – 2005 California High School Exit Exam

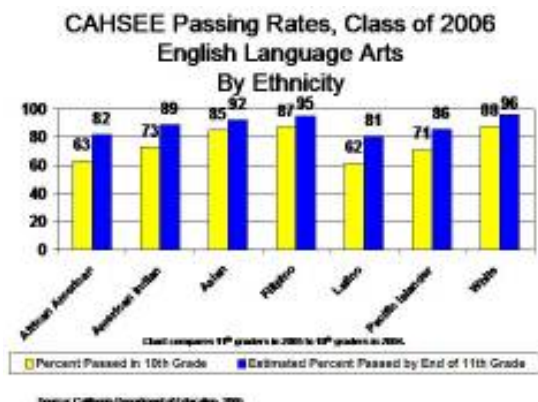
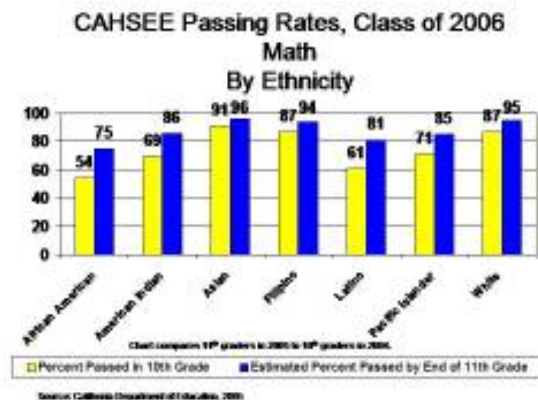
Students in the graduating class of 2006 are subject to new requirements. They must pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in order to receive a high school diploma. The CAHSEE tests mathematics standards from sixth and seventh grades, as well as Algebra I, and English language arts standards through tenth grade. In order to pass, students need to answer 55% of the questions correctly in math and 60% in English. CAHSEE gauges whether students leave high school with the absolute minimum level of skills necessary for life after high school. The encouraging news is that most of this fall’s senior class are on track to pass, and students’ passage rates are increasing over time.

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Today, the CDE reported data tracking the cohort of students graduating in the class of 2006. The cohort is an estimate of course, because the state doesn’t collect data on individual students so it’s impossible to know whether the 11th graders in 2005 were in fact the same students in 2004’s 10th grade class. Still, these data tell a compelling and positive story about student success on the CAHSEE over time.

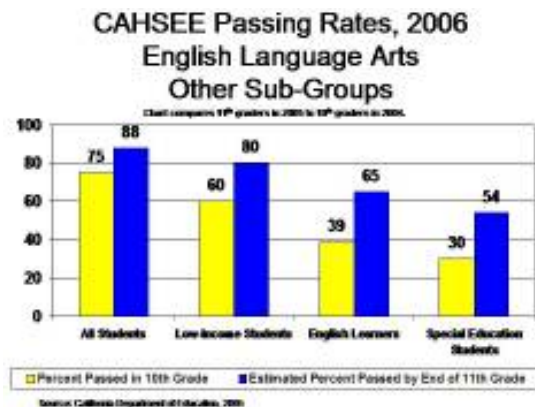
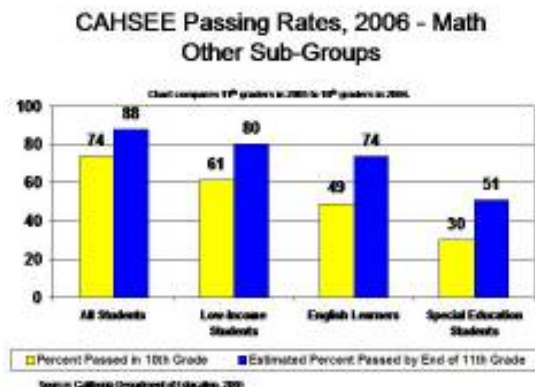
A full 88% of this fall’s entering seniors passed the English and mathematics portion of the CAHSEE in 2005. This marks a significant improvement in their passing scores – an increase of 13%. When these students took the test for the first time as 10th graders in 2004, 75% passed English and 74% passed the math section. Given this double-digit improvement rate, and the additional three opportunities that the seniors who haven’t yet passed will have next year to take the test, it appears that the vast majority of California’s class of 2006 are on track to meet the CAHSEE requirements.

Students of color, low-income students, English learners, and special education students have made huge strides in catching up to their peers on the CAHSEE, as shown in the figures below. Still, there are significant achievement gaps between groups of students, most notably the 15 percentage point difference between White and Latino students on the English language arts section and the 21 percentage point difference between African American and Asian students on the math section.



Low-income students, English learners and special education students also made great gains – they saw 20+ point gains on both the English and math portions of the CAHSEE. These gains are heartening, but the gaps remain large between these groups and their peers.

Our celebration of this encouraging progress is also tempered by the knowledge that many students simply are missing from these results. We have long known that a lot of students drop out of high school in California – that’s a problem that pre-dates the CAHSEE. But we must be sure that we don’t report increasing



pass rates as a result of fewer students. The state taking responsibility for every high school graduate being taught up to state standards implies a responsibility to know how many high school students have dropped out along the way, and it is long past time for California to implement the student-level data system that will include all ninth graders in the cohort’s pass rate.

With that caveat in mind, no one should diminish the significant progress this year’s CAHSEE results represent. Thousands of additional students have achieved up to and beyond the baseline standards California has established for a meaningful high school diploma. On balance, today’s CAHSEE data are tremendously hopeful. It seems clear that California’s high schools are picking up momentum. When everybody – teachers, administrators and students themselves – truly focuses on making sure that all students meet the standards implicit in a high school exit exam, students soar.

Still there is a justifiable concern held by many that state resources aren’t adequate to provide both teachers and students with the support

they need to make quick improvements. The stakes —the failure to receive a high school diploma —are every bit as high as the test critics suggest. But the key here is that they are already high. The stakes for a student who graduates without the ability to master the skills tested in a minimum competency exam, even after several chances, are enormous. There is almost no chance that such a graduate will have the skills necessary to secure a job with any meaningful career ladder, or to succeed in a two or four year college or an apprenticeship program. Before the CAHSEE, those stakes were invisible —except on urban and rural street corners and in unemployment lines. We couldn't assure our graduates that they were ready for life, that they were empowered to choose either work or further education, because we didn't know. The CAHSEE reveals those hidden —and enormously high —stakes for California's young people and it finally creates real accountability for the adults who are charged with teaching them.

Are the CAHSEE data heartbreaking? Unquestionably. Are we happy to see even one California youngster denied a diploma? Of course not. But the high school diploma students receive must mean something. And the lagging achievement levels in high school must be identified and cured. Before the CAHSEE, districts were not nearly as accountable for high school learning as they are now. Before CAHSEE our elementary and middle schools had improved, but our high school achievement levels remained stagnant, and the gaps widened. Without the CAHSEE, far too many of our high school students would have been written off, as they have been for generations. The good news is that since CAHSEE, district leaders are focusing more on the high school reform agenda than ever before. The higher levels of achievement reported this year are a testament to the hard work and resolve of the educators and students who embraced the challenge, kept at it, and exceeded the standard. The struggle moving forward is to make sure all students have the opportunity and support they need to meet the state's standards. Today's results indicate that we are making some good progress toward that goal.

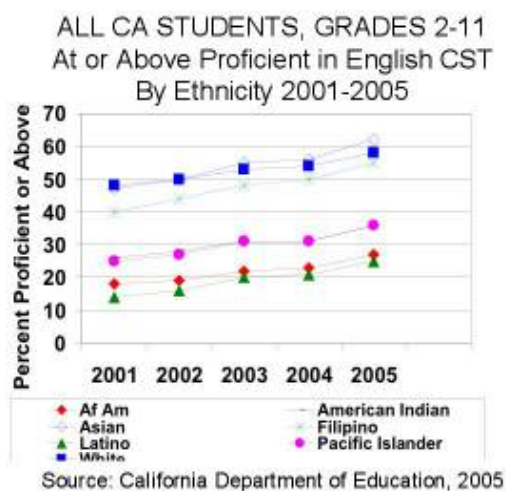
Results Over Time: Is the Gap Closing?

This year, for the first time, the California Department of Education produced data that show how all California students combined in grades 2-11 are progressing over time on the California Standards Test. Although all groups are improving, achievement gaps are virtually stagnant, and in some cases, gaps are widening. The gap between White and African American students scoring at or above proficient in 2001 was 30 points, in 2005 it's grown to 31 points. The gap between White and Latino students scoring at or above proficient in 2001 was 34 points and in 2005 it's 33 points.

But it Doesn't Have to be This Way.

There is a pervasive and destructive myth that African American, Latino and low-income students

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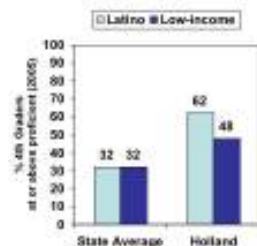


cannot achieve at high levels. But there are high-minority and high-poverty schools all across California that debunk these myths everyday. Schools like Holland Elementary in Fresno Unified, which is 100% low-income

and more than half Latino, outperform the average of all schools in California in 4th grade reading. At Holland, the Latino students are reaching proficiency at about twice the rate of the state average, and low-income students are doing 50% better than the state average. At West Middle School in Downey Unified, which is 63% low-income and 78% Latino, 65% of low-income and Latino students are proficient or above in 8th grade Algebra I, far surpassing the state average of 19% for low-income students and 18% for Latino students. At Covina High School in Covina Valley Unified, which is 59% Latino, and 37% low-income, 9th graders far exceed state averages in reading.

Dispelling the Myth in Reading Holland Elementary Fresno Unified

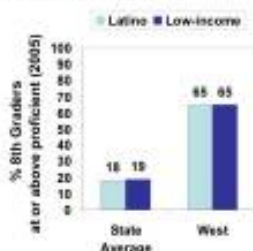
- 52% Latino
- 100% Low-income
- Surpassing state average in 4th Grade Reading



Source: California Department of Education

Dispelling the Myth in Algebra West Middle Downey Unified

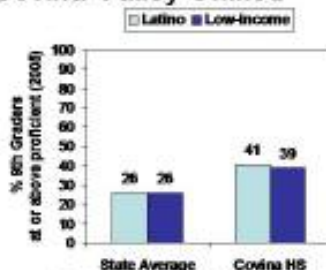
- 78% Latino
- 63% Low-income
- Surpassing state average in 8th Grade Algebra



Source: California Department of Education

Dispelling the Myth in Reading Covina High School Covina-Valley Unified

- 59% Latino
- 37% Low-income
- Surpassing state average in 9th Grade Reading



Source: California Department of Education

What Do We Know About the Places That Get Results?

They provide teachers who are well prepared to teach the subject matter. Students need teachers who know their subjects and know how to teach them. Yet, large numbers of students, especially those who are Latino, African American and low-income are taught by teachers who lack sufficient training and background in the subjects they teach. Research from the Center for the Future on Teaching and Learning (CFTL) show that students in California's highest minority schools are five times more likely to have an underprepared teacher and that students in California's schools with the lowest passing rates on the CAHSEE are three times more likely to have an underprepared teacher than students in schools with high CAHSEE passing rates.

They have clear goals: the role of standards.

Clear standards for what students should learn at benchmark grade levels are an invaluable tool for raising achievement and closing gaps. They are a guide—for teachers, administrators, parents and students—for the knowledge and skills students need to master. Standards represent a contract between schools and their communities that these skills are the expectation for all their students.

They provide all students with challenging curriculums aligned with standards.

New standards and assessments won't make much of a difference if they are not accompanied by a rigorous curriculum lined up with those standards. Yet in too many places throughout California, some students are taught rich and challenging subject matter, while others are relegated to a low-level curriculum—one that is better aligned with the assembly-line jobs that are disappearing than with today's job market or college entry requirements. (For more information on the importance of a challenging curriculum, please see "Are California's High Schools Ready for the 21st Century?" available at www.edtrustwest.org.)

They provide extra instruction to students when they need it.

There is ample evidence that all children can achieve at high levels if they are taught to high levels. Indeed, the simple act of putting students in more rigorous college preparatory courses will improve achievement; the data are clear on that. But it is equally clear that for some students, passing the course or examination will require extra time and support. All must mean *all*, but not necessarily all in the same way or in the same time.

How Can We Pay For This?

In California, schools that educate the greatest number of poor and minority children receive substantially less state and local money per student and per teacher than schools educating the fewest low-income and minority students. This is not only a problem between rich and poor districts, there are significant spending gaps *within* districts as well. (For more information on spending gaps within districts, see “California’s Hidden Teacher Spending Gap: How State and District Budgeting Practices Shortchange Poor and Minority Students and Their Schools” available at www.edtrustwest.org.) At a time when schools and districts throughout the state are rightly focusing on raising overall achievement and closing the achievement gap, California

can and must do more to close the funding gaps that disproportionately affect poor and minority students.

What Would Happen if We Had the Will to Close Achievement Gaps, and the Opportunity Gaps That Produce Them?

It only takes one school to teach Latino, African American and low-income students at high levels to prove that it can be done. All around California and throughout the nation, there are hundreds of schools that are doing just that. Underachievement among Latino, African American and poor students is a crisis, but as high poverty, high minority and high performing schools show, raising subgroup achievement is not an insurmountable task.

The achievement data released today prove that California’s schools have the ability to improve the achievement of their students, but it is also a reminder of the work that still needs to be done. Not all students are benefiting equally from our progress, and it’s time to change that. We must address achievement gaps head on, and make the changes necessary to close them and the opportunity gaps that produce them.

The Education Trust—West is the West Coast presence of the national policy organization the Education Trust. We work for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, kindergarten through college. While we know that all schools and colleges could better serve their students, we concentrate on the institutions most often left behind—those serving low-income, Latino, African American, or Native American students. The Education Trust—West works alongside policymakers, parents, education professionals and business and community leaders, in cities and towns throughout California, who are trying to transform their schools and colleges into institutions that genuinely serve all students. For more information please visit our website at www.edtrustwest.org.