

EQUITY ALERT
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN CALIFORNIA:
 2016 SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENT (SBAC) RESULTS



The Education Trust–West

Despite overall improvement in student achievement over last year, gaps persist – and in some cases, have even widened. With the release of California’s second-year Smarter Balanced assessment results, we are now able, for the first time since the Common Core State Standards were adopted in 2010, to measure student improvement in English language arts (ELA) and math. This year’s results, and the ability to make comparisons to 2015 outcomes, present a unique opportunity to gauge how well students are acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to be on track for future college and career opportunities. Each grade and student subgroup improved across both subjects. However, there are glaring achievement gaps separating Latino, African American, low income, and English learner students from their more advantaged peers. These gaps show we have much work to do to ensure all students achieve at the highest standards.

STATEWIDE TRENDS

Student performance improved by 4 percentage points in ELA and 3 percentage points in math overall. Still, across all grades, fewer than half of California’s students are meeting or exceeding standards in ELA (48%) and math (37%). Stark differences are also evident across subjects and grades: In ELA, performance is higher in the upper grades than in the lower grades, whereas the reverse is true in math. For example, in 11th grade, 59 percent of students met or exceeded standards in ELA, while just 32 percent did so in math. In 3rd grade, 42 percent of students met or exceeded standards in ELA, while 46 percent did so in math.

GAPS AMONG SUBGROUPS

Achievement gaps are large in both ELA and math. In math, fewer than one in four African American and Latino students overall are meeting or exceeding standards, while in ELA, about one in three meet this benchmark. Gaps are even wider when we consider the intersection of race and poverty. Low-income Latino, African American, Native American, and Pacific Islander students perform particularly low. However, non-low income students in these ethnic subgroups perform lower than some of their low-income peers in other ethnic subgroups – demonstrating that income is not always a predictor of outcomes. Most importantly, these gaps are a sobering reminder of just how many students are falling behind in critical knowledge and skills.

FIGURE 1: SBAC English Language Arts and Math Results, by Grade (2014-15 vs. 2015-16)

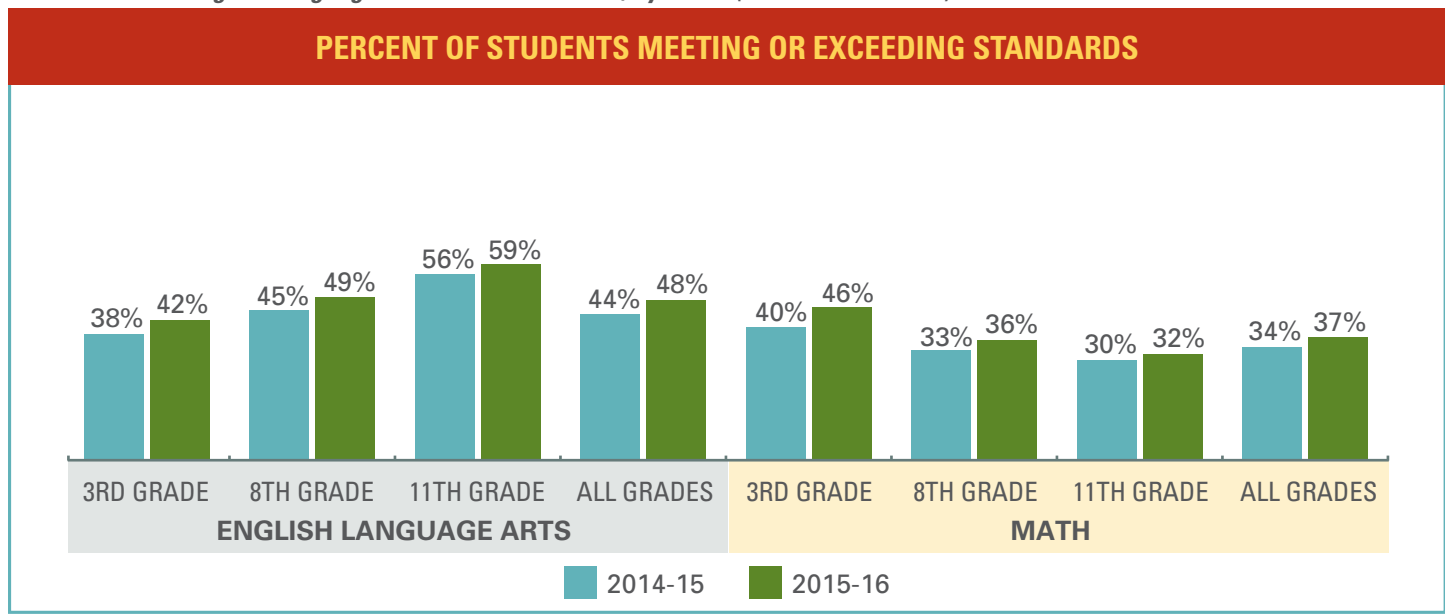


FIGURE 2: SBAC English Language Arts Results by Ethnicity and Income, All Grades (2015-16)

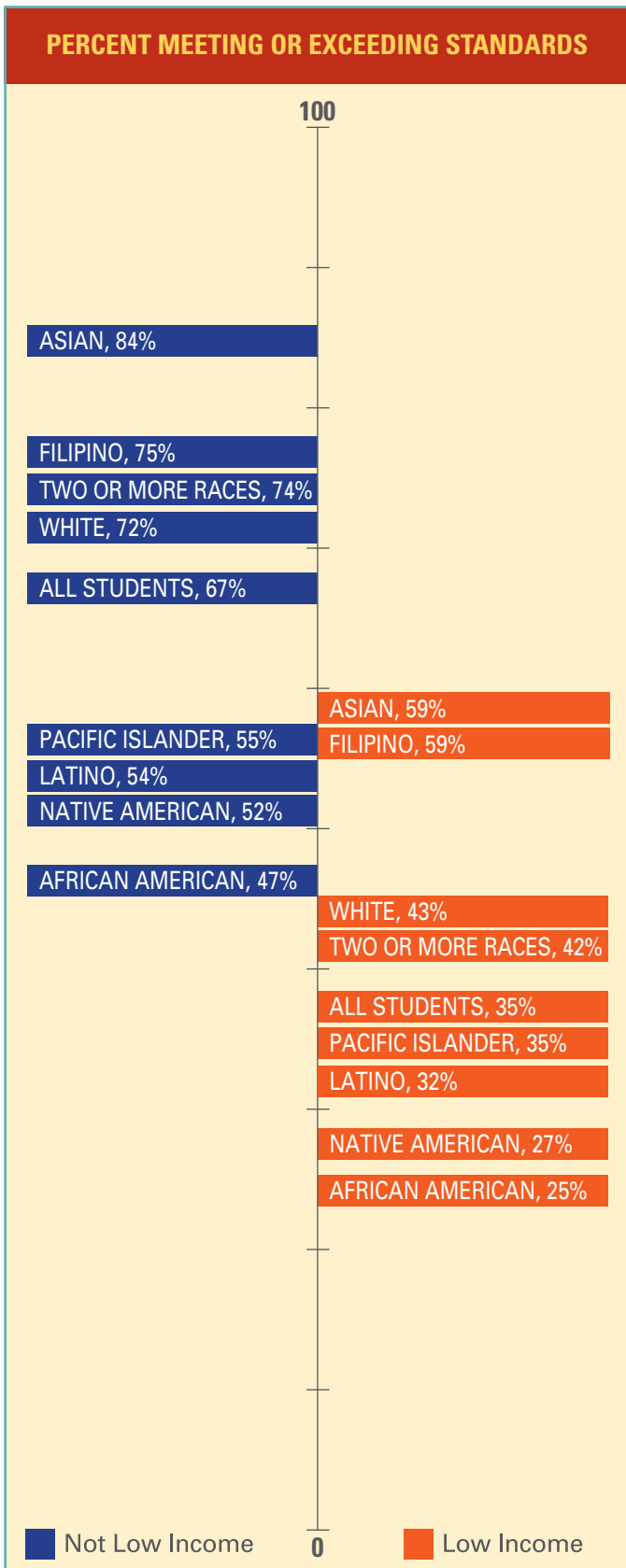
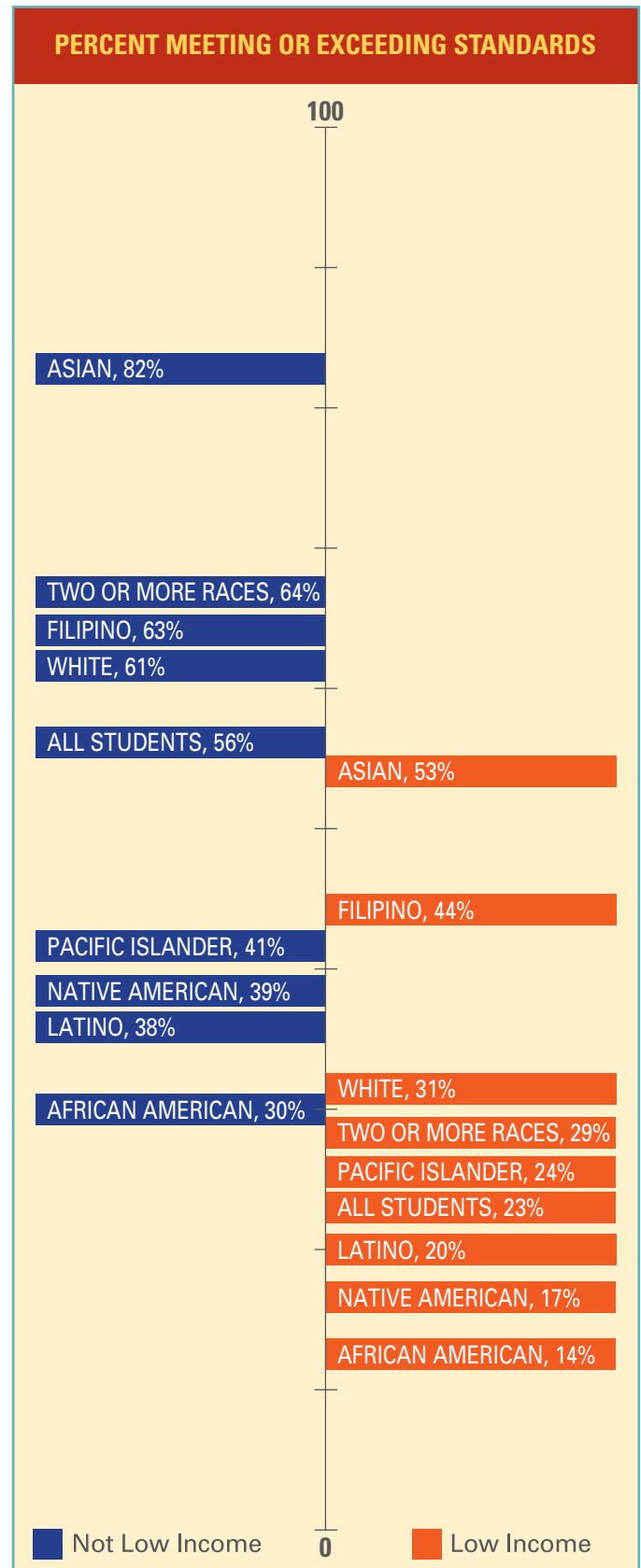


FIGURE 3: SBAC Math Results by Ethnicity and Income, All Grades (2015-16)



WIDENING GAPS

While all student subgroups demonstrated improvement from 2014-15 to this year, some subgroups are improving faster than others. With just two years of data, we cannot yet say what the long-term trend looks like. However, it is clear that achievement gaps are wider for some groups in the second year than they were in the first. If this pattern persists, achievement gaps could actually worsen rather than close. This is particularly true for English learners, where growth in ELA and math was just 1 to 2 percentage points compared to 3 to 4 percentage points for non-English learners. In math, improvement for low-income students was just 2 percentage points compared to 3 points for non-low income students.

FIGURE 4: SBAC English Language Arts and Math Results by Language Fluency Status, All Grades (2014-15 vs. 2015-16)

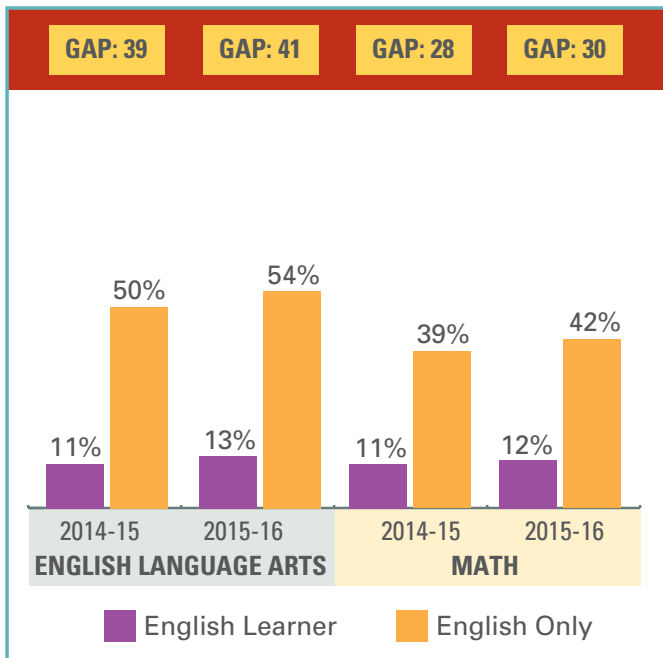
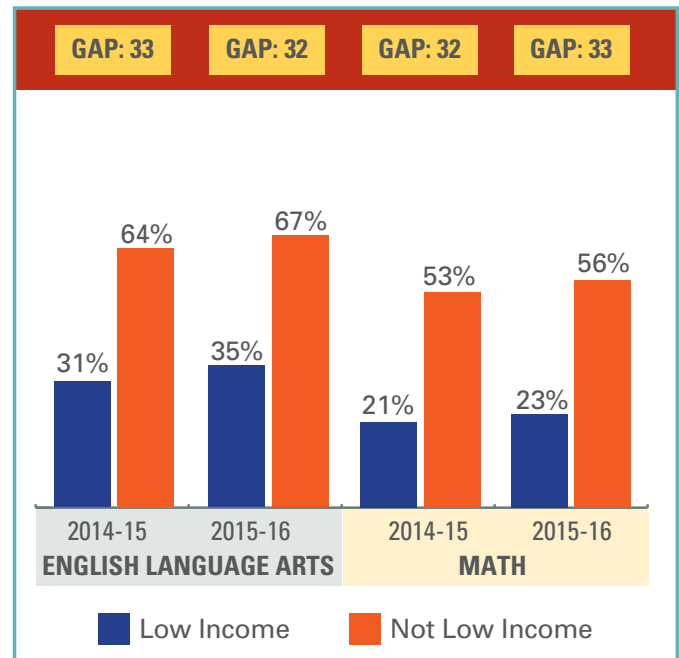


FIGURE 5: SBAC English Language Arts and Math Results by Income Status, All Grades (2014-15 vs. 2015-16)



BRIGHT SPOT SCHOOLS PROVE IT'S POSSIBLE TO DO BETTER

Though statewide achievement gaps paint a dreary picture of student performance, we also know there are many schools and districts – including those that serve large populations of low-income students and students of color – in which students are achieving at higher levels and showing rapid improvement. In these places, many students are meeting or exceeding standards while also demonstrating significant gains from last year to this year. It is examples like these that prove what we know to be true – that factors like poverty need not determine students' academic trajectories, and that strong school systems can help all students succeed. We should seek to understand and replicate the successful practices these schools are working hard to implement.

We highlight just a few of these examples below. The schools are among a larger group of schools that meet – and in many cases, far exceed – the following criteria:

- *Student population is at least 60 percent low income*
- *Performance for African American, Latino, and low-income students (where available) met or surpassed state average of students meeting or exceeded standards on ELA (48%) and math (37%)*
- *Improvement for African American, Latino, and low-income students (where available) met or surpassed state average improvement from 2014-15 to 2015-16 on ELA (4 percentage points) and math (3 percentage points).*

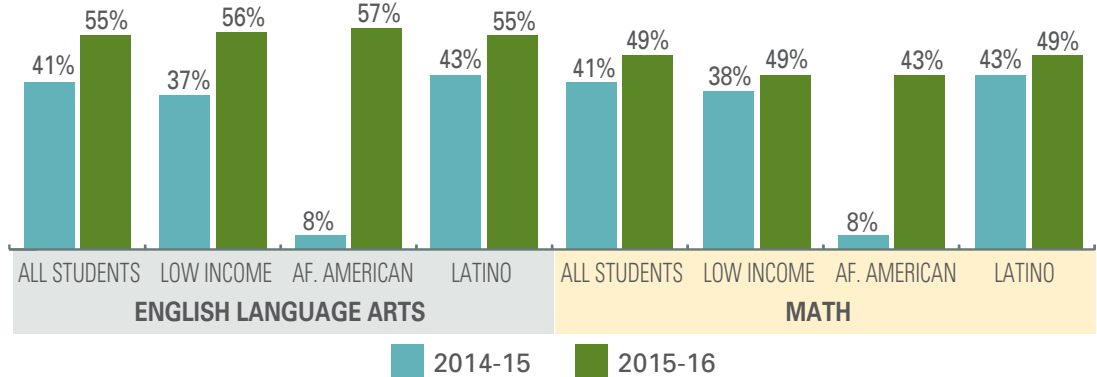
JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY

DISTRICT: Compton Unified | COUNTY: Los Angeles | SCHOOL TYPE: Traditional Elementary

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Grades served: K-8
 School size: 768
 Low income: 87%
 African American: 5%
 Latino: 94%

Percent Meeting or Exceeding Standards, All Grades



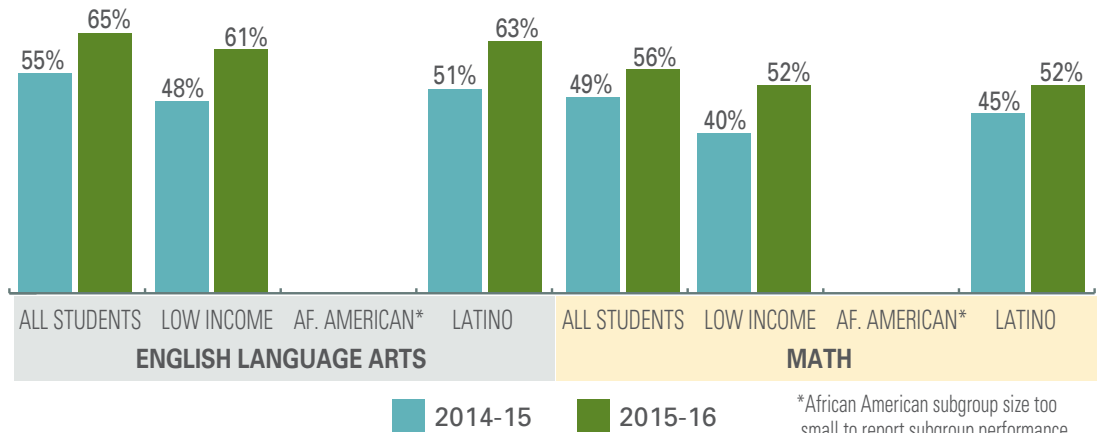
HILLTOP DRIVE ELEMENTARY

DISTRICT: Chula Vista Elementary | COUNTY: San Diego | SCHOOL TYPE: Traditional Elementary

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Grades served: K-6
 School size: 563
 Low income: 70%
 African American: 2%
 Latino: 84%

Percent Meeting or Exceeding Standards, All Grades



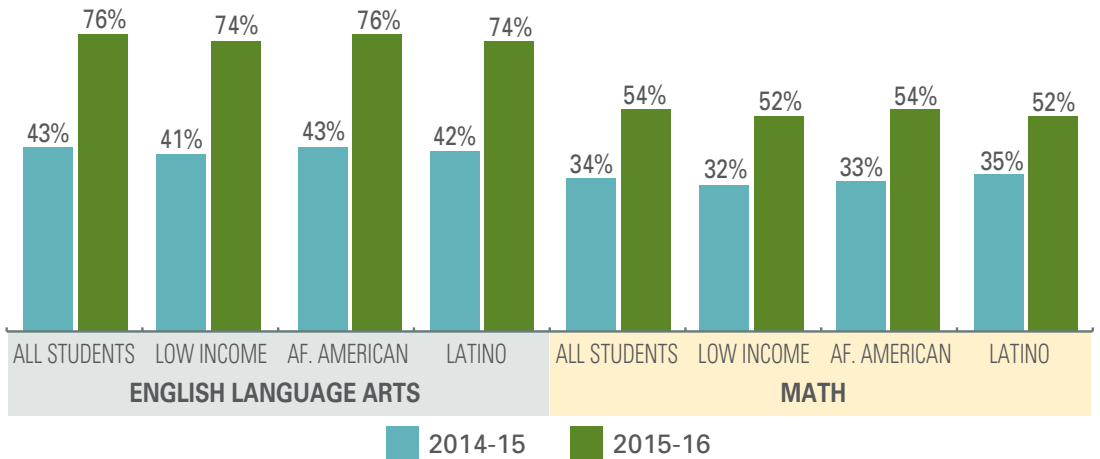
WILDER'S PREPARATORY ACADEMY CHARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

DISTRICT: Wilder's Preparatory Academy Charter | COUNTY: Los Angeles | SCHOOL TYPE: Intermediate Charter

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Grades served: 5-8
 School size: 200
 Low income: 73%
 African American: 83%
 Latino: 15%

Percent Meeting or Exceeding Standards, All Grades



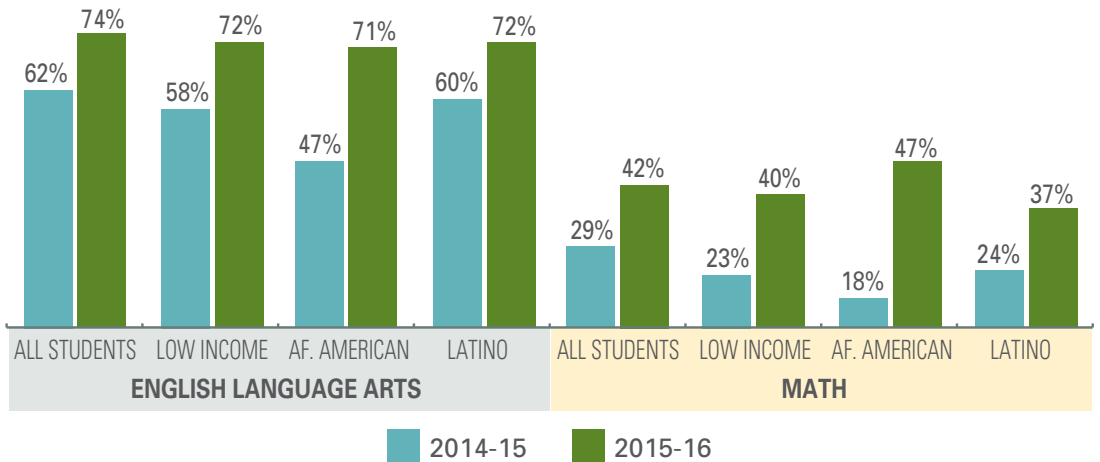
TUSTIN HIGH

DISTRICT: Tustin Unified | COUNTY: Orange | SCHOOL TYPE: Traditional High

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Grades served: 9-12
 School size: 2,287
 Low income: 69%
 African American: 3%
 Latino: 77%

Percent Meeting or Exceeding Standards, All Grades



LOOKING FORWARD: IMPLEMENTATION AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Despite statewide improvement from last year to this year, we know that far too many students – particularly students of color, low-income students, and English learners – are still missing out on the skill-building and critical thinking opportunities they need to advance academically and open doors to future opportunities. To ensure all students have the opportunities they deserve, we must take action at multiple levels:

- 1 Ensure the state’s new, multiple measure accountability system prioritizes gap closing as it promotes continuous improvement.** The state has already adopted a multiple measure dashboard, but it must follow through on its commitment to add student growth to the current performance-based SBAC measures. It should ensure that these achievement indicators collectively count for more than the other measures of school quality. To make it clear how schools are doing overall, the state should report summaries of school performance in addition to the dashboard. On this summary, a school should not be considered a “good” school unless it is serving all groups of students well. When schools consistently underperform overall or for subgroups, they should be identified for supports and interventions and be provided with opportunities to learn from successful schools.
- 2 Offer districts and schools the resources and support they need to ensure effective, ongoing implementation of standards.** Between LCFF, one-time funds for standards implementation, and the new college and career readiness block grants, the state has provided districts with some of the resources they need to implement the new standards and prepare high-need students for college and career. These financial resources are a start, but they must be paired with effective support and assistance. County offices of education, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, school districts, and community partners can create professional learning communities, incentivize collaboration between schools, and create other learning opportunities to ensure that our limited resources are used effectively to support Common Core implementation.
- 3 Continue implementing the Common Core standards at the district and school levels, with a lens toward supporting educators to effectively reach our most vulnerable learners.** These demanding standards ask much more of students than California’s previous standards. It is therefore even more important, particularly in this time of transition, that school staff analyze student-level data on performance and improvement and provide additional supports to students who need them. In order to support students to higher standards, teachers must be provided quality professional development, consistent collaboration opportunities, and additional resources that support them in this pedagogical shift.

Source: All data from California Department of Education, 2016 (accessed August 2016).