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Table of Contents

| | |
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| The Importance of Systems Alignment: Developing a Coherent Approach to Educational Governance and Finance Reform in California | 1 |
| From Compliance to Getting the Job Done: Excessive Regulations vs. Accountability for Results | 6 |
| Addressing California's Data Needs: Implementing Comprehensive, Longitudinal Systems at the Local and State Levels | 13 |
| Improving Teacher Quality: Redesigning Personnel Policies to Support Student Achievement | 19 |

California Collaborative on District Reform

The California Collaborative on District Reform, an initiative of the American Institutes for Research, was formed in 2006 to join researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in ongoing, evidence-based dialogue to improve instruction and student learning for all students in California's urban school systems.

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The Importance of Systems Alignment: Developing a Coherent Approach to Educational Governance and Finance Reform in California

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Topics covered: Cross-cutting approach to policy development

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Statement of the Problem

As superintendents and administrators of California districts, we are committed to taking the actions necessary to raise the achievement level of all students while simultaneously closing the achievement gap. We are committed to reaching the point where all students graduate from our schools ready to succeed in higher education or enter the work force in a job with significant economic growth potential.

We strongly believe that the quality of instructional practice can trump other factors that may limit the ability of some students to succeed in school. It is therefore incumbent on us – all of us – to ensure that high quality instructional practice in every classroom everyday is the focus of everyone's work. Only with such focus and the committed action to back it up, can we hope to achieve the goal of providing all our students with the opportunity to graduate with meaningful choices about their future.

The challenge of getting all parts of the system to work together to achieve this goal is one of the most important we face. In the past decade, California has made progress toward instituting a standards-based system with the potential for aligning policy and resources in a coherent and strategic direction. However, current policy and practice fail in very substantial ways to realize the alignment and coherence promised by standards -based reform and necessary to accomplish the goals we hold for all our students. The "Getting Down to Facts" compendium of studies chronicles many of the sources and forms of educational policy fragmentation in California. Multiple decision-makers, interest group politics, and policy by accretion rather than strategic deliberation have undermined any moves toward system coherence.

Among the examples of fragmentation discussed in the papers and experienced daily in our districts are the following:

- A conflicted and confusing approach to accountability. On the one hand, schools and districts are held accountable for producing results for students; on the other, we are constrained at every turn by a myriad of process rules and regulations for which we are also held accountable. The excessive regulations engender a compliance mentality throughout the system, from the state capital down into our classrooms. This focus on compliance undermines results-based accountability, distracts attention from the real goals, and inhibits us from finding and using the most effective approaches to serving all our students well. Even within the results-based aspects of our accountability systems, we lack coherence. The differences in measures, programs, and interventions between the state API (PSAA) and the federal AYP (NCLB) systems send mixed messages to school personnel and increase the likelihood that schools will be found wanting by at least one of these measures.
- Failure to implement and fund a comprehensive data system at the state and local level that make it possible for districts to diagnose student needs, monitor student progress and determine the effectiveness of policies, programs, and practices. A strong data system, with unique student identifiers and vertically aligned assessments, is essential for measuring progress and ensuring both results-based accountability and evidence-based instructional and system improvement strategies.
- Conflicting and overlapping categorical programs, many of which have little if any relevance to standards and results and contain duplicative and conflicting requirements regarding reports, plans and processes. State reliance on categorical funding leaves districts with little real discretion in designing programs to meet their students' needs. If districts are to be held accountable for results – as they should be – then they have to have more control over the strategies and actions that will lead to staff and student success.
- Restrictions on the purchase and use of instructional materials that limit instructional options and can get in the way of producing high outcomes for all students. The current adoption cycle is costly, while districts lack flexibility in selecting materials that they believe (based on evidence) will be most effective for their students.
- An unpredictable state budget cycle that makes strategic planning difficult and thus undermines coherence in district strategies and programs. This cycle also adversely affects the timing of decisions that should be made regarding the employment and retention of staff.
- Overly restrictive credentialing, evaluation, tenure, and professional development policies that are not well aligned with standards and performance goals and that negatively impact district decisions about hiring, retaining, training, and evaluating staff.
- Policy development and administration that lacks an adequate evidence base, derived either from research or from program evaluations.

These and other areas of needed policy reform are addressed in the accompanying policy briefs on improving the state data system, on moving away from reliance on categorical funding, and on personnel concerns. In this brief, we focus on the need for all these reform initiatives to be aligned around the common purpose of reaching the state standards and reducing performance gaps among groups of California students.

The issue of alignment is critical to us because research on best practices strongly suggests that system coherence – at the school, district, and state levels – is far more likely to produce the desired results than a system plagued by fragmented programs, confusing goals, and misaligned regulations. Moreover, coherence in support of high quality instruction and improved student achievement is relevant not only to instructional personnel. It must incorporate the funding and business divisions, the human resources policies and offices, the facilities and management information offices, state and local governance bodies, and communications with stakeholders.

Yet the importance of systems alignment is neither well appreciated nor well understood. One of the primary implications of the Getting Down to Facts studies is that many parts of the system must improve but they must do so together. Focusing on one to the detriment of the other undermines the ability of the entire system to move forward. That is why our policy recommendations firmly state that policy responses to Getting Down to Facts findings must be coherent and comprehensive – that is, they must address all the major areas noted in the studies even if all recommendations cannot be implemented at once. We believe that a timeline that calls for action on the major policy recommendations in a staged manner over a defined period is not only an acceptable but also a desirable approach.

Our recommendations are also based on the belief that the state’s primary role is to set standards, establish expected targets, hold districts accountable for success, and provide districts the resources and local flexibility required to produce results.

Recommended Policy Approach

In this brief we focus not on particular policy recommendations but rather on a recommended overarching approach to making the needed changes. (See our other briefs for more specific policy recommendations.) We emphasize three key aspects of this approach:

1. The reform of state policy should reflect a comprehensive, coherent and long-term vision for the governance and finance of California’s educational enterprise.

Our first recommendation stems directly from our prior discussion. We view the many of the findings of the Getting Down to Facts studies and the policy recommendations emerging from those findings to reflect the need for a larger reform strategy. Our concern is that the policy response to these findings will be piecemeal and subject more to political maneuvering than strategic vision. Such an approach will not work in the long run and will in fact undermine continued improvement efforts. What is needed instead is a strategy that focuses on the whole, recognizing that the reform of all the identified systems is necessary and that it must be carried out in a clear and coherent manner.

A well-aligned education reform system that makes high quality instructional practice the focus of everyone’s work will create a much better context for success making it possible to achieve our goal of giving all our students meaningful choices about their future upon graduation from our schools.

Such an approach will not be easy. It will require foresight, political restraint, and time. Indeed, recognizing that everything cannot be done at once, we suggest that an explicit staged timeline be developed. In this approach, actions on different elements of the system would be mapped over an extended period – say a five year time frame. More straightforward (though still fundamental)

changes – such as the full funding and implementation of the CALPADS data system – could be accomplished on the front end. Indeed, we believe the data system is an excellent place to start, as it is absolutely crucial to realizing a more standards-based approach to accountability and instructional improvement. Moreover, the legislation is already in place – and has been so for some time – and the main missing ingredient is the funding to fully populate the system.

Other areas – such as fundamental overhaul of the finance system – would require further study and opportunities for stakeholder input and so would also need more time to design and implement. For example, to move away from categorical allocations necessitates that as a state we develop and agree upon an alternative funding system (such as a weighted student formula) that would allocate money based on identified student need. Such a major shift would involve significant design and implementation issues that require forethought and planning. Similarly, addressing the problem of our unpredictable budget cycle – also a key roadblock to coherence at the district level – would suggest moving to a multi-year budget or similar approach. Such a move would also involve significant implementation challenges and so would also require additional investigation and time to arrive at the best policy solution. These and similar policy changes would be slated for later on in the five year plan, after the required investigation was complete.

One other aspect of this comprehensive and staged approach must be emphasized. Whatever the specifics of the policies, they must reflect a substantially altered conception of the role of the state – one that is less focused on compliance with process regulations and more reflective of a commitment that all students in the state will have the opportunity to achieve to high standards and graduate from high school prepared for college, citizenship, and work. In this role, the state sets the standards and goals (with input from stakeholders, including district practitioners), provides adequate resources and capacity-building support for reaching these goals, and holds schools and districts accountable for doing so. For their part, districts and schools would gain flexibility in determining the best allocation of resources and strategies for responding to the local context and achieving the state goals.

2. Policy responses should be based on evidence from practice and research.

With all the current rhetoric about evidence-based practices, this recommendation may seem obvious. Yet, as evident from the Getting Down to Facts studies, state policy rarely flows from evidence. Indeed, policies either accrete haphazardly over time or are put into place on a grand scale with little evidentiary base or R&D involved. We suggest a different approach, one which incorporates and supports opportunities for trying out policy directions before implementing them at full scale (see our recommendations regarding categorical programs in an accompanying brief, for example).

In addition, we believe that an important role for the state is to encourage, support, and disseminate research relevant not only to state policy options but also to strategies likely to be effective at a local level. Several research organizations in the state have been studying district practices that appear to contribute to improvements for students. Results of these studies should be disseminated broadly. In addition, districts collect their own data and conduct their own analyses and could serve as relevant case studies for improvement. We even have California districts that have been awarded the prestigious Broad prize or other awards. What lessons can others in the state learn from these successful examples of achievement and continuous improvement? Learning from the best practices of others and how they connect into a single coherent system will help all raise achievement and close the achievement gap.

Similarly, the state, including CDE and the state board, should review current policies and practices with respect to the strength of the evidence behind them. We are convinced that many of the current practices would not hold up under close scrutiny, thus opening up options for other creative solutions. The rule of thumb here should be that if a policy or practice is required, it should have a convincing basis in evidence. Without that, practices may be recommended but not mandated.

3. The state should support non-legislative as well as legislative responses.

This third aspect of our recommended approach may be more relevant for districts and for outside funders than for state policy makers. The thrust here is that much can be learned and accomplished without direct legislative action. Indeed, establishing new laws often ends up locking the state and districts into a prescribed course of action at a larger scale or for a longer time period than is beneficial. By contrast, establishing or encouraging (e.g., through the use of incentives) collaborations among districts or between K-12 systems and institutions of higher education can lead to policy or practice initiatives on a more limited scale that are more fluid and responsive to context and new knowledge. Similarly districts with the support of external support organizations can join together in collaborative endeavors. These collaborations and partnerships can have extensive influence by successfully addressing a complex problem – such as improved instruction for English learner students or more appropriate and effective programs for pre-service teacher preparations. An appropriate role for the state would include support for such initiatives and for disseminating the lessons derived from their experience.

We believe that a policy approach that addresses the findings in the Getting Down to Facts studies and reflects the above qualities would go a long way toward improving the functioning of the state system and the opportunities it affords California's youngsters. If we are to achieve what we believe should be the non negotiable goals of preparing all our graduates for success in higher education and/or a career with significant economic growth potential, closing the achievement gap while raising the overall level of achievement, and increasing the academic proficiency of English Language Learners, then a more coherent and aligned approach is necessary along with a very different view of the state's role in educational decision making and administration.

From Compliance to Getting the Job Done: Excessive Regulations vs. Accountability for Results

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Problem Statement

California has advanced significantly toward a standards-based system. As district leaders, we wholeheartedly support the emphasis on setting clear standards and outcome goals for students and then holding local systems and schools responsible for producing results for all students in their charge. We believe our job as educational leaders is to raise student achievement overall and to close performance gaps in achievement, graduation, and preparation for post-secondary education and employment.

However, our ability to perform that job is hampered by overly restrictive and outdated regulations and by a myriad of conflicting and unnecessary categorical programs that fragment resources and divert district and school attention from meeting the needs of our students. Indeed, **over-regulation actually weakens accountability for results and discourages districts from adopting coherent, evidence-based strategies to move all children to meet state standards.**

Particular problems stemming from the proliferation of categorical programs and of state regulations associated with those programs and with a burgeoning state education code include the following:

- Lack of alignment of state and local action to achieve state standards
 - Many categorical programs, goals, and Ed Code requirements are outdated and no longer aligned with state goals or current standards.
 - Meeting these requirements makes it more difficult for districts and schools to allocate resources and design instructional programs based on the standards and on student performance.
 - Lack of alignment goes beyond state categoricals – e.g., API and state accountability programs vs. AYP and Program Improvement, and credentialing/personnel requirements.
- Fragmentation of attention and effort
 - Programs differ with respect to timing, format, planning and reporting requirements, and assumptions about best practices. Multiple planning and reporting requirements (e.g.,

- technology, school site, and school recognition documentation) divert time and energy from more important priorities.
 - These differences are reflected in compartmentalization that begins in CDE and is mirrored in the districts. Programs create specialized constituencies and staff who develop allegiances to particular regulations or programmatic components rather than to meeting demonstrated needs of children – including the children that the programs were intended to serve.
 - The compartmentalization and conflicting requirements undermine the coherence necessary for instructional and organizational improvement.
- Compliance mentality and wasted resources
 - Categoricals tend to create a rule-compliance mentality that limits creativity and diverts attention from meeting student needs. Principals and district leaders too often ask first “Can we do this with that money?” and then make decisions based on what is allowed rather than what would be most effective.
 - Districts waste substantial amounts of time, money, and staff attention on establishing a clear paper trail for state monitors. This paper trail does not lend itself to the work that needs to get done, whether that work is professional development, student intervention, assessment, etc. While documentation can be a powerful tool for improvement (one reason we need a comprehensive data system in California), the documentation associated with most categorical programs is for compliance, not progress.
 - The compliance mentality and over-specification of required practices contribute to teacher and administrator burn-out and disengagement, thus undermining professional responsibility and commitment.
 - Current checklist approaches to program monitoring reinforce these negative conditions and do little to build the capacity of district and school personnel to improve practice and student learning. Moreover, program evaluations that identify these problems often fall on deaf ears and produce little substantive change.

Policy Options and Recommendations

The primary objective must be to create an accountability and funding system that is truly standards-based; that keeps the focus on raising student achievement and closing gaps among groups of students; and that allows districts and schools the flexibility to develop coherent, evidence-based programs, while holding them accountable for results. We must replace the current compliance orientation to one of “getting the job done.” In order to do so, we suggest the following longer term and interim policy recommendations:

Longer term: We firmly believe that the school finance and governance systems in California need to be substantially overhauled, not tweaked around the edges. The findings and directions laid out in the GDTF overview and summary report (Loeb et al., 2007) are consistent with our experience and recommended course of action. Our recommended overhaul would necessitate a substantial rethinking of the ways in which fiscal resources are allocated to districts and schools as well as of the locus of decision authority as to how those funds, once allocated, are spent. At the minimum, the new system must:

- Put an end to the use of categorical programs as a central mechanism for funding improvement efforts for specific groups of children or favorite programs of particular interest groups. In its place, we must establish a system that provides adequate resources to meet the needs of the students in any given district. We strongly urge the state to investigate the use of a weighted student formula targeted to the district (that considers particular district circumstances such as degree of poverty and geography) or other

similar approaches to resource allocation that would get the requisite funds where they are needed.

- Provide districts the flexibility to decide how best to allocate their resources in order to meet state standards and close achievement gaps.
- Hold districts and schools accountable for producing results – in a single accountability system (i.e., merge state and federal accountability requirements) – rather than for following overly prescriptive regulations. As stated earlier, we fully support a results-based accountability system. We would emphasize, however, that the thrust of this system should be directed toward building local district capacity to meet the outcome goals rather than on pre-determined punitive actions or checklists that do little to address underlying problems or shortcomings in identified schools and districts. We would also emphasize the need for an accountability system that is coherent and focused on measuring progress and on supporting continuous improvement strategies at both the state and local levels. This approach requires a comprehensive and easily accessed and used data system with data longitudinally linked at the student level (see our brief on improving California’s data system).
- Remove outdated and extraneous provisions in the education code that stand in the way of standard-based accountability and system improvement. For the reforms suggested by the GDTF studies to be effective, we need to simplify the education code substantially. The first items to go should be those provisions that are outdated and no longer consistent with our standards-based system. Recommendations for other simplifications have been generated by several studies focused specifically on this issue and should be revisited and implemented.

In the interim: District Flexibility and Accountability Initiative

While what we have just described is the direction we believe the state must go in to accomplish the task ahead, we recognize that this comprehensive overhaul requires further investigation of alternative models, creation of the necessary political support, and a staged approach to implementation. However, we cannot wait until these conditions have been met before addressing the barriers created by the state’s current reliance on categorical funding. Moreover, whatever governance reforms are finally implemented, they will be strengthened if the state has taken the opportunity to try out options and explore the implementation issues that are bound to arise before overhauling the system across the state.

With that in mind, we considered various alternatives for interim strategies, including a more aggressive waiver option, allowing 15-20% of a district’s categorical funding to be set aside for flexible allocation based on the district’s identified strategic needs, or allowing districts to combine the largest categoricals into a common funding stream for flexible allocation. However, we concluded that none of these options would significantly address the issues raised at the beginning of this brief. Research on past waiver programs demonstrates that they have little uptake and thus little effect on practice. Allowing for a percentage of categorical funds to be used flexibly would not reduce paperwork but might in fact increase it as districts would still need to follow the same requirements as before and then account for the flexible funds in addition. Finally, combining the large programs would reduce some paperwork and constraints but would leave the majority of small programs in place, again doing little to alleviate the problems of fragmentation and waste mentioned earlier.

What we are suggesting instead is an alternative strategy that would both address many of the most counter-productive constraints of current categorical programs and do so in a way that would provide an opportunity for a policy development process in which changes can be “implemented in a controlled

fashion before they are introduced statewide” (Loeb, et al., 2007, p. 8). The focus of this interim strategy would be four-fold:

a) Increased flexibility for selected local districts to make decisions about resource allocation based on identified local needs and a coherent, well-specified strategic plan to meet those needs. Participating districts would be released from all (or a specified majority of) state categorical requirements on input processes and allocation of dollars to specified uses. There would be one major exception to this flexibility: the categorical dollars could not be used to augment the salary schedule. This exception would ensure that monies originally allocated for categorical purposes remained additional to the base budget with the express purpose of addressing key improvement goals in a responsive and agile fashion.

b) Accountability for results rather than processes in these districts. In exchange for being released from certain major regulations, participating districts would commit to and be held accountable for a very small set of specified outcome goals focused on reducing achievement gaps. These outcome commitments would be targeted to identified statewide goals, such as raising redesignation rates for EL students, adopting more aggressive targets for closing the gap between African American students and other groups, setting specific goals for moving students from Basic to Proficient, or increasing graduation rates and college preparedness (e.g., completion of A-G requirements, enrollment in Advanced Placement courses, and college matriculation and completion rates (when such data become readily available). Note that these goals should be small in number and both consistent with and supportive of any other accountability goals for schools and districts. For example, increasing redesignation rates for English learners is consistent with NCLB Title III AMAO targets for increasing the percentage of students scoring proficient on the CELDT and meeting AYP targets for the EL subgroup.

To remain in the initiative, districts should be expected to meet or exceed the state goals for the selected indicators – or, if initial district performance is not yet at expected state level, the district should demonstrate substantial progress toward the state goal. Districts that failed to do so within a specified period (e.g., three years) could lose some or all of the flexibility provided through the initiative. Finally, to prevent a potential narrowing of district focus solely to test-based accountability subjects and measures, we recommend that the initiative incorporate some attention to state expectations for non-academic development (such as physical fitness and arts standards) and to children who would be eligible for Gifted and Talented Education programs.

c) A new approach to state monitoring and accountability for the participating districts that focuses on capacity building and continuous improvement through the generation and analysis of local and state data, networks for sharing information and lessons, and opportunities for professional and organizational development. Local flexibility in resource allocation implies a very different role for the California Department of Education than its current emphasis on compliance to prescriptive input and process requirements. If California is to move to a more standards-based system of accountability and governance, the CDE needs to develop alternative methods of monitoring local districts and schools. We believe the crux of those methods needs to focus on continuous improvement of results, on the exchange of ideas through networking and collaborations among districts, and on local and state capacity building rather than checklists and process rules. Therefore, districts in this initiative would have to provide regular concrete evidence of progress toward the outcomes. They would need to agree to open their practice to observation and learning by others and to participate in mutually beneficial activities with other participating districts. We suggest that to develop and evaluate new methods for monitoring and capacity building, the SPI put responsibility for monitoring participating districts into a special unit in the CDE, under the leadership of a deputy superintendent whose sole responsibility is to

ensure the success of the participating districts. Other monitoring typically associated with categorical funding would cease.

d) Systematic evaluation and documentation of lessons learned from the process, initiated at the very beginning of the initiative. This documentation and analysis would help to identify implementation issues that are likely to occur in a larger statewide move toward more local flexibility and best practices at both the local and state levels for addressing these issues. Information gleaned from this effort could then inform the design of a more flexible standards-based system statewide.

We believe this interim initiative has a number of advantages. It is systemic in nature, allowing whole districts to develop a coherent set of policies rather than issue more generalized releases from a limited set of regulations that will not substantially alter the barriers to effective resource allocation and decision-making at the local level. This approach also provides for standards-based improvement and results-based accountability that can actually support change rather than simply penalizing failure. It begins to develop a new role for the CDE, a necessary ingredient of any major system overhaul. And it provides an opportunity to identify potential implementation issues as regulations are relaxed and the state moves toward a more flexible and responsive system.

At the same time, there are critical design and implementation challenges that would need to be worked out for such an initiative to yield the desired results. First and foremost, a well thought-out selection process for districts would need to be instituted. For this initiative to have the greatest chance of success and for it to yield meaningful lessons, the criteria for selection should center on evidence that the candidate district has the requisite conditions to use the regulatory flexibility to the best advantage of its students. This approach to participation would represent a major change from the usual selection processes of CDE, which tend toward reliance on lottery selection and minimal assurances from district leadership. We suggest that an independent panel be convened to refine the criteria and make the selections, removing this potentially sensitive process from the CDE, which would maintain responsibility for providing implementation support and monitoring after the selection is completed.

We recommend that the selection panel consider criteria addressing the following domains: achievement trend data; evidence of the leadership capacity and track record of the district's administrative team, and the clarity of their strategic plan regarding how they would use the flexible dollars to improve instruction and achieve the identified outcomes. Selected districts should be able to articulate a clear strategy for managing the change process and developing the capabilities of their district and school staff. They should also have analyzed potential barriers to success – such as particular collectively bargained agreements – and be able to articulate a strategy for working with their unions or others to resolve predictable issues or constraints. Finally, recognizing that flexibility may be equally necessary for currently low performing as for higher performing districts, we recommend that Program Improvement districts not be excluded from participation in this initiative if they are able to demonstrate that they have met the criteria regarding the clarity and strength of their strategic plan, the capacity of their leadership team, and analysis of the change process and potential barriers. It may also be advisable, however, for PI districts to have also established clear mechanisms for external support with their improvement efforts (e.g., through partnerships with support providers, collaborations with other districts, etc.).

Additional challenges regarding these recommendations involve creating the political support and public will required, both for the long term overhaul of the system and for this interim demonstration and developmental initiative. Interest groups and other education stakeholders would need to be willing to let go of pet programs and narrow interests, which are working neither to the benefit of the identified interested party nor for California students overall. CDE would need to be willing and able to step back from a compliance orientation and toward a more evidence-based focus on continuous improvement and

capacity building. We would need to approach monitoring and evaluation in a different way, so as to derive lessons that can truly affect the design of future policy and the improvement of current implementation. Accountability criteria, processes and actions would need substantial reorientation, and capacity must be created and spread at all levels of the system if individuals and units are to take on new responsibilities and ways of operating. Critical to all of this effort are enhanced and user-friendly state and local data systems, built on longitudinally linked student data and aligned with state standards and goals. With these and other elements of a comprehensive approach in place, we have the potential for giving districts and schools the support they need to “get the job done” – that is, to raise student achievement and attainment for all students and close the gaps between the have and have-nots in California education.

Summary of Evidence Supporting Recommendations

The evidence supporting the analysis and recommendations in this brief derive from a combination of research and our own multiple decades of practice as educators and district leaders. The lack of alignment between the current finance and governance systems, the fragmentation and inefficiencies created by the reliance on categorical funding, and the barriers to real improvement presented by the over regulation have all been well documented in the Getting Down to Facts studies (see for example, Brewer & Smith, 2007; Fuller et al. 2007; Duncombe & Yinger, 2007; Timar, 2007; Kirst, 2007; and Loeb, Bryk, & Hanushek, 2007). By contrast, the research support for many of the categorical programs and for the specific processes they require of schools and districts is generally weak and often non-existent. It is not surprising that principals and superintendents interviewed or surveyed point to greater flexibility as a central condition for deeper and more effective improvement efforts. We wholeheartedly concur with our colleagues in other districts who responded to these surveys.

Unfortunately, no simple solution emerges from the research literature. While Duncombe (2007) finds that greater reliance on categorical funding lowers district efficiency as measured by the API, Brewer & Smith (2006) find no conclusive evidence supporting any particular governance structure with respect to its impact on school improvement. These authors do, however, posit a research-based framework of design principles that includes several of the characteristics reflected in our recommendations. In particular, they include innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness (as opposed to regulation and compliance) and simplicity, efficiency, and coherence (as opposed to complexity and fragmentation) as two of their five general indicators of effective governance. We believe that moving from reliance on categorical funding (accompanied by a funding formula based on student need) and removing extraneous and ineffective regulations from the state education code will help provide the conditions for greater local flexibility and coherence. Moreover, instituting a pilot initiative in which such flexibility is introduced and studied in a small number of districts can help provide the evidence needed for more effective and informed statewide policy in the future. A similar approach was tried at the state level under the federal Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999 (Ed-Flex). The Ed-Flex Program allowed six states authority to waive federal requirements seen to impede local and state efforts to improve their schools. This program, however, was limited in scope (relying mainly on devolving waiver authority to the state) and short-lived (it ended under NCLB). Local examples of productive use of flexibility and pilots also abound, however. Effective districts, such as Long Beach Unified, often also use pilots as a form of R & D before instituting practices more broadly in the district. Data on implementation and effectiveness of such efforts inform later policy development and have helped to cement a continuous improvement culture in the district.

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Addressing California's Data Needs: Implementing Comprehensive, Longitudinal Systems at the Local and State Levels

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Statement of the Problem

In the past decade California has made significant strides towards making important and relevant school and district data available to educators and the public. Databases, such as the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS) and student achievement data sets (including average test scores, API, AYP, Program Improvement status) are publicly accessible and provide important information on school performance, teacher and student demographics, and subgroup performance.

Despite these efforts, the state still falls short of a comprehensive and easily accessed system with longitudinally-linked student-level data. Schools, districts, and the state are unable to track the progress of students over time, link that progress to program participation or teachers, or accurately determine key benchmarks such as dropout, graduation, or student mobility rates. We are also unable to track the progress and/or success of students who graduate from high school, leave high school early, transfer to other schools or districts, or attend post-secondary institutions.

As a result, our evaluation and accountability measures, both at the local and the state levels, are severely hampered. Without an effective student tracking system, we as superintendents and administrators of California districts are significantly limited in our ability to determine the effectiveness of local policies, programs, and practices aimed at improving student learning and attainment. Without significant investment in our own local data systems, it is difficult to accurately monitor individual students' progress prior to and after implementation of new programs and policies, to look at effects of initiatives on subgroups of data, or to obtain needed information for diagnosing and addressing individual student needs. This hinders the productivity of schools and districts by limiting the ability of educators to make evidence-based decisions about instructional practice and policy.

Similar limitations exist at the state level. The lack of a strong state data system weakens our ability to conduct robust evaluations of important state initiatives such as the Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA). With respect to accountability, school progress at this point must be assessed based on improvement from one cohort of students to another, rather than on growth of individual students across years. This method of tracking progress is especially problematic in a state like California with high mobility rates. In addition, because longitudinally-linked student data are not available, the state has been unable to apply to the federal government to establish a growth model for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). On a very fundamental basis the ability of the state to determine the effectiveness of policies and initiatives is severely compromised.

Unfortunately, state efforts to put a comprehensive data system in place seem to have been a casualty of political struggles, usually around budget priorities. SB 1453 authorized the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) in 2002, but to date funding for the system has not been anywhere near the level necessary for full implementation.¹ For CALPADS to be successful, districts must establish a sound infrastructure to ensure that high quality data are collected and entered into the system. This infrastructure would primarily be a one-time investment, yet the necessary funds for this investment have not been allocated. In addition, for the system to realize its potential contribution to evidence-based decision-making, it must track a sufficient range of data on both educational outcomes (such as California Standards Test (CST) scores, graduation, etc.) and educational inputs (program participation, teacher qualifications, etc.). Yet the data to be included in CALPADS have been limited to only those variables required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), apparently due to fears that requiring additional information would generate district demands for more state funding to modify and expand local data systems. Thus, even if fully funded, the data system currently envisioned would remain focused on trailing indicators (such as the AYP and API scores) rather than also including variables (leading indicators) that might help predict or explain patterns in student achievement. We believe that if we are to raise the overall level of achievement and close the achievement gap in this state, we must identify and track the leading indicators that are likely to predict improvements in student performance.

In addition to the limitations in California's statewide data systems, we are also concerned about the limited capacity of many of our state's districts and schools to generate, analyze, and use data for instructional improvement. Districts and schools require data at a fine-grained level, collected at frequent intervals, to inform their instructional practices and policies. These data include scores on benchmark assessments, information on course enrollment and classroom assignments, student grades, and student supports, among others. Some of these variables would be unnecessary and overly cumbersome in a state data system, so districts must find ways to collect, store, and analyze them on their own. Since districts typically do not have the internal capacity needed to do so, we often work with vendors who can set up systems for data collection and analysis. However, accurate and sufficient information necessary for us to choose appropriate and reliable vendors is not readily available. Companies often over-promise on data systems for districts, and dollars and time are wasted on unsuitable or low-quality systems as a result. Furthermore the systems that are developed locally often are incompatible with the state system or higher education data systems, preventing the merging of data sets needed for important analyses. This lack of compatibility also hinders districts

¹ For the 2006-07 budget, the CDE and LAO requested \$15 million to support districts' maintenance of the student identifier system and for other data quality improvements. The allocation of these funds was later withdrawn from the budget. See Hansen (2007).

from sharing necessary information when students change locale. We believe there is a state role for facilitating more effective data systems at the local level.

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations address the need (as described above) for improved systems that will make necessary data available and accessible to districts, schools, and teachers, and will facilitate improved monitoring and accountability by the state, as well as local entities.

➤ **Implement and fully fund a comprehensive, longitudinal state data system**

First, we recommend that the state fully implement the comprehensive longitudinal data system (CALPADS) that will enable districts and schools to examine individual students' performance over time. We must identify and take specific steps to break the gridlock that is preventing the implementation of this system, and the state must appropriate sufficient funds to initiate and maintain high quality implementation. Without an initial investment to ensure that this system is comprehensive, accessible, and easy to use, it will always fall short of meeting the data needs of the state.

In addition, the state should provide the funding necessary for districts to implement and contribute to this system, at least during the initial start-up period when new data collections and systems must be established at the local level. Any data system is only useful to the extent that the data it contains are accurate and complete; the quality and usefulness of our statewide system should not be dependent on the uneven capacity and will at the local level.

To address the needs outlined above, this system must include the following:

- A required unique identifier for each student in California. While this identifier currently exists, an effective system for using this identifier has not been established. Use of this identifier should be required of all publicly funded schools, including charters, in the pre-K-12 system. Full use of the identifier will enable the tracking of student progress over time, even if the student moves to a new school or district. This identifier will help districts to calculate dropout and graduation rates more accurately as well as student and teacher mobility.
- The use of this unique identifier should also be required at all publicly funded institutions of higher education (IHEs) (including community colleges, California State universities, and the University of California). Ultimately the goal of the pre-K-12 system is to prepare students for success in college and/or careers, and beyond. Without the ability to track students into and through higher education institutions, the ability for the state and districts to assess their success towards this goal is limited.
- A comprehensive review of the variables to be included in this system should be completed by the state. Decisions on what variables to include (including leading indicators) should be based on the data needs of local districts and the state, and not for political or financial reasons. At the minimum, the state data system should include individual students' test scores (STAR, CAHSEE, CELDT, etc.), dropout and graduation status, student demographic

information, program participation (e.g., special education, vocational education), as well as linkages between students' and teachers' data.

To ensure that such a system is used appropriately and to its full potential, the state must also find ways to make the data accessible to educators and researchers while maintaining student privacy. Educators should have access to individual students' records of performance and teacher assignments for students in their jurisdiction in order to plan instructional programs. In addition, educators should be trained how to access and use these data effectively.

Such a comprehensive and fine-grained student-level dataset would enable more effective evaluation of statewide educational programs and policies. The growth of individual students across years could be used to measure school progress and contribution to student learning, rather than simply changes from one cohort of students to another. In addition, by linking students to teachers, and tracking teachers over time, the state could further evaluate the effects of programs and policies for teachers (e.g., professional development programs) on student achievement and could examine additional indicators like teacher mobility. Finally, the presence of such a system would enable California to further explore options with the federal government that would allow the use of a growth model for AYP in California, though such a system may also require changes in the CST such that scores are vertically equated across grades.

Such a system would also further enable local districts and schools to make evidence-based decisions about programs and policies to improve instruction. Educators could follow students over time, examine past performance of students who attended other schools or districts in California, and follow students beyond the K-12 system to determine how successfully they prepared students for post-secondary programs. Districts and schools could better identify shortcomings in curriculum, improve the design of their instructional programs, and analyze programs to ensure they are effective.

➤ **Provide support to develop and refine local data systems**

While the state system outlined above will provide necessary data for the state and local jurisdictions to analyze the effectiveness of practices and policies, individual districts and schools need to utilize a broader set of data to track progress on specific district goals. More detailed and comprehensive data sets can help to ensure districts and schools are meeting the range of their students' needs and are adjusting instructional programs accordingly. Thus, we also recommend that the state take measures to support regional and local efforts to develop local data systems that are customized to their needs, coordinated with the state system, and linked to post-secondary information. Specifically, we recommend:

- Vendor quality: The state should play a supportive role in helping districts identify vendors for local data systems that can articulate with one another and with the state system. For example, the state could compile a "Consumer Reports" style summary of various software systems available for district and school use, based on an independent review. Data that would be useful to districts in such local systems include (in addition to student performance data) information on intervention and remediation efforts, access to rigorous academic courses, use of particular teaching practices for English learners, professional development initiatives, social services provided to students, etc. These data could be used to determine

the effectiveness of particular programs and instructional practices, as well as to identify specific needs of students.

- **State and local system compatibility:** The state should provide guidelines to ensure that data vendors create systems that are compatible with the statewide CALPADS system. In other words, districts should have the capacity to merge data from their local systems with data from the statewide system, IHEs, and other districts (for example, if students transfer into a district from elsewhere in the state).
- **Post-secondary information:** Currently, many districts pay a clearinghouse to obtain relevant information from IHEs. The state should consider partnering with other state-funded post-secondary education institutions such as the CSUs and community colleges as a part of the pre-K-16 system to enable the sharing of these data across all levels for purposes of instructional improvement and evaluation of educational initiatives.
- **Leading indicators:** The state should commission a study that will recommend leading indicators that could be carefully tracked by local districts to determine which systems, structures, and processes are most likely to impact the quality of instructional practice

We believe these recommendations address the primary data concerns and issues raised in the Getting Down to Facts reports. Significant evidence indicates that the use of data to inform instruction is an important strategy to address student needs and improve student learning. In addition, accurate and timely data are an essential component of any effective results-based accountability system focused on improving student learning and achievement. Therefore, as part of a statewide, coherent and aligned system of governance, accountability, and finance in California, a comprehensive data system is key. We urge the state to move ahead with its plans to implement such a system. We also caution against taking shortcuts in terms of funding and comprehensiveness. A strong one-time investment that addresses the data needs now and into the future will avoid additional challenges, limitations, and constraints down the road. Finally, to make the statewide system effective, it will be necessary for the state to provide the necessary supports for local districts to build their capacity to utilize the data and create customized systems to address local needs.

Summary of Evidence Supporting Recommendations

A growing body of research (Williams et al., 2005; Bitter et al., 2005) in California provides evidence that systematic analysis and use of data to inform instruction is a key factor for the improvement of student outcomes and achievement in high-poverty schools. In light of this evidence, we recommend in this brief that the state put systems in place to make data that can be used to inform instruction available and easily accessible to educators throughout the state.

The data systems we recommend are based on evidence from a combination of research and our own practice as educators and district leaders. As documented in the Getting Down to Facts studies, California is behind most states in its data approach and the quality of the educational data system (Hansen, 2007). California still has a “traditional approach” to data collection, with multiple and separate collections that primarily satisfy accountability and monitoring requirements. We concur with Hansen’s recommendation that California should look to the experiences of other states to develop data systems that can be used for “robust, integrated analyses” to inform policy and program

development and implementation. A comprehensive, longitudinal system as recommended in this brief would move us in the right direction.

Researchers have also identified little support among California's state leaders for developing an education data system. As mentioned above, in 2006 the state Legislature denied the level of funding recommended for districts to maintain the new student identifier system, something noted as critical to tracking longitudinal student progress within the K-16 education system (Hansen, 2007). In addition, other constituencies have restricted the variables to be included in the system to those required by NCLB. We believe that it is critical for state leadership to overcome these hurdles and to focus on developing a "culture of data" (Hansen, 2007) in order to focus on the connection between quality data and school and district improvement efforts.

Finally, California's focus on compliance with federal and state testing and accountability has largely driven the existing state data system, but it has not supported *district* data needs (Springboard Schools, 2007). Districts must be able to link the effectiveness of particular strategies and practices to improvements in instructional practice and student achievement. While researchers have noted some recent promising changes, we believe it is critical for the state to fully fund and support a comprehensive longitudinal data system as well as support local efforts to collect, analyze, and use data to inform instruction.

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Improving Teacher Quality: Redesigning Personnel Policies to Support Student Achievement

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Statement of the Problem

Education is a personnel-intensive enterprise that depends on professionally trained staff and support personnel to provide the diverse services that make high quality teaching and learning possible. Approximately 85 percent of school district expenditures are directly related to the costs of hiring, training, and evaluating personnel. Of these personnel costs, the majority go toward the certificated employees who provide direct services to children, whether those services occur in the classroom, the counseling office, the library, or other locations.

We believe the key to effective teaching and learning is the quality of the certificated personnel who work in California's very diverse collection of school districts. The systems, structures, processes, and practices that guide the work of these districts must ensure that everyone stays focused on student success. They should support what works best for students, not for adults.

Unfortunately this is not the generally case in California. Certain policies and practices serve in fact to impede the district's mission-critical work to foster student success. We believe it is crucial for the state to address these policies and practices if we are to achieve our goal of preparing all students for success in higher education and/or a meaningful career. In this brief, we focus on policies related to the quality of our teachers and leaders. We categorize these policies into two groups: those related to the certification and hiring of qualified personnel, and those related to professional growth.

With respect to credentialing and hiring, examples of policies that impede district efforts to hire the best candidates abound. In particular, we highlight the following four:

1. A credentialing system that is cumbersome at best and that at worst undermines or impedes district efforts to identify and hire the most qualified staff. This problem especially impacts smaller, more rural districts.

2. The lack of connection of pre-service training to actual job requirements both for teachers and administrators. For example, high school teachers receive insufficient preparation to respond to the literacy needs of students; upper elementary and middle school teachers are often unprepared to teach content areas.
3. Laws related to the granting of tenure – arguably the most important personnel decision made by districts – which force districts to make a permanent commitment to personnel without adequate evidence to support ongoing success.
4. The absence of laws that require demonstrations of performance and continued professional growth to maintain teaching and/or administrative credentials.

The cumulative effect of these policies is to limit severely the ability of districts to make the personnel decisions that enable them to hire the best candidates both at the initial point and later when decisions about permanent status both for certificated and classified staff are required.

A second area is that related to the importance of encouraging and supporting participation in excellent professional development programs. Education is a dynamic and changing field. As new knowledge of practices that are likely to improve teaching and learning develops, teachers, administrators, and others must have continued access over time to this knowledge. Our particular concerns relate to three policies:

1. The severe curtailment of state support for professional development. While demands on teachers have intensified in the past decade, state support for professional development has decreased; we are nowhere near the level of eight professional development days we had in the 1990s, for example. Moreover, funding for professional development is either tied up in overly prescriptive categorical programs or spent on salary enhancements that accrue as a result of completing coursework unrelated to district and school improvement strategies. Neither is likely to contribute to improved student achievement.
2. The lack of state support for leadership development especially for teacher leaders, aspiring administrators, district office leadership, and governing bodies. We all know that the quality of our educational leaders is critically important to the ability of schools and districts to engage in continuous improvement strategies. Yet opportunities for leadership development and the maintenance of an effective pipeline to leadership positions are both woefully lacking in this state.
3. A credentialing system which fails to recognize the necessity of continued participation in professional growth and performance.

When we consider these issues in total, it is clear to us that absent a much better alignment of personnel policies and practices to other reform efforts, our ability to raise the level of achievement and close the achievement gap is constrained.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the issues and problems above, we recommend the following changes in current policy and practice to improve the quality of certificated staff in California's districts. We have grouped our recommendations into four categories – teacher credentialing, recruitment and retention, tenure, and professional preparation and growth.

➤ Revise the Teacher Credentialing System

We propose the following four recommendations for revising the teacher credentialing system:

Redesigned Credentialing System to Address Content and Language: First, we recommend that the state engage in a comprehensive study and reform of the current credentialing system with the intent of

simplifying the process to allow for three major credentials: K-3, 4-8, and subject matter specialty thereafter. The K-3 credential would focus on knowledge of literacy, numeracy, and instruction of English learners, which we consider to be the most important skill areas for this age group given California's student population. This credential would also have an option for a pre-K specialization. The 4-8 credential would address the transition to a content area focus. The credential would focus on subject matter knowledge (including a strong focus on mathematics and science) as well as writing, academic language, and instruction for English learners. We recommend the state negotiate with the federal government so that this 4-8 credential would satisfy the "highly-qualified" criteria at the middle school level. The primarily content-focused single subject credential would then just be used for high school teacher candidates. This new breakdown in the credentialing system would help to build necessary skills applicable to each grade span, balancing the need to address both content and language. Both the 4-8 and single subject credential should require demonstration of teachers' ability to incorporate literacy skills (reading and writing) into content instruction. We realize that changing the system in this way could pose logistical challenges initially, particularly for small schools and districts. The process for rolling out this change would need to be considered carefully and planned out over time to prevent operational difficulties during the transition.

Competence in Key Areas: We also recommend that the state identify and require the demonstration of competence in key skill areas for instructing California's students. These areas include (but are not limited to) the deep content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge tied to the curriculum and standards in California, assessment strategies (both formative and summative) and the use of data to inform instruction, cross-cultural competency, and strategies to work with parents and families. In addition, the elements of the Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) certificate should be strengthened within the credential program. These skills are essential for teachers to meet the needs of California's diverse student population. Performance measures in these various areas should complement the training.

Supplemental Special Education Credential: We recommend that the special education credential be revisited, particularly in light of the shortage of qualified special education teachers and increased expectations that students with disabilities be held to the same standards as all students. We recommend that the regular education credential require sufficient and solid preparation such that a teacher with this credential could teach students with mild to moderate disabilities. The special education credential would be a supplemental certificate beyond the regular education credential and would ensure a teacher is prepared to teach students with moderate to severe disabilities. The special education credential would therefore be based more directly on the regular education credential, ensuring that students with disabilities have an education grounded in the same standards required for all students. In addition, this system would enable more cross-over and flow among teachers between these two credential statuses. We expect that a structure like this could attract more qualified teachers to special education classrooms and better enable regular education teachers to address the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Credential Renewal Linked to Professional Growth: Finally, as part of the credential revision process we also recommend that there be a stronger link between credential renewal every five years and performance (or skill level) and professional growth. As is the case with other professions, maintenance of one's credential ought to be conditional, based on evidence of performance and professional growth requirements. The state would need to consider ways to do this without greatly increasing the bureaucratic processes around credential renewal.

- **Provide Flexibility and/or Incentives to Improve Recruitment and Retention in High-need Areas, Hard-to-staff Schools, and Identified Subject Areas with Shortages**

Along with revisions to the credential system, the state should address the difficulties that some districts and schools have finding and retaining credentialed personnel. Some districts, particularly rural districts, struggle to find teachers in their locale or teachers who are willing to move to the district. Others struggle to maintain credentialed staff in specific high-need schools. These could include schools that are facing particular challenges (e.g., in improving achievement) or schools that are in various stages of Program Improvement such as restructuring, where there is the potential for staff to be released. In addition, districts and schools throughout California struggle to identify, hire, and retain teachers in certain subject areas, including mathematics, science, and special education. These difficulties are exacerbated by current state conditions and policies. For example, it is difficult for districts and schools to be pro-active in locating and hiring qualified staff when the state fiscal calendar prohibits them from knowing sufficiently ahead of time how much money they will have available to hire staff. In addition, the Williams requirement that schools have staff in place by the 20th day of the school year often forces schools to hire whomever is available to fill the position rather than spend additional time to locate a strong, credentialed, and experienced teacher.

In order to address these recruitment and retention challenges, we recommend the state implement incentives to help recruit and retain teachers in these areas and/or provide more flexibility in the hiring process for these districts. Specifically,

- **Incentives:** The state should implement incentives to attract and retain teachers in these high-need areas, including rural districts, hard-to-staff schools, and identified subject areas. For example, incentives could be provided to a rural district and its closest urban district to share staff. Or a teacher could be given an extra year of service credit for each year he/she continues teaching in a high-need district or hard-to-staff school. Other incentives could be considered as well, such as improvements in working conditions, opportunities for professional learning, additional pay (e.g., hiring bonuses), etc. By establishing these incentives at the *state level* (similar to the incentives offered to National Board Certified Teachers), the need to navigate unique collective bargaining agreements in local jurisdictions will be minimized.
- **Flexibility:** We also recommend that districts in very high need areas – particularly rural regions – be given increased flexibility with respect to credentialing requirements. We suggest that specifically identified districts be allowed to hire individuals they have identified as likely to achieve success in the classroom, but who may not have completed the requirements for a credential. These districts should then receive assistance to help these individuals earn their credential, potentially through flexible or creative processes. We recognize that the state may need to apply to the federal government for this increased flexibility in order to meet the highly qualified teacher provisions of NCLB.

➤ **Increase and Add Flexibility to Tenure Timing**

Our third area of recommendation concerns the length of the probationary period. It is important that before granting tenure, districts be confident of the ability of the staff member to succeed in the classroom. This is particularly important given that the removal of ineffective tenured staff is an extremely difficult and time consuming affair. Under current law this decision for all practical purposes needs to be made in one and a half years. This is simply too short a period of time for novice teachers to develop or demonstrate their skills. We therefore recommend the following:

- The expected probationary period for tenure should be increased to three years, on average. However, while we suggest three years as the norm, we also recognize that the particulars of specific tenure cases may vary. In some situations and for some particularly well-qualified

individuals, two years may be sufficient time for a district to feel confident granting tenure. There may be times when a speedier tenure process may be necessary to keep a well-prepared and mobile teacher in the system. In contrast, there may also be cases in which even three years does not provide enough time for a candidate to develop or demonstrate his or her potential as a qualified teacher. In these situations, the district may want to provide the candidate with an additional year to hone his/her skills before making the tenure ruling. For these reasons we are recommending a flexible window of 2-4 years in which the tenure decision would need to be made. In all cases tenure decisions should be based on sufficient evidence that the candidate is ready and qualified to teach independently within the system.

- This probation window and tenure clock should start *after* any internship period in which a teacher is not fully credentialed and *after* any temporary assignment period.

➤ **Provide Support for Professional Preparation and Growth**

Finally, we recommend the state take actions that will place a stronger emphasis on the value of continued professional growth for all members of the education profession.

High-Quality Pre-Service Training: To better align the pre-service training that teachers receive with the challenges and expectations they will meet in the classroom, we recommend the state provide incentives for higher education and school districts to work more closely together in the development and delivery of high-quality pre-service programs. While statewide credential requirements can ensure necessary training in key skill areas, individual districts can help local pre-service programs better prepare teachers to meet the needs of students in their area. For example, Long Beach Unified has partnered closely with CSU Long Beach to ensure students graduating from this program are well-prepared to meet the needs of the diverse Long Beach population. Many teaching candidates participate in internships in Long Beach Unified, and Long Beach Unified staff help to teach courses and inform program faculty of district needs. This has been a very effective partnership that has helped to increase the quality of teachers entering the system.

Additional Professional Development Days: We recommend that the length of the school year be expanded (for teachers) to provide at least ten days for professional development outside the 180-day school year. These days should not continue to be carved out of time necessary for direct teaching and learning. The use of these days should be determined locally, based on the instructional needs in the district. The provision of additional days will mean that districts and their external partners will be able to provide the breadth and depth required for the kind of professional development efforts which will be necessary to close the achievement gap. This also has the benefit of raising salaries so that we can attract and retain more quality people in the profession.

Leadership Training: We recommend that the state support and/or implement systems to develop high-quality leadership (at all levels) in the state. Specifically:

- The current administrative preparation system should include a stronger pre-service preparation program, such as that offered in a high-quality MBA program.
- Continued leadership development should be fostered through increased opportunities for professional growth and coaching. This could be accomplished through better leadership development partnerships between higher education and K-12 such as that which occurs with Central Valley school districts, CSU Fresno, and the Central Valley Education Leadership Institute or Long Beach Unified and CSU Long Beach. In addition, other models, such as the

California School Leadership Academies (CSLA) or the California Subject Matters Projects (CSMP), that have been viewed positively in the past for their leadership development work, should be reinvigorated.

Strengthening the quality of leadership development through improved pre-service programs and continuing professional growth requirements will help improve the management of the systems that support education reform. Recognizing that development of our teacher, school, and district leaders is an important part of the reform process, we recommend that the proposals be solicited for the development and operation of partnerships among higher education, third party organizations (e.g., reform support organizations, research groups, professional associations), and districts that develop leadership programs that equip our present and future leaders from in and outside education to provide the leadership required to raise achievement and close the achievement gap by making high-quality instructional practice the focus of everyone's work.

Summary of Evidence Supporting Recommendations

Several of the *Getting Down to Facts* Studies addressed issues of teacher quality and teacher/leadership development. These studies corroborate the policy issues that are outlined in this brief, the implications of which we have directly experienced in our leadership roles. For example, Loeb and Miller (2007) point out that California is one of only 10 states that issues tenure after only two years, and that many principals reported that they viewed the current tenure laws "as a barrier to improving teaching in their schools." Survey responses from principals in Darling-Hammond and Orphanos's study of leadership development in California (2007) indicated that the leadership development efforts in California were weak compared to those in other states. The authors note the variation in quality among administrator preparation and credentialing programs and the few opportunities to participate in administrative internship or mentoring/coaching programs. Finally, Koski and Horng (2007) find in their research (which supports prior research in California) that schools with higher percentages of minority students and large and growing schools have fewer credentialed and experienced teachers than others. They report that their findings imply a need for incentives to attract teachers to difficult-to-staff schools.

One of the primary findings of Loeb and Miller (2007), however, is that few states have systematically evaluated their teacher policies, including preparation, certification, and tenure policies. Therefore, evidence of effective policies across the U.S. is limited, leaving California with few models to draw on for improving teacher quality. Given the limited research evidence, evidence from practice and the professional judgment of educators in California should be considered in making improvements to policies that affect teacher preparation, hiring, and professional growth.

We also cite the analysis of administrator development programs led by Levine (2005). This study was critical of the misalignment between current leadership development programs nationwide and the actual job demands placed on principals, superintendents, and other support personnel. The study called for institution of a preparation program similar to that offered in a high-quality MBA program.

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California Collaborative on District Reform

California Collaborative on District Reform

The California Collaborative on District Reform, an initiative of the American Institutes for Research, was formed in 2006 to join researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in ongoing, evidence-based dialogue to improve instruction and student learning for all students in California's urban school systems.

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For more information about the Collaborative and its work, visit www.cacollaborative.org.