

The California Collaborative on District Reform

Jennifer O'Day, Chair
American Institutes for Research

George Bohrnstedt
American Institutes for Research

Jim Brown
Pivot Learning Partners

Richard Carranza
San Francisco Unified School District

Cynthia Coburn
University of California, Berkeley

John Deasy
Los Angeles Unified School District

Ken Doane
S. H. Cowell Foundation

Patricia Gándara
University of California, Los Angeles

Amy Gerstein
John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities

Kenji Hakuta
Stanford University

Mike Hanson
Fresno Unified School District

Matt Hill
Los Angeles Unified School District

Joseph Johnson
San Diego State University

Marc Johnson
Sanger Unified School District

Derry and Charlene Kabcenell
Dirk & Charlene Kabcenell Foundation

Maggie Mejia
Former Superintendent

Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana
Santa Ana Unified School District

Rick Miller
California Education Partners
Capitol Impact LLC

Ellen Moir
New Teacher Center

Jonathan Raymond
Sacramento City Unified School District

Jorge Ruiz de Velasco
Ford Foundation

Laura Schwalm
Garden Grove Unified School District

Tony Smith
Oakland Unified School District

Warren Simmons
Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Marshall "Mike" Smith
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Tony Smith
Oakland Unified School District

Brad Stam
ConnectEd

Christopher Steinhauser
Long Beach Unified School District

Joan Talbert
Stanford University

Dale Vigil
Los Angeles Unified School District, Local District 4

VIA EMAIL AND HARD COPY

May 30, 2012

Honorable Edmund G. Brown
Governor of the State of California
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown:

For years, there has been a collective cry for a dramatic change to California's state funding system for education. Now is the time to make that cry for change a reality. A shift to a state weighted pupil formula (WPF) is the right thing to do to improve our state's ability to educate children to their fullest potential. Therefore, **the members of the California Collaborative on District Reform**—led by 10 district leaders from across the state, coupled with researchers, grant makers, support providers, advocates, and policymakers—**urge the state to move forward with plans to implement a new state-level WPF policy.**

The foundation of a state WPF policy is built on three key concepts that the Collaborative has long held as important tenets at the local level. First, dollars should follow students and should be targeted at those students most in need (e.g., students in poverty, English learners). This tenet echoes the overarching goal of the Collaborative to ensure that students are at the center of every policy and that every policy helps ensure that all students have the opportunity to graduate from high school prepared for success in college, career, and civic life. Second, districts should have flexibility to spend funds in ways that will best meet their students' needs, ensure access and equity, and respond to unique local contexts. The Collaborative has long argued for increased flexibility in strategy and programming, coupled with accountability for outcomes, recognizing that local educators know better how to allocate their resources to best fit the needs of their students. Third, the state's education funding mechanism should be rational, transparent, and comprehensible. The Collaborative has previously argued that it is difficult for local and state policymakers and voters to make informed decisions within the framework of the current system.

The support of a WPF policy among the Collaborative members is clear. Indeed, three of the districts that participate in the Collaborative already "walk the walk," having already embraced a WPF policy as the district funding mechanism. Oakland and San Francisco Unified have both used a student-based funding policy for years and, prior to the budget cuts of recent years, saw schools with higher need students receiving a greater proportion of the districts' funds. Los Angeles Unified more recently began piloting increased flexibility and increased resource allocation decision-making for school leaders in over 100 schools. But all of the district leaders in the Collaborative have long pushed for the tenets behind a WPF approach at the state level; we do not enter into this decision lightly.

The California Collaborative on District Reform (www.cacollaborative.org) joins researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in ongoing, evidence-based dialogue and collaborative activity to improve instruction and student learning for all students in California's urban school systems.

While the Collaborative firmly endorses the concept of a WPF policy, we also recognize that the details of the final proposal will significantly impact whether the policy actually fulfills its intended purpose. There are necessary preconditions for this shift to serve the policy's intended purpose and meet the needs of all our students.

First and foremost, a move to a new funding policy cannot distract from the fundamental need for the state to provide all districts with an adequate base amount of funding. The state reportedly owes districts over \$9 billion from budget dealings over the past several years of the state's fiscal crisis. A move to a WPF policy does not change the fact that districts are owed this money. Nor does it change the fact that the state must continue to find ways to increase the overall funding amount for education. California now ranks 46th in the nation in per pupil spending, after adjusting for regional cost differences. A WPF policy cannot increase the overall amount of education funding in California; the state should.

Second, the weights in the funding formula matter. The weights should be significant enough to ensure that students most in need receive a greater amount of resources that allow them to meet the state's high standards and graduate prepared for college and career. If a WPF policy is truly supposed to target dollars to those students most in need, such as students in poverty and English learners, the weights must provide enough funds to make a difference for these students. If the state dilutes the weights too much, the policy will fail to increase the equity of educational opportunities across the state. Any further changes to the weights should be based on conversations with practitioners in the field and researchers who have studied WPF policies, to better understand the appropriate levels of resources for high-need students. In fact, a WPF approach loses its impact when all funds—including the money from the additional weights—go to cover basic costs rather than to the additional supports we know some students need.

Third, phasing in the implementation of WPF policy over too many years will dilute the strength and intention of the reform effort. The current approach to funding education in California is broken; a change is long overdue. If we phase in a WPF policy over seven years, the import and impact of the policy could be lost, giving districts several years of the "same old" dysfunctional funding system that does not best serve the needs of students. This change could be implemented, with an adequate transition time, over four to five years. The time for change is now; pushing off the implementation will not produce the results we need for children now.

Finally, the decision-making process to establish the specifics of the state's funding policy should be transparent and should involve dialogue with practitioners who truly understand the effects of state funding policies. Moving to a new funding policy will affect every district in the state. Therefore, districts should be involved in the process of shaping the important details of what this policy will look like moving forward. Whether discussing the weights or proposed timeline, as described above, or other important components that arise as the policy is being shaped in Sacramento, districts must have a voice. This cannot be a time for political interests to trump the interests of our educators and our students. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with state leaders and discuss in greater depth the changes to the policy that are currently being considered, and would encourage more public hearings on the design of the formula.

With these considerations in mind, we applaud you for your bold leadership on this issue and we urge the state to move forward quickly with plans for a new state WPF funding policy. Changing to

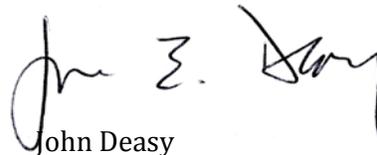
any new funding policy may result in perceived “winners” and “losers”—districts that receive more or less money than under the previous funding policy. To be clear, there will be districts that will receive more money than some of the districts in the Collaborative. But that is because, collectively, their students have an even greater need for resources to achieve success. As a collaborative of districts made up of some who will get less than others, we still support this move because it is the right thing to do for our students. We believe that education funding should be allocated based on students’ needs. That is the purpose of the policy and one that we all embrace. We want to discourage conversations that pit districts against districts. The more important consideration is about the students across all districts. California needs a more rational, effective, and equitable finance system that targets education funding based on student need and gives district leaders flexibility to respond to the needs of their students. In the long run, a WPF approach helps to ensure that *all* students in California will be winners.

With that in mind, we urge the state to enact a weighted pupil funding policy that brings California back to fully funding its districts and in a manner that best serves all our children.

Sincerely,



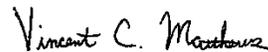
Jennifer O’Day, Chair
on behalf of the California Collaborative on
District Reform



John Deasy
Superintendent
Los Angeles Unified School District



Richard Carranza
Superintendent (*incoming*)
San Francisco Unified School District



Vince Matthews
Superintendent
San Jose Unified School District



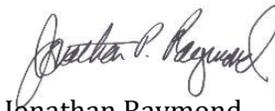
Marc Johnson
Superintendent
Sanger Unified School District



Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana
Superintendent
Santa Ana Unified School District



Michael Hanson
Superintendent
Fresno Unified School District



Jonathan Raymond
Superintendent
Sacramento City Unified School District



Laura Schwalm
Superintendent
Garden Grove Unified School District



Anthony Smith
Superintendent
Oakland Unified School District



Christopher Steinhauser
Superintendent
Long Beach Unified School District

cc:

Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent for Public Instruction

State Board of Education:

Michael Kirst, President

Sue Burr, Executive Director

Trish Boyd Williams

Carl A. Cohen

Aida Molina

James Ramos

Patricia Ann Rucker

Ilene Straus

Assembly Member Tom Ammiano

Assembly Member Bill Berryhill

Assembly Member Bob Blumenfield

Assembly Member Susan Bonilla

Assembly Member Steven Bradford

Assembly Member Julia Brownley

Assembly Member Joan Buchanan

Assembly Member Betsy Butler

Assembly Member Charles Calderon

Assembly Member Nora Campos

Assembly Member Wilma Amina Carter

Assembly Member Connie Conway

Assembly Member Mike Davis

Assembly Member Tim Donnelly

Assembly Member Mike Eng

Assembly Member Felipe Fuentes

Assembly Member Mike Gatto

Assembly Member Sharon Grove

Assembly Member Linda Halderman

Assembly Member Isadore Hall III

Assembly Member Diane Harkey

Assembly Member Jerry Hill

Assembly Member Ricardo Lara

Assembly Member Fiona Ma
Assembly Member Holly Mitchell
Assembly Member Brian Nestande
Assembly Member Jim Nielsen
Assembly Member Chris Norby
Assembly Member John Pérez
Assembly Member Jose Solorio
Assembly Member Sandré Swanson
Assembly Member Donald Wagner
Assembly Member Das Williams
Senator Elaine Alquist
Senator Sam Blakeslee
Senator Ellen Corbett
Senator Bob Dutton
Senator Ted Gaines
Senator Loni Hancock
Senator Bob Huff
Senator Christine Kehoe
Senator Alan Lowenthal
Senator Ted Lieu
Senator Carol Liu
Senator Curren Price
Senator Sharon Runner
Senator Darrell Steinberg
Senator Juan Vargas
Senator Mimi Walters
Senator Roderick Wright
Ana Matosantos, Department of Finance
Nick Schweizer, Department of Finance