

RACIAL JUSTICE REPORT CARD ON CALIFORNIA EDUCATION POLICY

An Education Climate With Opportunity for Change

When Governor Schwarzenegger named 2008 the Year of Education, a clear opportunity for big change was spotlighted in California education policy. In response, policy makers, committees, and organizations are issuing policy agendas.

State Superintendent of Instruction Jack O'Connell has noted that race is, yet should NOT be, a determining factor in the academic success of students in California. As policy agendas from the Governor's Advisory Committee on Education Excellence, Superintendent O'Connell's California P-16 Council and others are brought forth, it is important to evaluate whether these policies will truly move California toward a vision for racially just schools. There is cause to be wary as past efforts to reform California education policy have been deeply deficient in bringing about improvement in the quality of education for students of color.

Is Racial Justice in Education on the Horizon?

Many of California's schools serving students of color are hostile and dehumanizing places that track them into low-wage jobs and prison. Mainstream education policy is disconnected from an understanding of what strong learning experiences for students of color really look like. To build and support racially just schooling, education policies must 1.) seriously invest in a much-needed core policy *infrastructure*, AND 2.) ensure that this infrastructure addresses the necessary racially just policy *content* for a high quality learning experience for students of color.

Justice Matters has developed a report card to evaluate policy agendas being put forth for the Year of Education on how well they address these needs, how far they push us toward a vision of racially just schools. This report card is based on information and ideas from a recent study on policy supports for student learning in communities of color.

High Schools for Equity: Policy Supports for Student Learning in Communities of Color was conducted by Justice Matters and Linda Darling-Hammond, Diane Friedlaender, and the School Redesign Network at Stanford University (SRN LEADS). *High Schools for Equity* offers powerful and vivid examples of schools that are interrupting the status quo by providing real opportunities for low-income students of color to become critical thinking leaders with opportunities for their futures. However, these schools will remain anomalies without substantive policy changes.

The report card that emerges from this study is a tool for evaluating whether education policy agendas are connected to a vision of learning for students of color, or whether they simply perpetuate the status quo. Policy recommendations that receive high marks will not only dramatically improve learning for students of color, but they will also enrich and deepen learning for all students.

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Building Policy With a Racially Just Vision of Student Learning

California's current educational system is based on antiquated notions of learning and short-sighted measures of achievement driving curriculum, pedagogy, and learning to narrow ends, especially in schools serving low-income students of color. Attempts at closing the "achievement gap" fall short of a truly racially just vision of education and, in many cases, impede rather than support a learning environment in which students of color can achieve academically in meaningful ways that far exceed scoring well on standardized tests. To truly build racially just policy, we must begin to base education policy-making on a richer picture of what a strong learning experience in schools can be for students of color. This entails addressing the wide range of interlocking policies that actively shape the day-to-day learning experiences for students of color inside the classroom. In this way, we can ensure serious investment not only in a sorely lacking core policy infrastructure, but an infrastructure that addresses the necessary racially just policy content to bring about an intellectually rigorous, responsive, and culturally relevant learning experience for students of color.

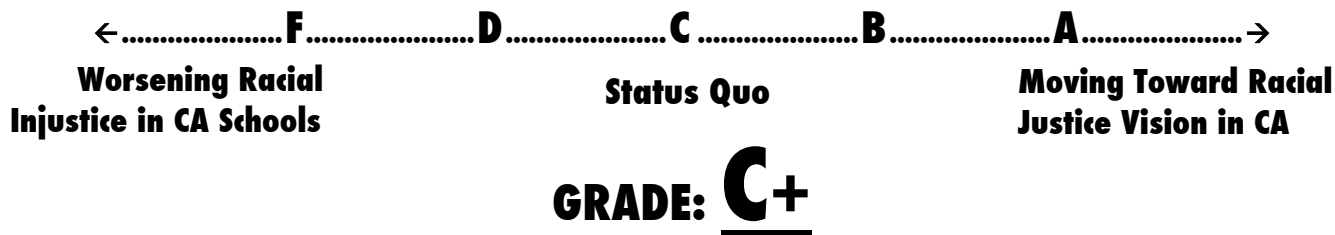
The Applied Research Center, Californians For Justice, California Tomorrow, César E. Chavez Institute of San Francisco State University, and Community Asset Development Re-defining Education (CADRE) endorse this report card framework.

HIGH SCHOOLS FOR EQUITY: POLICY SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

High Schools for Equity is the only research available that identifies policy areas that have major influences on the ability of high schools to provide learning experiences that are academically rigorous, relevant, and address the learning needs of English learners enabling our most underserved students to succeed. The study focuses on five California non-selective public high schools serving a majority low-income students of color. These schools not only graduate students and send them on to college and careers, but also are healthy places for students of color to develop their identities, envision and realize a broad range of future opportunities, and become vital members of their communities. *High Schools for Equity* identifies the policies that would be needed for other schools to undertake the practices of the schools in the study. Many of the findings have implications beyond the high school level and identify policy needs throughout the K-12 system as well as at the postsecondary level. The study can be downloaded at www.justicematters.org

Report Card on the Recommendations of The Governor's Committee on Education Excellence

In April 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger established the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence. The Committee was charged with developing recommendations for changes in the school system in the areas of governance, finance, teacher recruitment and retention, and administrator preparation and retention. The Committee held meetings across the state and also considered an extensive set of studies that were commissioned to inform its work. This Report Card grades the recommendations that the Committee developed.



Discussion

Overview. The C+ grade factors in a number of bold recommendations that are vital to achieving a racially just school system, some recommendations that could actually make our schools worse, and silence on several policy issues that must be addressed if California students are to get the education they deserve.

Issuing a Call. The Committee members do a great service through the manner in which they frame their recommendations. First, they tell some important truths about California's schools. They state that our education system is "fundamentally flawed," and that the state has "created a pattern of disparities" where "students from low-income families, many of them children of color and/or English learners, are losing the most" (Summary Report, pp. 4-5). The Committee holds that as the school system "reinforces and enlarges the existing social inequities" it acts in a way that is "exactly the opposite of the intended function of public education in a democracy" (Summary Report, p.5).

This honest diagnosis of the problem lays the foundation for a call for bold, serious, comprehensive changes to the school system. And indeed, the magnitude of many of the changes the Committee calls for lives up to its ambitious call.

The Committee delineates several important guiding principles that should shape an effort for making big changes in our school system. The school system must be student-focused, must promote equity, and must be founded on the work of excellent teachers and principals (Summary Report, p. 8). Reforms must be coherent and inter-linked, because a history of piecemeal changes is part of what has created the current problems in our schools (Summary Report, p. 8). For example, reforms to increase flexibility and autonomy in the system must be matched with increased professional development and investments in the capacity of those who are being given more autonomy (Summary Report, p.2).

Aside from the recommendations themselves, this framing for the Committee's work is a productive and meaningful opening to a conversation about changing California's school system in ways that are bold, serious, student-centered, equity-focused, and informed by key principles for what it takes to improve learning.

Unfortunately, the Committee's frame for its work leaves out one crucial element—some ideas and criteria for what is involved in a good education. It is not enough to say that teachers must be "excellent," and students should "achieve." These concepts can mean many different things, and when they are not thoughtfully defined, they can lead to education policy that fails to meet the learning needs of California's students and can even worsen the quality of learning. Many of the recommendations' weaknesses flow from this absence of a clear vision for what our schools should do. Some might wonder if a vision for education is compatible with the Committee's interest in moving the system

toward more local autonomy. We believe that it is possible for the state to support local autonomy while still laying out a broad vision for schooling, and in fact, that such a vision will actually be a strong complement to more flexibility at the local level.

Our own vision for schooling is that it should involve intellectually rigorous content for all students; that the learning experience should be interesting and meaningful; that learning should take into account who students are and what they bring to school including their cultures, languages, current skill and knowledge levels; and that learning should take place in a setting of strong, positive relationships between school staff and students and their families. We believe that such schooling results in mastery of basic skills; the ability of students to think deeply and independently; holistic development for students; student and family ownership of the learning process; and preparation of students for careers, democratic participation, and contribution to their community. We see this vision as a vision of a racially just school system because it emphasizes features that students of color are most deprived of in the current school system, and it also requires schools to specifically understand the backgrounds of students of color so that they can provide them with a rich, relevant learning experience. At the same time, this vision is one of greatly enhanced quality for all students.

Strengthening Teaching and Leadership. Strong teacher and principal skills are essential to providing high quality learning experiences, and to addressing the specific learning strengths and needs that students of color bring to school. These skills get developed in two phases of educators' careers: 1.) the preparation phase, which occurs prior to being placed in a job; 2.) the ongoing professional development phase after the educator is serving as a teacher or principal. The Committee's recommendations regarding ongoing professional development are quite strong, whereas many of the recommendations for teacher preparation are problematic.

The recommendations for professional development would strengthen the core infrastructure that would enable the ongoing growth that teachers must engage in to do a good job. The recommendations for ongoing professional development including mentoring and coaching during the school day are a much-needed correction to a system which has been very seriously deficient in time and structures to allow teachers to master the professional skills that their students need them to have (Summary Report, p. 17). The Committee also calls for pathways for teachers to become master and mentor teachers and take roles in planning, classroom observation and peer coaching (Summary Report, pp. 16-17). These pathways provide mechanisms through which the kinds of professional learning experiences that teachers need can be effectively delivered.

Unfortunately, some of the Committee's recommendations about the preparation for people getting ready to become teachers could actually weaken teachers' skills. The Committee identifies a number of problems in the current teacher preparation infrastructure. We also believe that the current teacher preparation infrastructure needs serious change in order to consistently prepare educators to successfully teach students of color. The Committee proposes to replace the current teacher preparation accreditation system with an approach based solely on outcomes such as graduation rates from programs, retention rates of graduates in their teaching positions, and their performance on state-required teacher assessments (Technical Report, p. 4-20). We agree that the accreditation system should become more outcome-oriented. But information about outcomes should be embedded in a broader framework that makes sense of the data. There is a substantial body of research on the elements and characteristics of teacher credentialing programs that provide teachers the skills and knowledge that they need to fully support the learning of their students, with specific attention to teaching students of color (as well as English learners, low-income students, special education students and other groups with specific learning strengths and needs). The state has the responsibility to make sure that these core elements are in place. Relying on crude outcome measures alone could mean that many teacher education programs are seriously deficient in key areas without such problems being detected and addressed.

The recommendations also open the door to the idea that people going into teaching who have strong knowledge of a subject such as science might get a teaching credential without any training whatsoever in how to teach California K-12 students (Technical Report, pp.4-18-19). Such an approach flies in the face of research—and common sense—that tell us that in addition to subject matter knowledge, teachers need skills that help them transmit that knowledge effectively, and to do so with students who have a diverse range of learning strengths and needs. Taken together, these recommendations could seriously lower the quality of teacher preparation rather than improve it. Ironically, the improved professional development system for teachers that the Committee recommends would have to focus on remediation to correct for a weak teacher preparation system.

In terms of recruiting teachers into the school system, we like the recommendation to reduce attrition in the Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program (Summary Report, p. 19). This program, which assists teachers' aides in becoming teachers, increases the supply of teachers of color. However, this program is relatively small in comparison to the teacher recruitment needs. More must be done here, as well as with respect to recruiting principals that have the abilities that students require and that reflect the diversity of California students.

The Committee proposes that teacher and principal compensation be linked to factors such as student academic achievement, demonstrated advancement of skills and knowledge, and addressing the needs of parents (Summary Report, p. 17). Such "pay-for-performance" schemes run the risk of actually lowering the quality of education rather than improving it. If teacher and principal pay is largely linked to student test scores, incentives could be created for using narrow, superficial teaching approaches that focus exclusively on the content and skills covered in standardized tests. Linking pay to student scores could push teachers and principals to teach in schools where students are scoring at higher levels. Principals might feel pressure to push out students that would bring down school scores. Students of color tend to be the hardest hit by all of these negative responses to pay-for-performance approaches that emphasize student test scores. The Committee says that it does not advocate "simplistic" approaches that rely on test scores alone in determining pay, but it does not suggest safeguards for making sure that test scores do not dominate formulas for setting salaries (Technical Report, p. 4-8).

The Committee recommendations on strengthening teaching and leadership are silent about the skills and knowledge that good teachers and principals must demonstrate and that a racially just school system would need from them. Articulating the range of important skills and knowledge that our educators need would help make the case for investments in their development and would make sure that such investments focus on the most important skills and knowledge, and that the specific needs of students of color (as well as English learners, low-income students, special education students, etc.) are met in ways that are not currently happening.

Funding. The Committee made a number of strong recommendations about the amount and type of funding that would bring about a more racially just school system. First, they take a big step towards the level of funding that is needed when they propose that the system devote 40% more to low-income students and 20% more to English learners (Summary Report, p. 23). Second, by specifically having funding follow students and providing extra funds to low-income students and English learners, they move the system to much greater equity (Summary Report, p. 23). Finally, they propose eliminating categorical funding streams that prevent money from being used in the ways that work best for students (Summary Report, p.24). These are bold proposals that would really make a difference for all California students and for students of color specifically.

The suggested approach to attaching additional funding to some groups of students would be even stronger if additional funds were also attached to racial groups that schools have had a poor track record of success with. The Committee recommendations do not include adding funding based on racial group, yet middle class students from some racial groups do substantially worse than other students, demonstrating that race is a factor in how well schools are doing with students, over and above income. Similarly, some students of color that are native English speakers have had less successful school experiences than some groups of English learners yet would not receive additional funding under this plan.

The Committee suggests that the additional weight for English learners start to be phased out after three years to reduce incentives to over-classify English learners (Summary Report, p. 24). This concern is justified, but based on research about how long it takes English learners to master academic English, it would be more appropriate to start phasing out the additional funding after 4 or 5 years.

Governance. The Committee's recommendations combine increasing autonomy at the local level with increasing the capacity of teachers and principals. This combination is very important. The school system's current emphasis on compliance with burdensome rules prevents local ownership and gets in the way of sound educational decisions that can really enhance students' experiences. Such regulations have specifically been found to be a major hindrance for schools that are providing a strong education to students of color. Accordingly, the Committee recommends reducing state regulations, increasing district autonomy, and progressively increasing autonomy at the school level (Summary Report, pp. 29-30). However, more flexibility and freedom does little if those being given the flexibility are not prepared to make

good decisions. The Committee's proposals combine recommendations for increased local autonomy and flexibility with investments in the capacities of educators at the local level (see discussion above on investments in professional development).

As part of its approach to increased local autonomy, the Committee also recommends instituting a different approach to teacher and principal evaluation. They call for teacher evaluations that are based on professional standards and that are conducted by master teachers and administrators who are well trained in evaluation and who observe teachers multiple times during a year (Summary Report, p.17). This focus on professional evaluation is an important piece of replacing bureaucratic accountability with an accountability that comes from committed educators holding each other accountable.

However, the governance provisions that address students' and families' roles in local autonomy are much weaker. The main recommendation that speaks to this area is the proposal to enhance school choice for families (Summary Report, p. 33). The idea is that families have a voice in their capacity as consumers that can choose which product (school) to consume. However, students and their families are more than consumers. They are members of a democracy, and they are members of the community of the school and district that they belong to. They deserve mechanisms and resources that enable them to have an authentic role in shaping how local autonomy is used. Their participation, particularly the participation of families of color who are currently least served by schools, is a vital ingredient in transforming the school system.

What's Missing? We very much agree with the Committee's view that meaningful improvement for our schools will not come about through piecemeal reforms because the various aspects of schooling are inter-related. Accordingly, we believe that the absence of recommendations on key aspects of the school system seriously hinders the potential impact of this package of proposals. The Committee made no recommendations on curriculum, assessment, and the stakes tied to assessment. Current policies in these areas are having a negative impact on California's students in general and on students of color specifically. The quantity and content of curriculum standards and guidelines in some subjects are impeding the high quality learning experience our students deserve. Narrow, standardized assessments tied to high stakes are driving approaches to learning that are rigid, superficial, and devoid of relevance to students and their communities. So many of the Committee's recommendations are based on using student achievement as a gauge for decisions and success. But the state's *de facto* definition of student achievement is so flawed that building a system on top of it is rife with problems.

While the recommendations take the important step of speaking to what kind of a preschool system needs to be in place, they do not discuss postsecondary access and supports. Sadly, even if the K-12 system was completely transformed, our higher education system is not set up to serve the students who would then be eligible for it.

In Conclusion. Although the Committee recommendations only earned a C+, they nevertheless make a very important contribution by opening a conversation about transforming California's schools. The Committee issues a call for bold, comprehensive change of a school system that is currently reinforcing and enlarging existing social inequities. Some of the recommendations match this call in their level of ambitiousness and boldness and serve as examples of the scope and scale of reforms that are needed.

Californians need to answer this call and pursue conversation and action to transform our schools. We must not let the current budget crisis undermine the momentum that has been starting to build around a sweeping agenda for change. In fact, the current budget crisis need not impede progress. The cost of the changes that are needed in our schools far outstrips what is financially available in even the best of budget years within the current structure of the state budget. New funding streams must be identified. At the same time, big changes in how the school system operates must be planned. All of this will take more time than the likely length of an economic downturn in the state. It is urgent to move forward in this planning right away. This is what all California students, and specifically students of color, deserve.

2008 RACIAL JUSTICE REPORT CARD

Governor's Committee on Education Excellence Recommendations

KEY POLICY AREAS	CORE INFRASTRUCTURE	↑, -, X or ↓	RACIAL JUSTICE POLICY CONTENT	↑, -, X or ↓
Recruitment and Preparation of Strong Teachers and Principals for Students of Color	Proactive recruitment of strong future teachers and principals	—	Recruitment of teachers and principals from demographic backgrounds that will reflect the diversity of their students' communities	↑
	Level of financial support to allow teachers and principals to participate in high quality pre-service preparation and professional development	X		
	A statewide infrastructure of high quality teacher and principal pre-service preparation, professional development, and teacher and principal mentoring	↓↑	Teacher and principal preparation, collaboration, and professional development that equip them with skills and knowledge to provide and support intellectually rigorous content through adaptive and culturally relevant pedagogy, to support English learners, and to build relationships with students and their families	X
	Adequate time built in for high quality professional development, and teacher planning and collaboration	↑		
Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability	Investments and structures to ensure students are provided personal and academic supports in a holistic and integrated way to enable success in academically rigorous courses and readiness for higher education	X	A-G curriculum requirements that acknowledge more modern conceptions of learning and curriculum, including interdisciplinary, culturally relevant, hands-on approaches and emphases on technology	X
	Investments and structures to ensure students are provided eligibility for higher education	X	The quantity and content of curriculum standards and guidelines that enable, rather than impede providing intellectually rigorous content through adaptive and culturally relevant pedagogy, supporting English learners, and building relationships with students and their families	X
	Investment in assessment development and a state and local infrastructure that enables appropriate use of high quality rigorous and authentic assessment	X	Assessments and the stakes attached to them that enable rather than impede providing intellectually rigorous content through adaptive and culturally relevant pedagogy, supporting English learners, and building relationships with students and their families	X
Postsecondary Access and Supports	Reinvestment in higher education to keep the college and university systems affordable, accessible, and high-quality	X	Passage of the Dream Act into law to allow immigrant students the place in college they have earned and deserve	X
			Increased financial aid to equitably reach students of color	X
Organization and Governance	Professional (vs. bureaucratic) forms of accountability that strive to develop knowledgeable educators who can be trusted to make responsible decisions about practice	↑	Increases in local autonomy paired with investments in: 1) School capacity and professional knowledge and skill for school leaders and educators to know how to effectively provide a rigorous, culturally relevant, and responsive education to students AND 2) Authentic involvement, capacity and authority of students, their families and community in decision making processes	—
	Monies allocated to facilitate involvement of students' families and community members in schools	X		
Funding That Shapes How Resources Are Allocated to and Used in Schools	Increase funding to address policy needs listed in above sections	↑	Funding that is directed to the resources that are most important for providing intellectually rigorous content through adaptive and culturally relevant pedagogy, supporting English learners, and building relationships with students and their families	X
	Consistent and stable approach to funding facilities	X		
	A weighted student funding formula that replaces fragmented funding streams and levels up resources	↑	A weighted student formula, that ensures equitable distribution of funds by allocating additional funds to populations of students that schools have a poor track record of supporting, such as students of color, low-income students and English learners	↑

Key: ↑ Addresses this need in a serious way, — Does not address this need in a serious way, X Does not address this need, ↓ Worsens this need