

April 25, 2007

To: Members of the Board
From: Tom Bishop
Subject: Article of Interest

Attached are the following articles of interest:

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California's Schooling Is 'Broken'

Education Week 3-21-07

Studies Call for Overhaul Of Finance, Governance

BY LINDA JACOBSON

California's system of school finance and governance needs such a major overhaul that simply funneling more money into the existing formula or tinkering with the administrative structure probably wouldn't help students reach state achievement goals, a massive research project commissioned by a bipartisan group of state leaders concludes.

Even though the package of studies—more than 1,200 pages in all—offers little in the way of cost estimates for improving student performance, the consensus is that the state first needs to give local schools more flexibility in their use of funding, get rid of barriers that make it hard to fire ineffective teachers, and improve data collection so officials can determine whether the money they are spending is making any difference.

Turbulent Decades

The studies document "how broken the system is," Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said during a press conference held to discuss some of the findings in the nearly two dozen academic papers released last week. "This is just a starting point for what I hope will be a renewed focus in the legislature on increasing student achievement with needed reform," he said.

The project also is the latest chapter in a turbulent, nearly 30-year school finance story, which has seen California fall from its position as a leader in per-student spending in the 1970s to now spending well below the national average—a plunge that followed adoption of the Proposition 13 tax-limitation measure in 1978.

The researchers' work will be used to draft policy recommendations, but with Gov. Schwarzenegger currently pushing a universal health-care plan, it's unlikely that any proposals to change the system will come before next year.

Whatever happens, the state is in for "a very political discussion," said Mary Perry, the deputy director of EdSource, a Mountain View, Calif.-based policy-research organization. "My sense is that there is general consensus that the school finance system in California is ineffective. That may be where the agreement ends."

Assessing Resources

The project, called "Getting Down to Facts," was requested during the 2005-06 school year by the Republican governor's Advisory Committee on Education Excellence, as well as by Democratic leaders, to reassess the state's complex school finance system and determine whether more resources are needed for students to meet achievement goals.

Underwritten by four philanthropies—the Bill & Melinda Gates, William and Flora Hewlett, James Irvine, and Stuart foundations—the \$3 million project mainly involved California researchers, but included some from as far away as Syracuse University in New York and the University of Pennsylvania.

Treated in advance with a secrecy usually accorded national-security matters, the 22 studies were released in two batches last week.

The studies on governance—which examine the current system—assert that financial resources, which are highly centralized at the state level, are distributed in such an irrational way that schools serving similar student populations in similar locations receive different funding. The researchers partially attribute what they see as a dysfunctional situation to overregulation and multiple funding streams that are designed to help improve instruction for low-performing students.

"Spending formulas are tied to arcane and complicated criteria established in the 1970s and are combined with a confusing mix of categorical programs that do not systematically address differences in needs across districts or allow districts and schools to spend resources in a way that help students achieve their goals," a summary of the research states. "Our information systems are so inadequate, that even if we implemented reforms that were particularly effective,

we might not realize it."

Taken as a group, the studies suggest the need for systemwide changes. Michael W. Kirst, a Stanford University education scholar and one of the researchers, said that state policymakers should resist the "instinct as a government to add one more widget. This says you can't tinker around the edges anymore."

Another theme is what researchers identified as weaknesses in the state's teacher policies across a host of areas, including recruitment, pay scales, evaluation, and tenure.

But Barbara Kerr, the president of the California Teachers Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association, said a suggestion that the state lengthen the time before teachers earn tenure was a "nonstarter." She referred to California voters' rejection of a ballot proposal on that issue during a 2005 special election.

Ms. Kerr argued that discussing ways "to get the best teachers into the classroom" is more important than "saying some principals want to fire a teacher or two."

Three studies focus on additional resources that might be needed to lift the performance of California students from the bottom of national rankings and meet the goal of reaching 800 on the state's Academic Performance Index, a scale ranging from 200 to 1,000.

In one study, which relied on responses of administrators and educators on how they would spend money to improve achievement, Jon Sonstelie, a senior fellow at the San Francisco-based Public Policy Institute of California, showed that even with a 40 percent increase in funding over the actual 2003-04 level—which would have put the state education budget that year at \$60 billion—more than half the state's schools still would not have met API.

"This suggests that new resources will need to be coupled with systematic reform and instructional innovation to help low-performing schools meeting high goals," the researchers say in their summary. The current state budget for K-12 education is \$55.1 billion.

Leaders of the project, however, quickly dismissed funding estimates of up to \$1.5 trillion provided by researcher Jennifer

Y. Imazeki, an associate professor of economics at San Diego State University, calling those estimates, based on a highly abstract econometric model, "weak and unreliable."

State schools Superintendent Jack O'Connell cautioned against focusing at this point on projected cost figures for school improvement.

"The range of estimates researchers have given for what it

will take to reach that magic word, 'adequacy,' is so broad it may cause some to throw up their hands and say, 'impossible,'" he said in a statement. "I urge us not to do that. Let's not yet argue over specific dollar figures, or use the most sensationally high-cost estimates to torpedo efforts at real reform."

Suits and Initiatives

With the project—described by Mr. Kirst as "the biggest study of school finance and all its related policies in the history of the state"—California joins a host of other states, including Missouri, Ohio, and Oregon, in attempting to calculate the price of a good precollegiate education.

Supporters of what has become known as an adequacy approach—which often has been initiated by a legal challenge to a state's existing funding formula, such as the lawsuit now being tried in Missouri—argue that more money will lead to better student performance. Opponents say there are less expensive ways to achieve that goal and that money should be used more effectively.

California actually was "a predecessor" in school finance litigation with a 1968 case, *Serrano v. Priest*, involving an East Los Angeles parent, said Ms. Perry of EdSource.

In that case, the California Supreme Court said that students in low-wealth property districts were being denied some of the same educational opportunities as those in wealthier areas. In response, legislation was enacted that was intended to equalize funding by directing larger increases for inflation to districts with lower revenues.

But before the state law went into effect, voters approved Proposition 13, which resulted in a substantial reduction in the amount

of revenue available for cities, counties, and particularly school districts. Districts lost, in effect, half their property-tax revenue.

In 1988, voters concerned about that impact approved Proposition 98, a measure that set a minimum funding level for schools and community colleges. Still,

Ms. Perry said, Proposition 98 kept the discussion focused on finance equity in terms of "the same amount for every child," even as other states were "looking at education funding through a standards-based lens."

In his study, Mr. Sonstelie of the Public Policy Institute of California said Proposition 98 established a "constitutional floor" for school funding in California, but he added that the state has rarely gone over the minimum amount the funding formula requires.

The current research project also followed on the heels of a 2004 legal settlement in the case of *Williams v. California*, which dealt with school facilities conditions and teaching materials. The settlement provides up to \$800 million for repairs and on-going monitoring.

Mr. Kirst said in an interview that he sees similarities between the findings of the latest California research project and the sweeping court decision that led to the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990. In a 1989 ruling, the Kentucky Supreme Court found the entire public education system as it then operated unconstitutional.

While Mr. Kirst writes in his study that California is trapped by Propositions 13 and 98, he adds that the state is in a different position from Kentucky and other states that have been involved in finance lawsuits because California is "not constrained by the court" or by a

court's definition of adequacy.

Even though the researchers in the project cautioned the public against settling on a particular dollar figure, Scott Plotkin, the executive director of the California School Boards Association, said it's wrong to conclude that additional funding is not part of the answer. "It all has to be in the conversation," he said.

Kris Vosburgh, the executive director of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association—named for the sponsor of Proposition 13—said that "public education certainly needs some help, but from our perspective, it's just one more parochial interest" like prisons or health care. "None of these groups," he said, "ever come back and say, 'We recognize that taxpayers are hit from all sides.'"

Gov. Schwarzenegger's Committee on Education Excellence now will take the studies and use them to make policy recommendations. The others who requested the studies could also offer their own recommendations.

Allen Odden, a school finance expert at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said that he doesn't think the California studies provide instructions for how to make schools more effective, but that they do offer a "framework for where to go next."

edweek.org: A link to "Getting Down to Facts" is online at www.edweek.org/links.

Steps Toward Improvement

While cautioning against a "silver bullet" approach to changing California's school governance and finance systems, a detailed series of academic reports urges the state to consider a number of steps toward what it calls "systemic reforms."

- Improve decisionmaking at all levels by improving the alignment between the accountability system and decisionmaking responsibilities, including increasing flexibility at the local level.
- Improve information collection both at the state level, by following students over time and linking them with the resources they receive, and at the local level, where networks of teachers and administrators could learn from each other's experiences.
- Refine policies to attract and retain high-quality teachers and administrators while also removing excessive barriers to dismissing chronically ineffective teachers.
- Simplify school finance formulas so that similar districts are treated similarly and differences across districts are treated reasonably and consistently.
- Target resources to improve the outcomes of students living in poverty.
- Make the state budgeting process more predictable so that schools and districts can be more strategic in determining how best to use their resources for the next academic year.

SOURCE: "Getting Down to Facts"

Flaws in the System

California is not making the most efficient use of its resources according to those who studied the system.

- The current distribution of resources across schools and districts is complex and irrational.
- The highly prescriptive finance and governance systems thwart local schools and districts in their efforts to meet the needs of their students and promote higher achievement.
- Current teacher policies neither let state and local administrators make the best use of the pool of potential teachers nor adequately support current teachers.
- Policymakers, school administrators, and parents all lack the information they need to make informed decisions about education policies and practices.

SOURCE: "Getting Down to Facts"

School funding studies call for overhaul

EdCAL 3-19-07
The initial reports released on a comprehensive series of statewide studies on the subject of adequate school funding focused on the effectiveness of funding and school governance. The actual funding amount studies were released after EdCal went to press, and will be covered next week.

"Today's studies need to be taken very seriously by everyone in the education debate," said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. "If we hope to give our children the world-class education they deserve, then we need real education reform. I have long advocated for more transparency in our schools, more flexibility for our education leaders, and more information for our parents. This is just a starting point for what I hope will be a renewed focus in the Legislature on increasing student achievement with need-based reform."



Visit www.acsa.org for more on adequate funding.

"This research is bold, and the findings may make many of us uncomfortable," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. "But let's remember that a decade ago many were uncomfortable when California adopted

its high standards and when we built a system of accountability and when we first began to use data to shed light on student achievement. We knew that high standards and accountability were the right steps to take, and this research is the next right step in California education reform. We must use it as our guide to make the changes that are necessary to prepare our students and our state for a successful future.

"Quite frankly, many of the findings were obvious to me. We need to find multiple ways of entry into the classroom for new teachers. Our data sys-

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overhaul. The consensus is that the education system needs "fundamental, comprehensive reforms in order to meet our student achievement goals."

The studies also state that pouring money into the system without a significant governance overhaul would be ineffective. However, substantially more resources are needed. All 22 studies concluded that how funding is allocated is equally as important as how much funding is made available.

Student information was also seen as a key to any governance change. California has long been working on a universal student identifier in order to better track students from district to district and to keep tabs on such statistics as the dropout rate. But SPI O'Connell has already been on the record as having been disappointed in the amount of funding Gov. Schwarzenegger proposed in his January budget for getting this system up and running.

The Stanford studies found that California lags far behind other states in this regard, and in data collection on teachers, educational programs and other resources. The studies said it is key that any reforms be designed to allow for those interested to learn by experience how to design, implement and adjust educational practices.

Another finding of interest to ACSA members was that "current teacher policies do not let state and local administrators make the best use of

the pool of potential teachers or adequately support current teachers." The studies criticized policies designed to train, hire, retain and dismiss teachers as not being optimally designed. The one factor that emerged over and over in the studies was the difficulty faced in trying to dismiss ineffective teachers. But the studies also noted that principals and superintendents indicated they would only remove two or fewer teachers per school if given the authority.

The Education Coalition has stated that it welcomes the studies and recognizes that changes are needed to improve student learning. The coalition wants resources to be maximized to the public schools for student learning, and would like to see teacher and principal training be a part of that effort.

For years, California has ranked among the lowest of states in school funding and ranks last in such categories as school counselors and librarians, not to mention being among the bottom in administrator to teacher ratio. Many schools have cut such "extras" as music and art programs to make ends meet. Meanwhile Californians continue to rank education at the top of their funding priority lists. Approximately two-thirds of voters and parents in the state believe that more funding would mean better quality education, and that low-income schools should get more resources in order to have an equal opportunity to learn.

The key is to tie any reforms to investment in education. Any move ment derived from the studies must ensure reforms are approached in a comprehensive - not a piecemeal - manner.

To view the full set of studies, visit <http://irepp.stanford.edu>.

Studies call for significant funding hike

Edcal March 26 2007

The second part of the statewide studies on adequate school funding focused on the actual dollar figures required. As expected, the findings stirred more interest and controversy than the earlier findings that the entire school governance system needs overhauling.

Although some astronomical figures had been bandied about in the days leading up to the release - some as high as the entire \$1.6 trillion current state budget - representatives from Stanford's Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice who coordinated the 22 studies were quick to say those figures had already been

deemed unreliable.

However, the consensus figure was still nothing to sneeze at. Researcher

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Jon Sonstelie of the Public Policy Institute of California and a coordinator of the studies

said the ballpark figure the state is looking at is increasing education funding by at least 40 percent above what it is now receiving.

Researchers cautioned that most of that funding is needed for students in low socio-economic schools. Sonstelie

estimated that these schools would probably need at least double the amount resources they are now receiving.

ACSA's position is that any governance reforms must go hand-in-hand with the necessary additional resource. The association would like to see school leadership be part of the equation.

"Any meaningful reforms in our public education system must be accompanied by a substantial investment to help students meet the high academic standards and goals we have for them," said ACSA Executive Director Bob Well. "Investing in school leadership must

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also be a priority, as leadership is the second highest contributing factor to student learning."

Unfortunately, the overall financial figure could not be precisely determined for a number of factors, chief among them the woeful state of data collection on student achievement, something the California Department of Education has long been pushing for, and something for which Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell has already asked Gov. Schwarzenegger to find more funding in the state budget proposal.

So, lacking this data, Sonstelie arrived at his figure by asking 568 administrators and teachers what it would take to build a school that could bring all students up to an 800 score on the Academic Performance Index.

This question was much more than a "pie in the sky" inquiry. Sonstelie not only asked educators what they needed, he also gave them hypothetical budgets to constrain educators' wish lists. Sonstelie said that such areas as class size reduction, teacher professional development, after-school

tutoring and lengthening the school day and school year ranked high on educators' to-do lists.

Interestingly, after attending a press conference and applauding the findings of the initial releases on school governance, as well as streaming it on his Web site, Schwarzenegger, one of the studies' requestors, was visibly absent during the release that aimed to put an actual price tag on providing an adequate education to California students.

Ted Mitchell of the Governor's Committee on Academic Excellence was lukewarm in his support, emphasizing that the key was more on governance reform, not on pouring more money into schools.

While ACSA is encouraged that the initial studies heightened the need to increase efficiency in the education system, the association is taking the firm stand that any meaningful education reforms must be accompanied by a substantial investment in schools if students are to meet the world-class standards the state has established.

Educators have long posited that the state lags woefully behind the national average in per-pupil funding, and none of the 22 Stanford studies refuted that claim. To the contrary,

the studies acknowledged that many states spend much more on their students than California does, with New York spending 75 percent more than California, and the nation as a whole 30 percent more.

"The range of estimates researchers have given for what it will take to reach that magic word, 'adequacy,' is so broad it may cause some to throw up their hands and say, 'impossible. I urge us not to do that,'" O'Connell said. "Let's not yet argue over specific dollar figures, or use the most sensationally high cost estimates to torpedo efforts at real reform."

"I urge my colleagues in education and in state policy leadership roles to take this research as a starting point for designing a new way forward - a way that both fairly and fully enables our schools to meet the very daunting challenges we have put before them. The best way to do this is to design the right system and then fund it at a level that will ensure success."

Del Mar Times

MARCH 23 - MARCH 29, 2007

IN BRIEF

Del Mar Hills teacher honored

Del Mar Hills Academy 4th grade teacher Andrea Sleet has been honored with a Teachers Make a Difference award.

Sponsored by The San Diego County Office of Education and radio station KPRI 102.1 FM, the award honors inspirational teachers who ignite a love of learning and enrich the lives of children. Sleet was one of nine teachers in the county to receive the recognition. Sleet received a plaque and her class gets a field trip of their choice to either the San Diego Zoo or Wild Animal Park.

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Community

'Math Night' adds to family life, fun

By Karen Billing

Mataneh Tahriri covered her eyes as her fourth grade son, Andisheh, beat her in a math game and couldn't contain his giggles.

The mother-and-son duo was one of many at Sycamore Ridge Elementary School on March 8 attending what was billed as a first annual "Math Night." They flipped cards and rolled dice in an effort to involve parents in their children's math education while making it fun.

Fifty families filled the school's multi-use room to the brim. Some families had more than one child in attendance.

"I'm so excited to have such a great turnout tonight," said Sycamore Ridge principal Emily Disney.

Sycamore Ridge's Math Night is part of an established goal of the site strategic plan group to educate parents about what is being taught inside the classrooms.

Everyday math is the designation for the program taught to kindergarten

through fourth grades at Sycamore Ridge as well as at the seven other schools in the Del Mar Union School District.

As the latest in new math was a fairly new curriculum unfamiliar to many parents, Math Night aimed to provide them with a better understanding of the program as well as ideas to continue the learning process at home through game playing.

"Playing games is a motivating alternative to traditional repetitive drills," said Sycamore's Everyday Math consultant Gretchen Mars.

Most of the math games can be played with a regular deck of cards but Everyday Math also has a specialized set of game cards that were used that night. A raffle gave 12 lucky families their own Everyday Math deck to take home.

One of the games played was Top It, which is the same idea of the game War that helps with addition and multiplication. Another game called the Digit Game helps with learning about placing numbers in sequence.

"I think they have really great ideas," said mom Eliza Hsieh who was playing games with her first grader Katie.

"They give me something to work with," Another mom, Lynne Valentine, a former teacher, appreciated the concepts being taught as well as the information about the curriculum that is still very new to her.

"I had been wondering about it for awhile," Valentine said during a break from playing with her son Graham.

As with Valentine, many parents were curious about Everyday Math. As students were taken to the library for some fun, parents stayed behind to learn about Everyday Math with Mars.

Everyday Math was created and tested by the University of Chicago as a way to reform math in the United States, Mars said. It appeared students were falling those in other countries. So, the university researchers came up with a new curriculum that could create better results in mathematics, Mars said.



KAREN BILLING

Mom and daughter Eliza and Katie Hsieh play math games at Sycamore Ridge's first annual Math Night.

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The result is a program used by 2.8 million students at 175,000 schools across the country. This prepares students for the short term as far as standardized testing as well as in the long term for life's many endeavors, according to Mars. The newest math curriculum is the top program in the country for instruction, and a challenging one at that. For example, kindergarten students are introduced to algebra concepts.

"It is a very rigorous math curriculum," Mars said, adding it was so rigorous she was concerned about how her second graders were going to understand fourth grade concepts when she started the program.

"But they all got it," Mars added. "They all had great success."

The program offers a spiraled curriculum, meaning concepts are constantly revisited. For example, second graders touch on mean, median and mode. Those concepts are re-introduced

in third grade, so by fourth grade students are expected to master the concept.

Everyday Math is kept as close to real life math as possible, so students can see how math is used in everyday life. It utilizes all learning styles such as lectures, playing math games, working in groups and doing hands on activities like making triangles out of straws.

Math is integrated into every part of their day not just a 60-minute block.

Parents needed to keep on top of what

the kids are learning, according to Mars. "Just talk about math and ask them what they're doing," she said.

Mars also advised reading weekly letters about classroom progress sent home to families. Parents should play the math games with the kids at home and not hesitate to ask teachers questions if they don't understand something.

The Everyday Math website also has a lot of ideas for interested parents. It's at everydaymath.uchicago.edu.

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