

**K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION BRIEF**  
FOR LEGISLATORS, STATEWIDE OFFICERS  
AND CANDIDATES

# THE ESSENTIALS OF CALIFORNIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM UPGRADES

PRESENTED BY THE  
CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE FOR  
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

A PROJECT OF





# INTRODUCTION

California is home to 6.2 million school children and educates one in eight children in the country. California students also exemplify the rich diversity of our country. As such, our students' success is not only critical to California's future, but to the future of our nation. That future depends on all students, no matter who they are or what their circumstance, reaching their full potential so they can graduate high school ready for college and the careers of tomorrow – and to live, work, engage civically and thrive in a multicultural, multilingual, and highly connected world.

Our state has embarked on a bold path toward the creation of a better public education system for all students. Over just a few short years, California has put in place a series of major policy changes that raise the bar for what we expect all students to learn and do; target more funding for students with higher needs; improve the ways we use data to measure progress; and provide an unprecedented opportunity for students, parents, families, educators and local communities to be more active partners in shaping the ways their schools are educating all students. This new approach emphasizes continuous improvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility for the ongoing progress of all students.

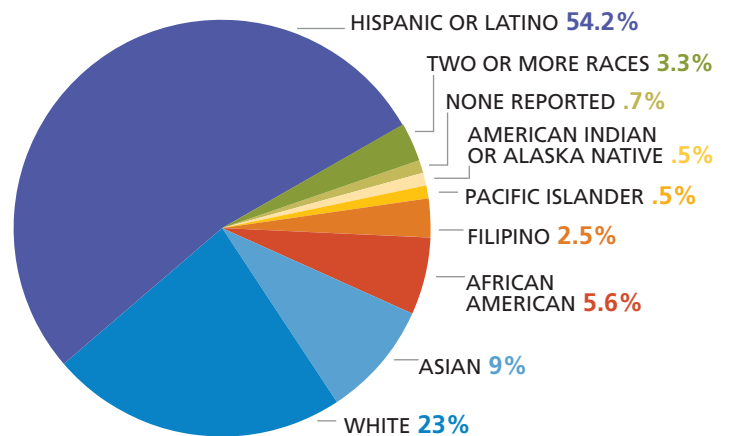
California's future success depends on our staying committed to this educational path – and continuing to invest in it, learn from it, and refine it. We must understand that it takes time and discipline to deliver meaningful, sustainable change. Simultaneously, we must acknowledge and address the urgency to deliver on behalf of all students and confront historic inequities that exist among groups of students.

This brief is intended to provide elected leaders and candidates with an overview of California's major, recent education policy changes, how they link together, and how they establish the current landscape for decisions about the future success of California's students.



## Enrollment by Ethnicity

California Public Schools 2016-17



Source: California Department of Education  
[cde.ca.gov](http://cde.ca.gov)

# WHAT'S IMPORTANT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS?

## STUDENT-CENTERED FUNDING:

### THE LOCAL CONTROL FUNDING FORMULA (LCFF)

California's landmark Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) legislation, signed into law in 2013, allocates funding based on students' needs. Significantly, it provides districts with additional resources to meet the higher needs of their students who are living in poverty, English learners, and foster and homeless youth. The LCFF also articulates eight priority areas for school districts, charter schools and county offices of education. Together with the new California School Dashboard, these priority areas serve as the foundation for how California defines success and measures progress for students and schools, and they help guide local planning and funding decisions. These priorities are:

- **Basic Conditions of Learning** (including student access to standards-aligned instructional materials, qualified teachers, and facilities in good repair)
- **Effective Implementation of Academic Content and Performance Standards** (including curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional learning)
- **Parental Involvement** (including input into decision making, and promoting parent and family participation in programs)

- **Student Achievement** (including standardized test performance, college and career readiness, and percent of English learners becoming English proficient)
- **Student Engagement** (including attendance and graduation rates)
- **School Climate** (including social, emotional and physical safety, discipline, and connection that students, staff and families feel to the school)
- **Access to, and Enrollment in, a Broad Course of Study** (including all required subject areas)
- **Other Student Outcomes** (including performance measures in subjects beyond standardized tests)

*\*The LCFF also identifies two additional priority areas for students served by county offices of education – Coordination of Instruction for Expelled Students, and Coordination of Services for Foster Youth.*

By nearly all accounts, the LCFF has created a less complicated and more equitable way for the state to provide funding to local school districts, county offices of education and charter schools. The LCFF gives local education agencies greater flexibility to allocate the funding they receive from the state to address local priorities. The LCFF replaced an old system of "categorical programs" that restricted the use of considerable funding for state-prescribed purposes.

## HOW LCFF WORKS

All districts receive a **BASE GRANT** for each student. The base grant is larger for grades 9-12 than for other grade levels.



Districts receive a 20% additional **SUPPLEMENTAL GRANT** per student for students with higher needs – identified as children living in poverty, English learners, and foster and homeless youth.



If more than 55% of children in the district are higher needs, the district receives an extra 50% of the base grant for each student beyond the 55% threshold. This is called a **CONCENTRATION GRANT**. These grants recognize that it costs school districts more to effectively address the challenges of high-needs students concentrated in high-poverty communities.



## **INCREASED LOCAL DECISION-MAKING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: THE LOCAL CONTROL AND ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN (LCAP)**

A central philosophy behind the LCFF and all of California's K-12 education system upgrades is that local educators, leaders and their communities know best how to address the needs of their local students.

To that end, the LCFF requires school districts and charter schools to engage their communities in developing and annually updating a **Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)**.

In creating this plan, districts must consult with teachers, principals, administrators, other school staff, and local bargaining units. They are also required to engage with parents and students when developing their LCAPs, including seeking advice from a parent advisory committee and an English learner parent advisory committee. There must also be at least two public meetings where the LCAP is shared, along with the formal budget. Many districts throughout the state have already pushed far beyond these minimum requirements to facilitate more dialogue and collaboration among all of their stakeholders.

## **HIGH STANDARDS FOR ALL – PLUS MORE ADVANCED, ALIGNED ASSESSMENTS**

In 2010, at the direction of the Legislature, the State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (with the addition of a few California-specific standards) as the foundation for what students should know and be able to do in English language arts and mathematics. In 2012, the state adopted standards aligned to the Common Core for English learners. California was also a lead partner in

### **WHAT'S IN AN LCAP?**

**Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs)** are required to be updated annually and approved by the county superintendent. Based on a template developed by the State Board of Education, each LCAP must identify goals and strategies to achieve those goals in each of the state-identified priority areas, as well as locally determined priorities. LCAPs also must describe how districts plan to utilize additional funding targeted for students with higher needs to increase or improve services for those students.

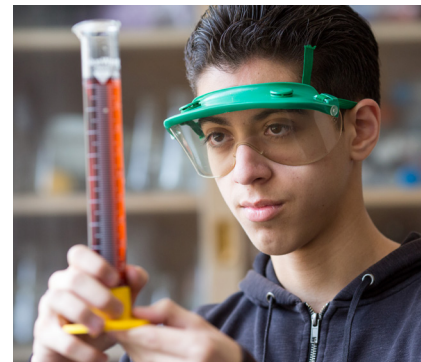
Since its initial introduction, feedback has been steady on ways to improve the usefulness of the LCAP template – and it has continued to evolve. Ultimately, as the nonprofit research agency WestEd has noted, “The key determinant of what makes a good LCAP is what happens after it is written. Ideally, the process for assessing needs, developing goals, identifying services, and creating a spending plan generates a sense of focus, purpose, and motivation to support the plan's implementation.”

For more information, visit [lcff.wested.org/making-a-plan-to-develop-the-lcap/](http://lcff.wested.org/making-a-plan-to-develop-the-lcap/)

developing and adopting new Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) in 2013.

### **The new standards reflect a 21st century curriculum and mean:**

- Deeper, richer, more relevant instruction for students
- Clearly defined learning goals for each grade level that build from year to year
- A focus on key knowledge and skills, including communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity



School districts, schools and educators have undertaken tremendous work in the past few years to implement the new standards, including more professional development opportunities for teachers, updated instructional materials and technology, and more useful assessments. The state's teacher preparation standards are also now aligned with the new student standards. The new standards provide students with hands-on experiences and opportunities to experiment and try new approaches. They help better prepare all students to navigate and engage in a fast-paced, super-connected and changing world.



In spring 2015, California began administering new assessments aligned to the new standards. These assessments provide teachers and families with valuable information about how well students are learning the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. Students take the new assessments using a computer or tablet, which enables a more customized and accurate measurement. The new assessments include open-ended items and those that require students to demonstrate what they know through “performance tasks.” They replace the state’s old system of standardized “fill-in-the-bubble” tests. All students are assessed in English language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11. Testing takes place mostly in April and May. The state also continues to create new assessments in additional subject areas.



California School  
**DASHBOARD**

#### HOW THE SCHOOL DASHBOARD WORKS

The California School Dashboard displays results for schools, districts, and charter schools on a variety of measures that contribute to student success, and provides ratings for overall student results, as well as for groups of students. The Dashboard includes four reports that show the performance and progress of all students and student groups. It currently includes 10 measures (indicators) of school success; six of these are state indicators and four are local indicators.

Each school district, school, or student group receives one of five color-coded performance levels for each state indicator. Importantly, the overall performance level is a combination of the school district, school, or student group’s current performance (status) compared to past performance (change). This represents an important step forward in measuring and considering the improvement a district or school is making.

#### **MULTIPLE INDICATORS SHOW HOW SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS ARE SERVING ALL STUDENTS: THE SCHOOL DASHBOARD**

California’s new system-wide approach to continuous improvement relies on using multiple indicators to measure how schools and districts are serving children and families, where their strengths are, and where improvement is needed.

**The California School Dashboard –** [caschooldashboard.org](https://caschooldashboard.org) – officially launched in December 2017, and updated with new data in the fall of each year – is the central tool. From test scores, graduation rates and suspension rates to school climate, the Dashboard provides a variety of ways for students, parents, families, educators and others to see how schools and districts are serving their students.

Similar to a car dashboard, the School Dashboard displays a variety of important indicators and gauges that inform overall performance and offer early warnings. This is a dramatic advancement from the single-measurement accountability system that was in place during most of the prior two decades and was based solely on the results of standardized tests. **Multiple measures** enable educators and communities to think more systemically about all the elements that contribute to student development and long-term success, including academics, health, safety, engagement and academic supports – what is often referred to as the “whole child” approach.



Significantly, the Dashboard focuses on equity by providing data for different groups of students. This gives a better view into how schools and districts are closing achievement gaps and serving students who haven't been well served in the past.

Many educators and communities are just beginning to familiarize themselves with all of the Dashboard's data and the ways it can be utilized to promote local dialogue and spur deeper analysis, innovation, and problem solving. Refinements to certain design and technical features of the Dashboard are also expected to continue with each year's release of data to enhance its accessibility and usability for all. In addition, the State Board of Education is charged with monitoring and refining the criteria for both current and future indicators.

## **ADDITIONAL HELP FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS THAT NEED IT**

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Beginning in 2018, California is rolling out a new "System of Support" that relies on information from the Dashboard to help identify districts where additional help is needed. Districts are identified when the Dashboard data reveals poor performance for one or more student subgroups.

County offices of education and a new state agency, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, will provide technical assistance and support (also called "differentiated supports"), working closely with local districts to improve their schools by helping them to assess their challenges and build their capacity to address them. The emphasis will be on assisting districts to improve, rather than punishing them for failure, as well as sharing promising and successful practices among schools and districts throughout the state.



## A SYSTEM-WIDE FOCUS ON EQUITY...

Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as students' gender, race, ethnic origin, socioeconomic status, zip code or family background, are not obstacles to achieving their full educational potential, including graduating ready for college, careers and life. Advancing equity means ensuring that students with greater needs or who are furthest behind receive more resources and support to catch up, succeed, and close gaps.

Historically, in California and the nation, the public education system has not equitably served all student groups. However, through its recent policy changes, California has embarked on a shift to build a public education system that recognizes and addresses past shortcomings. Each of the key elements of California's new system has a deliberate focus on supporting equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes for all of California's diverse students:

- **The LCFF** allocates additional dollars to districts to serve students with higher needs.
- **The LCAP** adopted by districts must identify goals and strategies, and describe how services and support are being increased or improved for students with high needs.
- **The Dashboard** highlights data by groups of students, to more clearly identify where inequities exist and measure progress toward closing gaps.

## ... AND ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

At the heart of California's new accountability system is a system-wide focus on continuous improvement for all schools and student groups.

Continuous improvement<sup>1</sup> describes an ongoing effort over time that leads to higher levels of performance. In a continuously improving education system, school and district leaders employ evidence-based methods and learn from experience by carefully measuring the effectiveness of different policies and practices. In particular, they support the natural motivation of students, educators, parents and families, and others; share best and promising practices; cultivate a culture of reflection and learning; encourage innovation; and make changes based on what is learned.

The LCFF, LCAP, School Dashboard and System of Support all function to provide more opportunities for local leaders and stakeholders to plan and work together to identify and meet the unique needs of their students, and to drive real educational improvement. This is a significant, positive shift from the previous approach to school accountability that was largely viewed as prescriptive, punitive, and narrowly focused on test scores.

Continuous improvement in California education depends on everyone in the system – locally, regionally and statewide – clearly understanding their roles and taking greater collective responsibility for the success of all students and schools.

<sup>1</sup> See "Continuous Improvement in Practice," a report by PACE and WestEd at [edpolicyinca.org/publications/continuous-improvement-in-practice](https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/continuous-improvement-in-practice)



## HOW ARE WE DOING SO FAR?

The full complement of policy upgrades and tools that make up California's new system-wide approach to continuous improvement are still relatively new. Allowing adequate time for local educators and stakeholders to fully utilize the new tools to drive local student success is essential. Researchers generally caution that it will take a longer period of years before substantial changes take hold throughout the state.

At the same time, policymakers are understandably interested in early results and lessons. Many districts and schools are making progress toward their goals, and data from the Dashboard shows where improvement is occurring. At the state level, there are both early indicators of progress and ongoing concerns about equity. While it is important not to form strong judgments based on a few early statewide results, initial signals worth considering include these recent reports:

■ **Targeting funds to students with higher needs through the LCFF reduces racial and economic disparities in graduation rates and mathematics achievement.**

Source: UC Berkeley and Learning Policy Institute Study, [learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ca-school-finance-reform-brief](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ca-school-finance-reform-brief)

■ **Statewide graduation rates continue to rise, although gaps among student groups persist, and rates vary by geographic areas.**

Sources: California Department of Education, [cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr17/yr17rel27.asp](https://cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr17/yr17rel27.asp) and EdSource, [edsource.org/2017/graduation-and-dropout-rates-look-up-california-districts-and-high-schools/580171](https://edsource.org/2017/graduation-and-dropout-rates-look-up-california-districts-and-high-schools/580171)

■ **Suspension and expulsion rates have declined dramatically, although the rate for African-American students, while in decline, remains disproportionately high.**

Source: California Department of Education, [cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr17/yr17rel80.asp](https://cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr17/yr17rel80.asp) and EdSource, [edsource.org/2017/suspension-expulsion-rates-fall-sharply-in-california-public-schools-but-racial-disparities-remain/589722](https://edsource.org/2017/suspension-expulsion-rates-fall-sharply-in-california-public-schools-but-racial-disparities-remain/589722)

■ **More students than ever in California are academically ready for college.**

Source: Public Policy Institute of California "Just the Facts," [ppic.org/publication/college-readiness-in-california/](https://ppic.org/publication/college-readiness-in-california/)

■ **Performance on new assessments improved in 2016, remained flat in 2017.**

Source: Legislative Analyst's Office, [lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3736](https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3736)

### LOCAL SPOTLIGHT:

Just a few examples and highlights of the ways that local school districts are utilizing the flexibility and additional resources provided by LCFF to address local needs, include:

■ **Alameda USD, Alameda County is...**

Offering a range of parent education programs, focusing on inclusion and support for underrepresented families through community roundtables, and implementing an individualized system of support for students that includes data collaboration, targeted professional development and family outreach.

■ **Escondido Union SD, San Diego County is...**

Offering broad-based family engagement activities at every school, providing students with a well-rounded curriculum, including P.E. at every grade level, and arts programs at both the elementary and middle school level.

■ **Fillmore USD, Ventura County is...**

Strengthening support for English learners (ELs), including more professional development, earlier intervention for struggling students, and increased family engagement opportunities with a focus on ELs.

■ **Folsom-Cordova USD, Sacramento County is...**

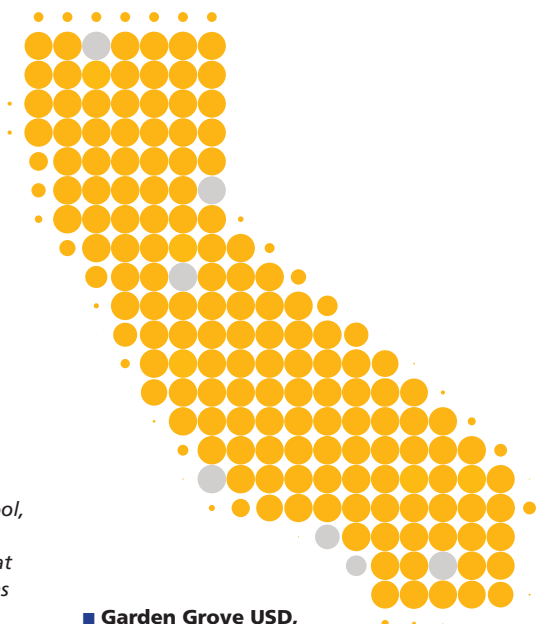
Increasing two-way communication with families, providing workshops on the importance of school attendance, and increasing access to a broad course of study, especially for ELs.

■ **Garden Grove USD, Orange County is...**

Using data to focus research-based instructional strategies on improving math outcomes for lower performing student groups, addressing suspension rates, and providing at-risk students with expanded learning opportunities.

■ **Little Lake City Elementary School District, Los Angeles County is...**

Providing full-day summer school, adding "intervention" staff to provide extra support for ELA and math at all elementary sites, and using Data Reflection Sessions to help teachers review current student data and work samples and identify and share strategies that work.



For more information on these and other districts, visit <https://bit.ly/2lyEhKn>



## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



California has become a leader in the nation in transforming its public education system. The path is challenging, often complex and takes time. Yet, through systemic changes such as the LCFF, LCAP, Dashboard and the new continuous improvement approach, **powerful policies and tools are in place to advance equity, enhance transparency, activate more stakeholders in local planning and decision-making, and support schools in focusing on the multiple aspects of learning and student success that go beyond solely test scores.**

### BUT IT'S ONLY A START.

What happens next – how California continues to sustain and refine this new systemic approach – is critical to ensuring opportunity and success for all students. Difficult work remains ahead to implement, strengthen and further align the core components of the system so that it truly supports all of our students.

Elected legislators and state leaders play a vital role by ensuring that the state's new accountability and continuous improvement system continues to emphasize:

- **A commitment to equity.** All student groups should be visible in accountability and improvement efforts to provide clarity on gaps in achievement, opportunity, and access between student groups – with resources and tools available to eliminate these gaps.

- **Engaging classrooms and supportive environments.**
- **High standards for all students.**
- **Inclusion.** Students, parents, families, educators and community members representing all backgrounds and experiences must be embraced as critical stakeholders.
- **Multiple measures.** Taking a systemic approach means looking beyond only test scores and considering the many factors that contribute to students' long-term developmental and academic success. This is best reflected by local plans that address the multiple indicators of school and district progress.
- **Collective responsibility.** Every level of the system should understand and be responsible for the contributions it must make to support learning for every child.
- **Effective teachers supported by high quality leaders.** Educators must have the supports they need to improve student learning. In addition, coherent strategies should be in place to address the dire threat of teacher shortages.
- **The knowledge and expertise of local educators and communities.** Accountability and improvement plans should be locally driven, with regional and state support where needed.
- **The ongoing use of research and data to inform policy,** such as the *Getting Down To Facts II* studies, to be released in June 2018.

## CONTINUED INVESTMENT IS CRITICAL

A continued investment in California's public school students and a continued investment of time and resources to fully implement the LCFF, LCAP, Dashboard and other components of the continuous improvement system are essential. The state's vision for all students to graduate ready for college, careers and life requires greater resources. While per-student funding has steadily increased since the depths of the Great Recession, California still ranks below the national average in funding, despite the greater needs of many of our students. This means that California's students have fewer staff to provide instruction and support. The state ranks near the bottom of all states in crucial categories, such as the number of students per teacher, as well as student-administrator, student-counselor, and student-librarian ratios.

California must continue to invest more resources in our schools to:

- **Advance educational equity** for all students.
- **Build the capacity of local educators and communities** to engage and focus on continuous improvement in their work to meet the needs of all students.
- **Expand and support opportunities** for parents, families, students, educators and communities to activate their voices and influence what happens at their local schools.
- **Foster collaborative conversations** and sharing/learning of promising practices at the state and local levels.
- **Help drive California's successful economic future**, which benefits all families.

### QUICK FACTS ABOUT CALIFORNIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

#### STUDENTS

- 6.2 million
- About two-thirds are in kindergarten-8th grade; one-third in high school
- Nearly 6 in 10 students are identified as low-income
- About one in five are English learners
- More than one in 10 have a disability affecting their education

#### STAFF

- Nearly 300,000 full-time teachers
- Highest average student to teacher ratio of any state in the nation (20.4: 1)
- 29,000 pupil services staff, such as counselors, psychologists and speech pathologists
- 250,000 "classified" staff, including clerical workers, bus drivers, custodians, teacher aides, etc.

#### SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

- 945 school districts, 58 county offices of education
- Half of all districts serve 2,500 or fewer students
- 12 districts each serve 40,000 or more students (about 20% of all students statewide)
- 8,793 district schools (serving about 90% of students statewide)
- 1,248 publicly funded charter schools (serving about 10% of all students statewide)

Source: Legislative Analyst's Office, 2016-17 data



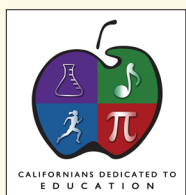
## K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION BRIEF FOR LEGISLATORS, STATEWIDE OFFICERS AND CANDIDATES



### ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

The California Alliance for Continuous Improvement (Alliance) is a group of education leaders representing the full spectrum of the state, including parents and families, students, teachers, administrators, business, community advocates, school board members, state and local education agencies, researchers, philanthropy, institutions of higher education, and others. The Alliance is committed to a vision for California of providing a high-quality education for every student in every school and in every part of the state. The Alliance first came together in 2015 as the Superintendent's Advisory Task Force on Accountability and Continuous Improvement to develop a set of recommendations for California's emerging accountability and support system. In early 2017 the group reconvened under a new name reflecting a focus on supporting implementation of California's system-wide policy changes.

The Alliance is a project of the Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation. To learn more about the Alliance, visit [cdefoundation.org/cde\\_programs/alliance-for-continuous-improvement/](http://cdefoundation.org/cde_programs/alliance-for-continuous-improvement/)



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### MEMBERS OF THE ALLIANCE

#### Co-chairs:

Eric Heins, *California Teachers Association*

Wesley Smith, *Association of California School Administrators*

Jorge Aguilar, *Superintendent, Sacramento City USD*

Vernon Billy, *California School Boards Association*

Peter Birdsall, *California County Superintendents Educational Services Association*

Dwight Bonds, *California Association of African-American Superintendents and Administrators*

Susan Bonilla, *Council for a Strong America*

Shannan Brown, *San Juan Teachers Association*

Carolina Cardenas, *California State University Chancellor's Office*

Carl Cohn, *California Collaborative on Educational Excellence*

Linda Darling-Hammond, *Learning Policy Institute*

John Garcia, *Downey USD*

Taryn Ishida, *Californians for Justice*

Mori Leveroni, *California Association of Student Councils*

Camille Maben, *First 5 California*

Shelly Masur, CEO, *Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation*

Molly McGee-Hewitt, *California Association of School Business Officials*

Laurie Olsen, *Sobrato Early Academic Learning Initiative*

Mary Perry, *California State PTA*

David Plank, *Policy Analysis for California Education, Stanford Graduate School of Education*

Morgan Polikoff, *University of Southern California Rossier School of Education*

Glen Price, *California Department of Education*

David Rattray, *Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce/UNITE-LA*

Jane Robb, *California Teachers Association*

Ingrid Roberson, *Alameda County Office of Education*

Ryan Ruelas, *Anaheim High School/Anaheim City School Board*

Sherry Skelly-Griffith, *California State PTA*

Ryan Smith, *Education Trust West*

Sue Solomon, *Newhall School District*

Shelly Spiegel-Coleman, *Californians Together*

Samantha Tran, *Children Now*

David Verdugo, *California Latino Superintendents Association*