FAILING OUR FUTURE:

The Holes in California's School Accountability System and How to Fix Them

By
James S. Lanich, Lance T. Izumi, and
Xiaochin C. Yan

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ISBN 0-936488-99-9
October 2006 | U.S. $14.95

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Executive Summary

Research shows that state school accountability systems have a positive impact on student achievement, but only when states attach significant consequences to the performance or non-performance of schools. California's school accountability system, unfortunately, is severely deficient in this crucial area of consequences.

I. Key components of California's school accountability system.

- The system's key measurement device is the Academic Performance Index (API), the purpose of which is to measure the academic performance and test-score-based growth of individual schools.
- The statewide API performance target for all schools is 800 (on a scale of 200 to 1,000). Schools scoring under 800 are given annual growth targets based on five percent of the difference between the school's current API score and the goal of 800. Using this formula, it would take decades for a low-performing school to reach the 800 goal.
- API uses student test scores at individual schools to measure school-wide performance and growth, and does not focus on performance and growth of individual students or groups of students. Thus, schools with significant numbers of students often make their school-wide growth targets, while masking the achievement caps of minority and poor students.
- The 800 target is significantly lower than 875, which is the state's definition of grade-level proficiency.
- One of the two school improvement programs under the state's accountability system is the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), a voluntary program under which low-performing schools apply for grant money aimed at improving student achievement. Only a minority of low-performing schools have applied and have been accepted into the program.

- Schools are eligible for II/USP only if they have not met the annual growth target, which means that the lowest-performing school in the state is not eligible for the program if it meets its minuscule annual growth target.
- To exit II/USP required schools only to meet their tiny growth targets two years in a row. Sanctions for failure to improve are usually gentle, such as assigning them a school assistance and intervention team. Data analysis shows that because II/USP is voluntary, there are hundreds of schools in the state that are performing worse than schools that are being sanctioned.
- The second school improvement program under the accountability system is the High Priority Schools Grant Program (HPSGP). Only schools in the lowest 10 percent of all schools could apply to this voluntary program, which sends extra money to schools to improve student achievement.
- As under II/USP, schools can avoid sanctions under HPSGP by showing "significant" growth, which simply consists of a single-point gain on the API. Schools exiting these programs as successful could still take decades to get their students up to grade-level proficiency.
- If one compares the performance of African American students at schools that were part of II/USP or HPSGP versus African American students who attended schools eligible for those programs but did not participate, there is virtually no difference in the percentage of the students who reached grade-level proficiency in reading and math.

II. Key accountability components of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

- Unlike API's focus on school-wide performance and growth, NCLB puts the spotlight on student achievement, with the key measurement device being Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is the annual percentage of students meeting the target of grade-level proficiency in reading and math as measured by the state tests. All students must be proficient in these two subjects by 2013-14.
- NCLB requires that not only a certain percentage of all students at a school hit grade-level proficiency in reading every year, but also that significant racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other subgroups of students hit those proficiency targets as well. Since API focuses on school-wide performance and growth, there is little incentive to pay attention to lower-performing students as long as there are enough higher-performing students to keep the school's average scores above state benchmarks.
- Given API's and NCLB's different focuses, California has dual, or dueling, accountability systems.
- Schools affected by NCLB's provisions are those that receive funding from federal Title I, which is an assistance program for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. In California, about 57 percent of schools receive Title I funding.
- Title I schools that fail to make AYP will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective, and restructuring measures. NCLB's sanctions and interventions program is called Program Improvement (PI).
- PI sanctions and interventions for schools are tough and wide-ranging, including allowing students to transfer to a better school, replacing staff, reopening the school as a charter school, or hiring a private management company to run the school. School districts are also subject to sanctions, including replacing the superintendent and staff.
- States set the annual rate of improvement toward the goal of 100 percent student proficiency in math and reading by 2013-14. California set very low rates for the first few years after the passage of NCLB, with much steeper rate for later years. Thus, prior to 2004, it was acceptable for 86 percent of students in reading and 84 percent in math to be below grade-level proficiency.

III. A battle between the accountability systems

- A recent analysis shows that nearly 1,000 schools in California met their school-wide API growth target but had one or more subgroups of students that did not meet that target. Almost 600 schools not only failed to meet their subgroup growth targets but actually had declining proficiencies for one or more of these subgroups. API fails to detect or address stagnant or falling student minority subgroup performance.
- Outside of NCLB, California has no real accountability system. Those schools that accept Title I funding are held accountable for delivering an effective educational service. That service must lead toward getting their students to grade-level proficiency by 2013-14. If they do not, then schools and districts are subject to tough sanctions that impose real consequences and empower parents.
- Meeting grade-level proficiency target goals is an achievable goal for all schools if they implement successful practices. An analysis of the growth trajectories of 100 high-poverty, high-performing schools shows that all these schools will reach 100 percent student proficiency in English-language-arts in three years and math in two years.

IV. Recommendations

- Set expectations high.
- Abandon the API.
- Focus on grade-level proficiency as measured by the California Standards Test.
- Education officials should not "game" the system to prevent schools from entering PI, but should acknowledge that there are thousands of schools that are in need of improvement.
- Replicate the best practices from high-performing schools, especially those with low-income and minority populations.

V. Key best practices of two schools with significant minority and low-income populations that are meeting AYP

- High expectations for students.
- Emphasis on the California curriculum frameworks and academic content standards.
- Textbooks aligned with state content standards.
- Reform the master schedule for students by offering double blocks of English and math for struggling students, plus offering college prep, honors, and Advanced Placement courses.
- Teaching methods that emphasize standards-based, teacher-centered direct instruction.
- Reviewing test results with every student and setting goals for students. Use test data for diagnostic purposes to focus standards-based intervention programs on student weaknesses.
- English immersion with supplemental assistance so that English language learners are reclassified quickly as fluent in English. Also, professional development for teachers that connects English language learners with the state content standards.
- A sheltered self-contained program for special-education students in English-language-arts and algebra, with the eventual goal of placement in mainstream classrooms.
- Principal regularly drops into classrooms to observe instruction.
- Teacher evaluations focus on key issues such as using the state standards to improve student achievement.
- Courage and willingness to remove poorly performing teachers.
- Teachers meet as departmental teams that focus on student achievement results.

Part One:
How the System Works and How It Doesn't

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the school accountability movement has become one of the most potent forces in education. Facing years of poor student performance, advocates of school accountability have succeeded in creating and implementing state academic content standards, implementing standards-aligned state tests, and establishing state and national accountability systems. When implemented correctly, these accountability elements can have a dramatic effect on student academic achievement.

A 2001 study by the Education Trust, a nonpartisan education research organization, identified 4,500 schools across the country with more than a million high-poverty and minority students that performed in the top one-third of schools in their states.[1] These high-poverty, high-performing schools often outscored schools in affluent white suburbs. Herbert Walberg, education professor emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago and one of the nation's top education researchers, summarized the Education Trust's findings for high-performing schools: "The common features of these exceptionally performing schools included (1) the use of standards to design curriculum and instruction, ongoing assessment of student work, and teacher evaluation, (2) comprehensive systems to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students as soon as needed, and (3) state accountability systems that have real consequences for professionals."[2]

Due in part to such findings, state and federal officials have tried to craft school accountability laws that will produce similarly beneficial results for all students. Referring to the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Walberg notes, "By instituting testing and accountability as centerpieces of the education agenda, President George W. Bush and Congress reinforced central themes of state policies aimed at improving education through testing and accountability."[3]

"The purpose of the NCLB Act," Walberg says, "is to ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on state academic achievement standards as revealed by state assessment."[4] NCLB requires that all students be proficient in math and English by 2013-14. Through effective school accountability, Walberg concludes, "It seems reasonable to think that all or nearly all students can make substantial gains in proficiency by the year 2014 as NCLB projects."[5] The key to meeting the federal requirements, however, is an accountability system that is not only in place is, but effective in raising student achievement.

California is fortunate to have some of the best foundational elements for an effective school accountability system. The state's academic content standards, which serve as the guidelines for what students must know in each grade level in their core subjects, are among the most rigorous in the nation. California's standards are routinely given high marks by education research organizations that survey and grade state standards, such as the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. In the late 1990s, California used the norm-referenced Stanford-9 (SAT-9) standardized tests in English and math to assess students. This test, however, was not aligned to the state standards, and there was legitimate criticism that information taught in the classroom was not assessed on the state test. This incongruity was corrected in 2001, when California instituted criterion-referenced standards-aligned tests, principally the California Standards Test (CST).

The CST is a so-called criterion-referenced exam that measures student performance relative to state standards, as opposed to a national sample of students. Scoring on the CST is grouped into five categories: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic.

As a component of the state's Standardized Testing and Reporting system (STAR), California also uses the norm-referenced California Achievement Test-6 (CAT-6), which is similarly aligned to the state standards, but measures student performance against a national sample of students. The CAT-6 was included in the state's testing regime to evaluate California's self-assessed progress as compared to national norms of performance. Ideally, the new CST and CAT-6 tests together would accurately measure how well classroom teachers were teaching to the standards.

With the institution of rigorous state academic content standards and tests aligned to those standards, the base was established in California for an effective school accountability system. Such a system would use student test results to identify poorly performing schools and attach real consequences for poor performance. The importance of consequences and mandated corrective interventions for poor performance cannot be understated.

Eric Hanushek, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and one of the nation's leading education economists, has found that accountability systems have a significantly positive impact on student achievement. But Hanushek attaches an important caveat: "The impact, however, holds only for those states attaching consequences to performance."[6] States that do not attach consequences to performance, he says, "do not get significantly larger impacts than those not having a formal accountability system."[7] Unfortunately, California's school accountability system is severely

deficient in this crucial area of consequences, mandated corrective interventions, or options for parents of students attending consistently low-performing schools.

Part One of this paper will examine the development and operation of California's school accountability system, analyze its various deficiencies, and make recommendations for fixing the system. The second part of this study will focus on two schools representative of the more than 200 high-poverty, high-performing schools that are improving at a rate sufficient to meet not only the state's minuscule school improvement targets, but also the more demanding federal NCLB proficiency requirements.

I

The California State Accountability System

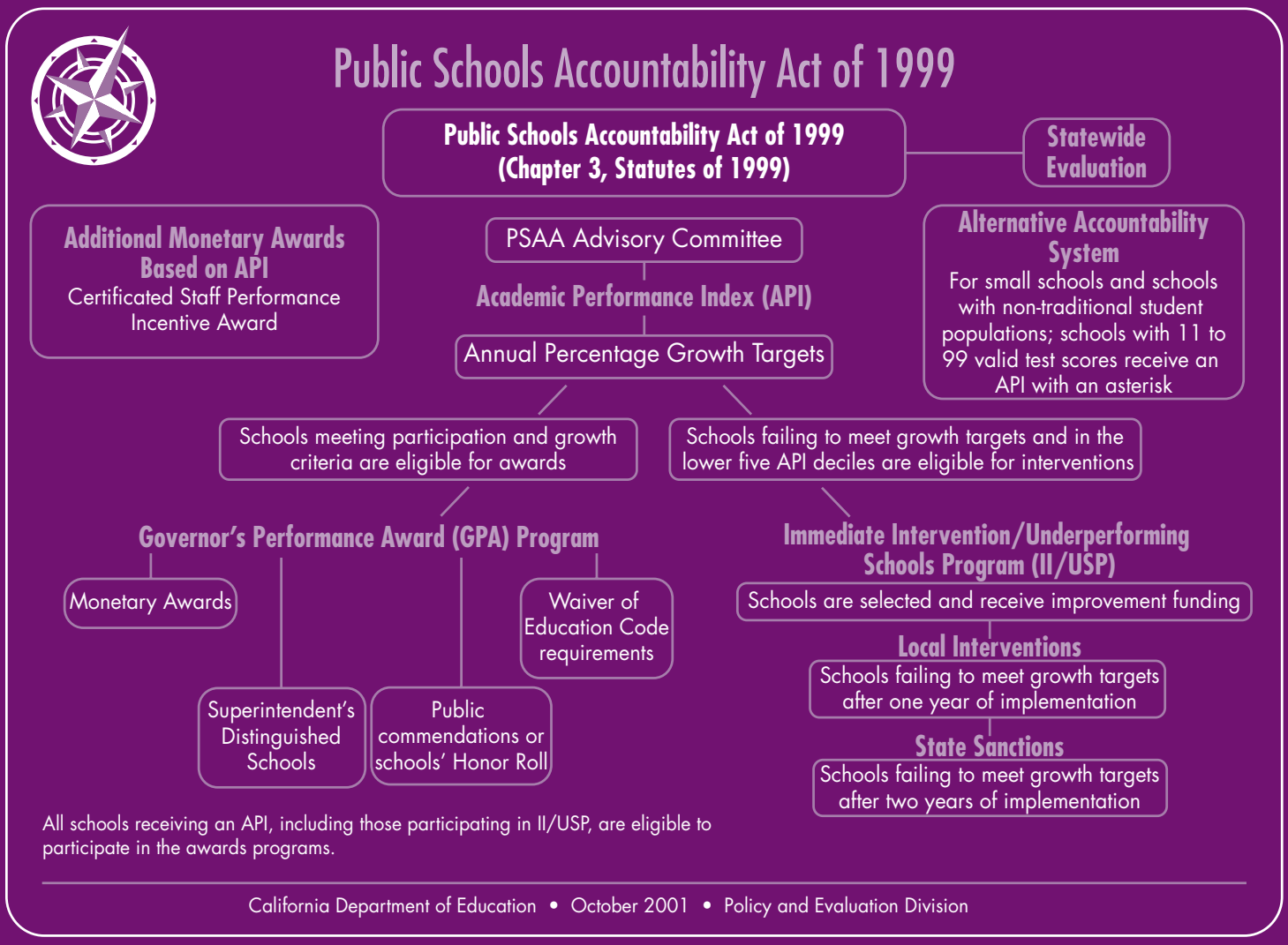
California's school accountability system was established under the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (PSAA), which predated the federal NCLB by two years. The system's key measurement device is the Academic Performance Index (API), the purpose of which is to measure the academic performance and test-score-based growth of individual schools. It is a numeric index (or scale) that ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1,000. Each school's exact score is based principally on the school's CST scores, though scores on other state tests for certain grades and certain types of students are also part of the equation.

The API score is an indicator of a school's performance level. The State Board of Education set the statewide API performance target for all schools at 800. A school's growth is measured by how well it is moving toward or past that target. The API also ranks schools on a scale of one to 10, with one ranking as the lowest-performing. Each year, 10 percent of all schools are placed in each decile ranking, and those in deciles one to five are considered low-performing.

Schools with an index below 800 are asked to meet annual growth targets based on five percent of the difference between the school's API score and the state goal of 800. Thus, a school with a score of 400 would have a growth target of 20 points, calculated as (800-400) x .05 = 20. In contrast, a school with an API between 781 and 799 would have a growth target of only a single point. Using the five percent formula, it would take decades for a low-performing school to reach the state goal of 800, by which time generations of unfortunate students would have graduated from the subpar institution.

It is important to point out early that California's accountability system and NCLB differ in the way they use test scores. California's API uses student test scores to measure school-wide performance and growth at individual schools, rather than assessing progress of individual students or groups of students. In contrast, NCLB puts the spotlight on student achievement, i.e. the percentage of students at an individual school who reach a certain level of achievement called grade-level proficiency. Thus, schools with significant populations of white students often make their school-wide API growth targets, while masking the achievement gaps of ethnic minority students. This difference and others will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

API has two components: (1) base information and (2) growth information. A school's API Base is subtracted from its API Growth to determine how much the school improved in a year.



One of the key problems with the API is that the statewide target score for all schools is not synonymous with grade-level proficiency.

These two components are referred to as a reporting cycle. Generally, base reports are provided after the first of the calendar year, and growth reports are provided each August. Thus, a school's 2006 API Base is calculated from 2005 test scores from the previous spring, while the 2006 API Growth is calculated from the 2006 spring test scores. These reports are based on APIs that are calculated annually with largely the same indicators. It is important to note, however, that each year schools receive a new base, and that a school may have a lower base in later years that would affect a school's growth in that given year, thus making it impossible to understand academic growth over time.[8]

One of the key problems with the API is that the statewide target score for all schools is not synonymous with grade-level proficiency. Under the PSAA, the State Board of Education adopted a statewide API performance target of 800 that all schools were required to meet. However, this target goal has been set well below the state's definition of proficiency, which is the level that the federal NCLB requires all students to reach. Grade-level proficiency is actually met with a score of 875. Thus, the state target goal of 800 is considerably lower than the grade-level proficiency scoring level. Schools, therefore, are striving to meet an API goal that is significantly below proficiency. Immediately, one can see the disparity between the goals of the state accountability system and the federal accountability law.

It was the intent of the PSAA legislation at the time it was enacted to also include rewards that would recognize high-achieving schools, while recommending interventions and, ultimately, sanctions for schools that are continuously low performing. The law was written and passed during a period of windfall budgets for providing schools monetary incentives for improvement. This aspect of the law is known as the Governor's High Achieving/Improving Schools Program. The appropriation for incentives was $227 million in the 1999-2000 budget and $157 million for 2000-2001. Due to economic conditions and consequent budgetary constraints, this incentive program has not been funded since 2001.

Also enacted under the PSAA was the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). This voluntary program invited schools to apply for an initial $50,000 planning grant to be used for development of a local action plan to improve student achievement at that school. This action plan required the school to set short-term academic objectives for a two-year period that would

allow the school to make adequate progress toward the academic growth targets on achievement tests, graduation rates, and any other indicators approved by the State Board of Education. In the following two years, the school would receive annual implementation grants of up to $200 per enrolled student, with a third-year grant possible if the school continued to struggle to meet its API growth target.

II/USP was initially open to those schools that scored below the 50th percentile on the SAT-9 exam. The state changed the program in 2000 so that schools that rank in the lower half of the API and fail to meet their state-calculated growth targets are eligible to apply for the program. Because the program is voluntary, low-performing schools can choose not to apply for the program; others may apply but not be selected. For example, in 2000-01, of the 938 eligible schools, only 532 applied for 430 slots. In other words, 406 eligible low-performing schools voluntarily decided not to apply, and of those that did, 102 were not selected.

As of 2003-04, three groups, or cohorts, of 430 schools have been funded, resulting in a total of 1,290 funded schools over three budget years. It is wrong to assume, however, that these 1,290 schools were chosen because they represent the worst schools in California. Focusing on schools that do not reach their growth targets makes sense because it funnels resources to schools that are struggling to improve. However, according to the state Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), this rule could result in the perverse possibility that the school with the lowest API score in the entire state would not be eligible for this immediate assistance program" if it had "reached its annual growth target."[9] The LAO notes that "such a low-performing school is likely to be in greater need of external assistance than a school in the fifth decile (close to the state average) that did not meet its annual API growth target."[10] As the LAO's observation indicated, there was no guarantee that only the lowest-performing schools in the lowest deciles be chosen for the program.

By definition, standard accountability mechanisms should serve as an obligation to accept responsibility for improvement, particularly when additional funds have been provided to support reform and improvement efforts. California's school accountability system, though, was designed at a time when the state policy for incentives and accountability to improve was not well defined or understood in California. This is evidenced by the fact that 3,428 schools shared $227 million in 1999-2000 and 4,562 schools shared $157 million in 2000–2001 as a reward for improving student achievement. This focus on rewarding nearly 5,000 schools stands in stark contrast to the state's acceptance of only 1,290 "underperforming," volunteer schools for funding to encourage improvement.

In order to complete and exit the II/USP program, a participating school simply had to meet its growth target for two years in a row. As has been noted, the growth-target formula produces a very minimal incremental growth requirement, so it is not hard to exit the program "successfully." For those schools that failed to meet the exit requirements, the PSAA law theoretically allowed the state superintendent of public instruction to impose sanctions including state takeover of the school, reassignment of staff, appointing a state trustee, turning the school into a charter school, renegotiating the labor agreement, or closing down the school. In reality, however, the current options are relatively mild and ineffectual, such as assigning a school assistance and intervention team (SAIT).

The II/USP program was made voluntary because schools that took the money had to accept what were marketed as strict sanctions should they not improve. Initially, the contemplated sanctions appeared to meet Eric Hanushek and Herb Walberg's requirement that accountability systems have tough consequences for failure to improve. However, not only have California's sanctions been watered down, the benchmark for avoiding them has been set so low, it is difficult to see how the state's system qualifies as an effective accountability program.

Given the low bar set for of the II/USP exit criteria, it is not surprising that 990 of the 1,290 schools have successfully met the minimal requirements for exiting the program. An additional 78 schools remain under watch, and 222 schools have become or continue to be state-monitored. Again, because II/USP is a voluntary program, many low-performing public schools that refused to participate or were not accepted into the program perform worse than participating schools. These non-II/USP schools are not subject to any sanctions and may perform at lower levels than II/USP schools being sanctioned by the state for failure to improve.

Remarkably, of these 1,290 II/USP volunteer schools across the state, only six schools had any sanctions imposed upon them by the state superintendent of public instruction (SPI), and those sanctions came only after five years of failure to improve. The six schools that received sanctions in 2005, were actually outperforming many others in the state. This disturbing phenomenon occurs for two reasons.

First, the law allowed only 1,290 schools out of more than 9,300 schools in California to accept improvement grants for II/USP. Second, the metrics for improvement were based upon the API, which in many cases allows the scores of ethnic minority and socio-economically disadvantaged subgroups within a school to decline. Often, these declining scores are masked by growth in the school's overall API score. This significant flaw of the state's API will be covered later in this analysis.

Analysis of the Six Schools That Received Sanctions Imposed by the SPI in 2005

1) WILSONA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

While Wilsona Elementary School, in Palmdale, Los Angeles County, was identified for sanctions in 2005, our analysis showed that 1,610 schools in the state performed worse based upon the schools' ability to get all students to grade-level proficiency as measured by the CST.

State sanctions on Wilsona included: 1) contract with a county office of education for a new SAIT, 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need, and 3) ensure that 100 percent of the teachers are highly qualified.

2) LEXINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

As for Lexington Elementary, in Cajon Valley, San Diego County, our research found that there were 617 schools in the state that performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for a new SAIT, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

3) ALICANTE AVENUE ELEMENTARY:

In Alicante Avenue Elementary, in Lamont, Kern County, our research found that there were 389 schools in the state that performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for assignment of a trustee, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

4) ANTELOPE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL:
In Antelope Valley High School, in Lancaster, Los Angeles County, our research found that 200 schools performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for assignment of a trustee, 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need, and 3) ensure that 100 percent of the teachers are highly qualified.

5) COMPTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL:
In Compton Junior High School, in Bakersfield, Kern County, our research found 185 schools in the state performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for a new SAIT, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

6) EASTIN-ARCOLA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:
In Eastin-Arcola Elementary, in Madera, Madera County, our research found 105 schools in the state performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for a new SAIT, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

Clearly, as evidenced above, these schools are not the worst-performing schools in the state. More important, however, is the fact that these state sanctions are neither severe nor necessarily helpful in turning around a school's learning environment in need of improvement. For example, at Alicante Elementary, the mere assignment of a trustee from the county office of education and the provision of supplemental services do not address the major issues that often lie at the root of poor school and student performance, such as teachers' competence and knowledge of the subject matter, standards implementation in the classroom, instructional methods and practices, and curriculum usage.

The SAIT teams, which were established in 2004, have the potential to influence student achievement positively because of their emphasis on alignment of instruction with the state academic content standards, effective teaching of subject matter, and good management practices by the district and the principal. However, according to one analysis of the pre-SAIT efforts to improve schools under II/USP and HPSGP: "Independent scholars found that the process had negligible effects on student performance because the external evaluation teams gave schools divergent and idiosyncratic recommendations. The recommendations usually emphasized classroom processes and school operations rather than what teachers are teaching and how effectively."[11] "After these initial failing years," this analysis reported, "failing schools continued to fail, and students did not learn."[12] The SAIT teams offer a better approach linked to practices that have been shown to improve student achievement. Nonetheless, it is still unclear just how successful these teams will be in practice over the long term, and, in fact, the aforementioned analysis noted that "what remains troubling is the lack of current efforts to evaluate the success of SAIT officially."[13]

The few schools subjected to sanctions receive $150 per pupil for three years and are eligible to have the sanctions lifted if they make "significant" growth for two consecutive years during the three-year sanction period. "Significant" growth does not necessarily mean meeting the school's state-calculated growth target, but can be a lesser amount.

In fall 2001, Governor Gray Davis signed a bill that layered yet another state funding program on top of the existing II/USP program. Under the new funding program, called the High Priority Schools Grant Program (HPSGP), Decile 1 schools may apply for $50,000 initial planning grants and three to four years of implementation grants at $400 per pupil, twice the II/USP rate, to fund their school improvement efforts. These Decile 1 schools are eligible to apply regardless of whether they are meeting their API growth targets.

Also altered by the grant program was the sanctions timeline, which was lengthened from two to three years. However, even if schools participating in the program do not hit their annual API growth targets, schools can receive another year's reprieve if they simply show, as under II/USP, "significant" growth. Oddly, though, "significant" growth in this case has been defined by the state Department of Education to equal one point of gain on the API. With this meaningless yet "acceptable" rate of improvement, "successful" schools exiting the program could still take decades to get their students to grade-level proficiency.[14]

Both of these reform programs have created for schools a false sense of improvement and a false sense of accountability. Formulas used for determining high performance and improvement are

easily gamed and often produce exactly the opposite result from what would truly have a high impact on student achievement. In addition, the sanctions imposed on schools in California are limited even when they are applied.

The primary reason for the lack of high rates of improvement in schools in the state programs is that the systems of rewards and sanctions under API-based accountability set very low expectations for academic achievement. Simply put, the academic achievement of California schools matches the expectations of the two programs, but that level of expectation is unacceptably low.

The public understandably assumes that accountability is for all schools, not just those that volunteer to participate in II/USP or HPSGP. In fact, based on the way these programs have been structured, many might argue that the result is simply throwing good money after bad. While the SAIT teams may be able to craft workable and effective improvement plans for individual schools, the fact remains that the state's expectations for improvement goals in II/USP and HPSGP are too low and are not connected to a tangible target such as grade-level proficiency for all students. The result is that the positive change in learning that the public wants for all students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, does not often happen.

Effectiveness and Impact of Spending More Than $1 Billion

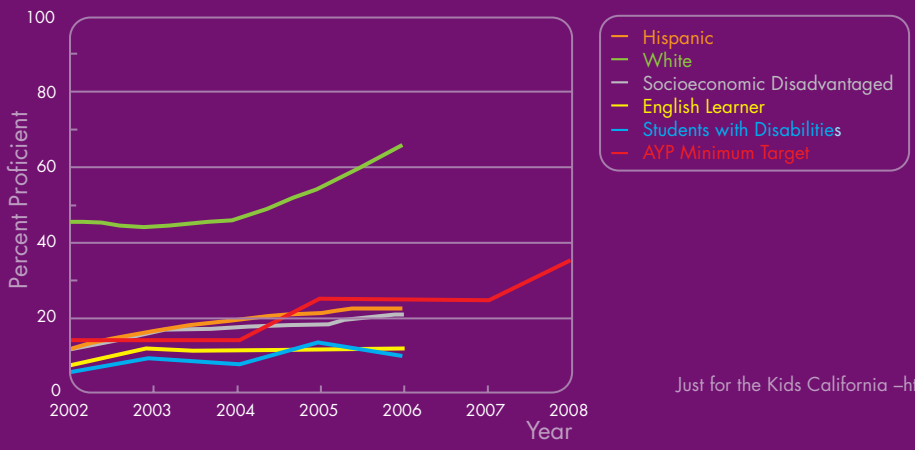
The following charts show the academic achievement results for those schools that participated in the II/USP and HPSGP grant programs. By accepting more than $1 billion total from the state, they agreed to improve student academic achievement in specific ways, as measured by the API. For each of the following data charts from schools or cohorts of schools, a comparison is made with a school or cohort of schools that was eligible to participate in these state programs but declined to do so.

Comparatively speaking, there are no differences in academic achievement for the participating schools, as measured by improvement in grade-level proficiency on the CST over time. Despite this lack of significant improvement, these schools met the criteria established by the state for successful program implementation with sufficient achievement results for exiting the program. The point here is not that these schools did anything "wrong." Rather, the fact that they did just what the state asked them to do, but did not significantly improve their performance and yet exited the program, is a condemnation of the accountability system itself.

A school that accepted II/USP grant and exited program as successful

Herbert Hoover Middle, San Jose Unified
Language Arts Subgroup Performance Summary

	Subgroup	All Students	Hispanic	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Update	Number of Students	1211	939	132	828	513	127
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	77.5%	10.9%	68.4%	42.4%	10.5%
	Include Subgroup	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑



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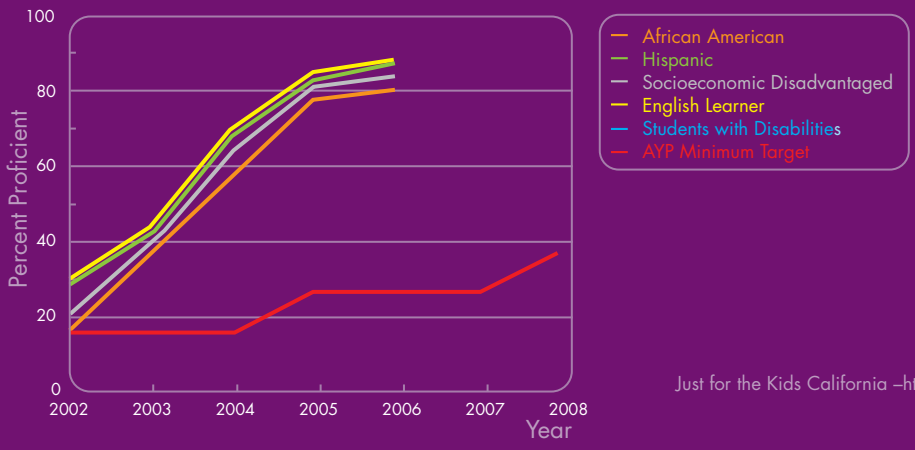
A school that was II/USP-eligible but accepted no grants or state intervention

Ralph Bunche Elementary, Compton Unified
Mathematics Subgroup Performance Summary

	Subgroup	All Students	African American	Hispanic	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Update	Number of Students	269	133	130	269	133	15
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	49.4%	48.3%	100.0%	42.0%	5.6%
	Include Subgroup	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑

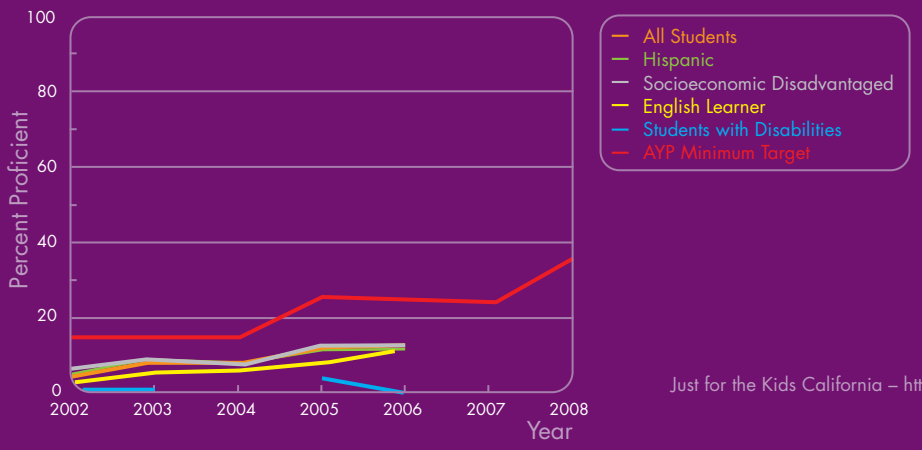


Just for the Kids California –http://www.jftk-ca.org

A school that accepted HPSGP funding and exited program as successful

Calwa Elementary, Fresno United
Language Arts Subgroup Performance Summary

	Subgroup	All Students	Hispanic	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Update	Number of Students	511	474	511	299	39
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	92.8%	100.0%	58.5%	7.6%
	Include Subgroup	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑



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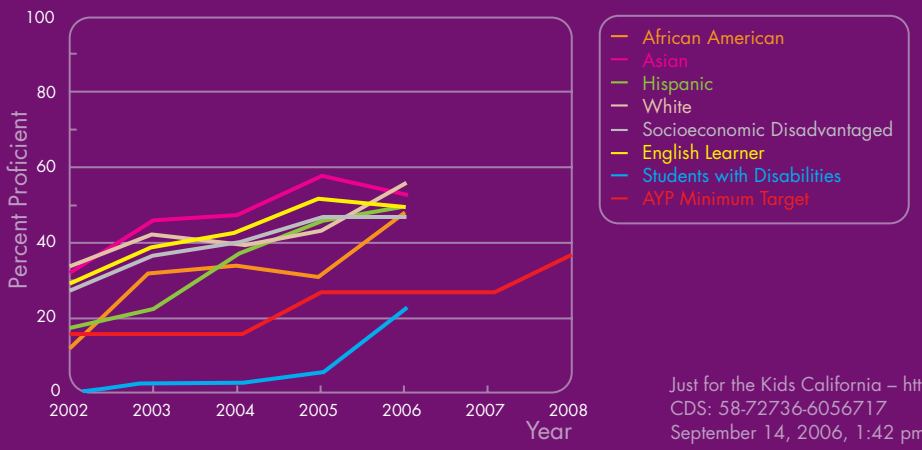
A school eligible for HPSGP that accepted no grants or state intervention

Linda Elementary, Marysville Joint Unified
Mathematics Subgroup Performance Summary

	Subgroup	All Students	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Update	Number of Students	462	26	106	183	137	354	231â	72
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	5.6%	22.9%	39.6%	29.7%	76.6%	50.0%	15.6%
	Include Subgroup	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑



Just for the Kids California – http://www.jftk-ca.org
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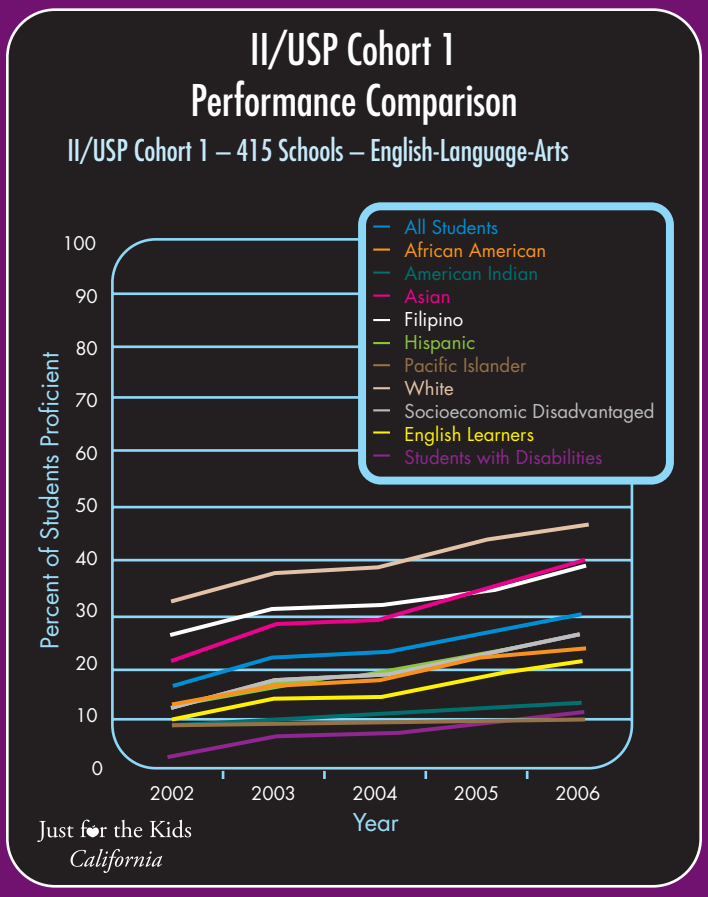
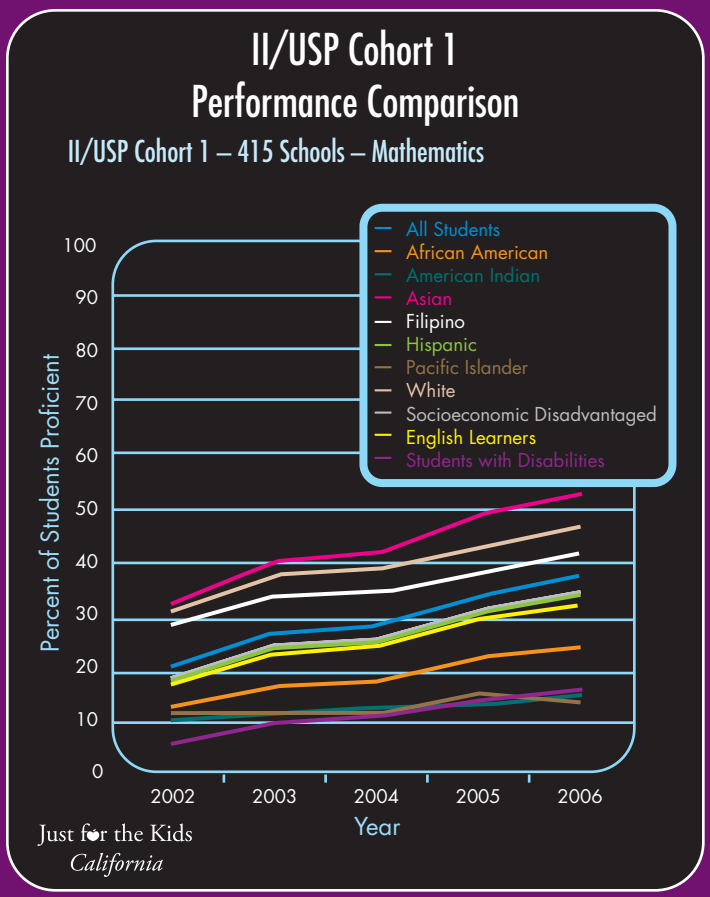
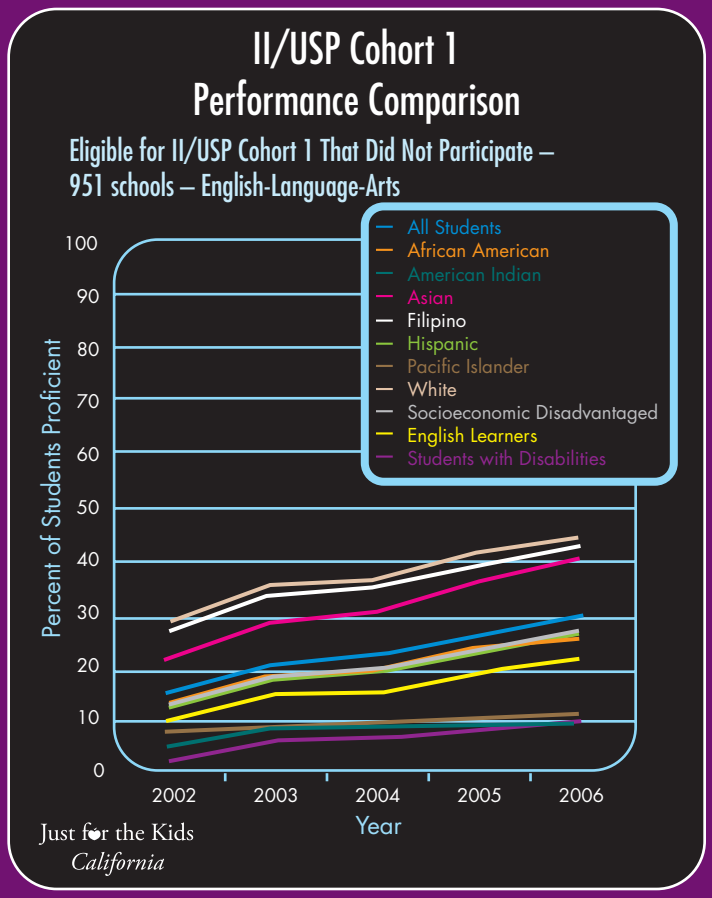
September 14, 2006, 1:42 pm PDT

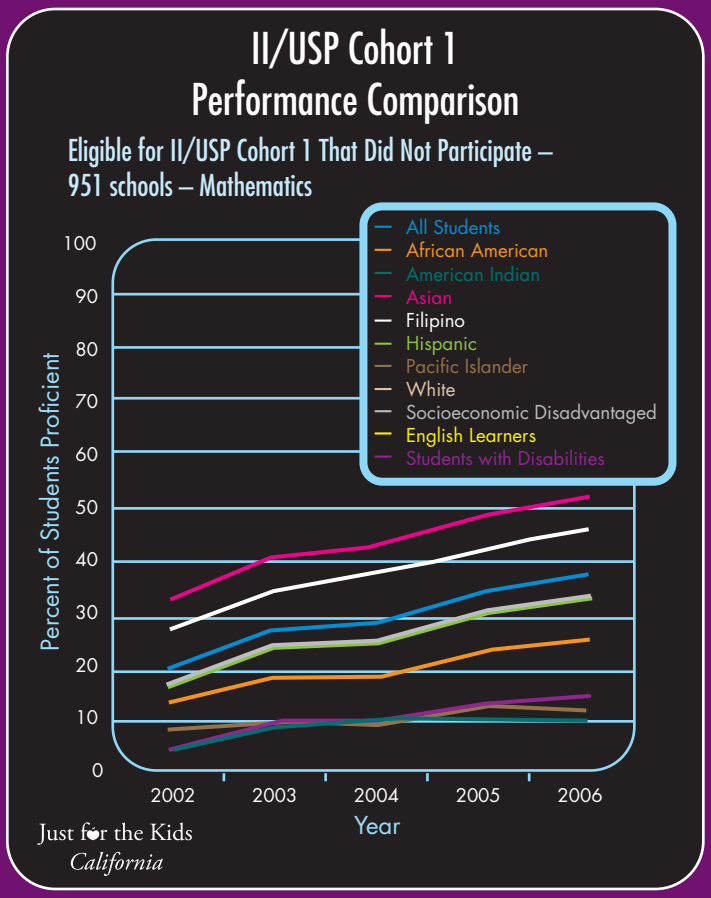
Improvement over time for all Cohort 1 II/USP-eligible schools that accepted grants



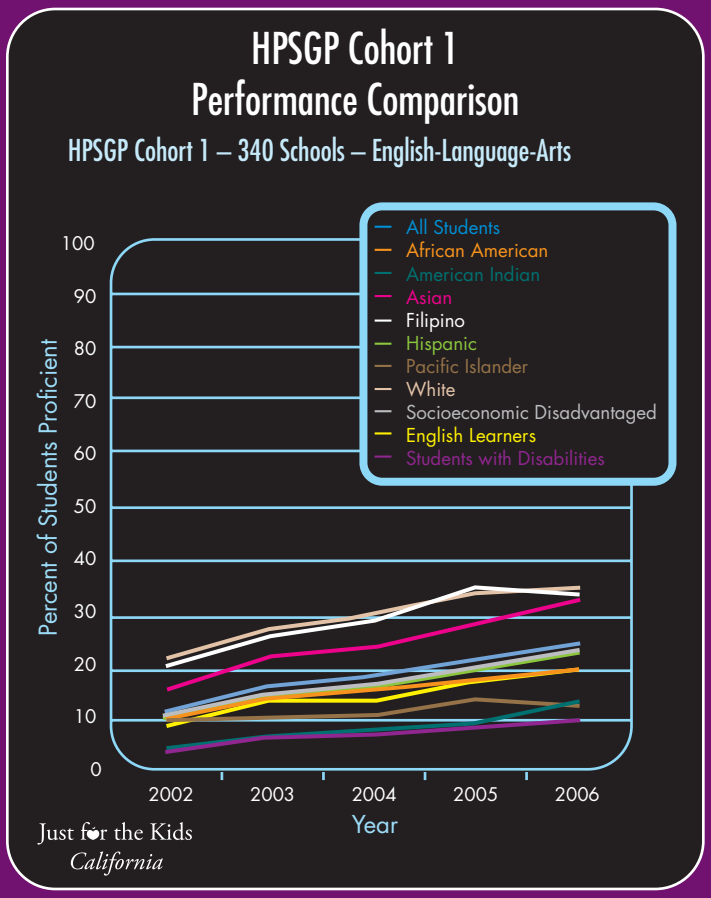


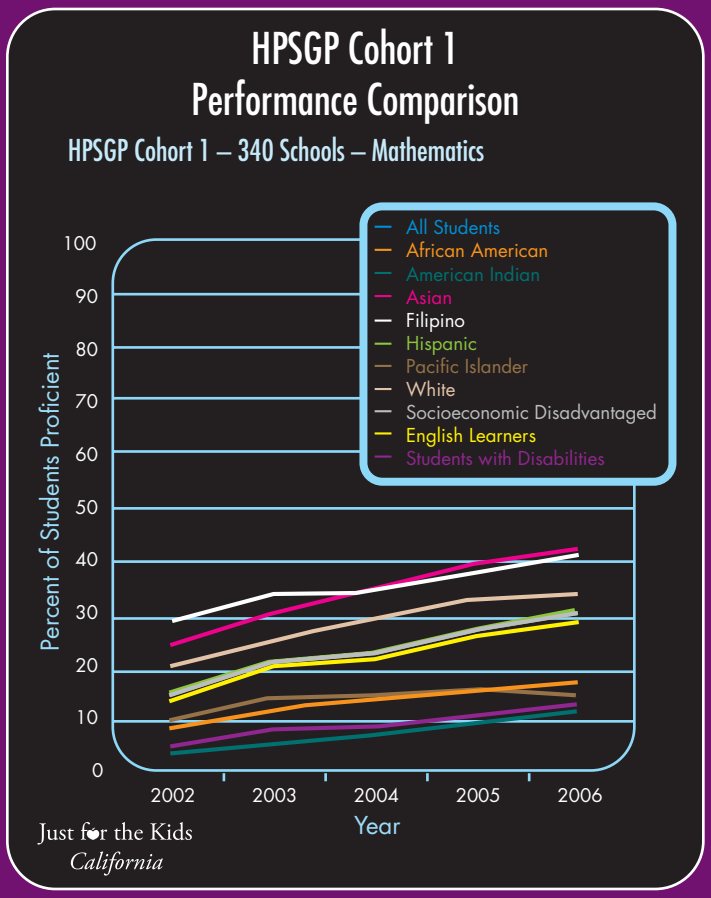
Improvement over time for all II/USP-eligible schools during the Cohort 1 startup year that did not accept the grants or state intervention



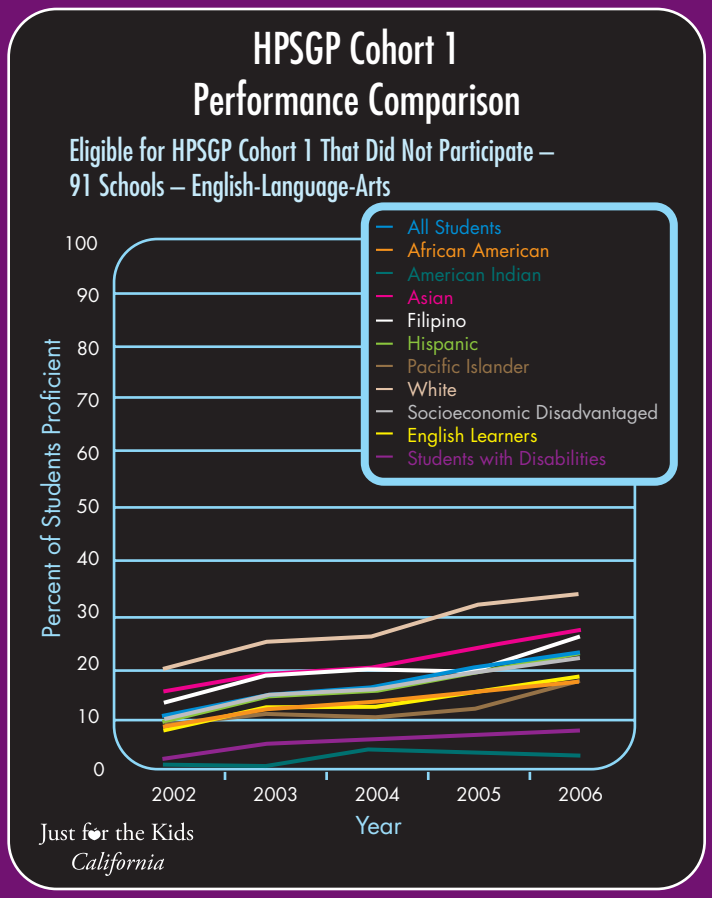


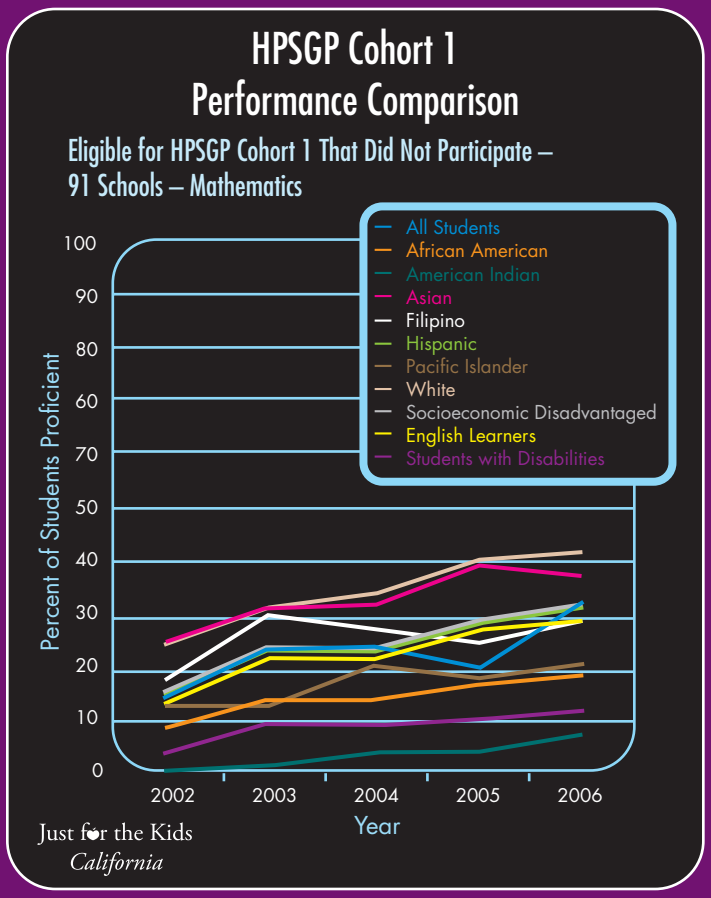
Improvement over time for all Cohort 1 HPSGP schools that accepted grants





Improvement over time for all HPSGP-eligible schools during the Cohort 1 startup year that did not accept grants or state intervention.





As these charts confirm, it made relatively little difference whether students attended schools that were part of a state improvement program or not. For example, if one compares the performance of African American students at schools that participated in II/USP or HPSGP to African American students who attended schools eligible for those programs that did not participate, one finds virtually no difference in the percentage of students who reached grade-level proficiency in reading and math. Thus, it appears that for all the tax dollars spent on the state improvement programs, they have delivered precious little bang for the buck.

II

The Federal Accountability System

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110), with overwhelming bipartisan support. The final votes were 87-10 in the Senate and 381-41 in the House. Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Judd Gregg (R-NH) and Congressmen George Miller (D-CA) and John Boehner (R-OH) were its chief sponsors in the Senate and the House, respectively.

As has been mentioned previously, NCLB requires, among other things, that all children be proficient in math and reading by 2013-14. In order to help students achieve proficiency, states must establish academic content standards, enact testing and accountability systems, and improve the subject-matter competency of teachers.

The key foundational concept upon which much of NCLB is constructed is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The state Legislative Analyst's Office explains this as follows: "States must define the meaning of proficient [on their state tests] and set annual objectives towards this goal [of proficiency], referred to as AYP. In order to meet AYP, schools must meet targets for all students and for the following subgroups: major racial and ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English Language learners."[15]

NCLB requires that all schools in a state administer the same test and have their progress measured according to the results of that test. The federal law focuses on the percentage of students meeting the target of grade-level proficiency in reading and math, while California's API-based accountability system focuses only on growth in a school's overall achievement from year to year. California, thus, has dual, or dueling, accountability systems.

NCLB aims to improve the performance of America's elementary and secondary schools, while at the same time ensuring that no child is trapped in a failing school without options or access to additional educational resources. Thus, the emphasis is on improving individual student academic performance, rather than the average performance of a school. As Harvard economist Caroline Minter Hoxby observes: "Boiled down, AYP is simple: every student should be on a path that, if projected forward, will lead him to be proficient by 2014. The *every* is a core principle of NCLB: we must ensure that no group of students — minority, disabled, poor, limited English proficient, mobile — is left behind."[16]

When the focus is only on the average performance of an entire school, as with California's API-based system, there is no incentive to pay attention to lower-performing students as long as higher-performing students balance them out and keep the school's average scores above state benchmarks. NCLB's AYP-based framework requires considerable improvement in the performance of all significant subgroups of students, rather than simply improvements in a school-wide average score. As such, it ensures that schools, school districts, and the state focus their efforts on raising the achievement of all students, instead of allowing individual students to continue falling behind.

Just as important, NCLB strengthens federal Title I accountability. Title I is a federally funded assistance program for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. In California, approximately 57 percent of public schools receive Title I funding. NCLB requires the implementation of statewide accountability systems that cover all public schools that accept federal money. These accountability systems must be based on state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades three through eight, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group of students is left behind.

Title I schools and school districts that fail to make AYP toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course to meet state standards. NCLB's major effort in this regard is called Program Improvement, which has four levels of sanctions and interventions.

The first level requires that schools develop a two-year improvement plan and use 10 percent of Title I funds for professional development on school improvement. At this level, a key incentive for schools to improve is the requirement that students have the option to transfer to any public school in the district, including a charter school, and have the district pay for their transportation costs. The district must use at least 5 percent of its Title I funds for this purpose, if needed.

At the second level, all level-one interventions are continued, plus schools must use Title I funds to create tutoring programs from state-approved public or private providers. Providers are selected by students and their parents and must meet state standards and offer services tailored to help participating students meet challenging state academic standards.

At level three, all level-one and level-two interventions are continued, plus the district must do one of the following: 1) replace responsible staff, 2) implement new curriculum, 3) significantly decrease management authority at the school level, 4) appoint an external expert to advise the school, 5) extend the school day or year, or 6) restructure the internal organization of the school.

The fourth and final level includes all the interventions at the previous levels and calls for another plan to be prepared and implemented within one year. This plan could include: 1) reopening the school as a charter school, 2) replacing most of the school staff, 3) hiring a private management company to operate the school, 4) turning the operation over to the state Department of Education, or 5) other major restructuring.[17]

In addition to the schools that receive Title I funding, their school districts are also subject to Program Improvement sanctions. The State Board of Education must identify districts that do not make AYP for two years in a row and provide them technical assistance. Districts that fail to improve are subject to a variety of sanctions: reduced administrative funding, deferred programmatic funding, revised curriculum requirements, replacing district personnel, removing schools from district control, replacing the superintendent and school board with an appointed trustee, abolishing or restructuring the school district, or authorizing students to transfer to other districts.[18] To ensure that districts offer meaningful choices, NCLB requires school districts to spend up to 20 percent of their federal Title I allocations to provide school choice and supplemental educational services to eligible students.

It is important to note that the AYP targets were set by the State Board of Education, not the federal government. Under NCLB, each state is responsible for developing its own definition of AYP and setting a course for how to bring all children to grade level by 2013-14. In fact, each state is also responsible for determining what level of academic performance at each grade level constitutes proficiency. Thus, it is not only possible, but quite probable that most states have different definitions of what constitutes proficiency in reading and math.

For AYP in grades two through eight, the California State Board of Education defines proficiency as scoring at the proficient or advanced level on the math and English-language-arts CST. For upper grades, a score on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) that corresponds to proficiency on the CST was selected, which is higher than the lower benchmark needed to pass the exit exam. According to the LAO, the Board "designed the proficient and advanced achievement levels to roughly represent students achieving above grade level who are on track to attend the California State University or the University of California."[19]

The LAO has recommended that California's definition of proficiency for upper grades be changed so that simply passing CAHSEE constitutes "proficiency." The agency also recommends, "the definition of proficiency for grades three through eight could be defined at a level commensurate with being on track to pass CAHSEE."[20] The LAO's recommendation, however, is an admission of defeat. The agency acknowledges that, if implemented, its recommendation would "create a lower standard than what [the State Board of Education] approved for the definition of AYP."[21] In fact, it would create a bar barely

above the ground, given that students need only answer correctly 55 percent of math questions and 60 percent of English-language-arts questions in order to pass the CAHSEE. Recall also that the exit exam contains material mainly geared to upper-middle-school difficulty levels.

Aligning all grade levels to such a low-level test with its low-level benchmarks would make the word "proficiency" meaningless and certainly not prepare twelfth-grade graduates to enter the workforce or college without extensive remediation from either their employer or higher education. Yet, the LAO promotes this change because it would slow the rate of schools entering NCLB Program Improvement.[22] As Caroline Minter Hoxby notes, states like California have "set proficiency levels on the basis of their true judgment of what their students ought to know, not what their schools can readily achieve."[23] "Dumbing down" the meaning of proficiency would, therefore, harm the very children that school accountability systems are designed to help.

How High Is High and How Low Is Low?

Other states have set "proficiency" levels for their tests at a lower level. This dichotomy has caused some to argue that California should lower its proficiency definition.

This argument will never be settled until the consumers of public education, the parents, the public, and the business community decide upon what exit competencies they expect from graduating twelth graders. Recently, California took a big step forward by defending the California High School Exit Exam. However, even though the California business community and others applaud this as a good start for benchmarking purposes, it still falls far short of what a graduating senior should know and be able to do.

The bottom line is that there seems to be consensus by all stakeholder groups that graduating high school seniors should exit the twelth grade with their choice of entering the workforce or pursuing higher education. However, today, more than half of the nearly 40,000 first-time freshmen admitted to the California State University (CSU) require remedial education in English, mathematics, or both. These 25,000 freshmen all have taken the required college preparatory curriculum in their high schools and have earned at least a B grade point average. According to the CSU, the cost in time and money to these students and to the state is substantial. Moreover, these students are confused by seemingly having done the right things in high school only to find out after admission to college that they need further preparation just to get started.

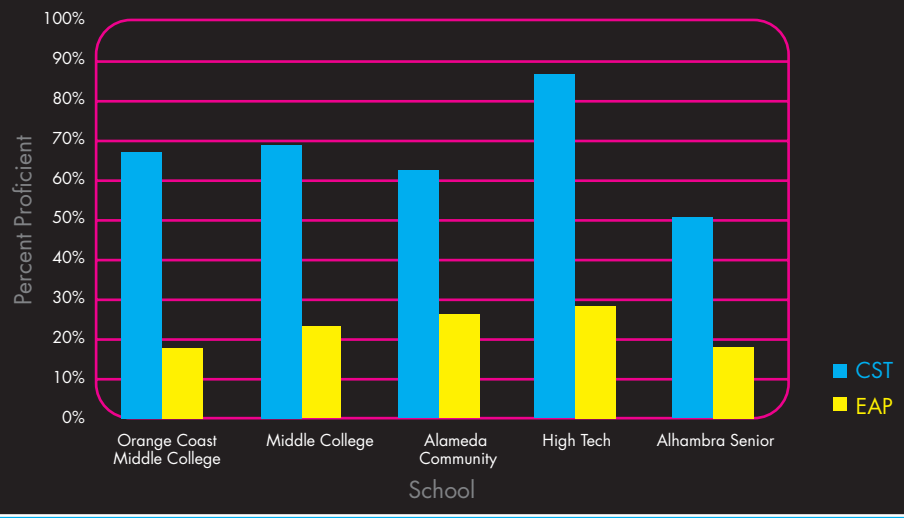
To mitigate this situation, the CSU designed and led a collaborative effort among state educational agencies to establish the Early Assessment Program (EAP). The program provides opportunities for students to measure their readiness for college-level English and mathematics in their junior year of high school, and to facilitate opportunities for them to improve their skills during their senior year.

Just for the Kids
California

Comparison of CST vs. EAP

Language Arts Scores

School	District	CST	EAP
Orange Coast Middle College High	Newport-Mesa Unified	68	18
Middle College High	Lodi Unified	70	23
Alameda Community Learning Center	Alameda City Unified	63	27
High Tech High	Los Angeles Unified	88	29
Alhambra Senior High	Martinez Unified	51	18



The goal of the EAP program is to have California high school graduates enter the CSU fully prepared to begin college-level study. They do this by taking a voluntary EAP test in the eleventh grade as an augmented CST. If they are considered proficient on the EAP, then they may enter their freshman year of college without remedial courses.

This begs the question—what is the relationship between proficiency on the CST and proficiency on the EAP? Does being at grade level in the eleventh grade mean that the student can expect to get into college without paying for costly remediation?

An initial analysis, as displayed in the chart above, of five comprehensive California High Schools with high percentages of eleventh graders at grade level in the CST clearly shows what many consider a benchmark set too high still is not very predictive of them getting into college without remediation. If the proficiency levels were dumbed down, this college readiness gap would dramatically increase, primarily because our expectations for their achievement levels would dramatically decrease. The bottom line is that teaching mastery of the state academic content standards would lose all meaning.

California's Response to Adequate Yearly Progress

In addition to the AYP component, NCLB sets several other goals for districts, schools, and teachers. These goals include annual assessments, annual measurable objectives (AMO), participation rates for students taking tests, other academic indicators (California chose a one-point gain on the API), graduation rates, average daily attendance, teacher quality, number of core academic subjects taught, paraprofessional quality, persistently dangerous schools and victims' rights, and parent notification and involvement.

The federal legislation sets the goals to be reached in each of these areas, and it is up to each state to respond with a strategy.

In California, the State Board of Education is the State Education Agency (SEA) for all matters related to NCLB. Each state that accepts federal grants must complete and submit to the U.S. Department of Education the state's implementation plan for the 10 critical elements required for approval of their state's NCLB accountability system. California's plan is known as the Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook.

These critical elements are defined and described in 10 principles that embody the federal legislation. An example of a critical element is Principle #3:

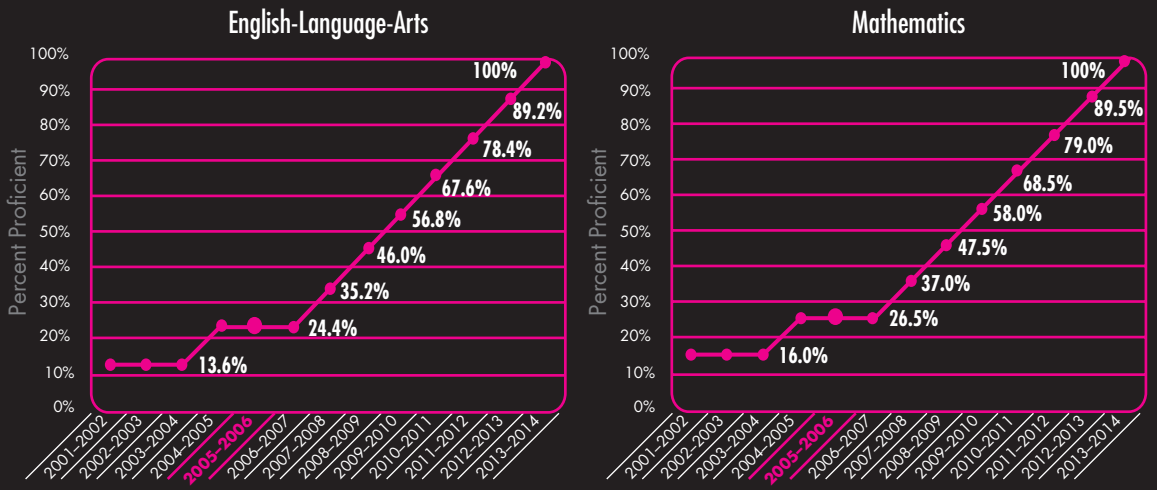
> The state definition of AYP is based on expectations for growth in student achievement that is continuous and substantial, such that all students are proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics no later than 2013–2014.

This AYP chart is California's response to critical elements of Principal #3 showing the timeline for getting all students to grade level by 2013–2104.

AYP Targets, 2002–2014

Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, and Elementary School Districts

- **Participation Rate** – 95% (schoolwide/LEA-wide and subgroups)
- **Percent Proficient** – Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) (schoolwide/LEA-wide and subgroups)



Source: California Department of Education, California Business for Educational Excellence

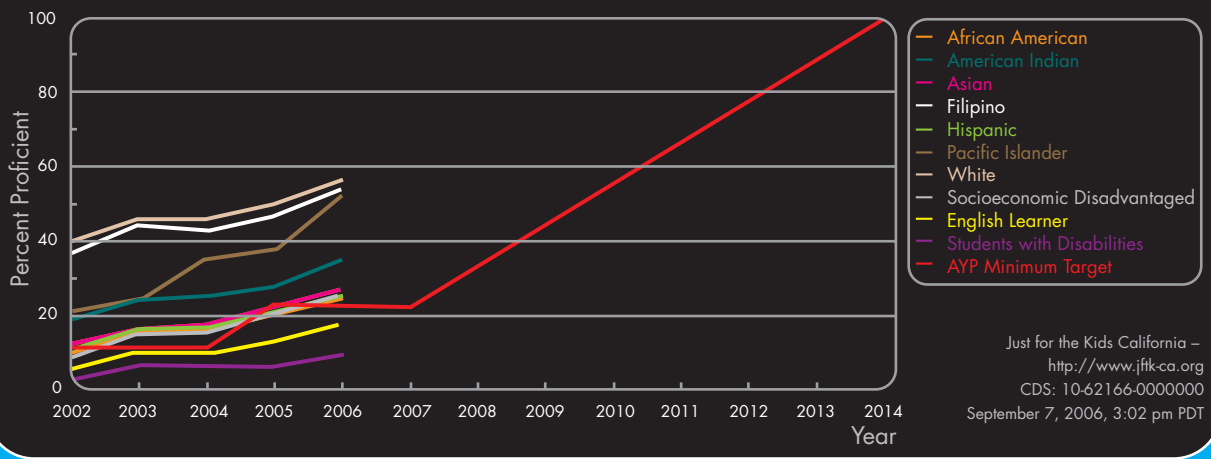
As shown in the graphic above, the State Board of Education chose to increase the rate of improvement in stages, with little or no improvement for the first three years, an increase in rate between years three and four, and then another flat line. The flat line coincides with election years and does not provide for a continuous expectation of improvement between 2001–2002 and 2013–2014. During the first three years, the expected rate of improvement was fixed over time at very low levels (13.6 percent at grade level for reading and 16 percent for math prior to 2004; and 24.4 percent at grade level for reading and 26.5 percent for math prior to 2008). Another way of saying this is that prior to 2004, it was acceptable for nearly 86 percent of students to be below grade-level proficiency in reading and 84 percent in math, and currently it is acceptable for more than 75 percent to be below grade level in reading and more than 73 percent in math.

One very negative aspect of the flat-line rate of growth in the early years is that it causes a steep, accelerated rate of improvement from 2007–08 to 2013–14. A skeptical, and probably very realistic, view of this rather strange plan for getting all kids to grade-level proficiency is that the creators of the California plan hoped that NCLB would be altered before real improvement in achievement was required. With the re-election of President Bush that became unlikely at least until after 2008.

The following graphic shows the state-designed ramp and its relationship to various NCLB subgroups of students and their performance over time on the Language Arts California Standards Test. This example shows the improvement data for every significant subgroup in Fresno Unified School District with relationship to the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for achieving AYP for that year.

District Summary, Fresno Unified
Reading Subgroup Performance Summary

	Subgroup	All Students	African American	American Indian	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Update	Number of Students	44109	5045	339	6545	215	24822	128	6979	37475	15668	4370
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	11.4%	0.8%	14.8%	0.5%	56.3%	0.3%	15.8%	85.0%	35.5%	9.9%
	Include Subgroup	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑



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http://www.jftk-ca.org
CDS: 10-62166-0000000
September 7, 2006, 3:02 pm PDT

III

A Tale of Two Accountability Systems

For nearly two years, led largely by the state superintendent of public instruction, there has been ongoing debate over the benefits of California's API and its so-called focus on growth, compared to the grade-level proficiency requirement called for in No Child Left Behind. In this debate, when the layers of the onion are peeled back on California's complicated and complex API, it becomes clear that the API is not a true accountability system at all. The API is confusing at best, and at worst, masks achievement gaps and the relative position of student subgroups and schools to a benchmark of absolute grade-level proficiency in reading and math.

As the LAO notes, "instead of measuring a particular *level* of achievement, [the API] measures *growth* in school-wide achievement from year to year." Yet, this growth is not targeted at grade-level proficiency. Recall that the state's API target score of 800 for schools is well below the proficiency benchmark of 875. "NCLB deliberately emphasizes *reaching proficiency*," says Caroline Minter Hoxby, "not just making gains every year" [emphasis in the original].[24] Growth, therefore, must be toward the goal of every child reaching proficiency, rather than schools making small incremental average gains de-linked from any proficiency goal or timetable focusing on all students.

The API, then, does little to provide educators, lawmakers, parents, and the public with data and information about a school's true academic performance. Without reliable and actionable data showing how schools are performing with respect to grade-level proficiency, it is impossible to identify the schools that are doing well and those that need additional help. There is no question that accountability is critically important to drive improved academic achievement. As such, it is all the more disturbing that true accountability is notably lacking when using the API as currently calculated and reported.[25] This is not to say that data should be used as a hammer, but simply that the state can do better than the current API system.

The API Holds Minority Students to a Lower Standard

Although the State Board of Education recently voted to change the discriminatory practice of setting minority subgroup growth targets at 80 percent of the school-wide growth target, draft language adopted by the board still allows schools to meet their growth targets and be recognized as successful even if they have subgroups that do not meet their growth targets.[26] Even worse, these schools often have declining proficiencies among their minority subgroups, yet are considered successful.

It takes the California Department of Education more than 80 pages in its API Base Report Information Guide to try to explain and defend this system. The attempt is not only confusing, but also misleading because it focuses on overall school "growth," without reporting whether students are achieving grade-level proficiency in reading or math. Under the API system, schools often reach their "growth" targets while at the same time achievement gaps among their ethnic minority groups of students were widening.

When the proposed amendment to change the lower growth targets for minority students as measured by the API came before the State Board of Education, an analysis was conducted of what exactly was being proposed. This analysis was not an easy task given the incomprehensible complexity of the API and the limited details of the two-page Board proposal. However, after reviewing the API Base Report Information Guide, the state's Accountability Work Book submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, and the proposal from the California Department of Education, the onion layers began to peel back. The result was both confusing and disturbing.

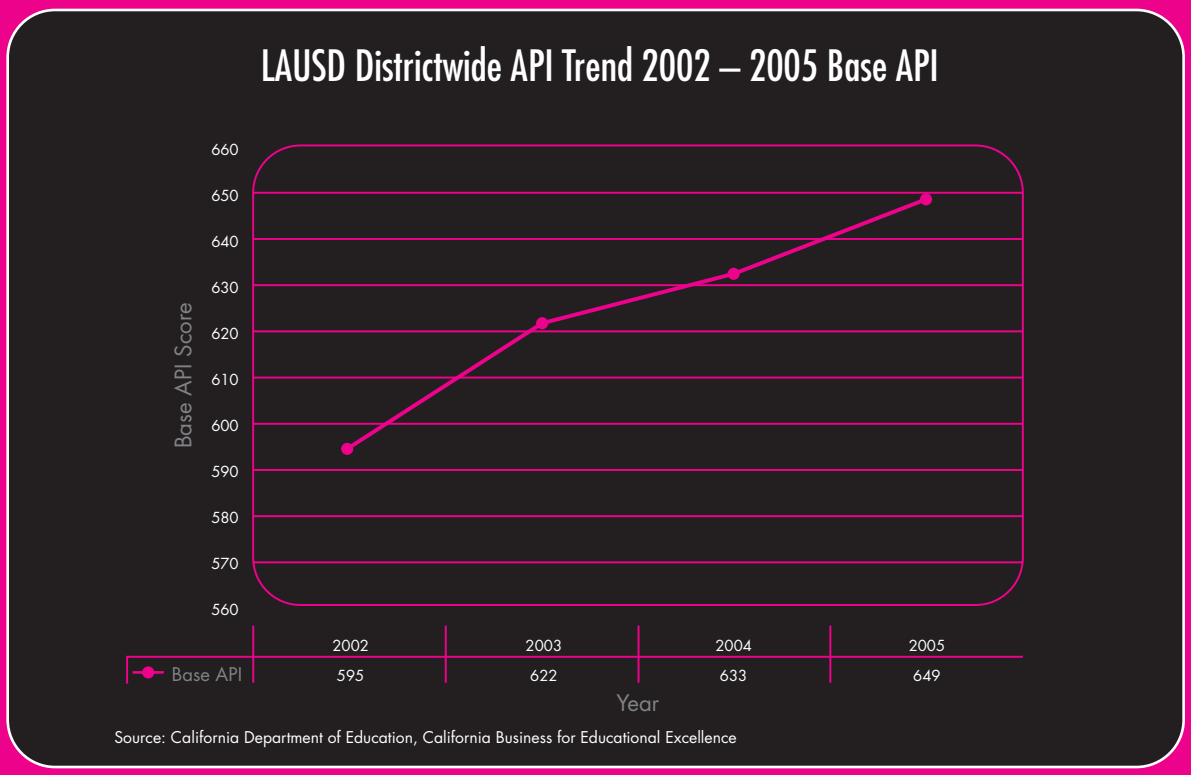
The analysis showed that of the 7,808 schools that have a valid API, which is 1,434 or 15.5 percent fewer than the total number of schools in the state, 981 of these schools met their school-wide API growth target but had one or more subgroups that did not meet their API growth target. Until this point, the public had been operating under the belief that schools were being held accountable for subgroup academic achievement under the API, albeit at a discriminatory lower level of 80 percent of their school-wide growth target. However, this is not the case. In fact, the only schools to face any sort of accountability for not meeting their API growth target were those small percentage of schools that had volunteered and accepted money for the II/USP.

Peeling back the layers of the onion even further, an analysis examined the proficiency levels of the schools that had met their school-wide growth targets, but which had failed to meet their subgroup growth targets. A full 593 schools not only failed to meet their subgroup growth targets but actually had declining proficiencies for one or more of these subgroups. For years, the state Department of Education has been broadcasting that these were the schools making "tremendous growth" on the API; in

actuality, these schools had declining proficiencies among their ethnic minority subgroups (therefore not making their Annual Measurable Objective as defined by the State Board of Education to determine if AYP was made). However, only after this analysis was an understanding gained of the absolute lack of connection or accountability between school-wide growth targets and subgroup growth targets.

API Going Up — Minority Grade-Level Proficiency Flat or Declining — Achievement Gaps Not Closing

Below are two graphics showing the lack of a relationship between the API and grade-level proficiency improvement over time. The first graphic shows the information the public receives from districts such as the Los Angeles Unified School District or the state Department of Education, showing that the school district is improving achievement.

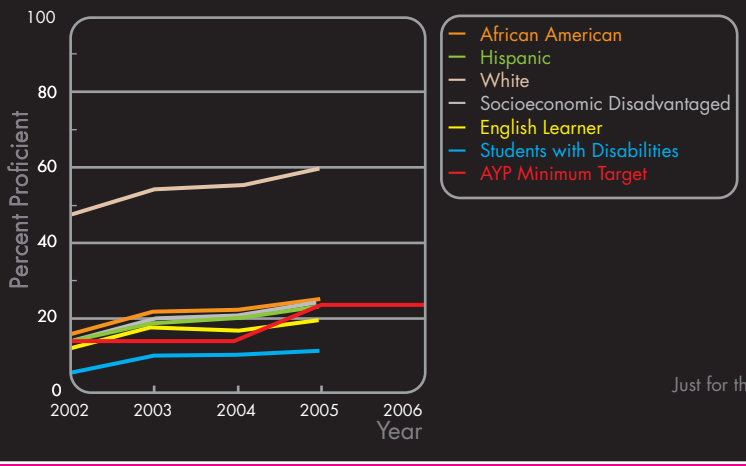


The second graphic shows that about eight out of 10 of LAUSD's 380,000 Hispanic and African American students are consistently performing below grade level, and that the district as a whole has seen negligible improvement over a five-year period, with no reduction in the achievement gap between those students and their white counterparts.

District Summary, Los Angeles Unified
Language Arts Subgroup Performance Summary

Update

Subgroup	All Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Number of Students	448894	51878	327459	39401	370574	261777	52318
Percent Enrollment	100.0%	11.6%	72.9%	8.8%	82.6%	58.3%	11.7%
Include Subgroup	☐	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑



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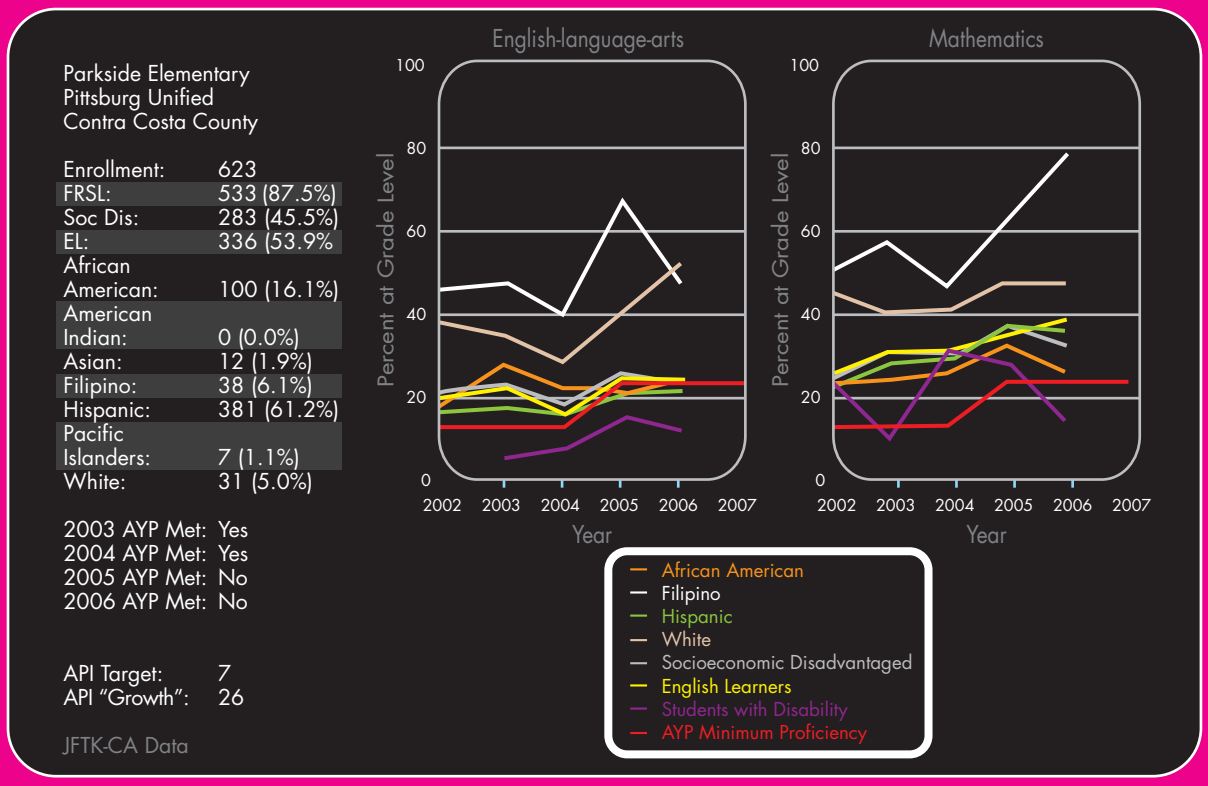
More than two-thirds of the students in California schools are ethnic minority students, and these students represent the state's future workforce. Given this reality, it is very difficult to understand the justification for an accountability system that masks the underperformance of these key subgroups. More confusing still, California's elected education leadership defends this situation as a better system. For instance, Jack O'Connell, the state superintendent of public instruction, has said:

It is important to remember the dramatic escalation in the AYP targets when viewing this year's results. The dichotomy in the progress reports released today underscores why we support our state API growth model as a more accurate reflection of trends in our schools.[27]

Yet it is the AYP that requires the focus on all students, including key subgroups of students. O'Connell chooses to ignore this fact, as well as the reality that the API system fails to detect or address stagnant or falling student minority subgroup performance. It seems clear that many officials want a system that offers comfort to adults rather than help to students.

As recently as August 31, 2006, the California Department of Education published yet another list of schools that made at least double the achievement gains as measured by the API, yet failed to meet AYP. The chart below clearly shows that even for a school that nearly quadrupled its API growth target, this increase was not due to any achievement gains in the majority of their minority students, more than 82 percent of whom were African American and Hispanic. It is apparent that the school-wide API gains were the result of increases in the performance of the white and Filipino subgroups.



A History of Lowballing Academic Benchmarks

The State Board of Education requested using the CAHSEE as the metric of success for assessing AYP for high schools. However, the review by the federal government found the benchmarks for passing the CAHSEE were far too low as a measurement of secondary-school success, since the exam included low-level subject matter like seventh-grade math and tenth-grade reading. As noted previously, in order to pass the English-language-arts portion of the CAHSEE, students need only answer 60 percent of the questions correctly. For the math portion, the passing benchmark is even lower, with students required to answer 55 percent of the questions correctly. Thus, for high schools to make AYP, students must do more than merely pass the exit exam, a fact largely unknown to most school districts and high schools across the state.

	Passing CAHSEE (For a diploma)	Proficient CAHSEE (For making AYP)
Scaled Score	350	380
% correct math	55%	63%
% correct reading	60%	76%

State Rewards a Focus on the Bottom

California's API places greater weight on rewarding schools that move children from far below basic to the next level of below basic than it does on moving children from basic to grade-level proficient. While this policy is no doubt driven by good intentions, there is no evidence to date that this focus on the bottom will encourage continued improvement of student achievement over time. The absolute goal must be to get all children to reach for the top and become grade-level proficient or advanced, not simply to settle for incremental improvement so as to avoid sanctions from the state. If the strategy is to focus on those students at far below basic, it will ultimately harm those students who fall outside that category.

Further, if California is to be successful at moving all children to grade-level proficiency by 2013-14, settling for the incremental growth allowed by California's API is not an option. At the API rate of growth, it could take schools 40 to 80 years to reach the goal of 800, and they would still be below grade level. Because children do not have a shelf life this long, the API growth rate could harm generations of students. The chart below calculates the number of years it will take for schools with particular API scores to reach the state's targeted score.

Starting API	Schools with that API or lower in 2005	Years allowed to reach 800
735	4,900	44
700	3,739	52
635	1,757	61
600	1,109	65
500	425	73
400	123	78
300	7	82
267	2	84

IV

Data: Beyond Opinion

Controversial rhetoric has dominated discussion of the future of California's public schools. Recently, officials in California's Department of Education have projected that between now and 2014, the NCLB deadline year for improvement, 100 percent of California's schools will fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress for all subgroups of students. Using achievement data available from state databases, it is now possible to leave aside projections based upon assumptions not grounded in fact.

The graph on the next page projects the current rate of growth in grade-level proficiency for both math and reading between now and 2014. This "status quo" model projects the percentage of schools reaching 100 percent proficiency based on their rate of growth from 2004 to 2005 on the California Standards Test. That is, those schools that are declining will continue to decline, those that are stagnant will continue to be stagnant, and those that are improving at a certain rate will continue at that same rate.

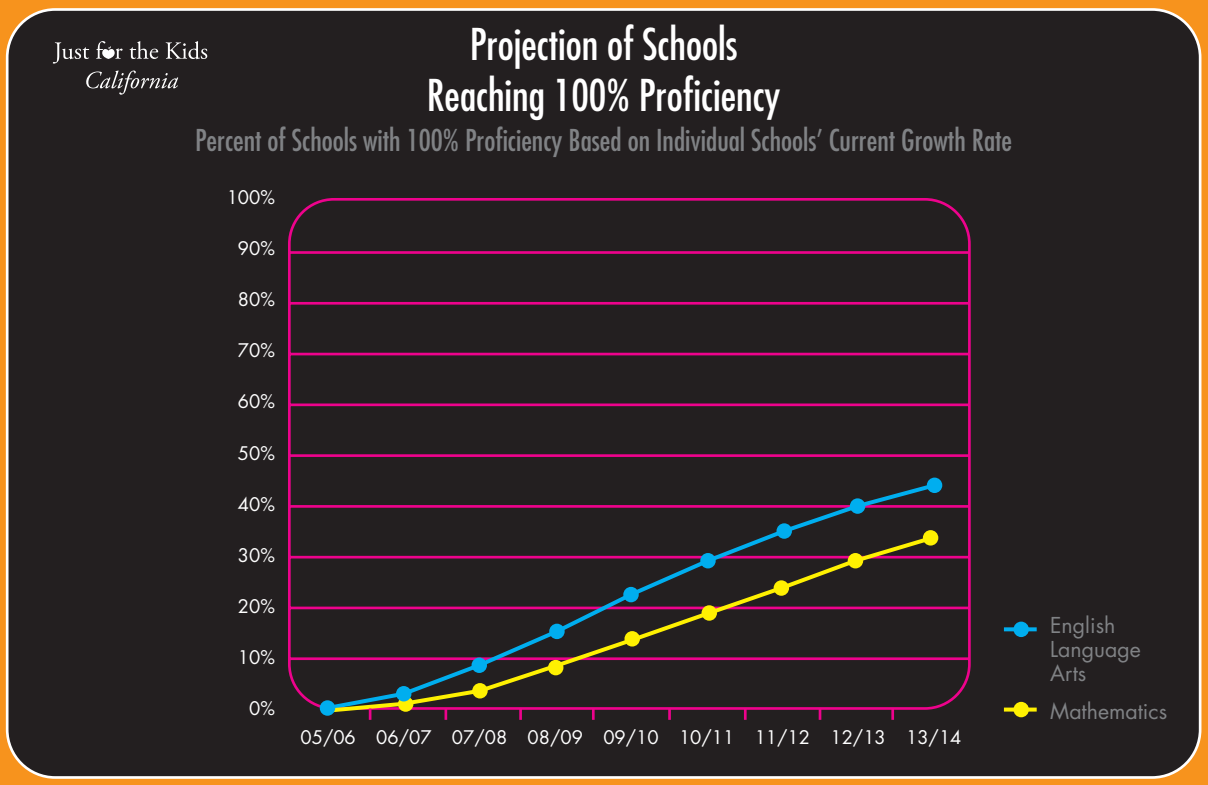
In other words, if nothing changes in our schools and they continue doing what they are doing today, only 44 percent will have 100 percent of their students to grade level in math, and only 34 percent will have 100 percent of their students to grade level in reading by 2014. Clearly, this data-informed projection suggests that far from 100 percent of schools will fail to meet grade-level proficiency goals for their students.

Theory of Action for Bringing Improvement to Scale in California's Schools

All public schools can reach high levels of academic achievement and successfully close achievement gaps. Indeed, schools are accomplishing this feat in all corners of the state, dispelling the myth that high levels of poverty or minority student populations will lead to lower achievement. By using student achievement data, it is now possible to identify the highest-performing public schools in California that are consistently raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps for all students.

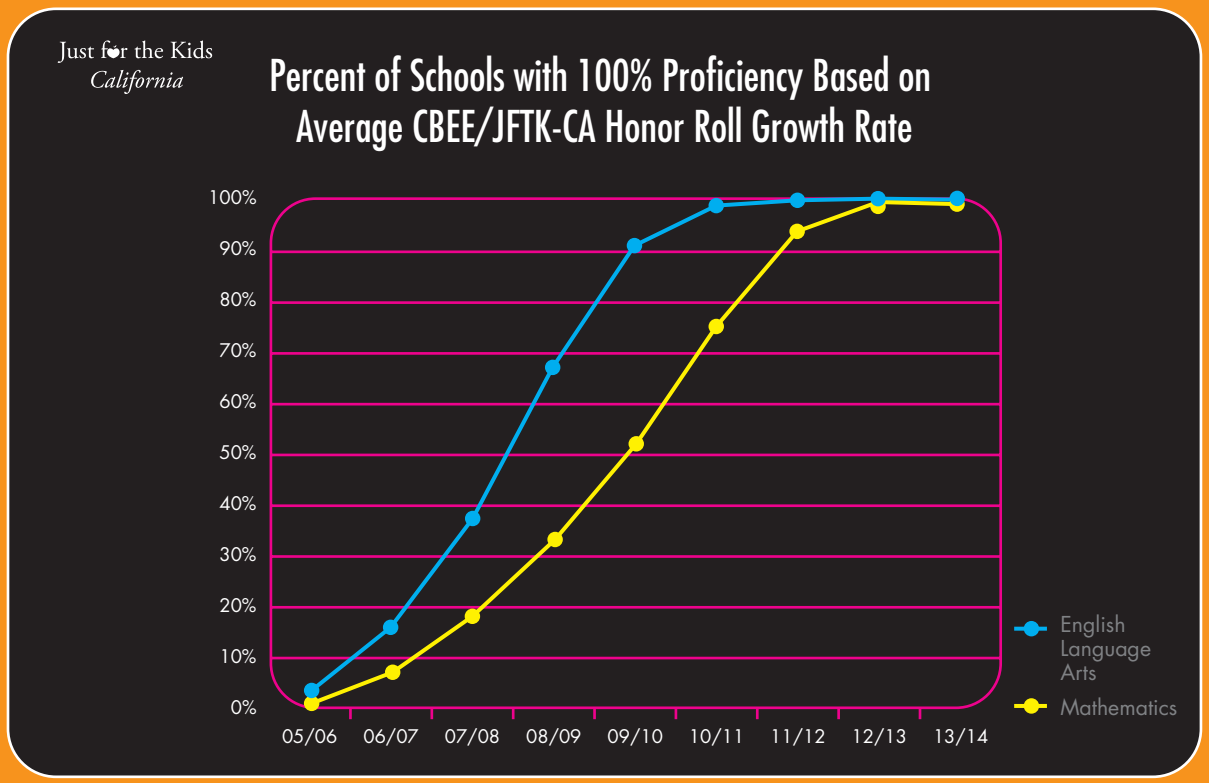
The goal for all schools should be to exploit the proven best practices from these academic successes, through best-practice research, peer-to-peer contact, and site visits to learn what works. "Getting the job done" means bringing students to grade-level proficiency at accelerated rates and significantly reducing achievement gaps among racial and ethnic subgroups.

The chart below shows how schools across the state will reach 100 percent proficiency by 2014 if they match the average growth of the highly improving schools, designated Honor Roll schools by the education research and reform organization California Business for Educational Excellence (CBEE). In fact, charting only the 100 high-poverty Honor Roll schools' growth on a similar chart shows that these schools achieve 100 percent proficiency in English-language-arts in three years and math in two years.



The projection below shows the percentage of schools reaching 100 percent proficiency based on the average rate of growth from 2004 to 2005 of the Honor Roll schools on the California Standards Test. There are 304 total Honor Roll schools, which include both the so-called "Stars" and "Scholars" schools. The Stars showed increases in academic achievement and achievement gap reduction in all significant subgroups. The Scholars showed significant academic achievement. This projection was done for both English-language-arts and mathematics.

Clearly, the schools in the state should adopt the best practices of the 304 Honor Roll schools to bring improvement to scale. For this reason, the second part of this paper analyzes the best practices at two of these Honor Roll schools.



V

The Bottom Line: California Simply Has No Statewide Educational Accountability System, but Needs One That Aligns All Schools and All Programs

Beyond No Child Left Behind, California has no real accountability system. Those 57 percent of schools that accept federal Title I grants under NCLB law are held accountable for delivering an effective educational service, including getting children served by Title I programs to grade-level proficiency by 2014. If they do not, then the schools and districts are subject to sanctions that allow the parents of the underserved children to use Title I funds in supplementary ways. The federal government does not take the money away; it simply moves it closer to the parents who are not receiving effective services.

The measurement the state of California chose to add to NCLB accountability was the school-wide API. However, the state only required a one-point gain (on a scale of 200-1,000) to meet the requirements for the state component of the AYP. Since this school-wide API has no connection to a school's subgroup performance, the school could have declining ethnic minority subgroup performance and still have a school-wide increase (usually due to a higher performance of white and Asian populations). This statewide component of the AYP does nothing to provide an incentive to reduce achievement gaps.

The only state-specific programs that purported to have accountability for results were the II/USP and the HPSGP. However, only a fraction of low-performing schools were eligible for the grants, and the accountability for results was very weak or completely absent. It is possible for schools to exit these programs with only a one-point school-wide API gain. More than a thousand schools have exited these programs and are considered successful, despite the lack of significant achievement gains from the "improvement" programs they were required to implement.

VI

Recommendations and Solutions

California deserves to have an accountability system that matches our world-class standards. More important, for the government's K-12 enterprise, if the public's trust is to be regained, an education accountability system that is clear and understandable to all must be constructed. If schools, parents, and the public do not have an understanding of how the accountability system works, they will ultimately have no faith in the system or the data that it presents.

California must work harder to identify those truly successful schools — those that are raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps — and share the best practices of those schools in a systemic and systematic way to raise academic achievement rapidly. In order to do so, California must move away from a complex system understood by only a few and toward a widely supported and accessible system.

The following recommendations will help reform California's accountability structures:

1. SET EXPECTATIONS HIGH

We know from high-performing environments across the country that the most important thing education leaders can do will not cost them a penny or require legislation or countless committee meetings. It simply requires a will to set expectations high and accept no excuses for not meeting them.

2. ABANDON COMPLICATED API

California cannot continue to cling to the API simply because it is what has been in place. It falsely shows that schools are doing better than they actually are, when compared with grade-level proficiency expectations under the federal system. If that were the only reason to have an accountability system, testing could be dropped altogether.

Honesty about successes must be balanced with candid assessment of the need for improvements. Too often, schools recognized as having achieved "tremendous" growth on the API are harming minority students.

3. KEEP IT SIMPLE

Focus on grade-level proficiency as measured by the California Standards Test. By keeping the focus on grade-level proficiency, greater public understanding about the success of our schools can be achieved. Schools that are successfully

raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps can be better identified so that they can share their best practices. Conversely, focusing on grade-level proficiency will more easily allow the identification of those schools and students that need additional help in meeting the standards and ensure that resources are effectively allocated to leverage the best possible results.

4. **PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT MEANS "IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT"**
Too many California officials are afraid of having too many schools in NCLB's Program Improvement category. Rather than worrying about numbers, these officials need to acknowledge that thousands of schools in the state are in need of improvement and that the students in these schools will suffer if officials game the system in order to prevent the schools from becoming subject to reforming sanctions and interventions.

5. **REPLICATION OF BEST PRACTICES FROM HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOLS**
High-performing schools with low-income and minority populations need to be treated as models to be copied, rather than as statistical anomalies to be explained away. An intensive effort must be undertaken to find out what these schools are doing right and to transfer this knowledge to low-performing schools so that improvement efforts can be scaled up.

Part Two:
Profiles of Two Schools That Are on Track to Meet Grade-Level Proficiency Goals

If the system is to be reworked so that individual schools can help all their students become proficient in math and English, it is critical that the faults of the current state school accountability system be honestly assessed and understood. But knowledge of the system's shortcomings must be coupled with an understanding of what actually works at the classroom level when it comes to raising all students to grade-level proficiency.

Caroline Minter Hoxby, the Harvard economist, says that one of the core principles of NCLB "is that every child is capable of attaining proficiency."[28] While paying lip service to this concept, many educators and analysts are skeptical that this is true of every child. After all, they say, California has so many children from challenging backgrounds — low-income, minority, and immigrant. As pointed out previously, they recommend dealing with these children by lowering the bar for proficiency, so that more children can be classified as "proficient" regardless of whether they actually are.

Yet, the hand-wringing of these skeptics is countered by the concrete examples of high-achieving schools of exactly the demographics they are concerned about. These schools are on an upward trajectory that will enable all their students to meet or exceed current grade-level proficiency requirements in reading and math by the federal deadline. What follows are profiles of two California public schools — a middle school and a high school, that have discovered recipes for success that have placed them on that trajectory.

C.A. Jacobs Intermediate School
Dixon, Solano County
Principal: Yolanda Falkenberg

Student Enrollment:	**660**
Free/Reduced School Lunch:	44.1%
Socioeconomic Disadvantaged:	46.5%
English Language Learners:	15.6%
District Characterization:	**Urban Fringes of Mid-Sized City**
Ethnic Breakdown:	
American Indian/Alaskan Native:	0.6%
Asian:	1.7%
Pacific Islander:	0.9%
Filipino:	1.4%
Hispanic/Latino:	45.3%
African American:	2.6%
White:	47.0%
Other/Declined to State:	0.6%
English/Language Arts:	
Met 2006 AYP:	Yes
All subgroups met AYP:	Yes
Mathematics:	
Met 2006 AYP:	Yes
All subgroups met AYP:	Yes

Source: JFTK-CA Data

Yolanda Falkenberg's Essential Elements of High-Poverty/High-Performing Middle Schools: A Model for School Improvement

1.0	**High Expectations**	
	1.1	Expectation that every student can succeed
	1.2	Relay high expectations to students and parents
	1.3	No excuses such as the *"pobrecito"* syndrome
	1.4	Force students to constantly think about where they are going to college
	2.0	State Standards and Curriculum Frameworks
	2.1	Frameworks posted in every classroom
	2.2	Individual student calendar of the school's academic expectations and standards blueprints for every subject
3.0	**Assessment Data**	
	3.1	Test chats with every student to review their state test results and set goals
	3.2	Benchmark assessments and pacing schedules
	3.3	Standards-based after-school intervention programs for students scoring below basic or far below basic, plus learning centers taught by special education teachers
4.0	**English Language Learners**	
	4.1	Emphasis on reclassifying ELL students as fluent in English
	4.2	Partnerships with local universities
	5.0	Curriculum and Teaching Methods
	5.1	Standards aligned, using spiral-review method
	5.2	Direct instruction
	5.3	Strategic literacy initiative that emphasizes literacy during the teaching of every subject
6.0	**Reforming the Master Schedule**	
	6.1	Double periods in core subjects such as English-language-arts for struggling students
	6.2	Improving schedule so that as students improve, they can exit remedial classes and enter mainstream classes
7.0	**Principal Involvement and Teacher Evaluation**	
	7.1	Regular walk-through observations of classrooms
	7.2	Formal classroom observations
	7.3	Formal teacher evaluations: focus on use of standards to improve student achievement, teaching strategies and techniques, classroom climate, and curricular objectives, such as whether students know how they are doing academically at all times
	7.4	Courage and willingness to remove poor-performing teachers
	7.5	Principal visits to neighboring successful schools to find out what works
8.0	**Professional Development**	
	8.1	Teachers meet as departmental teams focusing on student results
	8.2	Teachers visit each others' classrooms to discover teaching practices that work

Dixon, California, lies 20 miles west of Sacramento on the I-80 corridor linking the state capital and San Francisco. A sleepy little agricultural town for most of its existence, Dixon, like much of the Sacramento area, is experiencing a growth spurt. While the quaint old downtown still boasts various farm equipment shops, new tract-home developments and the commuter culture compete with the city's traditional industry. Despite its rural roots, Dixon schools face most of the same challenges as schools in the more highly publicized urban inner cities. This is why the turnaround success of Dixon's C.A. Jacobs Intermediate School is so encouraging.

Located in the heart of Dixon, C.A. Jacobs Intermediate is nearly evenly split between Hispanic and white students, with a smattering of students of other ethnic backgrounds. Almost half the students are socioeconomically disadvantaged and are on the government free and reduced lunch program. Until recently, students at the school had been performing poorly, especially Hispanics. In 2004, only 16 percent of Hispanic students scored at or above grade-level proficient on the state English-language-arts test. Overall, 34 percent of students at the school scored at or above proficient. What a difference, however, a year makes. By 2005, more than 40 percent of Hispanic students scored at or above proficient in English language arts, with 51 percent of all students scoring at that high level. A similar improvement occurred in mathematics.

In 2004, 23 percent of Hispanic students scored at or above proficient in math, while in 2005, that proportion jumped to more than 38 percent. In addition, 46 percent of all students met the proficiency benchmark in math in 2005, versus less than 35 percent the previous year. Much of this turnaround can be attributed to the goal-focused philosophy of newly arrived principal Yolanda Falkenberg, an articulate Hispanic woman committed to improving student achievement.

At 33 years old, the new Jacobs' principal is not only young, but as a native Dixonite and graduate of the school, she is now supervising some of the teachers she had as a student. That may have made for some initial awkwardness, but Falkenberg quickly overcame any doubts her staff may have had about her relative youthfulness.

Jacobs had climate problems, and not of the meteorological kind. When she became vice principal in 2004, Falkenberg was the fourth vice principal in as many years. The principal then left in 2005, and she became head of the school. She says that the staff meetings were "a little nasty." Teachers would yell at each other and storm out of meetings, slamming the door. Falkenberg changed this poisonous atmosphere by reaching out to the staff and asking teachers to come together to set norms of behavior and procedure. Her belief in collaboration with staff, rather than a heavy-handed top-down model, changed attitudes 180 degrees to the point where she now observes, "Folks like being here," and teacher turnover is very low. Walk into the teacher lounge and "people are talking about kids and how they're progressing," rather than backbiting and complaining.

Falkenberg spent a number of years as a teacher and a vice principal in the difficult Meadowview area of South Sacramento. It was there that she found out what worked when it came to improving student performance. "I rocked in the classroom," she laughs, "Boy, I was good." She wanted to

do things out of the box, saying, "I was thinking 'How can I blow up those [old and ineffective] strategies?'" So she did home visitations to each and every one of her students. Also, "I assessed my kids frequently and I shared [the results] with my students and their families." She was always looking for best practices backed by research. With this approach, it comes as less of a shock to hear her say that, despite being in a neighborhood with mostly poor minority children, "all of my kids were at grade level" in their achievement.

Like so many other successful principals, Falkenberg expects all her students to perform well: "If you treat the kids respectfully and have high expectations for them, they will reach up to that." Those expectations, she says, have to be communicated:

We could have the highest expectations in the world amongst the faculty and office staff, but if we don't relay that message to the parents and students, then it's pointless. So making sure that the vision that we have in the mission is very known to our parents, so that they can talk about it and know where we're heading. So that we have everyone onboard. You know in Spanish we say the "*pobrecito*" syndrome, the "poor little me" syndrome. Oh, you're a recent immigrant. Okay, well data are showing that our Asian immigrants are rising up to the occasion at a much higher rate than our African American students and our Latino students. So I don't want to hear that.

Falkenberg constantly asks her students about where they plan to go to college. Sometimes her students reply, "Mrs. Falkenberg, I'm only in the seventh grade," but she says, "I don't care, you need to start thinking about it now." She will then tell a student, "You give me five places where you want to go by tomorrow, and I'm going to call you in." She follows through by calling the student to her office the next day and asking again what college he or she will be attending. "They can tell me UC Davis or community college," she says, "I don't care where they tell me, so long as they start thinking about it."

At the middle-school level, Falkenberg notes, it is easy to blame the students and their situations "and just finding a lot of excuses for not being able to bring them up and not having those higher expectations." Some of the excuses she hears include, "Oh, this age group, it's horrible," "They're going through puberty, hormonal changes," "Just horrible children," and "Parents' education level is low."

"I don't want to hear it," she says. "Coming from the Meadowview area and teaching there and having all kids at grade level, I knew they are just that — excuses." At Jacobs, therefore, she says that her staff does not resort to excuses, but uses reasoning instead. "We have them here for six-and-a-half hours and we're going to put in all our effort there."

To get her students to reach those high expectations, Falkenberg has a recipe. First, she focuses on the state academic content standards and the state curriculum frameworks, which serve as blueprints for implementing the content standards. These blueprints are posted in every classroom. She says that this year the school will have planners for each student that have a calendar of the school's academic expectations and standards blueprints for every subject. The students and teachers will check off the standards that students learn, which she says, "is really powerful."

Falkenberg is also an advocate of using testing data as a diagnostic tool and as an incentive for both students and teachers. She does not understand other schools that treat such data as a problem or simply do not take data seriously. "That's just not an option for us," she declares. Students at Jacobs know exactly how they are doing on state tests and how much better they should be doing. Test chats are held with every student. During these conversations, students review their previous year's scores on the California Standards Test in math and English language arts. Eventually, using a new data system, the school wants to be able to show students two to three years of data, allowing them to view their progress over the years.

The test chats are not just informational, however. According to Falkenberg, they also focus on setting goals for students and teachers. Students are told at what level they are scoring this year, and then there is a discussion about where they should be next year. "Setting reasonable goals," she says, "will bring huge gains because kids are aware of it." Familiarizing students with data has had a huge impact on students:

We go out to the yard to supervise at lunch, and kids will come up to me and say, "Ms. Falkenberg, did you know that I'm basic in math, and this year I want to be proficient? And by golly, I think I'll be advanced." To have middle school talk like that, it is pretty amazing.

Jacobs will be creating a data wall in the main hallway where at least three years of the school's testing data will be shown in order to see what growth has been achieved. Eschewing the anti-competition mentality of some education circles, Falkenberg says that the scores of neighboring schools will be put up so students at Jacobs can compete against them and top them.

Using the data, teachers also pick out target students who are performing at the basic level just under proficiency. The teachers are instructed to give these students positive daily non-academic reinforcement, e.g., "Hey, cool haircut," but also to give focused academic feedback. The latter could include comments such as: "I noticed you didn't participate today, what's going on? I really need you to participate tomorrow." This feedback acts as an incentive for students to ratchet up their performance.

Falkenberg, however, is cognizant of the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind law that all subgroups of students, not just those in the middle, must improve their performance up to proficiency. She says that while the students scoring at the basic level "are the easy ones to move up" to proficiency, she also notes that "with the stakes going up so high so quickly with No Child Left Behind, we need to make sure that we're getting those far-below-basic kids [and] our special education population." She rightly says: "We can't keep Special Ed as a little bubble anymore. We need to really focus on all kids who are struggling."

For students who score below basic or far below basic on the state tests, Jacobs provides focused standards-based after-school intervention programs. In these programs, Falkenberg explains:

We're really going to focus on specific standards. If you're weak in vocabulary then you're going to get intervention in vocabulary. If you don't know how to add decimals then you're going to learn how to add decimals. And at the end of the very targeted intervention, then you're going to have the

opportunity to test out. … So if you do well and you've mastered that, then you're out. You don't have to go after school anymore. You know kids at middle school; they don't want to be here after school. … Show us you don't need to be here, and you're out. You'd be surprised at how many kids test out!

She cites the fact that her English language learner (ELL) students were found to be weak in vocabulary. Consequently, her English-language-arts department focused "on some specific strategies on vocabulary."

With regard to her ELL students, she makes important use of data from the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). When she became principal at Jacobs, she found that no one had been looking at the progress, or lack of progress, of ELL students. Too many students had spent years labeled as non-English fluent. She was outraged, saying, "Folks, you've been here since kindergarten and you're still in [English Language Development 1]?" She has therefore driven the school to reclassify ELL students as English fluent based on students' CELDT scores and other academic factors.

Reclassifying ELL students as English fluent is particularly important, according to Falkenberg, because of "our goal of getting our kids to advanced and proficient levels." Since Jacobs is a seventh- and eighth-grade school, "we get [students] for two years and then they're gone, and I want to make sure they're prepared at the high school level." She correctly worries that "if we keep them in the [English learner] category, then most likely they will be tracked at the high school level and they won't take the classes they need to get to colleges and universities." Thus, in addition to the regular English language-development coursework, she has been innovative in creating partnerships in the community to help her students. For instance, she notes, "We have partnered with UC Davis and Sacramento State, who have provided tutors to us for little cost, if any."

The school's drive to increase ELL students' English fluency has paid off. Pointing to a big folder filled with the names of students who have been redesignated as being fluent in English, Falkenberg says that there is now a much higher redesignation rate at the school than before. Using the excuse that large numbers of ELL students are the cause of poor school performance is, she says, "just ridiculous." Further, with NCLB, such an excuse "is just not an option anymore."

Parents, she says, are ecstatic and surprised: "You'd be amazed at how many parents are in tears when they find out that their kids are achieving at high levels. 'Why didn't anyone tell me?' 'Why didn't anyone push my kids before?'" She tells parents their children cannot continue as English-language learners in high school because they need to take tough courses such as Advanced Placement.

Falkenberg's philosophy on language acquisition is simple and based in part on her experience in Scandinavia. "My husband is from Denmark," she says, "I had to learn the language of the country I lived in two-and-a-half years." She tells immigrant parents that "You have to learn the language." Using the state high school exit exam as an example, she tells parents, "I'm sorry that your child is just learning English, but they're going to be held accountable to the same things [as mainstream students], so that you better get on the ball."

Falkenberg acknowledges that one of the big impediments for redesignating students at many schools is the fact that government money is available for ELL students. This extra funding serves as an incentive for schools to keep students in the English learner category for years even after they are obviously fluent in English. "You get money for it," she says, but "even though it would be great to continue getting money for these kids, ultimately our goal isn't money, it's to get them to where they need to go, that's colleges and universities." "At this point," she notes, "we're more concerned about reaching high levels of academic standards and achievement than the money." However, she observes: "A lot of folks that I've asked why these kids are still [English learners], [say] 'We get money for these kids.' " "Uh-uh-uh," she says shaking her head, "we need to move them on."

Students who are performing poorly on the state tests will now get instruction in a learning center from the school's excellent special education teachers. Falkenberg says that these teachers are trained to target children who are not at grade level, "so instead of having them only service our special education kids, they're going to service all of our students who fall in the far-below-basic and below-basic categories." She further explains:

So you will have a learning center teacher, which is our special education teacher, really pre-teaching the math lesson that you will be learning in the next period. So today we're going to focus on, say, least common factors. You're going to learn that in smaller chunks with your learning center teacher. The very next period you're going to learn it, the same concepts, with the broader and knowledge-based information from your mainstream teacher.

Of course, setting up these double periods means that something has to be eliminated from students' schedules. With reluctance, Falkenberg and her team took science off the schedules of these struggling students. Their reasoning makes sense: if these students cannot read or do math, then they will surely fail at science. Indeed, Falkenberg observes: "Looking at our kids who are far below basic and below basic, the vast majority — 90 percent and above — were receiving Fs, straight across every trimester in seventh-grade science. So we figured that in itself would help us make the decision." "If they test out and they no longer need the double math class," she says, "then we definitely put them back in science and we'll put them in a pass/no pass grade so that they don't have that affect their GPA."

Jacobs is not just using state testing data, such as the CST and the CELDT exam, to improve student performance. The school is creating so-called benchmark assessments and complementary pacing schedules. "What we're using is the blueprints that the state provides for us that tell us how many items there will be for each standard on the standards test," says Falkenberg. Pacing guides that detail the timetable of standards-based instruction are formulated. The guides will tell teachers that they need to get through certain standards by specific times in the school year. "Hey, you need to cover these standards by this time," she says, "and some people say, 'Oops, I didn't get there.'" "Oops" is not acceptable, though: "We're going to hold you accountable by looking at your kids' data. Did they get it or not? And that really puts pressure on folks."

The guides also inform teachers what they should and should not be teaching. As Falkenberg observes: "If you know that one standard is only going to be on [the state test] one time, or not at all, then why

do your favorite unit that you've done for 10 years because you love it, but it's not helping kids? It's not about [teachers], it's about kids."

Hand in hand with the pacing guides are the benchmark assessments administered every six weeks. The questions for the benchmark assessments will come from the existing curriculum, which has a large number of imbedded exams. It is critically important, says Falkenberg, that the questions placed on the benchmark assessments "are aligned with the standards that are taught so that they can get an accurate measure of whether [students] were able to learn the standard or not."

Teachers will review the results of the benchmark assessments to see how their students did as a class, period by period, as well as student by student. "If a kid falls, then immediately that's a red flag," observes Falkenberg, "Why did you fall, what's going on?" Perhaps the answer is a family problem, or "maybe the teacher didn't teach very well and they need to modify it."

"Some folks will argue, 'Oh, you're teaching to the test,'" notes Falkenberg. She has a firm reply to such arguments:

Well, you have to teach what's going to be on the test, otherwise it's handing me a test in Chinese and saying, "Here, take it, but I didn't teach you any Chinese." So you have to teach the standards that are going to be on there. I don't see that as cheating at all. I see that as being smart. You have to teach what will be tested, or else it's not true measurement.

The bottom line, she says, "We're teaching the standards."

The curriculum is also consistent with the priority given to standards and assessment. For example, the school adopted the McDougal-Little math series, which uses the spiral review method, where previously learned concepts are constantly reviewed in order to ensure that students really understand the material. Falkenberg points out that under spiral review, "You can assess, catch the kids who didn't get it, review, assess, catch them, and just loop around and make sure they're getting there."

In terms of the teaching method used at Jacobs, Falkenberg is moving the school toward a direct instruction model. Direct instruction is usually characterized by such common sense strategies as setting clear goals for students and making sure students understand the goals; presenting a sequence of well-organized assignments; giving students clear, concise explanations and illustrations of the subject matter; asking frequent questions to see if students understand the material; and giving students frequent opportunities to practice what they have learned. As an example, Falkenberg says, "The teachers are telling the students, 'Okay, today we're going to learn about protons. This is what a proton is. Class, tell me what a proton is,' and they do the choral response."

In order to facilitate the direct instruction process, Falkenberg says: "We purchased whiteboards for every classroom so that [teachers] can give that immediate feedback. So that you can say, 'You got it, you got it, you got it. Okay, you didn't get it, let me walk over here and check.' " Wrong responses and answers are immediately corrected, she says, "Otherwise, they are practicing incorrectly and

they build up a pattern." Further, "I know some folks use the approach that, 'Okay, what do you think the definition of this is?' and you get 10 different incorrect answers and then the teacher finally tells them the correct answer." Under that method, however, "the kids already learned the incorrect [answers]. They're not going to listen to the teacher's correct one."

Jacobs is also implementing a strategic literary initiative that requires every teacher, whether they teach science, math, or social science, to use a specific literary strategy that helps students access the textbook being used. It is a way to help students interact with the text and get meaning out of it. So, for instance, teachers will guide students to make notes beside passages in the texts. Teachers will also instruct students on how to dialogue with each other on the text they are reading. In addition, they will use "think aloud" instructional techniques. Falkenberg explains this method using the example of a math teacher:

The teacher will think aloud, "Oh I need to do this and I need to make sure all of my Xs are on one side." "Oh I need to make sure to subtract here." So they are thinking aloud and they are encouraging and teaching students how to do the same so they will do a lot of mental math. But taking it to the next level where they will also demand their students when they do that they have to be able to say it out loud to a partner or to the teacher or to the whole group. So that they are really thinking about thinking.

Falkenberg repeatedly mentioned the importance of smart scheduling of classes. She pointed with satisfaction to the revision of the school's master schedule. Now, for example, all the English Language Development classes are offered during the same period. This is a big improvement, because once ELL students get their CELDT scores in January, coupled with teacher recommendations and classroom data, a student can be elevated to the next level of coursework. Thus, Falkenberg says, "If they no longer belong in English Language Development 1, then we can move them without having to adjust their entire schedule, which was detrimental in the past."

Indeed, in the past, doing better "was a double-edged sword. All right, you did wonderful, you're going to benefit and move on to the next level, but at the same time we're going to wreck your entire schedule." The consequences were discouraging: "You're going to have to get used to new teachers in the middle of the year in your different subject areas that are already tough enough for you because you're learning English." The change in the master schedule, therefore, allowed students to move up in their English language acquisition courses without needlessly impacting other subject-matter courses.

Further, when an ELL student's test scores show that they are ready to move out of English language development classes, they are placed "in a double-period language-arts class, where one [period] is focused on reading and one is focused on writing." She believes that these double language arts periods have been a big help to students: "So instead of taking an elective — you don't have that luxury if you're still a struggling student according to your data — you must take two periods of language arts."

The master schedule has also created two periods of language-arts intervention for struggling students using the state-adopted High Point curriculum. Falkenberg says that these courses are taught by one of her "dynamite" teachers. Students can test out of these classes.

One of the side benefits of revising and improving the master schedule has been a reduction in student discipline problems. Falkenberg observes that "since we changed the master schedule to appropriately place kids according to their data, they're not at that frustration level." "You're not going to act out in class if the work is at your level," she says. Further, she points out: "Even if you're intervention language arts, you're still getting the standards you need, but maybe it's in a different way. Maybe it's at a little slower pace or maybe you're getting one-on-one." The result is very beneficial to students "because they're properly placed, the frustration level is gone."

It is obvious that Falkenberg is extremely focused on what goes on in the classroom. Like other successful principals, she regularly visits classrooms in order to make sure the children are learning and the instruction is up to snuff. One of her routines is to do walk-through observations. These classroom visitations, she says, are key for her and her teachers: "So the folks know, okay this is the expectation for us, and who's going to monitor it and who's going to give us some feedback, whether it's constructive feedback on some things that need some additional support or is it something to highlight the positives."

She and her vice principal make so many walk-through visitations that she posts the hours when they will be in classrooms so that parents know that during that time they are not reachable. The visitations have become so commonplace that students barely notice their comings and goings.

As at other good schools, Falkenberg tries to ensure that she has teachers that are capable of doing what she expects. In addition to the informal walk-through observations, she also uses formal evaluations. She holds a pre-conference with a teacher to tell him or her what she's looking for, to relate what she would like the teacher to focus on during the year, and to ask what goals the teacher has for him or herself. In the evaluations themselves, she focuses on certain areas, such as use of standards to improve student achievement, teaching strategies and techniques, classroom climate, and curricular objectives like whether students know how they are doing academically at all times.

Unfortunately, the district's union contract allows for only two 20-minute observations, which, she says, "is nothing." "That's two times around," she observes, but she makes up for this skimpy evaluation time with the walk-throughs. After the evaluations, she and the vice principal do a post-conference with the teacher where the results are discussed. "We highlight the positives that the teachers are doing [and] we recommend some things that are research-based," she says. Most important, Falkenberg is not afraid to let go of teachers that are not succeeding in the classroom.

"We make those tough calls that I know lots of principals don't make," she says, "and we release folks who aren't cutting it." She explains she is not a "barracuda," but that "if you're not here for kids and your kids aren't showing growth because of the climate that you're providing, then you're going to

be released." She goes on to say that many administrators do not let teachers go because they think it wrecks their school climate, "but I think if you work hard to build that positive climate, people will respect the decision." Regardless of the hesitancy of others, "I'm willing to take that chance."

Recently, Falkenberg released a teacher for not performing, and she says every teacher in the school told her that "we're going to respect your decision." She converses with all staff in a professional way, talking to them about what is and is not acceptable, "not beating around the bush and being very direct, saying this is what we expect here." "If this is not a match," she warns, "perhaps you need to find somewhere else."

Of course, it is easier to let a teacher go if that person is new and does not have tenure. She has released a veteran teacher, but she admits that "it takes a whole lot of documentation, and you have to become a lawyer in your writing abilities." When she released the tenured teacher, she had to maintain a two-inch-thick file of evidence. She persevered, however:

It took a year. It was just constant conversations, constant struggles, but you just have to really stick with it and do what's best for the kids. Boy, I was pulling my hair out at the end. I was a vice principal, too, brand new. I just knew this person wasn't good for kids and I refused to back down just because they were tenured. You can do it. It's a lot of work. And if you don't have the support of the board and the superintendent, then it's nearly impossible and it can be very expensive. We have the culture here at C.A. Jacobs that if you're not cutting it, you need to go. We'll help you find work somewhere else if we think you'd be a match somewhere else, but not here.

Interestingly, she says that despite her tough approach, she has had no problems working with the local teachers' union. She encourages teachers to bring their union representative if they know there will be negative discussion. While she says she is not punitive and she does not demoralize staff, she will use the evidence she has gathered to show that "It's just not a match here with our kids."

At Jacobs, teachers have common planning time every Wednesday, where students are let out at 1:40 p.m. and teachers meet together until 3:30 p.m. The teachers meet as departmental teams. They examine student data, identify students who are struggling, place them appropriately, and get them the services they need in order to achieve. Falkenberg says that planning and collaboration allows teachers to "see who's hitting home runs in your department." "So it's not a punitive, who's not doing well in their data, but who's doing really well and why," she explains. Teachers will also visit colleagues in their preparation time in order "to go out and highlight the wonderful things that their colleagues are doing." She does not want teachers to teach in silos, but rather, "to get out and embrace their colleagues' practices."

Unlike many other principals, Falkenberg actually visits other schools that are succeeding. "Let's just look at what's working at other schools," she says. She notes that schools in the nearby towns of Vacaville and Fairfield "are doing some great things." "We're getting good at really turning to them and visiting folks," she says, so that Jacobs can "duplicate what they're already doing there."

Coupled with the improved academic achievement of students at Jacobs, the school has also seen a large fall-off in student behavior problems. Falkenberg recalls a student asking her, "Mrs. Falkenberg, why aren't there any fights anymore?" Her response: "You're here to learn, not to fight." The school has consequences for bad student behavior. Suspended students cannot participate in activities like dances. Falkenberg and her staff make frequent calls to parents any time students are called into her office for any reason. "Communication with parents is critical," she says.

Also, she says teachers are "expected to teach their procedures and talk about their rules and behavior expectations in every single classroom the first two weeks of school, and anything that should have been handled in the classroom should be handled there, it shouldn't get to me or the vice principal." She wants teachers to set the tone, saying, "Really, just telling kids we don't behave that way from day one." Assemblies are held at the beginning of the year to reinforce things such as lunch-line procedures.

Jacobs has a character education program that emphasizes the six pillars: trustworthiness, respect, fairness, caring, citizenship, and responsibility. Students receive small rewards, such as getting to the front of the lunch line, for exhibiting these traits.

Falkenberg emphasizes that visibility is important. "We're out there," she says. "Kids don't misbehave if adults are out there." She says that she has "an advantage because I'm short so I can sneak-attack." "The kids don't even know I'm there," she laughs, "I have no problem going right into a little group and standing there and listening and joining in the conversation."

Falkenberg attributes much of her success as an educator to her constant efforts to find out what works. She does a lot of online reading to learn what works for others: "I just took a lot of those things and best practices from other folks — I love to steal good practices — and just make sure I really keep up-to-date with research and what's working that's kind of out of the box." "I think that's the key," she says, "making sure you surround yourself with folks who think in ways where you want all kids to be successful." Her relative youth has been a positive as well. Having only had her administrative credential for four years, "NCLB is nothing new to me, it's something I know is there, and has always been there."

Although Jacobs has done well under her leadership, Falkenberg says, "Now the pressure is on because we are doing so well." "We need to keep it up," she urges, "We can't lose momentum." She wants the school to be at the very top of the state's rankings, saying, "If you don't have a goal to look at, then you'll never achieve it."

Laton High School
Laton, CA
Principal: Terry Anderson

Student Enrollment:	**209**
Free/Reduced School Lunch:	75.2%
Socioeconomic Disadvantaged:	82.4%
English Language Learners:	11.5%
District Characterization:	**Rural**
Ethnic Breakdown:	
American Indian/Alaskan Native:	0.0%
Asian:	1.0%
Pacific Islander:	0.0%
Filipino:	0.5%
Hispanic/Latino:	82.8%
African American:	1.0%
White:	14.8%
English/Language Arts:	
Met 2006 AYP:	Yes
Mathematics:	
Met 2006 AYP:	Yes

Terry Anderson's Essential Elements of High-Poverty/High-Performing High Schools: A Model for School Improvement

1.0 Curriculum

- 1.1 Emphasis on California curriculum frameworks and content standards, especially in textbooks
- 1.2 California Standards Test Blueprints, especially noting weighted standards
- 1.3 Curriculum audit that informs instructional materials purchases
- 1.4 Intervention materials, plus in-class and extended-time (e.g. after-school) programs that focus on:
  - 1.4.1 All core subject areas
  - 1.4.2 English language acquisition (e.g. High Point) for English-language-development students
  - 1.4.3 California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)
- 1.5 Master schedule development
  - 1.5.1 Tiered programs for rigor and university A-G requirements

- 1.5.1.1 College prep, Honors, AP for core classes
- 1.5.1.2 Vocational education, AVID program
- 1.5.1.3 Increased graduation requirements
- 1.5.1.4 Double-block periods for ELA and math for students who scored Basic and below on STAR CSTs preceding the current school year

2.0 Instructional Practices

- 2.1 Standards mapping, pacing calendars
- 2.2 Explicit Direct Instruction
- 2.3 Instructional Strategies and techniques that engage *all* learners
- 2.4 Differentiated instruction, collaboration, academic vocabulary development
- 2.5 Ongoing assessment (formative)
- 2.6 Use of technology

3.0 Assessment

- 3.1 Use of historical data and summative tests (California Standards Test, CAHSEE, California English Language Development Test)
  - 3.1.1 Profiles, trends
  - 3.1.2 Extrapolation of meaning, direction
- 3.2 Identifying intervention groups

4.0 Professional Development

- 4.1 Professional development that connects English language learners with California content standards
- 4.2 Weekly professional collaboration time
- 4.3 Send faculty to staff-development opportunities tied to vision

5.0 Vision and Leadership

- 5.1 Goal setting with feasible and attainable objectives along the way
- 5.2 Change of philosophy, focusing on student achievement
- 5.3 Change of school climate, focusing on academics and learning
- 5.4 Change of school culture, where *all* students feel included as equal partners in the educational process

6.0 Equity

- 6.1 A belief that *all* students can learn and *all* students can achieve
- 6.2 Equal access to the most rigorous curriculum for *all* students
- 6.3 Increased representation of students of color in the most rigorous classes
- 6.4 School demographics aligned with students placed in prescribed course of study for university admissions

Point of Emphasis: Terry Anderson says that all of the above can happen if the school principal receives support from central office and governance levels. School improvement does not happen by accident; it happens by design.

Laton High School is located in a small rural town in Fresno County, in California's Central Valley. Oak trees and rich farmland surround the school. It is the kind of school to which educators often point when they are making excuses for the lackluster performance of many of the state's public schools. California, it is argued, has a disproportionate share of schools with "challenging" demographics, i.e., low-income, high minority, and low English skills, just like Laton.

Educators blame poor student achievement on these demographic challenges, which conveniently allows them to shed any personal or collective responsibility for the tragedy of poor outcomes from setting low expectations. Low expectations and low results lock in an academic death embrace. As recently as 2003, Laton was living out this awful stereotype.

That year, less than 10 percent of Hispanic students at the virtually all-Hispanic school tested proficient in mathematics, with a similar result in English language arts. In other words, nine out of 10 Laton students were not proficient in one, or likely both, of the two key core academic subject areas. There seemed scant hope that the school would ever come close, let alone reach, the 100 percent proficiency goal set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. That is, until Terry Anderson arrived.

Thoughtful and bespectacled, Anderson had been a teacher and administrator at a number of other schools, including a four-year stint as assistant principal at nearby Riverdale High School. He had no illusions about his new assignment at Laton, which started in June 2004. "When I first arrived, I knew I was coming into an underperforming school," he recalled, "I was under no illusions." Indeed, what he found was a school bereft of a coherent academic plan, students mismatched to the courses in which they were placed, and, most important, a lack of difficulty and challenge in the academic program.

"They had a master schedule that was woefully inadequate," Anderson observed, "that did not reflect any kind of curricular rigor or depth." The schedule lacked college prep-level core classes, many which would constitute the so-called A-G courses that are required of students who are applying for admission into the University of California system. Also, honors-level Advanced Placement courses were not offered. The lack of upper-level classes not only prevented students from becoming UC eligible, it also served as a commentary on the school's view of the abilities of its students. The unspoken attitude was that Laton students could not handle the tougher classes.

Terry Anderson had a totally different view of the potential of his students. Rather than lower the bar of expectations, he set out to raise it. According to Anderson, "You have to have very high expectations and a belief that your kids are going to achieve what you want them to achieve." This belief is now included in Laton's mission statement, which says, "The faculty and staff at Laton High School believe all kids can learn, and with this raised standard and philosophy of higher expectations, Laton High School will close any achievement gap that may exist among the student body." Further, the school's vision statement posts as its first goal that Laton graduates "will be equipped to apply competitively for college and university admissions placements or to enter any other postsecondary vocational/career option." These lofty goals and expectations stand in stark contrast to the lackadaisical attitude that low expectations had engendered in students.

"There was a culture at Laton amongst a lot of kids that you just finish high school and then you're pretty much on your own, and hope that good fortune and luck smile on you," noted Anderson. "They weren't keyed into a culture," he observed, "that you are absolutely and systematically preparing yourself, usually in the eighth grade, to get on a successful four-year plan to achieve your career goal upon graduation." Anderson and his team drilled this planning philosophy into Laton students: "You don't plan your life your senior year; it's too late. You need to start having a four-year plan as a freshman." That means, "if you want to go to the university, you prepare yourself from the very beginning of your high school experience."

Translating a high-expectations philosophy into increases in student achievement requires concrete, proven strategies. Among Anderson's first strategies was to review each individual student's scores on the California Standards Test, the California English Language Development Test, and other exams. In so doing, he could more accurately gauge each student's knowledge and skill level. Anderson used the following example to explain his use of testing data as a diagnostic tool to place immigrant students in appropriate classes or get them the extra help they needed:

Yes, we would look at student assessment a lot of different ways. If we're looking at students who have been in the United States a relatively short period of time, we could tell right away the students who had a very good formal education, say in Mexico, or students that perhaps lacked educational opportunities, given that there's not a compulsory education law in Mexico. If there needs to be a lot of remediation in fundamental skills throughout the spectrum of core curriculum, we would have to do that. Sometime you would notice that our newcomers were very good in mathematics, they had a good sense of scientific process, but then again you had that barrier of language acquisition. So we would look at factors like that and strategize and get those students the appropriate help or appropriate placement.

Classes, though, had to be organized to meet the disparate needs of each student. Anderson said that previously the school simply had generic subject classes in English and other core subjects where "you would have a wide variety of learners in there as far as their instructional backgrounds." He recalled that he and his staff then set up "a master schedule that included enough sections for not only those students that needed remediation, but also those students that we felt were advanced or should be more advanced."

For students whose performance on the state tests was at only the basic level or below, the master schedule set up double blocks of English-language-arts or math classes so these students could get extra support. Combining test score performance with observation and knowledge of individual students gave Anderson and his team important insight into which students really needed to be pushed.

"Some kids," he observed, "tend to gravitate to the academic middle because they choose to, so we decided we're going to be pushing these kids and getting them into more rigorous coursework." These students, especially those performing close to proficiency on the state tests, would be directed into newly created and designated college-prep-level classes. Previously, the school had only basic or general education classes. Under Anderson, new classes were designated "prep/honors" so that

university admissions officials could identify college-prep courses on a student's transcript that met the A-G requirements. For example, lead-up courses for AP classes were created, such as a tenth-grade world-history honors course that was developed in order to prepare students for eleventh-grade AP U.S. history. Simultaneously, Anderson established five AP courses in English language and composition, U.S. history, Spanish language and composition, English literature, and Spanish literature.

Raising expectations by offering AP courses had some unexpected benefits. One of the things that surprised Anderson was the impact that taking the two Spanish-language-oriented AP courses had on the general performance of students. He noted a "transference effect on their other coursework." "They became better students," he observed, and "they had a lot more pride in what they were doing." And, more important, he noted, "They felt more a part of the elite mainstream, and I think that was a real success for our Spanish-speaking kids."

In addition to creating these new college-prep courses, the school implemented the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program to identify and place students who populated the "academic middle," but who had the potential to succeed in university-track coursework. Anderson explained that AVID is designed to guide cohorts of students, by grade level, through a prescribed course of study that meets the A-G requirements. The students learn critical thinking skills and Cornell note-taking techniques, participate in Socratic seminars, visit university campuses, and systematically plan for university entrance and study.

Because of his prior experience as an administrator, Anderson said, "I felt I was systematically prepared to be a successful principal in my own right with a heavy emphasis on curriculum and instruction." What he found at Laton, however, was a school that did not take the importance of curriculum seriously:

The curriculum is another thing that was really a joke. We had textbooks that were very outdated. Some were even discards from other districts. They were not California standards-aligned. So the first thing I did was conduct a curriculum audit to find out what we had, who the publishers were, the publishing dates, whether they were standards-aligned, and then we ordered an awful lot of textbooks.

Laton spent more than $50,000 in 2004-05 on instructional materials, with special attention paid to "core subject matter textbooks which were standards-aligned (as you would find in 'California Editions') and had significant resource materials included such as test generators, black line masters for photocopying, resource materials for differentiated instruction … and other supplemental materials designed to enrich instruction."[29] These new instructional materials added "semantic meaning to essential core content standards and thus, elicit a higher level of learning and mastery of those standards."[30]

Anderson examined textbooks used at other schools. While visiting another Central Valley high school, he was impressed by the English-language-arts textbook series published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. He especially liked the fact that, "standards were highlighted and accentuated and included linkage to secondary/tertiary standards that augmented the primary standard contained in the lesson's instructional objective."[31] The series covered grades nine through 12, and Anderson liked

the "inherent continuity in the format, presentation, and expectations for the types of activities and assignments associated with the curriculum."[32] In contrast, he observed, Laton's previous English curriculum was a jumbled catastrophe:

[English] teachers are using different programs from various publishers and the sequence of coursework from grades nine through 12 is fractured and disjointed. There is also an insufficient assessment mechanism to ensure that students passing from one grade level to the next are making one year's growth instructionally. Having the same instructional program sequenced over four years will address this concern, as it will add a validity index for key performance indicators in [English-language-arts].[33]

In social science, the curriculum audit found that all world history and civics/economics textbooks were obsolete. According to Anderson, "The entire social science department collaborated on the [new textbook] selections, which were comprised of California editions that stressed state content standards contained in those domains."[34]

Hand in hand with negligence about the curriculum, Laton had also, for the most part, ignored the state academic content standards. "A lot of new teachers, a lot of older teachers, were not clued in on what California content standards were," said Anderson. These teachers had no idea, he noted, "that there was actually a blueprint available from the California Department of Education that shows you the weight of each standard" or "what standards need to be implemented that may not be in your textbook." They were also unaware of how to create a year's worth of instruction "to make sure that all standards are hit and systematically assessed along the way."

The teachers were not helped by the fact that the old textbooks used by the school were not aligned to the state standards. As Anderson recalled, "there were a couple of teachers who really considered teaching a year's worth of material consisted of starting at the beginning of their textbook and then going to the end of the textbook and the course was finished, and the textbook was not even standards-aligned." In a diplomatic understatement, he said, "So to say that there was an emphasis on standards would be a mistake."

Anderson was adamant about the importance of state standards to the achievement of his students: "It was absolutely forbidden for anybody to say that the California content standards were too tough for minorities or poverty students. We did not believe that, we were not going to accept that, because you would forever marginalize those students not to achieve at grade level."

The implementation of the state standards in the classroom, therefore, became one of the central focuses of Anderson's reform program at Laton. In fact, the school's mission statement says that Laton is committed to providing a high-quality academic program based first and foremost on "California's curriculum frameworks and essential core content standards."

This belief in the centrality of the standards as one of the crucial mechanisms to improve student performance rests on very sound research grounds. Research by the Pacific Research Institute

on high-poverty, high-performing public elementary schools and highly improving public charter schools found that these schools place a premium on using and implementing the state standards.[35]

As mentioned previously, Anderson's high expectations of students demonstrated a strong commitment to raising their achievement, and he ensured that student assessment data were used as a diagnostic tool to improve achievement and instruction. He also implemented a standards-based instructional program, rooting out non-standards-based coursework. For example, he made the school switch from physical science to earth science because the state standards and curriculum framework specify earth science for ninth graders.

Earth science focuses on the various geologic sciences concerned with the Earth's origin and structure. In contrast, physical science was much more vague, and allowed for physical science credit to be awarded for courses such as Introduction to Agriculture. "Essential earth science content standards were provided to the two teachers responsible for ninth-grade science instruction," said Anderson, and curriculum "addressing these standards was pulled from numerous sources in order to cover all standards blueprinted by the state."

The principal's focus on the state standards paid rapid dividends. In 1999, Laton scored below 500 on the state Academic Performance Index (API). Then between 2002 and 2005, the school improved about 100 points. Laton "grew 56 points for the 2004-2005 school year," noted Anderson, which "reflected a lot of emphasis on standards-based instruction."

While school-wide improvement on the API was gratifying, as the first part of this paper explains, the API and the state school accountability program is deficient, especially with regard to the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Unlike the API, the federal law requires that the performance of every significant subgroup of students improve. Anderson and his team devised various strategies to raise the performance of the most challenging subgroups, such as special-education students.

Laton used a sheltered, self-contained special-education program for English-language-arts and algebra. In lay terms, the special-education students received instruction in these subjects separate from other students. The goal was to have these students eventually placed in mainstream classes, but as Anderson observed, "for them to be successfully mainstreamed and be fully included in the regular education classroom, there had to be a lot of remediation and supplemental instruction in English." The special-education students had individual education plans (IEPs) that included major goals such as building reading comprehension and writing skills, improving math computation and application, and integrating a high-intensity intervention to get the students ready for the California High School Exit Exam.

The special-education model adopted by Anderson stemmed from his experience as a special-education teacher years earlier. In the past he found that many parents were not happy for their children to be placed in a mainstream class too early because they felt the teachers in the mainstream classroom "didn't know different instructional methodologies that they could use to address learning disabilities." Using a sheltered approach, said Anderson, allowed for "homogenous grouping of learners that were all basically

operating on the same grade level," which then gave the opportunity "to hit them all, rather than a shotgun effect where you have a lot of different levels in the same classroom." This approach was especially beneficial for special-education students who had mild retardation. As Anderson noted, "Those are very difficult kids to place in the regular education classroom with a non-specialist."

Some would argue against this sheltered approach, saying it robs special-education students of valuable experience in mainstream classrooms. Anderson's reply is no-nonsense and focuses on what works: "It's wonderful to have the social experience of being with their regular-education counterparts, but did they really learn anything, are they reading one grade level higher?" The bottom line: "We try to keep in mind what is best for the student, regardless of what some group might say is best for the student."

In addition to special-education students, children with limited-English-speaking skills present another challenge. Like many schools in California, Laton has many English language learners (ELL), constituting about a third of the student body. For these students, Anderson stated unambiguously, "the goal was English acquisition as quickly as possible." In order to accomplish this goal, Laton used the state-approved High Point curriculum. High Point is an intensive intervention for students who are two or more years behind in their reading skills. The standards-based program uses diagnostic assessment to place students into one of four levels of instruction based on their reading and writing skills. The curriculum focuses on grammatical structures, vocabulary building, technology and science language forms, cultural heritage, and global events. As an accelerated reading curriculum, its goal is to give students reading techniques and enough language to understand the syllabus in mainstream classes.

There is a popular belief that older ELL students, such as those in high school, cannot attain English fluency as quickly as younger elementary-grade students. Laton's success showed this belief to be a myth at Laton. According to Anderson, "We found that with the kids in the lower ELD classes, like the relative newcomers or very limited English beginning fluency, we could probably get them [fluent] after a year or in a year and a half." If any of these students needed to remain in an English language-development (ELD) class after a year or two, they were still given regular English credit because the ELD classes "were also taught with California's curriculum framework standards for English." Thus, even with ELL students, the importance of the standards was underscored.

Critics of current state ELD policy often claim that ELL students are forced to sink or swim in their regular academic classes. This argument is misleading. First, as Laton demonstrates, ELL students become English fluent relatively quickly. Second, even after they are determined to be fluent in English, supplemental support for these students continues. Anderson implemented an after-school tutorial program that ran three days a week, was taught by a certificated instructor, and provided transportation for students. The teachers involved covered all core subject areas and, said Anderson, "all those teachers were bilingual."

In addition to the curriculum used, Anderson credits much of the success of the ELD classes to the teacher who taught the courses, "because without really good teaching you don't have a good

program." High-quality teaching, therefore, must complement rigorous curricula aligned to tough academic standards. This important part of the achievement puzzle did not escape Anderson. In order to evaluate the performance of his teachers, Anderson adopted several strategies.

For instance, he created a drop-in observation forum that addressed the six standards to the teaching profession put out by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. This guide includes standards for engaging and supporting all students in learning, creating, and maintaining effective environments, understanding and organizing subject matter, planning instruction, and designing learning experiences, assessing student learning, and developing as a professional educator. Based on these standards, Anderson said, "Then we sort of made a book with all the teachers' names and would systematically and periodically go into the classroom, spend about five or 10 minutes making notes, checking off certain things that were evident, looking at student work, looking for evidence of instruction." These drop-in observations could occur daily or, at the very least, every few days. In addition to these drop-ins, Anderson conducted formal evaluations of the teachers.

In a formal evaluation, Anderson would contact a teacher, inform him or her that he was going to do a systematic lesson observation, which focused on "that specific lesson, and we would look for certain pedagogical events or student behaviors, learning behaviors, some kind of assessment techniques during the period, just to see if the kids are getting it or not." He would also look for "closure activities, effective use of time, and then we would sit down with the teacher in a couple days and go over that." There would be two lesson analyses every year for each teacher. The next step was to address the teacher's weaknesses. According to Anderson, his teachers "were very open to suggestions."

"Even those teachers who had a few years under their belt," he said, "were hungry when I got there." More specifically, he explained, "they wanted more results, they wanted better test results, they wanted to look better in the *Fresno Bee* when the results were published, and they knew I was coming from a high school just down the road that was head and shoulders above them, and they wanted that kind of experience."

Because of this attitude, Anderson would make recommendations for improvement, and subsequently he would find his teachers "implementing some of [his] suggestions and the kids are active and engaged and productive." In fact, his most common suggestion to teachers was to have greater oral interaction with students. "They're sitting there, they're looking at you and behaving themselves," he observed, "but you have no evidence that they are learning anything."

In order to ensure improvements in teacher performance, a good teacher professional-development program is a must. Like many better-performing schools, Laton used a collaborative professional-development model. Every Monday was a minimum day where students would leave at 1:30 p.m. and teachers would gather in the library at 1:45 p.m. Anderson and the teachers "would look at the most pressing issues instructionally, such as curriculum and assessments, and then we would break off into three different break-out groups and the teachers would meet and collaborate amongst each other." Rather than having only math teachers grouped together or only English teachers grouped, the groups were interdisciplinary and "representative of all core areas and electives, including for-

eign language and art and agriculture." Anderson observed that "Everybody has a voice, everybody can voice their concerns, and they would have a pretty pro-active time." Notes were taken, action items were agreed upon, and the climate of learning would usually improve.

Anderson also sent his teachers to summer institutes for the AP and AVID programs. Further, he contracted with the Fresno County Office of Education library media services to offer Laton teachers specialized computer training, so-called "portal training," that he said would allow teachers to "access standards-based lessons, streaming videos, and so forth and integrate those into their lessons for more meaningful instruction, especially for your visual learners and those students who are very curious and want to look at adjunct information."

When asked why so many other high schools in California are performing so badly, Anderson said that too many administrators and teachers do not take accountability seriously, including the federal AYP requirements. The belief of these educators is, "Don't worry about meeting AYP. Nobody's going to meet it and they'll get rid of it." Anderson, however, makes the keen and realistic observation that "these kinds of programs are not going to fade away, and we do need to rise to the challenge, and if you don't get on board and be a high flyer at the onset of this you're going to be chasing at the end." When a school is a poor performer and is not meeting the AYP benchmarks, "you really have to face that head-on and really look at what you're doing instructionally and make some changes, and it's not going to change being status quo."

When he came to Laton, Anderson's efforts yielded immediate results in the form of higher test scores and CAHSEE pass rates. He said, "The whole goal was student achievement." In an interesting side benefit, as student achievement improved, so did student discipline and behavior. Student energy became directed toward positive activities.

"One of the things I noticed especially when we entered the second year when I was there, we had this explosion in participation in extracurricular activities," recalled Anderson. "The football team, which was barely able to field the minimum of 22 members, boasted 60 players." "Kids were involved in clubs," he said, "they wanted to start new clubs." With a laugh, however, he acknowledged, "Of course some of the teachers weren't too happy about that since they had to become advisors."

Overall, the increase in student achievement changed the entire face and atmosphere of the school. As Anderson observed:

It just seemed like the milieu on campus was more energized. There was sort of an electricity, and even long-time Laton people would show up at board meetings and say, "I don't know what it is, but there's something good happening here." And I know in my heart that it was this idea of student achievement that had been unprecedented and the kids were excited about that. They always felt that they were disrespected by their neighboring high schools.

Now, however, Laton was placed in the surprising position of the school to beat. Anderson recounted: "Somebody was going through a nearby town of Hanford in the neighboring county and they

had these signs around their campus. It's a bulls-eye and they have two high schools in the bulls-eye, one was Riverdale High School and the other one was Laton. And the Laton kids couldn't believe that the Hanford kids are seeing them as somebody they have to challenge now."

Not only did the students feel better about the school, but so did parents. As student achievement increased, parents started to volunteer for the school-site council and they started to show up at events such as soccer games. In this regard, Anderson gave credit to his assistant principal, a dynamic Hispanic woman, who "really brought on-board the Hispanic community." "I couldn't have done that myself," he said. "Having very good people working for you makes a huge difference."

Despite its significant improvement, Laton sadly faces a tough challenge. Terry Anderson recently left his position as principal at the school in order to accept the position as director of instruction for the neighboring Riverdale school district. Without Anderson's leadership and focus on student achievement, the question is whether Laton can continue its upward academic climb. Anderson hopes so, saying, "What they have now is a very solid instructional program and a very solid master schedule and course offerings, new curriculum, teachers that one hope stay and that are going to carry on that kind of success year after year with their kids."

He especially hopes that the next principal "won't dismantle that master schedule that really reflected as much rigor and as many high-level classes as you could possibly get into a school of that size." With only 220 students at the school, he warned, "you have a limited number of sections, so make as many of them as you can rigorous and don't settle for anything watered-down or mediocre, what was once considered as a basic-level class."

Anderson's legacy at Laton is written in data which, he observed, served as "empirical evidence that the students really did perform much better than they did historically because of the increased opportunities to take advantage of rigorous coursework."

Anderson says he believes that what is critical is having leadership that believes that "the sky's the limit with any kid in that school." With this philosophy, Anderson says every young person will have the road to success opened to him or her, whether that road leads to "student achievement and being prepared in a post-secondary-transition sense or whatever goal or dream they have after high school."

Conclusion: The Path to Proficiency

The examples of Jacobs Middle School and Laton High School demonstrate two important points. First, these schools, with their challenging demographics, show that it is quite possible for all schools to put themselves on the trajectory to meeting NCLB's grade-level proficiency requirements. These schools are improving at a rate that will ensure not only that all their students will be proficient in English and math, but that their students will become successes in life. Their students' performance proves that all students have the capability to learn and achieve at a high level, and that stereotypes about which students can and cannot learn are simply wrong.

Second, the improved performance of these schools is due not to chance or luck, but to well thought-out game plans that use the state's tough academic content standards as the central focus of classroom instruction, use assessment results to improve student and teacher performance, use effective teaching methods and curricula, and — most important — have high expectations for all their students. These ingredients have been documented in other high-performing, high-poverty schools. It should be apparent by now that this is a formula that works and can be replicated.

The key lesson of Jacobs and Laton is that all schools can be like them. They are not run by superwomen or supermen, and they have not gotten lucky in their student selection. These are regular public schools that had been failing, but turned around because their new principals determined what worked and what did not. California education officials, therefore, should spend less time worrying about how many schools will not make proficiency goals, and focus instead on getting all schools to adopt successful school models that will ensure all students reach proficiency and their full potential.

Endnotes

[1] See Craig D. Jerald, *Dispelling the Myth Revisited* (Washington, DC: Education Trust, 2001).

[2] Herbert J. Walberg, "Standards, Testing and Accountability," in John E. Chubb ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 54.

[3] Ibid., p. 55.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Eric A. Hanushek, "Impact and Implications of State Accountability Systems," in John E. Chubb ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 101.

[7] Ibid.

[8] The educational research organization EdSource describes the technical calculation of the API as follows: "The first step in calculating the API is to divide the school's individual student scores into five performance bands. For the norm-referenced test (NRT), scores in each subject are placed into the five bands based on their national percentile ranking (NPR). NPR is the proportion of students in a national sample whose scores were lower than the California students' score on the national test. The California Standards Test (CST) results are also divided into five performance bands, labeled Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic. The next step is to apply weights to the percentage of students with scores in each performance band (least weight for the lowest bands). These are summed to give a value for the subject. Then each subject area and test is given a weight within the index. The weights depend on which tests are given to each grade in each school. For example, a high school's Base API includes CAHSEE results but no NRT scores. (For details of the weighting see http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/documents/infoguide05b.pdf.) The Base APIs can therefore vary somewhat school by school, depending on their grade levels and number of students tested. The calculation also depends on the number of valid test scores at the school. Finally, the resulting scores are added to become one number for each school — its API. A school district's API is the sum total of all the student (not school) scores." See "Understanding the Academic Performance Index," EdSource, September 2006, available at http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Articles/Article.asp?title=Understanding%20the%20API.

[9] "Analysis of the 2001-02 Budget Bill," Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst's Office, February 2001, p. E-101.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Williamson M. Evers and Lance T. Izumi, "Fixing Failing Schools in California," in John E. Chubb ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 115.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 125.

[14] The state Legislative Analyst's Office observes: "Schools that make significant growth after implementation receive another year of funding and avoid sanctions for one year. The [State Board of Education] defined significant growth as one point positive growth in either implementation year. This was done to limit the number of schools facing sanctions because of capacity con-

straints. . . . An examination of the schools classified as significant growth reveals that almost 19 percent actually had a net decline in API over two years. In addition, only 35 percent of significant growth schools had positive API growth in both years." See "Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill," Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst's Office, February 2003, p. E-129.

[15] "Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill," *op. cit.*, p. E-119.

[16] Caroline Minter Hoxby, "Adequate Yearly Progress," in John E. Chubb, ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 82.

[17] For a good summary of Program Improvement elements for schools, see "Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill," Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst's Office, February 2003, p. E-116.

[18] Ibid., P. E-117.

[19] Ibid., p. E-125.

[20] "Analysis of the 2004-05 Budget Bill," Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst's Office, February 2004, p. E-117.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Caroline Minter Hoxby, "Adequate Yearly Progress," *op. cit.*, p. 84-85.

[24] Ibid., p. 82.

[25] The Legislative Analyst's Office has pointed out that the state Board of Education has put out a matrix that classifies schools based on a combination of API and AYP: "The matrix places schools in six categories: exemplary, commendable, on the move, some improvement, and academic watch. For example, a school with API growth equal to or less than zero that did not meet AYP would be on the academic watch and would be highest priority for intervention. A school that met school-wide API and AYP targets but did not meet subgroup targets would be characterized as 'on the move.' Exemplary schools would be those that met all API and AYP targets. " The LAO notes: "The matrix is intricate and may add yet another layer of complexity to the accountability system. " See "Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill," *op. cit.*, p. E-122.

[26] According to a California Department of Education document: "However, growth targets for numerically significant subgroups will change when the 2006 API Base is reported in March 2007 and will be parallel to the school-wide target calculation that has been in place since 1999. Specifically, starting with the 2006 API Base Report, each numerically significant subgroup will have to show API growth of at least 5 percent of the difference between its 2006 API base and 800. In addition, a minimum target of five points school-wide and subgroup growth will also begin with the 2006 API Base Report." See "Overview of the 2005-06 Accountability Progress Reporting System," Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, August 2006, p. 2.

[27] "O'Connell Announces Significant Gains in State API Results, Mixed Progress in Federal AYP Results," Sacramento, CA, California Department of Education, Press Release REL #05-103, August 31, 2005.

[28] According to a California Department of Education document: "However, growth targets for numerically significant subgroups will change when the 2006 API Base is reported in March 2007 and will be parallel to the school-wide target calculation that has been in place since 1999. Specifically, starting with the 2006 API Base Report, each numerically significant subgroup will have to show API growth of at least 5 percent of the difference between its 2006 API base and 800. In

addition, a minimum target of five points school-wide and subgroup growth will also begin with the 2006 API Base Report." See "Overview of the 2005-06 Accountability Progress Reporting System," Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, August 2006, p. 2.

[29] Terry Anderson, "2004-05 Principal's Year-End Report," Laton High School, Laton, CA, p. 6.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 7-8.

[34] Ibid., p. 7.

[35] See Lance T. Izumi, Gwynne K. Coburn, and Matt Cox, "They Have Overcome: High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools in California," Pacific Research Institute, San Francisco, CA, September 2002, and Lance T. Izumi and Xiaochin C. Yan, *Free to Learn: Lessons from Model Charter Schools* (San Francisco, CA: Pacific Research Institute, 2005).

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Lance T. Izumi is Senior Fellow in California Studies and Director of Education Studies at the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy (PRI), California's premier free-market public-policy think tank based in San Francisco. He is the co-author of the book *Free to Learn: Lessons from Model Charter Schools* (Pacific Research Institute, 2005). He is the author of several major PRI studies, including the *California Education Report Card: Index of Leading Education Indicators* (1997, 2000 and 2003 editions), *Developing and Implementing Academic Standards* (1999), *Facing the Classroom Challenge: Teacher Quality and Teacher Training in California's Schools of Education* (2001), *They Have Overcome: High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools in California* (2002), and *Putting Education to the Test: A Value-Added Model for California* (2004).

In 2004, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed Mr. Izumi as a member of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. In 2005, the California State Senate confirmed Mr. Izumi to this position by a unanimous 34-0 vote. Mr. Izumi serves as the chair of the board's economic development and vocational education committee. He is also the board's representative to the California Post-Secondary Education Commission. In 2003, United States Secretary of Education Rod Paige appointed Mr. Izumi to the Teacher Assistance Corps, a task force of experts assigned to review state teacher quality plans as they relate to the federal No Child Left Behind Act. He also served as a member of the Professional Development Working Group of the California Legislature's Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education.

Mr. Izumi is the co-editor of two books: *Teacher Quality* (Hoover Institution Press and Pacific Research Institute, 2002) and *School Reform: The Critical Issues* (Hoover Institution Press and Pacific Research

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Mr. Izumi is a former visiting fellow in education studies at the London-based Institute for Economic Affairs. He has also served as a consultant on welfare reform to the California Department of Social Services, a consultant on juvenile crime to the Governor's Office of Criminal Justice Planning, and as co-chair of the governor's competitiveness task force on juvenile justice education reform.

For 10 years, Mr. Izumi was a regular contributor to the "Perspectives" opinion series on KQED-FM, the National Public Radio affiliate in San Francisco. His articles have been published in the *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy, Harvard Asian American Policy Review, National Review, Wall Street Journal Europe, Sunday Times* (of London), *Los Angeles Times, Investor's Business Daily, San Francisco Chronicle, California Journal, Los Angeles Daily News, San Diego Union-Tribune, Los Angeles Daily Journal, Orange County Register, Sacramento Bee, San Francisco Daily Journal,* and many other publications.

Prior to going into the think-tank world, Mr. Izumi served as chief speechwriter and director of writing and research for California Governor George Deukmejian. He also served in the Reagan administration as speechwriter to United States Attorney General Edwin Meese III.

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James S. Lanich began his career as an inner-city middle school teacher for the Los Angeles Unified School District. In 1992, he joined the Los Angeles County Office of Education, where he led the Research and Development Unit. In 1998, he assumed leadership of Core Curriculum Services for the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, where he developed and led the Academic Achievement Alliance charged with raising the reading and math scores in the 100 lowest-performing schools of Los Angeles County.

In 1999, he was elected by the 58 counties of California as the Chairman of the California Technology Assistance Project, charged with bringing standards-based education to all schools of California. From 2001-2005, he served as the first director for the Inaugural Broad Prize for Urban Education which awarded $1 million dollars in scholarships to high-performing urban school districts in the United States. He also co-founded Just For the Kids-California and became President of California Business for Education Excellence (CBEE), representing California's business leaders focused on raising student achievement in the state. In 2006, Dr. Lanich was appointed by The U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, as a member of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), which oversees the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP).

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She has also worked at the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal* in Asia, based in Hong Kong. She has written editorials on education in Southeast Asia, free trade in ASEAN, and democracy and politics in China and Taiwan. In addition, Ms. Yan was a Collegiate Network journalism fellow and a contributing editor to *Choosing the Right College: A Guide to America's Colleges,* published by ISI Books.

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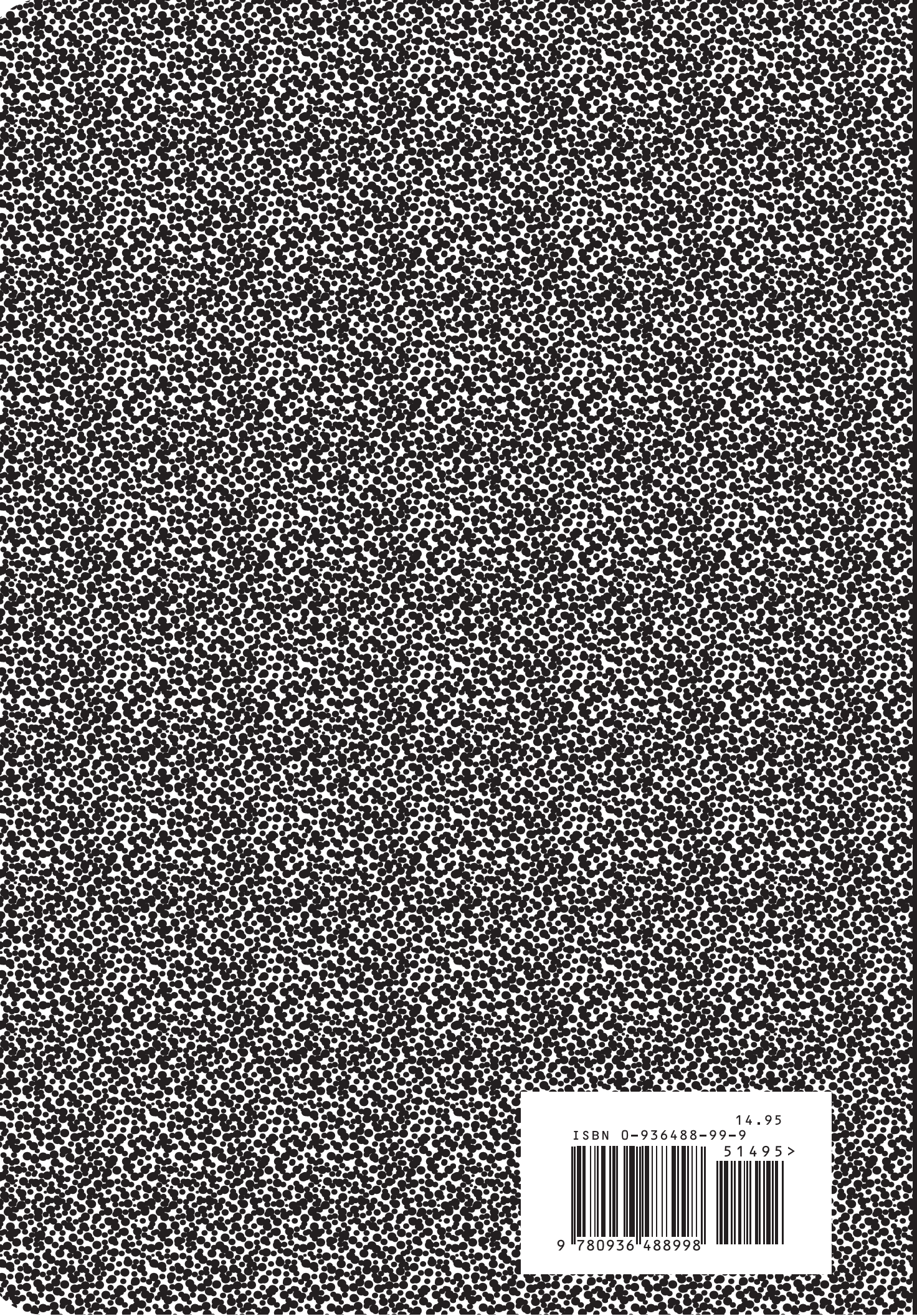

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