A Blueprint for Change

The Committee undertook its work with great clarity of purpose stemming from both its members' fundamental commitment to students and the Governor's charge. From that, the Committee was able to organize its inquiry systemically, in support of a coherent model for change that can support student success.

The Committee applied its findings to the context of its charge areas (governance, finance, and teacher and administrator policies). Its review revealed what needs to be improved in today's education system, demonstrated key strengths that already exist in California's system as a foundation for the future, and identified characteristics of success that can guide improvements.

The Committee developed a clear blueprint for improving California's school system based on an overarching objective; a set of clear principles to focus decisions on achieving that objective; a set of priority issue areas; and a framework of coherence to ensure that all efforts promote one another and avoid working at cross-purposes. This chapter conveys the rationale and structure of the Committee's review to set the stage for the reader to better understand its recommendations.

The System Impedes Successful Teaching and Learning

As research describes, California's K–12 education system is fundamentally flawed in ways that structurally keep the best teaching and learning from occurring. The current system is not close to helping each student become proficient in mastering the state's clear curricular standards and prepared for success in college, work, or life; and wide disparities persist between rich and poor, students of color and others, and English learners and native English speakers. We must act now to make fundamental changes to a system that impedes California's students and educators, imperils the state's communities, and threatens its future.

That is the bottom-line conclusion of the Committee's two-year review of California's K–12 system. To be clear at the outset: *This is a problem of systems, not individuals*. It's not that students lack the essential commitment, initiative, or talent to succeed; most have these qualities. It's not that countless talented, committed teachers, principals, and school staff aren't working hard; most are. It's not that there aren't examples of great schools throughout the state that are beating the odds and providing high-quality education to most of their students; many are. And it's not that schools aren't experiencing some signs of improvement; many are.

The core problem is that those students and educators who are succeeding often are doing so *in spite of* the system — a system that is hobbled by red tape, riddled with inefficiencies, and impossible for parents and students to understand. "Success in spite of the system" is seen in study after study of what works in those "beating the odds" schools that are able to achieve impressive student outcome results despite abundant disadvantages. In those schools, school leaders often follow a business management philosophy developed in the 1990s — "First Break All the Rules" (or at least bend them).[1] While the Committee applauds the creative leadership of those individuals who are able to achieve in spite of the cumbersome regulatory requirements of the system that have no bearing on achievement, the Committee deeply questions the rationale for setting up — and maintaining, despite all that is known — a system in which the best advice available to leaders and educators is to break all the rules, within the limits of the law.

California's students, teachers, administrators, and other professionals work within a system that actually impedes their effectiveness, neither recognizes nor rewards success, and too often stifles innovation and the spread of proven practices. In particular, the current system:

- Raises numerous bureaucratic impediments to effective instruction.
- Does not ensure that sufficient resources reach students, in accordance with their individual needs.
- Fails to provide educators with the initial and continuing preparation and training — or the proven ongoing support — that gives them what they need to succeed.
- Has no incentives to reward achievement at any level and, in fact, creates reverse incentives that effectively reward low performance — by augmenting funding when failure occurs and then withdrawing those funds in response to success.
- Minimizes the decisions that can be made by those nearest the students (teachers and principals), who best know what their students need.
- Lacks the kind of data and information needed to inform instruction and policy, drive continuous improvement for every student, and help parents and families make informed choices.
- Fails to create a culture of genuine accountability and continuous improvement toward higher student outcomes — meeting and then exceeding current expectations.
- Does not align decision-making authority with accountability.
- Does not effectively engage parents and communities in their children's education.

Not surprisingly, with such conditions impeding excellence, California's academic performance ranks toward the bottom of the 50 states and of the industrialized world. Getting Down to Facts researchers found that, "despite the development of challenging education standards and sustained attention to school improvement over the past decade, California continues to lag behind other states in achievement scores" and that, "on many different measures of achievement, California's students fall far below those in other states."[2] Perhaps more important, California's students are not measuring up to the standards the state has set for them.

Students from low-income families, many of them children of color and/or English learners, are losing the most. California has created a pattern of disparities — an opportunity gap and achievement gap — in public schools that limits these students and thereby expands the social inequalities confronting them, exactly opposite of the intended function of public education in a democracy. California pays lip service to the idea that all students can achieve at high levels, and although individual educators succeed in their classrooms and schools, the system, as a whole, does not deliver on that belief; rather, the system seems to accept as inevitable some level of achievement gap for many students. Moreover, California's neediest students are not the only ones being deprived. The state's highest achievers also are not being sufficiently challenged, encouraged, and enriched. While students in California's wealthiest communities are doing OK, they are not improving at a rate that socio-economic conditions would predict, and they trail their peers in other states and nations on a range of performance measures.

California deserves better.

Building on Successes in the Current System

As sobering as these findings are, the Committee is equally convinced that major improvements are possible, that California's schools can educate students who master the state's high academic standards and are genuinely ready to succeed in college and work, and that all California's children can receive the kind of education they need and deserve. The Committee firmly believes the foundation for those improvements already exists in its own backyard, in certain systemic strengths on which to build and successful practices that should be emulated.

Gradual student improvement has occurred

California has undertaken a most ambitious and unprecedented endeavor to educate a more diverse range of students than any state or nation has previously attempted. The state has set its goals high for all students, through world-class learning standards that are applied to *every* student, and it has built an initial accountability system that drives educators and students toward attainment of those goals. In response, California's students have experienced some gains in achievement in recent years. Since the initial implementation of California's standards and accountability programs, performance growth has been steady. Scores (Academic Performance Index [API] 630) that placed a school in decile 6 (10 is the highest) of API rankings seven years ago would place that same school at the bottom of achievement — in decile 1 or 2 — today. Even as California schools continue to serve increasing numbers of students who bring to the classroom more difficult challenges to learning, higher percentages of students than ever before are taking more advanced courses and doing well in them. For example, the number of students taking algebra has increased 51 percent in the last four years, and similar increases have occurred in other subjects — geometry (40 percent), biology (51 percent), and chemistry (48 percent).[3] More students also are taking tests for college admission, and more are doing well on them. These improvements are promising; but the rate of progress in these areas is simply not good enough, especially for students who are at the lowest end of the achievement gap. It is essential that California capitalizes on the progress that has occurred ... and accelerate it.

Foundations exist within the system

These achievements demonstrate the dedication of individuals throughout California's educational system — education professionals and students alike. But there is much evidence that these gains are being made in spite of the system and structure within which they work. Numerous studies detail the major impediments educators and students face each day. Teachers and students do not receive the supports they need to perform effectively, and administrators and board members do not have the scope of authority they need to ensure effective and successful educational delivery at every school and in every classroom. One needs look no further to understand this dynamic than the "beating-the-odds" schools mentioned at the outset of this chapter and characterized in detail below. The success of these schools does not correlate with enhanced resources; rather, the common characteristic was creative leadership that *found effective ways to circumvent systemic constraints*. That a school's success depends on getting around the system that is supposed to support it is untenable and begs the question of how extensive their educational gains could be if the system were effectively focused on teaching and learning. With the knowledge that schools are overly constrained as the backdrop, and the recognition from the described successes that California's schools are doing some things well, the Committee considered it essential to identify the underpinnings of success and build on them.

Early in its inquiry, the Committee assessed what was working in the current system that the Committee, and ultimately the state, could build upon. Two key elements stand out that can serve as a foundation for enhanced success: standards-based accountability and a core of high-quality staff already serving in California's schools.

- ***Standards-based accountability creates a solid starting point.*** The Committee believes that the difficult efforts that started in the 1990s with the development of the state's academic content standards create the foundation for a new approach to education in California. Minor modifications to California's assessments and more significant adjustments to the oversight and intervention elements of its accountability system are needed. Standards-based accountability is not only important, but should become the very core of a restructured education system, rather than continuing its current status as an add-on program to a status quo operation.
- ***Many high-quality teachers and administrators lay the foundation.*** The formula for attaining high achievement is simple: It stems from outstanding classroom instruction. California's schools and classrooms already are staffed by hundreds of thousands of dedicated professionals doing an outstanding job of educating students despite the constraints of the structure in which they operate. The state must build on these staff as core strengths of the system and use them in ways that expand their strengths more systemically, enabling greater levels of success. Unfortunately, California's current system is not good at recognizing the hard work of dedicated individuals — which the Committee's recommendations also address.

Using these two key ingredients as a starting point, the Committee believes the state can rapidly make changes in other key areas that will accelerate progress.

Learning from the best schools in the state

Amazing things are happening around the state, within specific districts and schools that have been able to beat the odds despite all of the barriers to achievement the state has created. Much can be learned from these success stories. Several recent research efforts — conducted by the American Institutes for Research, an EdSource consortium, Springboard Schools, and Just for the Kids, California — have compared schools that beat the odds and those that do not.[4] What emerges from repeated studies of schools making progress is the conclusion that far too many of the state's schools are underperforming and that this need not be the case. Even as they differ in strategies and resourcefulness in finding ways to overcome the system, some common themes stand out among successful schools: Schools that work and schools that do not are as different from one another as night and day. The Committee has identified many of the reasons why this is so and, from that, many of the corrective measures that will most likely produce change in school culture and outcomes. These lessons point to the directions for meaningful systemic reform. Among the numerous unifying traits that these different successful schools all clearly demonstrate are the following:

- **High expectations for all students.** These schools and districts share a culture of high expectations for all students. They focus on student achievement and take a "no excuses" approach. These schools have a shared culture within the school regarding the value of improving student achievement and a sense of shared responsibility for it.
- **Implementation of a standards-based curriculum**. These schools do much more than use the state-adopted textbooks. They focus on each standard and ensure that what they are teaching is well-aligned with the standards. These schools have absolute clarity about what is to be taught and learned by grade level.
- **Use of data to drive instruction.** From studying their students' prior year assessment results in the days before the school year starts to the last day of school, these schools use data to drive constant adjustments to their instructional program. They use high-quality benchmark assessments and analyze the results in detail to determine what went right and what did not.
- **Teachers have collaboration time**. These schools have "open door" policies, and the teachers work as teams to get support from other professionals on how to improve their teaching craft. This type of collaboration and support dramatically increases teacher retention and helps keep a quality team in place.
- **High-quality teachers and leadership.** These schools are often led by strong principals who protect the rest of the school personnel from the chaos of district and state policies. These principals are instructional leaders who know what is happening in each classroom. Through positive relationships with district and union leadership, these principals often have a strong influence on who is hired at the school and are able to encourage some struggling teachers out of the school.
- **Various other traits.** These schools identify a student's poor performance early and intervene immediately to ensure that students do not fall behind. These schools empower parental involvement at the school, establishing clear lines of communication about goals and expectations for each student. These schools ensure that teachers have the instructional resources they need. The professional development at these schools supports the goals for improvement that have been adopted by the schools. Finally, these schools ensure that students get to school ready to learn by helping their students to receive any social services needed to offset conditions that might create a distraction to learning, thereby creating a true sense of community.

The striking similarities in findings among various studies of effective schools in California — including schools in high-poverty neighborhoods with significant percentages of English learners and students whose parents did not graduate high school — offer promise and guidance as to policies and practices that can be effective for renovating the state's public school system.

Schools Getting It Done in Spite of the System

Many schools find ways to succeed despite the systemic constraints. These are just a few of those exceptions.

Ralph Bunche Elementary, Compton Unified: The students are 99 percent Latino or Black, 40 percent English learners, and 95 percent economically disadvantaged. A 27-year-old former Teach for America principal worked with dedicated teachers to apply a high-expectations, no-excuses, standards-focused approach to engineer a dramatic turnaround. In 1999, Bunche had an API of 445, one of the lowest in the state. By 2006, the API score was 868, making Bunche Elementary the fastest growing school in the state, with an API score above the state's academic target and in the top 20 percent.

Hughes Middle School, Long Beach Unified: Even successful schools have work to do. While Hughes has long been a high-achieving school and winner of numerous accolades, it has had significant achievement gaps. For example, in 2002–03, 75 percent of White students were proficient in 8th-grade English Language Arts, compared to only 30 percent of Black students. Using multiple tools focusing on staff development and student empowerment, the school has cut the White-Black gap by 10 percentage points.

The Preuss School, UCSD, San Diego: The state's first charter high school to be located on a university campus, the school prepares low-income students whose parents lack a college degree for the University of California system and other college opportunities. In a school serving only socio-economically disadvantaged students, Preuss combines a focus on teaching excellence and deep community partnerships with great flexibility and rigid accountability to achieve impressive results: Its 2007 API score was 877, and it has been honored by the California Department of Education.

Gateway High School, San Francisco: The school makes a rigorous college preparatory education available to "all kinds of minds" (to borrow a phrase from Dr. Mel Levine) and especially to students with learning disabilities. Among a student population of uncommon ethnic and racial diversity, 25 percent of Gateway's students have a learning disability — two and a half times the rate in a typical public school. Gateway is recognized as a California Distinguished School: Its 2007 API was 739, and its API for low socio-economic students was 728.

While California should learn from these successful strategies and characteristics, there is much that educators do not yet know about what works and what does not. Fortunately, education in the United States is currently in an era of rich experimentation. For example, in New York City, the mayor's Children's First initiative is delegating decision making and budgeting to the school level and providing leadership training to support this delegation of authority and has implemented a school inspection system to monitor the schools and provide them guidance. In Florida, reform has implemented numerous school choice initiatives, including scholarships that provide greater choice alternatives for special education students. The Denver school district, in collaboration with the teachers union, designed a professional teacher compensation system that creates a model for thinking differently about teacher compensation. This experimentation, combined with excellent data systems to support the evaluation of these pilots, will lead to significant increases over the next decade in educators' understanding of effective school practices.

It is *essential* for California to become a part of this new culture of experimentation and learning. By developing the needed data systems and conducting educational experiments linked to rigorous evaluation, the state will be able to learn what works and what doesn't and apply that understanding to improving educational practices. These promising schools and programs should not remain isolated instances of success; they should be seen as models from which others can learn, and the elements of success should be emulated broadly. In promoting experimentation, analysis, and learning, the state can help transform the culture from

the current one of immunity to reform into a culture of continuous improvement, wherein educators throughout the system are constantly asking themselves what they can do better and then doing it once they have the answers.

Principles for Transforming the System

Concurrent with its review and analysis of the findings, the Committee spent significant time distilling the principles that should guide its work and the future work of California policymakers and educators in implementing its recommendations. This exercise blended the systemic and the specific, the latter often organized along the Committee's four areas of focus. At times, research was helpful, pointing out essential characteristics of effectiveness that carry great benefits. More often, common sense was the guidepost. Sometimes, the clear direction was simply the opposite of current practice. Always, Committee members recognized that circumstances and the resolutions chosen will change over time.

As noted, the Committee brought to its work a dedication to the guarantee of a high-quality education for every student in California. In contemplating how to achieve that result, the Committee explored whether to focus uniquely on outcomes, to commit to what might be considered essential inputs, or blends of these. Similarly, the Committee evaluated standards intended to ensure "quality," the idea of "excellence," and measures of "effectiveness" against one another. Committee members' commitment to quality and equity permeated every avenue explored.

It was obvious to the Committee that all changes to California's education system *must* be designed to result in improved classroom instruction. The Committee believes that each California student deserves to be taught by an effective teacher regardless of the student's socio-economic status, native language, or special needs and that educators must be empowered and supported to succeed.

Committee members deemed it essential that sufficient resources be made available in ways that support the teaching and learning that delivers expected levels of achievement. In contemplating how to achieve that outcome, members explored principles related to resource generation, distribution, and control, as well as fiscal accountability. The Committee investigated how to best align resources with goals; how to ensure resources address differentiated needs; how to combine sufficient resources with adequate authority and accountability; and especially how to make effective use of incentives and disincentives.

Also of importance was linking communities, including but not limited to parents, with schools. This belief promoted explorations about information transparency, shared accountability for results, and expanded educational options.

Decision-making authority (who makes the decisions about resources) is key. In contemplating governance, therefore, the Committee examined which types of decisions are best made by which type of body and where, to best support student achievement. Members felt strongly that clarity of roles should be fostered so that responsibility is clearly understood and so that responsibilities are carried out.

Many discussions of education finance attempt to separate the funding of the schools from the policies that govern operations. The idea is that it is possible to determine the level of spending and its distribution across students, schools, and districts and then separately decide on the policies and regulations that guide them. History shows that, as a general rule, this cannot be done effectively, and the attempt frequently leads to very bad policy outcomes.

As the Committee reviewed an array of research and resource materials, and as its formal principles were taking shape, members were struck by the congruence between the initial principles they were developing and those encountered in other change efforts across the nation. There is strong agreement that an education system must be student-focused and that equity

must be promoted through high standards for every student by providing both an excellent teacher in every classroom and a great principal for every school. Many would assert, as the Committee does, that funding must be fair and stable and that authority to make finance decisions should be aligned with accountability for those decisions. Recognizing that those who are closest to students can best gauge and meet their needs, Committee members join other prominent voices who support enhanced local control and seek to empower parents within a system in which everyone must be held accountable for results.

A system should not be judged by what it claims are its beliefs, but by how well it implements them. Too many have given lip service to initial principles such as these, claiming to hold them as their own; but the reality is that California's education system does not apply them with any rigor or consistency. The Committee has been stunned by the structural inability of the state's system to actually focus on students — an inability based on the failure to provide appropriate resources, authority, capacity, and incentives for education professionals charged with the real work of teaching and learning. If the state is to realize the promise of these broad initial principles, it requires not just talk, but action, organized around a set of operational principles that create not a static system, but one that is dynamic, promoting a focus on students and a cycle of continuous improvement. These principles created the foundation on which the Committee developed recommendations in each of its charge areas.

Committee's Operational Principles

1. Educational policies and practices must be judged by their impacts on student outcomes against the state's high standards and must be organized to support continuous improvement in student achievement for each student in California and to ensure that all students reach proficiency. The state has a special responsibility to close the achievement gap and thereby ensure that disadvantaged students do not continue being underserved.
2. Accountability drives excellence by rewarding success and promoting continuous improvement. But accountability, authority, incentives, and transparency must go hand in hand, and separating these components is likely to lead to bad outcomes.
3. Local educators should have the latitude and support to make decisions on how to spend resources that support students' differential needs, and the educators should be held responsible for results that meet state standards and expectations for California's students.
4. Education professionals must be trained and supported in ways that build their capacity to carry out their roles effectively.
5. Education funding must support the attainment of the state's educational goals for all students. To do so, the approach must recognize that individual students have differential needs that generate different costs and require differential funding. To the greatest extent possible, funding should follow those students who generate those funds.
6. Incentives should be aligned with objectives at every level, and disincentives to high performance should be removed. Districts, schools, and individuals should be rewarded for improving student achievement, supported in efforts to do better, and held accountable when they consistently fail to meet the needs of students.
7. The state must have reliable, timely, and valid information about performance and school outcomes, as well as the analytical capacity to evaluate that information; this expertise must be an integral part of making the school system an evolving and improving system.
8. Innovation, coupled with rigorous evaluation, drives improvement. It must be encouraged and supported to reveal best practices that can be emulated across the system.

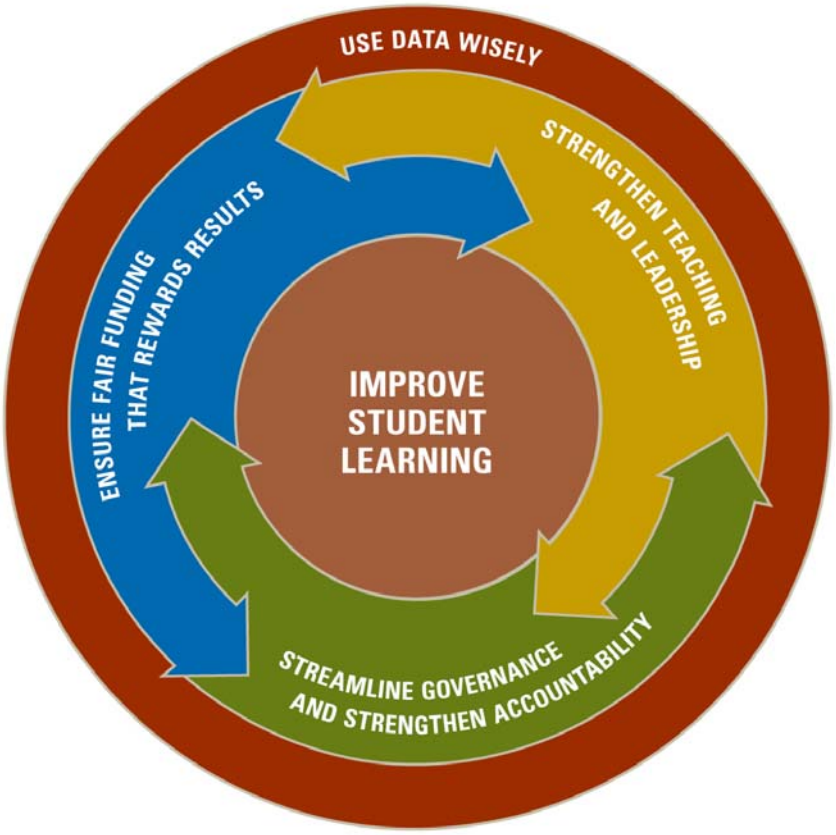
If these principles are to be transformed into reality, a different approach is needed. Policymakers need to be willing to enforce their implementation. The Committee's recommendations in this report are designed to do just that. They are the practical, tangible signposts that would signal that, this time, the system is actually "walking the talk." This technical report provides a detailed understanding of how to achieve each of these goals, and just as important, how to verify whether these reforms have

worked or not. Without such commitments, California will continue to be comforted by high-minded rhetoric about "students first," while another generation of children falls behind.

Changing the Culture To Focus on the Continuous Improvement of Student Learning

California's education system must be student-focused in every aspect, with all actions driven by the only goal that really matters: continuous improvements in student achievement. By "continuous improvements in student achievement," the Committee means that the growth targets the state sets, and school districts and schools set for themselves, must be ambitious enough so that students reach proficiency before they leave school and so that schools should never settle for less than ongoing improvement — to strive toward ambitious goals and, on attaining them, to reach even further. All schools, even the most successful, must always strive to improve to respond to the constantly evolving challenges students will face. That is what accountability, when done right, is intended to achieve.

The Continuous Improvement Cycle diagram shows how changes in each of the charge areas of the Committee are inter-related with each of the other areas (discussed in detail below). Making piecemeal reforms will not work, as discussed above, and the job of improvement is never complete. A continuous cycle (a) plans new policy directions based on the best available information, (b) acts on this information to make the best decisions for improving student achievement, and (c) reviews the results of each reform to assess what worked, and what did not; then the cycle begins again, learning and changing anew. Enacting and sustaining such an approach requires considerable effort, but the rewards are great.



Locally, improvement begins with communities and educators making decisions about how best to raise student achievement, deploying resources to support those decisions, and monitoring how well students do. This takes time for teacher collaboration in grade-level teams, across grade levels, and within departments. It takes mentoring new and struggling teachers. It takes districts and school site educators analyzing the data to identify the areas that need improvement and develop best practices approaches to make improvements. Educators then can emphasize programs that work and take corrective action on ineffective programs.

For its part, the state must be supportive, not obstructive. First, this means getting out of the way of districts by streamlining the state's finance system and regulatory structure. The state must help develop and disseminate best practices, using experimentation linked with rigorous evaluations; support improved information systems and provide additional tools for local districts to use in their cycle of improvement; remove impediments to local experimentation and instead help facilitate district communication to share best practices. The state has one additional important role, and that is to measure the impact that the implementation of this set of recommendations has on the system. As with any other policy initiatives, the Committee's recommendations must be evaluated and monitored with the same level of rigor asserted for local education entities, to ensure that the intended impacts on student achievement are being realized; and if they are not, the state is obligated to make adjustments to improve or eliminate these programs.

Plan, act, review, plan, act, review — this is what the Committee refers to as the cycle of continuous improvement, in which the components are strengthened teaching and leadership, fair and flexible funding, and local decision making coupled with strong accountability. The cycle is powered at every step by data and information systems that allow professionals, parents, and all stakeholders to monitor progress, make better decisions, and hold the system itself accountable.

Comprehensive and Integrated Reform

For decades, California has pursued wave after wave of "silver bullet" reforms, implemented individually and sometimes haphazardly, often watered down from the initial concept — or even the ways in which research proved them to be effective. As a result, the state has shamefully little to show for billions of dollars of ongoing investment. Imposing an accountability program without building capacities is untenable; promoting class-size reduction without developing personnel and building a facilities infrastructure means too few reap the benefits, and some are hurt by the intervention. Because the entire *structure* of the K–12 public education system is flawed, more *à la carte* improvements will not make much difference. Instead, policymakers and the public should commit to a systemic and coherent approach to reform that rejects business as usual. Indeed, the Committee considers acceptance of continued piecemeal changes to be part of the problem, not a solution for either the short or long term. From its inception, the Committee identified the need for integrated, systemic change to rebuild the system in ways that can empower effective teaching and learning.

Changing the system from its current piecemeal policy approach to focus on student success means embracing comprehensive, coherent changes that support high academic achievement by simultaneously addressing four interconnected priorities at the state level and creating an environment and scope of authority at the local level to support continuous improvement efforts at every school in the state. The four interconnected priorities are the following:

1. Strengthen teaching and leadership.

Putting students first means that every student in every classroom is taught by an excellent and effective teacher. This is by far the most effective way to improve student learning and close the achievement gap, and it will require extensive changes in how the state prepares, recruits, trains, and compensates teachers and holds them accountable for steady gains in student learning as measured by the state's high standards. In turn, having every school and district led by a highly effective leader will create the conditions that will help ensure that good teaching and learning is happening in every classroom for every student. These

professionals should be held accountable for steady gains in student learning and should earn increased autonomy and additional resources based on the performance of their schools. The state must assume responsibility to help school districts develop the tools needed to promote success of educators throughout the system. This will require better information systems and improved student assessments; financial investments in the supports needed for success; and empowerment of local educators to determine the "how" of education delivery for which they will be held accountable.

2. Ensure fair funding that rewards results.

Putting students first means that state resources should follow the student and that those who need more support actually receive it. This means overhauling the state's current approach that funds programs and transforming to a system that bases funding on what it takes for diverse students to meet state goals. Fiscal incentives also should change, becoming aligned to support achievement, reward excellence, and promote behavioral changes. Just pumping more money into a system that structurally impedes success will not deliver the results California's children deserve and the state's future well-being requires. If students come first, educators will need to be given sufficient flexibility of resource use to meet the needs of students that only they, at the school site and in the district — not the state from afar — can identify.

3. Streamline governance and strengthen accountability.

Putting students first means that educators throughout the system are empowered to do — not constrained from doing — what is in the best interest of students. This means reducing the burdensome red tape that distracts from a relentless focus on quality classroom instruction; delineating roles appropriate to each player's responsibility for student success; providing those players (state, district, school) the authority, flexibility, and capacity to do their jobs effectively; and holding all players accountable for ensuring that *all* students learn at higher levels. Only after educators and local decision makers have been empowered to make student-focused decisions can individuals, schools, and districts truly be held accountable for their students' results. The state must improve the quality of its accountability measures to delve into the details that support success and failure of schools and must take a more active and thoughtful role to intervene when districts and schools are unable to get the job done.

4. Use data wisely.

An indisputable fourth priority, perhaps the first because it undergirds each of the other three, is an investment in a world-class system of data and information that will turn the flywheel of continuous improvement; the education system itself must "learn." Without good information, the state cannot help schools and districts improve or make the best choices and investments. Among the many ironies the Committee confronted in its work, none is greater than that California, global home of the information economy, has woefully inadequate education data systems that lag behind those of nearly every other state in the nation. The Committee's systemic reform proposals depend on much better data and information — to help improve classroom instruction and school strategies; to empower parents to make better choices for their children; to inform state policies, programs, and investments; to provide incentives for success; and to allow the public to hold the system accountable for steady improvements year by year and school by school.

These Four Priorities Are Interdependent

California does not have the luxury of picking and choosing among these four strategic priorities. The nature of each, and even the principles that guided the Committee in its approach to them, necessarily depend on one another. A student-centered system of education requires an infrastructure of support that fosters success at every level — students must have what they need to learn, teachers must have what they need to teach well, and school/district leaders must be capable of moving their institutions toward greater levels of achievement. Meeting those needs requires strategic investments in improved data systems and enhanced resources for disadvantaged students; capacity-building and revised training so data can be used effectively and best

practices can be understood and emulated; less micromanagement of schools by the state, so local educators can be responsive to student needs; and other related changes. By bringing together changes in all four priorities —personnel, finance, governance, and data — the state can develop a support system for schools that truly fosters and sustains achievement by all individuals in the system.

If changes in one priority are not accompanied by changes in the others, however, California will end up with just a different variation of the incoherent, unworkable, structurally flawed system that now gets in the way of student learning — perhaps even with significant unintended consequences that worsen conditions for some, if not for all. Closer examination of each priority bears this caution.

Providing additional, flexible funding — without commitments to improve teacher and administrator quality — to create the right incentives for continuous improvement and to ensure that the funds serve the needs of individual students, would perpetuate the inefficiency that plagues California education today. Well-meaning efforts to attract more effective teachers and principals are doomed to fail, unless the state also provides them with plentiful opportunities to keep improving their practice and reward them for their success. Deregulating the system and shifting more authority from Sacramento to those closest to students — county, district, and school leaders — amounts to irresponsibility, unless the increased autonomy is supported by the professional development that enables local leaders to carry out their roles and is linked to more accountability for results. And such accountability must be based on a system of data that is easily understood and widely perceived as fair and accurate, or policymakers will continue to make too many decisions in the dark, based on hunches and hopes — not research — that are incomprehensible to the public.

Moving California Forward

The continuous improvement model (discussed above), organized around these four interdependent priorities and driven by the Committee's operational principles, provides a powerful blueprint for change that will lead to the attainment of the educational goals and expectations. California deserves and should accept nothing less than an extraordinary education system — for its economy, for its communities, and for the 6.3 million children who go to school every day counting on the state and its education community to help them fulfill their dreams. The Committee knows that without more comprehensive, strategic changes, California will let them down. The Committee believes the path to greatness is clearly marked.

Endnotes

[1] Buckingham, Marcus, and Curt Coffman (1999) *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently,* Simon and Schuster, New York City.

[2] Loeb, Susanna, Anthony Bryk, and Eric Hanushek (2007) *Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California*, Getting Down to Facts, Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice, Stanford University.

[3] Mockler, John (2007) "Who Says We Are Not Getting Our Money's Worth?", John Mockler and Associates, can be downloaded at (www.californiaschoolfinance.org).

[4] For an example of this work, see María Pérez, Priyanka Anand, Cecilia Speroni, Tom Parrish, Phil Esra, Miguel Socias, and Paul Gubbins (2007) *Successful California Schools in the Context of Education Adequacy*, Getting Down to Facts, Institute for Research on Education Policy & Practice, Stanford University; Trish Williams, Michael Kirst, Elisabeth Woody, Jesse Levin, *et al.* (2006) *Similar Students, Different Results: Why Do Some Schools Do Better?* EdSource; Just for the Kids — California (2004) *California "Best Practices" Study*, Various school reports, prepared by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (www.just4kids.org).