

Promising Education Practices

Throughout its deliberations, the Committee investigated several promising education practices that research has suggested can support student academic improvement. Ultimately, the Committee determined that it would not recommend statewide implementation of these practices, to be consistent with operational principles guiding the Committee's actions. However, these practices sufficiently warrant consideration for voluntary implementation that the Committee comments on them here.

Committee members were sufficiently impressed by research findings that they were inclined to recommend that the state pursue the expansion or creation of various new programs or policies. These included strategies for the following: (1) extending instructional time; (2) improving the quality of instruction; (3) hiring additional staff; and (4) expanding the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, among others. The Committee examined each of these strategies extensively. While many of these policies were deemed to have sufficient merit to warrant recommendation based purely on the policy implications, the Committee determined ultimately that the decision of which education investments to make should be left to local educators.

In the Finance and Governance chapters of this report, the Committee recommends a significant streamlining of the finance system because it believes that state micromanagement of funding allocations by school districts is inefficient: Districts often are unable to incorporate new programs into their strategies or integrate specified programs in ways that best meet students' needs. As a result, the current funding system has led districts to implement numerous programs that the state has funded, without determining which programs and practices will help them most effectively meet their achievement goals.

The Committee has recommended returning decision-making authority to school districts. The Committee believes that for education reforms to be effective, local educators need to own the reforms and support them with other policy changes at the district level. That is more likely to happen if these reforms are implemented as local initiatives. The state cannot dictate a comprehensive education program for each district because districts operate in different contexts. However, districts can and should develop such programs on their own and in collaboration with other districts. Along with the consolidation of categorical programs, the Committee recommends additional funding to promote innovation, reward success, and provide appropriate additional investments in schools serving economically disadvantaged student and/or English learners. Giving districts more flexibility in using resources along with additional funding will promote investments in some of the changes in policy and practice discussed below.

The Committee believes that, even in a local-control finance system, the state still has three important roles in supporting districts. First, the state should create an innovation and research fund to help improve the knowledge base on what works in California schools. For example, the state could fund small pilot/evaluation programs that test the cost effectiveness of some of the investments proposed below. Second, the state should provide a repository of best practices to share its findings with districts. Third, for districts that are struggling to improve academic achievement on their own, the state should take a more activist role through the accountability and intervention system and help districts implement these types of reforms by reallocating funds more effectively. The Committee believes many districts would benefit from the following specific practices.

Extending Instructional Time

The call for increasing instructional time in schools in the United States is not new. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* recommended that U.S. schools lengthen the period of instruction by one extra hour per day and up to 40 extra days per year¹. The American school calendar is largely a product of a time in history when a much larger portion of society worked in the agricultural sector. That is no longer the case, yet continuing the traditional school calendar means U.S. students receive less instruction than students in other countries, as shown in the chart, “U.S. Students Receive Less Instructional Time.”

U.S. Students Receive Less Instructional Time²

OECD ranking by hours per week	Country	Hours per week
1	Thailand	30.5
2	Korea	30.3
7	China	26.9
14	France	24.8
15	United Kingdom	24.6
16	Mexico	24.2
23	Japan	23.8
26	Canada	23.6
36	United States	22.2
40	Brazil	19.0

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

A recent report by *Education Sector* compares the amount of annual instruction received by students in the United States to those in other countries, as well as the overall achievement in mathematics. The chart “International Math Ranking and Instructional Hours per Year,” shows that the United States provides far fewer hours of instruction than other countries and that American students do not do well in mathematics compared to other countries. As the Committee discussed earlier in this report, California does not do well in mathematics compared to other states either, so California’s performance relative to other countries is even worse than the chart would suggest. It is often the straightforward analysis that countries with more hours of instruction do better on international tests that is used to justify the call for more time. However, four countries in the chart with lower math rankings than the United States all offer more hours of instruction, suggesting that instructional hours comprise only one factor in determining student outcomes.

International Math Ranking and Instructional Hours per Year

PISA — Math ranking (of 29 countries)	Country	Instructional hours per year
1	Finland	861
2	Korea	1,079
3	Netherlands	911
4	Japan	926
24	United States	799
25	Portugal	889
26	Italy	884
27	Greece	806
28	Turkey	825

Source: *Education Sector* based on data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) administered by OECD

A recent study by the Brookings Institution conducts a more sophisticated analysis that looks at the relationship between changes in instructional time in each country and changes in their student outcomes.³ By comparing a country against itself across time, the study is able to eliminate the cultural factors that often explain much of the outcome differences between countries. This study uses the other primary data set for international comparisons, the Trends in Mathematics and Science Survey (TIMSS) data, to determine the impact that additional instruction time has on student outcomes. The Brookings study found that additional time has a significantly positive relationship on student achievement. In addition to finding that time matters, the study also investigated whether lengthening the year or lengthening the day would be more effective in improving achievement. By comparing two strategies to add 1,800 minutes of math instruction to the school year, Brookings found that adding 10 minutes of math instruction every day had more impact than providing an additional 40 days of school per year. In fact, the Brookings model suggests that the academic gains from an additional 1,800 minutes of instruction would be double if it were provided on a daily basis instead of lengthening the school year.

KIPP schools show the power of additional time in a comprehensive reform

Alternative schools also have shown the potential benefits of extending the school day and school year as part of broader reforms. For example, several high-achieving charter schools serving large portions of economically disadvantaged students extend their school year and school day. One of the best-known examples of using extra time for learning comes from the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) school model. Students attend from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and every other Saturday. They also attend for three weeks during the summer. It is important to note that the investment KIPP makes in providing additional time is part of a more comprehensive education package.

KIPP's data on student achievement shows significant gains in both math and language arts at virtually every site, and their supporters suggest that the extended time is a large part of the winning formula. KIPP uses a nationally norm-referenced assessment to test its students at the time they enter the school and annually in the spring. For students who started at the school in 5th grade and remained in KIPP through 7th grade, the average student moves from the 44th percentile of the national norm in math to the 83rd percentile, and from the 34th percentile in reading to the 58th percentile. Similar results were found by independent external evaluators.⁴ Comparing KIPP schools to schools in their local district, 5th-graders at KIPP score better than the district average in 59 percent of the KIPP schools. By the last year of middle school, 100 percent of the KIPP schools score higher than the district average.

Currently, various proponents of education reform propose increasing student learning time. Strong American Schools (SAS), supported by the Gates Foundation and Broad Foundation, calls for "more time and support for learning" to be at the top of the education agenda for the 2008 presidential election (www.Edin08.com). SAS proposes that if policymakers and educators are going to demand more from students, the state must give them what they need to succeed.

The National Center on Time and Learning indicates that more instructional time will do the following:

- **Help level the playing field.** Many students fall behind academically and never catch up, while others begin school far behind their peers of generally higher socio-economic status. In low-income, urban neighborhoods, the average student enters high school between three and four years behind grade level in reading and math. Students who are behind often are placed into remedial or low-level courses, which affords them no opportunities to catch up to their peers.
- **Increase school readiness.** Closely related to the above, children begin school with very different levels of education capital. Children from lower-income families generally arrive at school with fewer skills than those from higher-income families. Much of the literature regarding "opportunity to learn" focuses on the relationship of the disparities between children and the resources they bring with them to school. Early childhood education and full-day kindergarten are advocated by some as a way to narrow the learning readiness gap among children as they enter school. (See Create a Foundation for Continuous Improvement chapter.)

- **Provide enrichment.** A number of analysts argue that accountability policies have narrowed academic offerings in many schools, particularly low-performing schools that serve low-income children. There are increasing reports about schools that enroll students in two or more English or math classes in order to increase test scores. Hence, there is little opportunity for enrichment programs or more engaged learning opportunities.
- **Allow more time for teacher preparation and collaboration.** While the school year in some countries is longer than that in the United States, additional days there are not spent on increasing instructional time. Instead, they are used to provide teachers with opportunities for assessment, instructional planning, and collaboration. The underlying assumption is that the amount of time teachers spend in those kinds of activities in support of quality instruction is just as important as instructional time in the classroom.

Lengthening the school day or school year would deliver two additional benefits. First, school districts would likely need to pay teachers more; increasing annual salaries can make teaching a more competitive career and particularly attract potential candidates just leaving college. Also, lengthening the school day or year would help some families address a portion of their child care needs, especially families in which all of the adults work.

For all of these reasons, the Committee believes that increasing the hours of instruction as part of an integrated local reform plan is a worthwhile investment. This additional investment could take one of many forms, depending on the needs of the district, the desired outcomes, and constraints the district may face, such as insufficient facilities. Districts are encouraged to experiment with a longer school day, a longer school year, expanding before- and after-school programs, and expanding full-day kindergarten.

Improving the Quality of Instruction

The single most important school-based influence on a student's achievement gains is his or her teacher and the quality of the instruction the student receives. This quality can vary substantially. In the Teaching and Leadership chapter, the Committee proposes several actions the state could take to improve the training and motivation of teachers. School districts should consider taking two additional actions to support the improvement of teacher quality.

Provide teachers with time for collaboration and preparation

As discussed in the Teaching and Leadership chapter, collaboration and preparation time is a part of the investment that would support a teacher professional practice model. Education services are provided differently in the United States than in other countries, in ways that minimize teacher collaboration and preparation. Schools here are generally open fewer, and often shorter, days. International studies such as TIMSS have shown that teachers in the United States have less collaboration and preparation time than teachers in other countries and spend more of their work week providing direct instruction to students. As a result, teachers have little time to invest in improving the quality of their instruction or to collaborate with other teachers — including grade-level teams or subject-area teams that could improve each others' practice and integrate a school's education program. Moreover, with good planning, investments in time for teacher preparation and collaboration can be coordinated with other programs to help schools achieve multiple goals at the same time they are improving teacher quality. For example, recent initiatives have supported the provision of additional art and physical education experiences for students. Well-planned utilization of additional staff to lead those programs could provide other teachers with the time they need to prepare and work collaboratively. The Committee encourages districts to make additional investments in providing teachers this additional time to promote professional effectiveness.

Targeted professional development

In the new era of standards-based education, teachers are expected to be able to undertake a wide array of responsibilities — many of which go beyond their traditional and current teaching responsibilities. Districts expect teachers to be able to teach the state’s rigorous academic content standards, and while most teachers believe they are currently teaching the standards, various reviews demonstrate that many are not doing so. Teachers need additional support to ensure that their instruction is well-aligned with California’s expectations for students. Teachers also are expected to use data to help drive changes in instructional practice, but many teachers have not been provided the support to effectively use data in their daily decision making, curriculum development, and classroom teaching processes. Administrators and other school and district staff have similar professional development needs. The Committee believes that districts should make ongoing, strategic investments in providing targeted professional development that is aligned with district and school goals.

Providing Additional Staffing

As discussed in the Finance chapter, California has fewer staff per pupil than almost all other states. This shortfall includes fewer teachers, administrators, reading specialists, counselors, nurses, psychologists, librarians, and paraprofessionals. Districts have the opportunity to make additional investments by hiring more staff to improve the level of service students receive. The Committee believes that two particular approaches toward expanding school staff can impact student achievement especially well.

Targeted class size reduction in the early grades

While many have commented how poorly California implemented K–3 class size reduction (CSR), the state’s deficiencies in implementation should not tarnish the potential benefits that can result from effectively managed CSR, especially for economically disadvantaged students.⁵ Poor planning, rapid roll-out, and insufficient availability of facilities and qualified teachers to meet the demand contributed to the poor evaluation results for the K–3 CSR program in California. But many of the negative results in these evaluations can be attributed to the implementation of the policy and not linked to the potential benefits of CSR.

Research has shown that CSR is beneficial, especially for minority and economically disadvantaged students.⁶ Because teachers would rather teach in classes that are smaller, targeting class size has the added benefit of potentially attracting more effective and experienced teachers to schools serving greater proportions of disadvantaged students. Although the Committee has recommended the inclusion of CSR among those categoricals to be folded into base funding within the student-centered funding model, the Committee would encourage districts to continue to reduce class sizes, targeting schools with the greatest need and the early elementary grades. Moreover, if the Committee’s recommendation for eliminating the CSR categorical is adopted, districts would be encouraged to use CSR more flexibly to meet students’ needs as determined locally; for example, a school might organize two classes in the same grade to serve 15 and 25 students, respectively, offering specific need-based services in the smaller class to better offset learning challenges of those students.

To date, research has only supported the reduction of class size in grades K–3. Recent statutes have created the Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA), however, which now provides funding to reduce class sizes in other grades in targeted schools. This will create an opportunity for the state to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of targeting resources to schools serving disadvantaged students to reduce class sizes in other elementary grades and in core subject areas in the higher grades. The Committee suggests that districts wait until the QEIA investments have been rigorously evaluated before making additional investments in CSR in grades for which research has yet to justify those investments.

Hiring additional specialists, including reading specialists, counselors, nurses, psychologists, and librarians

California’s per-pupil funding is below the national average, and teacher salaries are the highest in the nation, which help explain why the state has relatively few support and administrative staff. Committee members believe that with few exceptions, schools would benefit from investing in additional non-instructional staff. The QEIA program requires participating high schools to meet staffing ratios for counselors (1 counselor for every 300 students), which will increase the number of counselors. Other past Legislature and Governor’s initiatives have focused on increasing such staff as reading specialists, counselors, nurses, psychologists, and librarians. While the Committee does not think the state should mandate staffing ratios or set aside funds for hiring staff with specific specializations, the support services that these professionals provide can help improve the overall achievement at a school.

Expanding AVID

AVID is a college-preparation program that helps students — primarily economically disadvantaged students — succeed in a rigorous curriculum, resulting in their having the opportunity to enroll and succeed in a four-year college. Program results are impressive. AVID reports that it helps approximately 75 percent of its students get accepted to four-year colleges, and more than 85 percent complete their A–G requirements for entrance into the University of California or California State University. (It must be noted that efforts to provide additional, empirical evaluation of AVID beyond these college acceptance rates are confounded because AVID programs often require that students meet certain criteria to enter and remain in the program.) The additional cost of this program is minimal — primarily the costs of staff development and support for AVID teachers. Committee members strongly support the AVID program and encourage districts to use some of the additional targeted funding proposed in support of disadvantaged students to invest in expanding the AVID program in their districts.

Endnotes

¹ The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), *A Nation at Risk*, U.S. Department of Education.

² *USA Today* (2007) “Our View on More Time in School: Needs of New Economy Trump Old School Calendar,” December 17, 2007.

³ Loveless, Tom (2007) *How Well Are American Students Learning?*, Brookings Institute.

⁴ See Education Policy Institute (2005) *Focus on Results: An Academic Impact Analysis of the Knowledge in Power Program (KIPP)*, (www.educationalpolicy.org); and Harold Doran and Darrel Drury (2002) *Evaluating Success: KIPP Educational Program Evaluation*, *New American Schools Education Performance Network*.

⁵ Many reports have addressed the impact of California’s K–3 CSR program. Most recently Peter Schrag comments on the politics of K–3 CSR in California and the poor implementation approach taken. See Peter Schrag (2007) “Policy from the Hip: Class-Size Reduction in California” *Brookings Papers on Education Policy: 2006–07* by Tom Loveless and Fredrick Hess eds., Brookings Institution Press. Also see George Bohrnstedt and Brian Stecher (2002) *What We Have Learned About Class Size Reduction in California*, CSR Research Consortium, submitted to the California Department of Education; and Christopher Jepsen and Steve Rivkin (2002) *Class Size Reduction, Teacher Quality, and the Academic Achievement in California Public Schools*, Public Policy Institute of California.

⁶ For examples of the benefits of K–3 CSR see Research Points (2003) *Class Size Reduction: Counting Students Can Count*, American Educational Research Association; U.S. Department of Education (1999) “Local Success Stories Reducing Class Size”; and Thomas Ouchi (2000) *The Cost and Benefit of Smaller Class Sizes in Wisconsin: A Further Evaluation of the SAGE Program*, Wisconsin Policy Research Institute (www.wpri.org).