

PRESS RELEASE

PACE Report Offers Opportunities to Strengthen TK–12 Education Governance in California Amid a Diminishing Federal Role

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[Policy Analysis for California Education](#) (PACE) has released a new report, [TK–12 Education Governance in California: Past, Present, and Future](#), that offers insights into long-standing structural complexities in California’s education system as well as recommendations for realigning roles and responsibilities to create more coherent education governance in California.

Over the past year, the federal government has initiated an unprecedented dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education, including the withdrawal of federal oversight, research, and technical assistance infrastructure that states have long relied upon. These shifts have already disrupted California’s school systems and pose further profound risks to the state’s ability to sustain a high-quality, equitable education system.

“California can no longer assume that the long-standing federal role in public education will remain intact, nor that federal functions will be restored in a stable or reliable way in the foreseeable future,” said the report’s lead author, PACE Director of Policy Research [Jeannie Myung](#). “In this context, California must strengthen its own internal capacity to carry out essential functions that ensure equity and drive improvement in our school systems.”

Since the state’s founding, California’s “double-headed” education governance structure—dividing authority between the elected Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and the governor-appointed State Board of Education (SBE)—has contributed to overlapping responsibilities and unclear lines of accountability. As early as 1920, a report of the California Legislature Special Committee on Education warned that “the present California educational organization must be regarded as temporary and transitional, and dangerous for the future, and it should be superseded at the earliest opportunity by a more rational form of state educational

organization.” Despite multiple reform efforts, many of the challenges resulting from this unstable structure persist.

Based on interviews with policymakers, researchers, and education leaders, the report identifies how diffuse accountability and fragmented authority undermine policymaking and implementation. Participants rated California’s overall education governance effectiveness at 2.8 out of 5, reflecting concerns about misaligned incentives, uneven capacity to carry out complex directives, and fiscal volatility that limits long-term planning.

“California is home to hardworking, thoughtful, and deeply dedicated educators, administrators, and policy leaders. Yet long-standing system challenges are holding us back,” said co-author [Heather Hough](#), senior policy and research fellow with PACE. “The report’s recommendations can help remove barriers and build a more coherent governance structure to ensure equitable opportunities for all students.”

A FRAMEWORK FOR MORE COHERENT GOVERNANCE

The new analysis highlights a three-domain model that may help align the state’s efforts to collaborate around a shared vision for student learning:

1. **Policy and funding:** Establish statewide priorities, develop education policy, and allocate resources via a coordinated, long-term approach.
2. **Implementation and capacity development:** Strengthen guidance, professional learning, and technical assistance through integrated state and regional supports.
3. **Evaluation and system accountability:** Monitor policy development, implementation, and impact while holding entities at all levels of the system accountable for outcomes, promoting continuous learning at all levels.

POTENTIAL PATHWAYS FORWARD

A reimagined education governance system would clarify roles and responsibilities to ensure that all three domains are aligned. Rather than suggesting constitutional changes—which have historically not gained voter approval—the report outlines statutory adjustments that could bring greater coherence and effectiveness.

Under this approach:

- The **governor** would hold clear responsibility for California’s TK–12 system, establishing statewide priorities and shaping policy through the budget process in partnership with the **legislature**.
- The **State Board of Education** would continue to translate laws into standards, frameworks, and accountability systems that guide policy and practice statewide, and would appoint a **CDE director** with the expertise to lead implementation and capacity-building efforts.
- The **CDE** would function as a trusted source for professional learning, technical assistance, and implementation support, helping districts build capacity to deliver on state priorities and working in close coordination with the **California Commission on Teacher Credentialing** to ensure that students have access to well-prepared, effective educators. Through **regional hubs**, the CDE would deliver tailored assistance that strengthens implementation and remains responsive to local context and needs.
- The **SPI**, as an elected and independent official, would have a strengthened responsibility for evaluation and system accountability, generating nonpartisan assessments of system effectiveness to inform policy and elevating student and family voices to ground California’s educational priorities in community needs.
- **County Offices of Education** would focus on their unique local strengths: rigorously evaluating district LCAPs and finances, and coordinating countywide resources to support students’ whole child needs.

This structure, aspects of which appear in many other states, offers clearer lines of authority and a more balanced distribution of responsibilities across the three governance domains.

Co-author [Julie Marsh](#), professor of education policy at the Rossier School of Education and Sol Price School of Public Policy at the University of Southern California, concludes: “These changes will introduce a period of transition, but given shifting federal responsibilities, declining enrollment, and widening achievement gaps, California can no longer postpone reforms that have been overdue for a century. We must take on the challenge of modernizing our governance system now.”

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