

COMMENTARY

Reflecting on a Year of Research, Partnership, and Policy Impact



AUTHOR

[Lupita Cortez Alcalá](#) | Policy Analysis for California Education, Stanford University

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Dear PACE Community,

As I reflect on my first year as Executive Director of [Policy Analysis for California Education](#) (PACE), I am deeply grateful for the many people across California who engage with and contribute to our work. I began the year with a listening tour across PACE's five university partners—Stanford, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UCLA, and USC—and expanded that engagement to UC Merced in the Central Valley. Those conversations, along with many others with policymakers, educators, practitioners, researchers, and community partners, reinforced for me PACE's distinctive role: connecting research to the questions facing California education and creating opportunities for evidence and experience to inform policy and practice.

This year provided powerful examples of that role in action. In December, PACE published [TK–12 Education Governance in California: Past, Present, and Future](#), examining California's fragmented state education governance structure and opportunities to clarify roles and responsibilities. The research became part of a broader statewide conversation, and in July Governor Newsom signed [AB 181 \(Alvarez and Patel\)](#), a significant restructuring of California's state education governance system that reflects central recommendations from PACE's research.

PACE also helped bring important research on English learner reclassification into the state policy conversation. Through a [PACE-hosted webinar](#), we highlighted research documenting substantial variation in

local reclassification practices and the opportunities to create a more consistent and equitable statewide approach. In September, Governor Newsom signed [**AB 2555 \(Patel\)**](#), translating key recommendations surfaced through this research into state policy, including a consistent statewide reclassification standard, stronger parent communication and monitoring of students after reclassification, and provisions addressing the reclassification of English learners with disabilities. Together, AB 181 and AB 2555 demonstrate the role PACE seeks to play: producing rigorous, independent research, bringing evidence into active policy conversations; and helping California translate research into meaningful policy change.

Our partnership with Stanford's [SCALE Initiative](#) on [Getting Down to Facts III](#) created another important opportunity to connect evidence with the issues facing California. Researchers, including PACE staff and faculty directors, disseminated 55 technical reports and 22 policy briefs examining school finance, the educator workforce, multilingual learners, early childhood education, special education, governance, instruction, and other critical issues. In close partnership with SCALE, PACE helped bring these findings into conversation with the people making and implementing policy through the statewide [Getting Down to Facts III conference](#); regional convenings in [Los Angeles](#), the [Bay Area](#), and [Central Valley](#); and legislative and state agency briefings. PACE has continued to build on this work through smaller policy discussions that bring researchers, policymakers, and practitioners together to consider the implications of the research and develop actionable policy recommendations for California.

PACE's work extends well beyond any one report or initiative. Over the past year, our researchers produced evidence on [mathematics](#), [literacy](#), [multilingual learners](#), [special education](#), [chronic absenteeism](#), [foster youth](#), [K–16 pathways](#), [finance](#), [governance](#), and [instructional improvement](#). We also strengthened partnerships across California—with universities, education organizations, practitioners, youth and family organizations, philanthropy, and research partners. These relationships matter because good education policy cannot be developed from research alone. It benefits from bringing rigorous evidence together with the knowledge and experience of the educators, leaders, students, families, and communities most affected by policy decisions.

Looking ahead, California is entering an especially important period for public education. In 2027, the state will have a new Governor, a newly elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction operating in a substantially different role, a Governor-appointed Education Commissioner leading the California Department of Education, and a reconstituted State Board of Education. AB 181 also begins a second phase of governance reform that provides an opportunity to examine California's broader systems of support, accountability, implementation, research, and evaluation. The question ahead is not simply who is in charge, but how California can better align its goals, policies, funding, implementation, support, accountability, research, and evaluation to improve opportunities and outcomes for students.

As I begin my second year, I am excited about the work ahead and deeply grateful to the PACE team, our faculty directors and researchers, and all of you who read our research, participate in [our convenings](#),

challenge our thinking, bring evidence into your work, and share your expertise with us. I am also deeply grateful to our philanthropic partners, whose continued investment makes PACE's independent research, policy engagement, and convening possible.

PACE's role is not to prescribe a single agenda for California education. It is to produce and elevate rigorous, nonpartisan research; identify where we need to learn more; and create a trusted space where researchers, policymakers, practitioners, educators, funders, and communities can come together around evidence. Thank you for being part of that work and for your shared commitment to improving opportunities and outcomes for California's students.

With gratitude,

Lupita Cortez Alcalá

Executive Director

Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)

Stanford University



Stanford Graduate School of Education

507 Lasuen Mall | Suite 205

Stanford, CA 94305

Phone: 650.576.8484

edpolicyinca.org

