



## *Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)*

# *POLICY BRIEF*

### **NATIONWIDE INFLUENCES ON CALIFORNIA EDUCATION POLICY**

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The good news is that academic achievement among California's public school students is improving. The bad news is that it still has far further to go before being able to meet so-called "world class standards." More troublesome yet, the state presently is beset by a complex web of troubling conditions which severely threaten continued education reform.

Dramatically increasing enrollments, declining real revenues, and debilitating political issues are combining to distract from a concentrated state effort to improve California's schools. Each of these conditions, as well as student performance, is itself the subject of a subsequent chapter in this report. However, here we wish to bring to the reader's attention another development which, while not currently on the front burner of policy consideration in California, we believe will become increasingly important in the future.

We refer to building public visibility and political consensus around *national* strategies for accelerating education reform. The following section describes these multiple national strategies, and the individuals and institutions responsible for them.

The message here is *not* that California's public education system is about to be subordinated to a monolithic national reform effort. Such is a remote if not impossible idea.

However, the following national reform proposals are establishing a new evolving context in which California policymakers and educators must operate. The previously mentioned distractions of enrollment growth, resource decline and political disruption are presently preventing these national reform strategies from exerting substantial influence in California. However, we predict that in time, the policy environment will evolve to the point that these ideas will be considered far more intensely.

### **NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM STRATEGIES**

For more than 350 years the hallmark of United States education has been local and state control. But in the past few years there has been a dramatic increase in nationwide initiatives for education policy. These initiatives may take many more years to become concrete, but by the end of the 1990s they are likely to have a major impact on states and localities across the United States.

Given the slow economic growth in most states, there will be few additional resources available for state education initiatives during most of the 1990s. Consequently, the period 1991–1995 will likely witness a larger portion of nationwide initiatives and a smaller complement of new state programs that were the hallmark of the 1980s. This turnabout represents a major contrast from the decade of the 1980s when state-level leadership (especially between 1983 and 1987) produced large-scale reform packages in 44 states and a net increase in education expenditures of 30 percent in real terms for the decade.

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The key concept here is *nationwide* influence as contrasted with *federal government* policies. Few prognosticators predict a large array of mandated federal policies, or substantial increases in federal aid. (Federal aid currently accounts for only 5 percent of total education expenditures.) The federal government's role will be more indirect, through supporting research and development and systematically reporting pupil outcomes.

For example, by the end of the 1990s, the U.S. likely will have nationwide curriculum standards and subject matter frameworks, though not a detailed national curriculum. Currently, nationwide policy is all around us—the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Test (ACT), school accreditation agencies such as the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges, and organizations such as the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the College Entrance Examination Board, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association. These policy-setting organizations do not represent a specific group or cross-section of education employees and they possess sufficient legitimacy to recommend or manage nationwide policies.

Many of the new 1990s political developments arise from the perception about the alleged dismal status of K–12 education standards as indicated by the following:

1. Current state and local standards for pupil achievement and teacher performance are lacking in rigor and do not provide uniform pupil outcome data crucially needed for interstate or local comparisons.
2. Commonly used multiple choice tests are excessively oriented to low-level basic skills that inappropriately emphasize single right answers. Moreover, the proclivity of local education agencies is to choose commercial tests that do *not* adequately emphasize analysis, statistical inference, mathematical problem-solving, hands-on science, synthesis, expository writing, and complex reading. Many widely available standardized tests, such as the California Test of Basic Skills, and Stanford or Metropolitan Achievement Tests are not geared to the high curricular standards of our economic competitors in Europe and Asia. Since the

United States is involved in worldwide economic competition, solely local control of tests and curriculum is a luxury the U.S. can no longer afford.

3. Since the commonly used standardized multiple choice tests are at such a low level, the parents and general public receive a “phony story” that exaggerates what U.S. pupils know and can do today compared to prior decades or to students in other nations. The “Lake Woebegone effect” becomes the reality.
4. U.S. tests and exams often do not contain “high stakes” for the pupils who take them. Few employers look at transcripts of high school graduates, and state assessments are not used for college entrance. The SAT is not aligned with the high school curriculum and alleges to measure “aptitude” rather than achievement.

As will be seen, a coalition of nationwide leaders has concluded that national subject matter curricular standards that meet world-class benchmarks are needed. This coalition contends that a nationwide exam system should be developed and aligned to these world class standards in five core subjects—English, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign languages. Moreover, the exams should be reported for individual students, and “high stakes” decisions should be based largely on student performance. Specifically, contends this group of leaders, employers should utilize the national exams when hiring high school graduates, and universities should consider national exam scores as well as high school grades. Further, these national initiatives need to be part of a state systemic reform strategy that revamps staff development and teacher training so that it is compatible with the national curricular standards.

California policy contained most of the elements of systemic reform by the late 1980s. The state's curriculum frameworks, for example, widely are acknowledged to be leading California toward “world class,” or at least model national curricular, standards. However, since the 1980s, the state has repealed its pupil assessment program and failed to invest adequately in staff development. Consequently, few teachers are

able to implement curriculum frameworks, and measurements of student achievement are spotty at best.

## **SPECIFIC COMPONENTS OF A FUTURE NATIONWIDE STRATEGY**

Several emerging and evolving components of a nationwide education strategy are described below. Some of the elements are compatible with one another. Others seemingly are in conflict. At least a portion of the policy debates around these issues will involve a process of sorting out, streamlining, combining, and perhaps eliminating strategies that currently are receiving national attention.

### **National Education Goals Panel**

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) resulted from the 1989 Charlottesville Summit of the president and the nation's governors. That summit produced the six national education goals. In 1992, the NEGP will be broadened to include members of Congress and public members, as well as representative governors and members of the Executive branch. (Congressional members were not included immediately after the 1989 summit and Congressional Democrats want education to broaden the structure and functions of NEGP.) The National Governors Association (NGA) has been unusually active in elaborating and measuring the national goals. NGA also is playing a major role in the annual reports which describe U.S. progress toward meeting the goals.

### **National Education Goals**

#### **1 . *Readiness for School***

By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

#### **2 . *High School Completion***

By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

#### **3 . *Student Achievement and Citizenship***

By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.

#### **4 . *Science and Mathematics***

By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

#### **5 . *Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning***

By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

#### **6 . *Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools***

By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

National standards, specifically, are contained in Goals 3 and 4:

- American students will leave grades four, eight and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
- U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.



## **National Council for Education Standards and Testing**

The National Council for Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) was created by Congress in 1991. The purpose of NCEST, a thirty-member bipartisan board co-chaired by the same governors that are leaders in National Education Goals Panel, is to decide the feasibility and desirability of national standards and assessments. The NCEST board represents is a good example of the emerging national coalition. Among its members are Governor Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. (R) South Carolina; Governor Roy Romer (D) Colorado; Gordon Ambach, Executive Director, Council of Chief State School Officers; U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D) New Mexico, Committee on Labor and Human Resources; Iris Carl, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics; Lynne V. Cheney, Executive Director, National Endowment for the Humanities; Ramon C. Cortines, Superintendent, San Francisco Unified School District; Chester E. Finn, Jr., Vanderbilt University; Keith Geiger, President, National Education Association; U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch (R) Utah, Committee on Labor and Human Resources; David Kearns, U.S. Department of Education (former CEO, Xerox Corporation); Roger B. Porter, The White House; Lauren Resnick, University of Pittsburgh; Roger Semerad, RJR Nabisco; Albert Shanker, President, American Federation of Teachers; and Marshall S. Smith, Dean, School of Education, Stanford University. NCEST's final report in January 1992 advocated the establishment of national standards and exams, with heavy reliance on "bottom-up initiatives" from professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). NCEST is important because, unlike the National Education Goals Panel, it has congressional authorization and participation, so it expands the coalition beyond the governors and Bush administration.

## **New Standards Project**

The New Standards Project (NSP) is funded by the Pew Memorial Trust and the MacArthur Foundation and is charged with building a national consensus for educational standards in five core subject areas (mathematical problem-solving, hands-on science, expository writing,

complex reading, and synthesis/analysis). NSP is co-directed by Marc Tucker of the National Center on Education and the Economy and Lauren Resnick of the University of Pittsburgh. NSP is also designing high-stakes examinations intended to be compatible with national standards. The first subject area test to be developed will probably be in mathematics using the NCTM standards regarded by many as world-class quality.

## **National Assessment of Educational Progress**

Since the 1970s, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has conducted periodic national assessments of student achievement in core subject areas. NAEP is funded by the federal government and overseen by a component of the U.S. Department of Education. The federal contractor is the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which supplies NAEP with subject matter trends for its reports. NAEP is *not* based on curricular standards or frameworks such as are envisioned for the high-stakes individual pupil exam by the National Education Goals Panel, National Council for Education Standards and Testing, or New Standards Project. NAEP is not meant to guide classroom syllabi and therefore its long-run future in "world-class high-stakes" exams is uncertain. In the short run, it will continue as an overall measure of educational attainment at the national and state levels, but will *not* be an exam each pupil takes. NAEP will be used to compare state performance and provide impetus for state curricular reform.

## **U.S. Labor Department Secretary's Commission for Achieving Necessary Skills**

This activity, known as SCANS, produced a report outlining the skills necessary for meeting the demands of the U.S. workplace. These workplace skills also provide guidance for pupil exams but are not entirely compatible with the concepts emphasized by New Standards Project or National Assessment of Educational Progress. SCANS stresses group work, oral communication, and interpersonal skills, but these skills are not featured, at least so far, by NAEP or NSP. Group skills, for example, are difficult to

combine with individual high-stakes examinations. These contradictions will need to be reconciled as policy debates continue.

### **New American Schools Development Corporation**

The New American Schools Development Corporation, known by the acronym NASDC, is a board composed primarily of big U.S. businesses that will fund several "break the mold" school experiments. All grantees must address "world-class" standards in the core subject areas specified in National Education Goals Panel and National Council for Education Standards and Testing. NASDC hopes to provide \$200 million in privately funded school experiments between 1992 and 1996, and will commit at least \$25 million in 1992 for design teams.

### **America 2000**

This is President Bush's proposed strategy to improve U.S. education by the year 2000. The proposal combines a series of federal, state, and private initiatives designed to meet the previously mentioned six national Education Goals. Most relevant to this analysis is the president's support for world-class standards, high-stakes testing, federal funding for break-the-mold schools developed by NASDC, and a continuation of NAEP. "America 2000" also includes a heavy press for "choice" extending to public and private schools. However, this issue will be fought out at the state rather than the federal level unless there is a change in Congress to Republican control.

### **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), based in Detroit, Michigan, has a 63-member board (two-thirds teachers) that will begin in 1994 to certify teachers nationally. NBPTS certification assessments will be based on the ability of teachers to teach the curriculum envisioned by the New Standards Project and National Assessment of Educational Progress. NBPTS views certification as appropriate solely for teachers with five or more years of experience. State and local education agencies

will be urged to reward teachers who pass NBPTS assessments and become "board certified." NBPTS assessments will be different from any current teacher evaluations and will feature the ability to adapt subject matter to diverse students. NBPTS assessments will stress teachers' knowledge of their students and demonstrated ability to cooperate with other teachers to improve local schools.

### **Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act (Two Bills Pending in Congress)**

These bills provide grants to states to be used for state systemic reform plans. Specifically, HR 3320 specifies federal aid shall be used to "develop innovative reform plans which include state achievement goals, a means for developing or adopting high quality, challenging curricular frameworks and coordinated curricular materials, professional development strategies, and assessment instruments." HR 3320 has bi-partisan Congressional support, but is opposed by the Bush administration which views it primarily as a Democratic alternative to America 2000.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR STATE POLICY**

These nationwide efforts may not result in all their intended outcomes or be as well integrated as the list above implies. However, it is likely that the general direction of all these initiatives will result in new nationwide and state policies by the end of the decade. Probably, the "national exam" will *not* be a single exam but rather an examination to which state pupil assessment systems could be anchored. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is likely to have the most immediate impact because it does not require development of the other national reform strategy components as prerequisites. Among other decisions, states will need to determine whether to recognize and reward board-certified teachers by 1994.

There is opposition to these national strategies—focused, for example, on the impracticality and cost of national exams. Nevertheless, the political momentum behind these national reform efforts is impressive and growing. The political support for national changes is *not* solely top-down, but rather stems from all directions, including business, professional associations

(NCTM), universities, and local school districts. As evidence of broad-based support, the January 1992 recommendations of the National Council for Education Standards and Testing for national standards and exams was supported by both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, as well as by the National School Boards Association.

The widest political disagreement concerns the federal role for meeting world-class standards and providing equity for all students. The view of most elected Republicans is that the federal role is limited to "keeping score" on progress toward the national goals and providing research and development. Many elected Democrats contend that the federal government should play a major role in funding state and local operations, especially for school readiness, finance equity, and the disadvantaged. After a protracted battle, the 1992 National Council on Education Standards and Testing report concluded that these functions are the responsibility of state and local education agencies. This political conflict over federal funding of school operations will likely intensify as more federal funds are made available for reallocation from defense cuts.

States need to monitor these developments carefully while keeping in mind that state curricular policy developed in the 1980s is quite similar to the orientation of these nationwide forces. California's new state assessment, for example, includes revamped curricular frameworks and individual testing, and is compatible with the high-stakes pupil outcomes.

Components of the national strategy can mesh productively. Standards, curriculum frameworks, and exams do form a nice package. State policy, therefore, needs to keep the interrelationships of these strategies in mind rather than merely look at them as discrete, independent reform efforts. Moreover, the developmental costs for these national efforts need not be borne by the hard-pressed state budgets, but rather can rely on foundations, businesses, and federal appropriations.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR CALIFORNIA

California state education policy will be shaped in many ways by these nationwide influences. California does not have a statewide goal-setting process or any specific education targets that it is trying to reach. Should California adopt the national goals without any supplementation for the unique California context?

California has an implicit set of education standards embodied in its subject matter curricular frameworks. However, these standards are not yet explicitly linked to a state exam or assessment. California's new student assessment program is at least three years away. Once in place, the new system is likely to be closely aligned to national exams since California leaders such as State Superintendent Honig and California Assessment Program Director Dale Carlson are key players in the nationwide coalition. Francie Alexander, who headed California curriculum frameworks development in the 1980s, has moved to the U.S. Department of Education where she is leading a similar national effort.

California may also be an early proponent of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Superintendent Honig is on the board. The board's Vice Chair is Claire Pelton, a San Jose Unified School District teacher. The teacher evaluation system that resulted from SB 813 in 1983 is *not* based on the sophisticated new concepts featured in NBPTS assessments. Simulations, portfolios, and demonstration teaching exercises, critical features of national board certification, no doubt will influence state and local policies. The national board's vision of "what teachers should know and be able to do" may also have a significant impact on California teacher preparation and induction.

California school districts have responded enthusiastically to the NASDC request for proposals for "break-the-mold" schools. Consortiums have been formed to spur large-scale innovative changes.

California also would benefit substantially from the pending bills in Congress (S2 and HR 3320) that stress systemic reform. California has an overall state policy vision that

includes the element of systemic reform, but many of these elements are implemented in a partial manner only. Conceptualization of the entire systemic process is sound and exemplary. But the implementation has faltered because of insufficient political consensus and a consequent lack of resources. This shortfall is particularly acute with respect to staff development and preservice teacher education.

New federal aid in S2 or HR 3320 could, at least partially, fill these gaps. Investment even to reach the teachers who want to teach the new state frameworks is woefully inadequate, and time and resources need to be invested to convert the skeptics as well.

Superintendent Honig has been able to envision the many interlocking parts of systemic reform. However, the dispute between the state superintendent and former governor George Deukmejian led to a gubernatorial veto of the crucial California Assessment Program, shattering the state's accountability system. The state's staggering pupil enrollment growth—in excess of 200,000 students a year—has stretched the state's resources for education "basics" and consigned reform initiatives to the fiscal background. California school districts are frequently so hard-pressed to contend with enrollment growth and limited-English-proficient (LEP) students that little time or resources are left to implement the state's reform vision.

Then there is the issue of preservice and inservice training. The state department of education has not had sufficient leverage over teacher preparation, especially in the California State University (CSU) system. (The University of California prepares only a small percentage of new teachers, while CSU accounts for between 60 and 70 percent.) In addition, there are some effective state staff development institutes and local programs, but these reach only a small percentage of teachers. Most local staff development programs are not even aligned with the state's curricular efforts. The state's large-scale academy for prospective principals, however, is well designed to help with leadership in systemic reform, especially in the curricular area.

Finally, state education department staff has been reduced drastically since 1989, a condition which has eroded the state's leadership capacity.

The state superintendent has been under fire from conflict of interest allegations concerning his wife's consulting firm, drawing time and attention away from reform efforts.

Nevertheless, California is "inching forward" and making progress on systemic reform. The curriculum frameworks drive the education dialogue in the state. The recession has slowed but not stopped this process. A crucial priority is to focus on the missing elements in the implementation of systemic reform—primarily building teacher and school-site decision-making capacity. The subject matter frameworks and texts are in reasonable condition to support successful change. The testing system is uncertain. A small school-based decision-making restructuring program (\$8 million) will become operational in 1992–93. California has been a leader in school-linked social services and this remains a priority of Governor Wilson, who hopes to expand this effort in 1992–93 with \$40 million in operational grants to local schools and social service agencies.

These components of a systemic reform package for California's schools undoubtedly would result in greater reform progress if they were fully implemented. However, current concerns for awesome enrollment growth, shrinking real resources, and political controversy are overshadowing important successes that have been made. These conditions hold the prospect for impeding the additional future changes that are badly needed.

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