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*California's 'North Star' for Education Leaders*

## Scholars Bridge Gap Between Policy, Research

By Lynn Olson

BERKELEY, CALIF.—Two years ago, in the midst of a heated debate in the California legislature over whether to eliminate the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, a proponent of the proposal stood up, waved a red, white, and blue publication, and declared: "PACE says eliminate this."

Leaping to his feet, a supporter of the commission waved his own copy of the report, and shouted: "No it doesn't!"

The incident exemplifies the growing role that PACE—or Policy Analysis for California Education—has played in the often vigorous debates waged on school issues in California since its creation in 1983.

At a time when many states are seeking a broader base of information on which to base their education policies, the university-based research center offers at least one model for providing such data.

PACE's mission is to provide policymakers with a "nonpartisan, objective, independent body" of information about K-12 schooling in California. According



PHOTO: COURTESY OF PACE

**Allan R. Odden, director of the Southern California PACE Center (center), discusses PACE's annual compendium of education facts and statistics.**

to both lawmakers and educators, its numerous analyses on the state's schools have provided an invaluable source of information during one of the most active education-reform periods in the state's history.

As one advocate put it, PACE has helped to "provide a much better feel for what is actually happening in education."

"They've brought together data that were available before," said Kati Hay-

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# Scholars Are Bridging the Gap Between Policy, Research in California

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cock, director of the Achievement Council, an advocacy group for minority and low-income youngsters, "but from so many different sources that [in the past] it was almost impossible to get an overview of what was happening in K-12."

The research endeavor is a cooperative effort between the schools of education at the University of California at Berkeley and Stanford University, two of the state's most prestigious institutions.

Additional centers are located in Sacramento, the capital, and in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California.

## 'A Benchmark'

Supporters say that, unlike much university research, which often remains far-removed from the hurly burly of politics, PACE was designed to provide quick turnaround on precisely those issues that most occupy legislators' minds.

Gerald C. Hayward, director of PACE's Sacramento center and former chancellor of California's community-college system, said, "I worked for the state legislature for 10 years, and I can tell you that there was a lot of stuff that came out of quality institutions that was not relevant for policymakers."

"There was a lot of cynicism about it," he added. "Oh, here comes another report that nobody will read, that doesn't have anything to do with what we want to find out as policymakers."

In contrast, noted William Whiteneck, a consultant to the state's Senate Education Committee, PACE's "materials are often used as a benchmark or a reference."

To date, PACE has published more than 20 papers and publications on a range of topics that includes teacher supply and demand, vocational education, curricular changes in high schools, school counseling, administrator preparation, teacher credentialing, and the use of state lottery funds by local school districts.

In addition, its annual compendium of education facts and statistics, "Conditions of Education in California," is generally viewed as the pre-eminent resource book on the state's school system.

The nearly 200-page document of charts, graphs, and interpretation

draws on governmental and quasi-governmental data bases, PACE's own research, and information supplied by other professional and private research groups.

## 'Turn Around the Track'

To ensure the timeliness of their work, PACE investigators set their research agenda based on what co-director Michael W. Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford University, describes as a "turn around the track."

At least once a year, PACE staff members roam the halls of the Capitol, meeting with the major policymakers in education, including those in the legislature, the state department of education, and the Governor's office.

Based on those meetings, they compile a list of policy issues that key decisionmakers expect to face in the next six months to a year. It is predominantly from that list that PACE studies are drawn.

As a result, Mr. Whiteneck said, "I think they have studied and reported on current issues of most con-

cern to both legislators and state policymakers in California. They don't seem to go off and study something people aren't interested in."

In contrast, he noted, "most consulting groups either think up ideas on their own or respond to requests for proposals."

## Core Funding

PACE's flexibility in choosing topics to study—and its ability to remain aloof from partisan concerns—is in large measure a result of its structure and funding arrangements.

One-third of PACE's annual funding, or approximately \$300,000 of its \$1-million budget, comes from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The money is not tied to a specific project.

In addition, groups and agencies that include the state education department, the legislature, the Metropolitan Life Foundation, and the Clark Foundation in New York City have financed specific studies.

Such funding is channeled through the universities, which are actually

the grantees for the programs and must approve all PACE projects.

In general, PACE analysts do not receive a salary beyond that supplied by the universities, with the exception of summer pay. Mr. Hayward, who works for PACE on a part-time basis, receives 40 percent of his salary from the organization.

Because PACE's core funding is from a private foundation, Mr. Kirst said, "we are free to choose some things that government is not studying that ought to be studied."

"We are not a contract outfit," he noted, "and everybody working here is a tenured professor" who does not depend on PACE for his livelihood.

The organization's directors said they had agreed never to accept more than two-thirds of their funds from the government, in order to retain their independence.

In addition, they have tried to keep the operation small: There are six full-time professional staff; approximately 20 graduate students and part-time research associates;

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Gerald C. Hayward, director of PACE's Sacramento center (right), chats with John Garamendi, a California state senator, and Ann Reynolds, the chancellor of the state university system.

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and 10 clerical workers.

Much of PACE's research is conducted by the directors themselves, who have a hand in all of the center's reports. The organization also commissions experts within the California university system to conduct individual studies.

A small advisory group reviews the technical quality of PACE's research. A permanent advisory board—which includes such influential figures as Robert Maynard, editor and president of the *Oakland Tribune*, and A. Alan Post, a retired legislative analyst—helps chart PACE's overall goals and directions.

### 'Fuller Brush Kit'

The dissemination of PACE research is also distinctly different from that done by many other academicians.

"When you do a paper, the way you get it disseminated to academics is you publish it," said Allan R. Odden, director of the Southern California PACE Center and associate professor of education at the University of Southern California.

"The way you get it disseminated in the policy arena," he said, "is you go up to Sacramento and you hand it around and you knock on people's doors."

Added James W. Guthrie, co-director of PACE and a professor of education at Berkeley: "Mr. Hayward is in Sacramento most of the time. Others of us go up periodically. And we have a Fuller Brush kit of ideas and products that we put on policymakers' desks and talk about."

Most of PACE's larger studies take eight months to a year to complete. Typically, they are planned to have the most impact by being released shortly before the start of the budgetary and legislative cycles in September. The studies are aimed at a key group of some 150 policymakers, who are on a central mailing list to receive all of PACE's reports.

Although the researchers also convert their work into papers for scholarly journals, those products may appear well after the original policy documents.

"We have to get the benediction and approval and support from our academic colleagues in order to stay credible in the policy arena," Mr. Odden said. "But it doesn't matter when we get it. If we publish 18 months [after the policy report is released], that's fine."

### Brokers of Information

In addition to their more formal publications, PACE staff members also act as "brokers of information": convening meetings at lawmakers' requests; giving speeches to some 200 groups a year; providing interim briefings on their research to small gatherings; and answering requests for information about education in California through letters, personal visits, and more informal mechanisms.

In 1985, for instance, PACE initiated the Sacramento Seminar, a forum that brings together the chief executive officers of the state's most powerful education interest groups every other month to discuss ideas.

In another example, a group of legislative staff members asked PACE to meet with them and researchers familiar with career ladders for teachers.

"At the end of the meeting," Mr. Hayward said, "we wrote up a model statute and sent it out to all of the people present. Now, that language is in the current bill that is carrying the major teacher-reform proposals in the state."

"That's a good example," he said, "of quick turnaround."

In addition, added Mr. Kirst, "some of our impact has been in discouraging people from proposing bad ideas."

"We argued strongly with various state officials not to propose a statewide salary schedule [for teachers]," he said. "We thought it was a bad idea, and gave them a number of reasons why, and never published it."

In general, Mr. Guthrie said, PACE's personal approach to providing services and information has been indispensable.

"If one wanted to wait until you could get a calendar coincidence of all the major policymakers, you'd be sitting in a corner sucking your thumb for years," he said. "They'd just never all come together in one place."

"The alternative strategy," he noted, "is to go to them in sequence."

According to Mr. Kirst, PACE was created largely because policymakers do not have the time for reflective analyses.

"Despite the fact that California has the largest and best-staffed state government of any that I know of in terms of policy analysis," he said, "there is still not much reflec-

tive capacity."

Legislators and their staff are "all caught up in day-to-day budget items, rather than long-term issues," he said, adding that they cannot "get detached to do any in-depth work."

### Replication

According to PACE's founders, few university-based groups like PACE exist in the field of education.

"As we have gone around the country," Mr. Kirst said, "we are surprised and disappointed at how the major state universities, which are often in the state capitals, do not have the kind of visibility and impact and policy-analysis capacity that we have generated here."

"I think it's partly just a history of detachment," he said. "I think universities grew up with a view that education and politics shouldn't mix that closely, and that gap has never been bridged."

Lorraine M. McDonnell, a senior political scientist for the RAND Corporation, a national consulting firm, said, "I've looked at information networks in a lot of different states, and I think PACE is unique, and a really important resource in this state."

"It means that a lot of things that in many states either wouldn't get done or would get done in government—and, therefore, might be suspect—are being done here," she said.

According to Mr. Guthrie, PACE's development has been aided greatly by the high quality of the state's educational data base—including the California Assessment Program and the California Basic Education Data System.

"With the exception of New York, it's unlikely that there's any state that can match California for educational data," he said.

Nonetheless, he added, PACE has received queries from other states interested in replicating its work. Even without a rich data base, he suggested, other universities could strive to create a PACE-like organization.

PACE's directors respond to such queries by recommending that research groups begin by publishing technical information on such issues as teacher supply and demand, or studies that summarize what policymakers are doing in other states in an area of particular concern to legislators.

"Start with some opinion surveys," Mr. Kirst suggested. "Start

with useful things where just straight data would help a lot."

"Don't start off with hot potatoes, like vocational education, or the fact that there are too many school administrators being trained," he cautioned. "Start with these other things, and then work your way back into the more controversial policy issues from that base."

Another important task for university-based research groups, Mr. Hayward said, "is to point out data gaps."

"There often needs to be somebody external to the bureaucratic maze and the legislative maze who says, 'We need to have some information on these items,'" he said. "That would be a good, early thing for a group to do."

While PACE may be alone in the field of education, Marshall Smith, dean of the school of education at Stanford, noted that it is similar to the applied-research groups that exist in many other fields.

"The project may be unique in the country in the care with which people are looking at the nature of the educational system in a state," he said, "but I don't think that it is qualitatively different than what might exist at the University of Wisconsin, where somebody might be studying the transportation system in the state, or doing an analysis of the leisure industry, or the problems of agricultural markets."

"Economists are studying social phenomena that are current all the time," he noted, "and they're doing it in a policy framework; their statements may have direct policy relevance."

### Eighty Years

One aspect of PACE that may be difficult for other groups to replicate, however, is the experience of the men who run it.

Mr. Guthrie, Mr. Hayward, Mr. Kirst, and Mr. Odden have had a combined total of nearly 80 years' work in the education-policy-making arena:

- Mr. Guthrie was an education specialist in the U.S. Senate and a special assistant in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare before coming to Berkeley.

- Mr. Kirst served as president of the California State Board of Education from 1977-1981, and has also

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held positions within the federal government.

• Mr. Odden worked with the Education Commission of the States for a decade, and has consulted with numerous states about their school-finance programs.

• Mr. Hayward served for 10 years as principal consultant to the California Senate Committee on Education and, subsequently, its Committee on Finance, before becoming chancellor of the state's community-college system.

PACE's associate director, Jacob E. Adams Jr., has worked for Clinton-Reilly Campaigns, a professional campaign-management firm in San Francisco, and has held staff positions with the California State Department of Education and the Committee on Ways and Means in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Not many states are easily going to find that combination of experience," Mr. Guthrie said.

Mr. Kirst agreed. "The experience obviously helps you understand the context and how to operate and how to talk with policymakers," he said.

But most of all, he added, it gives PACE legitimacy. "State capitals are basically pretty small towns," he said. "To stay consistently in a state capital and be a player for 15 or 20 years, as Jerry and I have done, is just enormously useful."

"The experience gives you legitimacy in their eyes," he said, "and it also gives you a style of personal contacts and even personal friendships that are really very important."

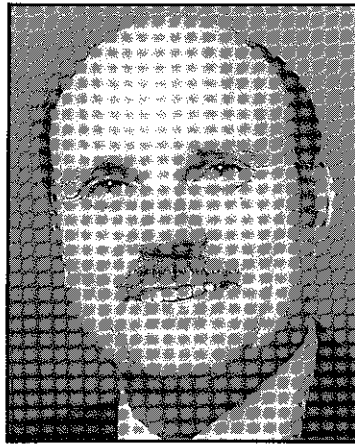
### Media Strategy

To heighten its influence and visibility, PACE has designed a strong media strategy.

"It's a top priority for us," Mr. Kirst said. "I think a lot of reporters don't call professors because professors regard reporters as a pain, and don't call them back. They know we'll get back fast, and they know we'll spend time with them."

"We believe that a lot of public policy is influenced by what people read in the newspaper," he added, "and that a crucial dissemination strategy is through the media."

PACE's annual report on the "Conditions of Education in California," for example, is released simultaneously at press conferences in three cities in the state.



**Michael W. Kirst**

PACE directors also spend a lot of time working with reporters in small towns, because, as Mr. Kirst noted, "the legislature is everywhere."

### Walking a Thin Line

Treading the thin line between partisan politics and educational interest groups, however, has not been easy.

"We don't try to wade into the fray deliberately," Mr. Kirst said, "but if asked, we'll come in."

Mr. Odden, for example, in January wrote an editorial at the request of the *Los Angeles Times* arguing that Gov. George Deukmejian's proposed budget "falls short of what is needed to stay even and threatens continued improvements in the quality of education" in California.

"We all were on the telephone talking about that" article, Mr. Guthrie recalled. "We discussed it. The only reason that we decided to do it is because we thought those were the facts."

"We would be doomed if we got too cozily in the camp of any party," he noted. "The most troublesome part of that, so far, has been with Bill Honig [state superintendent of schools]—because, in our judgment, he has been a dynamic voice for education reform in directions with which, generally, all of us personally concur."

"To hold ourselves at arm's length from all of that and be dispassionate takes continual conscious effort," he said.

### Remaining Neutral

In general, PACE appears to have succeeded in maintaining a neutral

stance. But a few observers have questioned whether, because of its close ties to those in power, the organization is too conservative.

For example, Catherine Minicucci, a consultant in the areas of precollegiate and higher education, said, "While PACE has done some important work on issues of great importance to Bill Honig, it has not concentrated on some of the biggest issues confronting us in California."

They include, she said, the low skill levels of large numbers of black and Hispanic youngsters; a high dropout rate; the unmet needs of large numbers of language-minority youths; and overcrowding in the schools.

PACE analysts said they have not conducted research on bilingual education, in particular, because they lack expertise in that area. But they plan to address the issue, in part, through a proposed study of categorical programs.

Raymon Cortines, superintendent of the San Francisco school system, said, "I know both Guthrie and Kirst and find them objective and very candid and very apolitical."

"Now, that doesn't mean that there are not times they agree with the superintendent," he said. "But I have also known times when they have been constructively critical. I don't think they are aligned [with any particular party], and I don't think they should be."

Being part of the university system has helped PACE to maintain its neutrality, Mr. Odden said.

"In the long term," he said, "I think that universities connote nonpartisan, independent, objective views. There is an institutional aura."

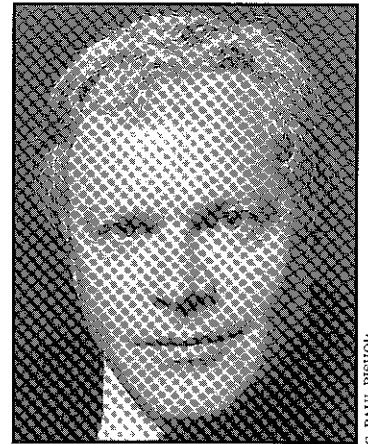
Others said PACE has provided an invaluable supplement to the government's work.

According to Mr. Honig, PACE conducts studies "in many of the areas of research we just can't undertake."

"We don't have the resources to do it," he said.

Bernard Gifford, dean of Berkeley's graduate school of education, credited PACE with elevating the level of the education debate in California—from arguments about whether certain statistics are correct, to discussions focused on policy.

"Some people might not agree with [PACE's] results," commented Herbert Salinger, executive director of the California School Boards Association,



**James W. Guthrie**

"but the fact is that it's extremely helpful information that's needed."

### 'North Star'

Maintaining that careful balance between opposing political forces may be even more crucial for PACE in the coming year.

In the past few months, Mr. Honig, a Democrat, and Governor Deukmejian, a Republican, have been caught up in a war of words about the status of education funding in California.

Mr. Deukmejian has questioned whether all of the money invested in schooling has produced enough results. He favors maintaining school funding at its current levels. Mr. Honig has warned that, without substantial increases in funding, California's school-reform movement could wither and die.

"I think the current stalemate between the Governor and the state superintendent is very worrisome," Mr. Kirst said. "It's quite conceivable that after four years of feast, there's going to be four years of famine" in educational spending.

"That makes information all the more important in terms of what is happening to the system in an overall sense," he said, "to get people beyond what is featured in the daily papers as a shouting match between Honig and Deukmejian."

Said Mr. Guthrie, "One of our board members used a metaphor . . . which is probably accurate."

"He said, 'If PACE doesn't act as the North Star for educational policy, looking for the next issue on the horizon, then it's not doing its job.'"

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### 'We're Trying To Get Below the Surface of Numbers'

This year, Policy Analysis for California Education—PACE—has undertaken two of its most ambitious projects to date: a study of the impact of education reform at the local level, and an assessment of the condition of children in the state.

Known as "PACE-ACE," the first study is being financed with \$175,000 from the California legislature. It focuses on 12 high schools and 6 middle schools that have been relatively active in carrying out the initiatives required under California's education-reform law, Senate Bill 813.

Over the course of a year, teams of researchers are spending about 13 days at each school developing case studies.

"We're trying to get below the surface of numbers to understand the real impact in the classroom," said Michael W. Kirst, co-director of PACE.

The study will try to determine whether key provisions in the reform measure are being carried out in secondary schools. It will also attempt to identify the local factors associated with successful implementation, and the elements of state policy that may hinder or help reform efforts.

In addition, researchers will try to assess the law's impact on the school curriculum, the knowledge and instructional skills of teachers, and the knowledge and performance of students.

#### Stimulating Reform

Allan R. Odden, director of the Southern California PACE Center and project director for the study, said, "We ought to get out of this some clear strategies both locally and at the state level for stimulating high-school reform."

In addition, PACE researchers expect to make a series of recommendations for fine-tuning S B 813.

But the study does not attempt

to evaluate the overall success or failure of the state's reform efforts.

Mr. Kirst said they excluded from the study schools that were not actively pursuing education reform because the state government did not want to evaluate S B 813's results prematurely.

In general, he said, he agreed with that decision.

But it raises some cautionary flags about PACE's ability to maintain its independence, in the face of a large influx of state dollars.

"When [PACE] was taking money totally from outside the government, they could say, 'Hey, we have no ties. We're totally outside of it.' Now that's changed," said Lorraine M. McDonnell, senior political scientist with the RAND Corporation, a California-based consulting firm.

"As someone working at RAND, I'd be the last to say that's going to compromise their research," she added, "because I don't think it needs to. But it's an issue."

Others predicted that the study—one of the first in the nation to examine with precision the effects of a state's school-reform initiatives—will be invaluable in guiding future reform efforts.

"It's terribly important, not just for the state, but for the country to have a handle on the effects of the reform movement," said Marshall Smith, dean of the school of education at Stanford University.

#### Conditions of Children

The second major initiative—paid for with \$137,500 each from the James Irvine and Stuart foundations—will attempt to characterize the overall condition of children in the state in much the same way that PACE's "Conditions of Education in California" sheds light on children's educational status.

"It's a huge effort for us," said James W. Guthrie, also a co-director of PACE.

tor of PACE.

"The reason for it is that it became clear that children are embedded in a larger context, and schools can't do it all," he said. "It was a conscious effort to expand the reach—and, hopefully, preserve the core—of what we've done to this point."

According to PACE researchers, a growing number of California children are "at risk" in terms of health, poverty, crime, suicide, and substance abuse.

In addition, increasing numbers of disadvantaged and limited-English-proficient children are entering the state's public schools each year.

Because the schools traditionally have not had much success in educating such students, the PACE researchers argue, it is imperative that policymakers begin to understand the connection between the conditions of education and the profound social and economic changes shaping children's lives.

The first version of the report is expected to be released early next year. Like the "Conditions of Education" report, it will include data as well as interpretive essays by experts in the field.

Unlike "Conditions of Education," it will not rely as heavily on statistics, because so much information is lacking about children's general well-being.

"We're dealing with such disparate folks here—mental health, criminal justice," Mr. Guthrie said. "One of the tricks for us is going to be to get these topics integrated, and to look for a kind of cohesiveness that professionals in those fields don't have."

According to Mr. Kirst, the study will strive to conceptualize a "new vision of delivering children's services," based on the assumption that neither the schools nor the family can "do it all."

—L.O.