USC Rossier

MAGAZINE

The California Way

CHARTING A PATH FOR K–12 EDUCATION POLICY

USC ROSSIER SCHOOL OF EDUCATION : SPRING / SUMMER 2017

Dear Friends of Rossier,

In March 2017, former U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. paid a visit to USC Rossier shortly after becoming the new CEO and president of Education Trust. His message? More than ever before, states had to lead the way if we were to continue to ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

Historically, educational oversight had been left to state and local governments. That changed in 1965, when Congress passed President Lyndon Johnson's landmark legislation, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It mandated equal access to a quality education for all students.

Nearly 20 years later, in 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education issued "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," which painted a bleak picture of America's educational system as a whole, emphasizing the need to improve the nation's curriculum standards.

While "A Nation at Risk" played a role in shaping George W. Bush's reauthorization of ESEA in 2001, known as the No Child Left Behind Act, it also set the stage for the state and local education measures that began to proliferate in the 1990s. Some of those milestones that have come to shape our state's educational landscape are listed on pages 4 and 5. President Barack Obama's reauthorization of ESEA in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act, is yet another step toward increased state control.

This is part of the background we had in mind when we set about gathering the stories for this issue. Is there a California Way of navigating the future of K-12 education policy?

Unlike the uncertainty we are experiencing today on a national level, our state is witnessing an extended period of stability and cooperation among practitioners, policymakers, researchers and state agencies. As the stories in this issue show, USC Rossier faculty, students and alumni are part of this collaboration to lead all students of California to a more equitable future.

Fight On!

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PHOTO BY BRIAN MORRI

USC Rossier MAGAZINE

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DEPARTMENTS

Students at Rialto High School are finding a smoother path to college thanks, in part, to the impact of California's Local Control Funding Formula.

FEATURES

PHOTO BY MARGARET MOLLOY. BACK COVER PHOTO BY BRIAN MORRI


Louisiana
CHINESE FOOD
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FREEDOM SQUARE
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We have it.
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The California Way

At a time when the direction of national education priorities is unclear, collaboration among teachers, administrators and researchers is charting a path forward for the more than 6 million public school students throughout the state. —R

California's K–12 Milestones

Before Proposition 13, there was *Serrano v. Priest*, the landmark school funding case that set the transformative "People's Initiative" into motion. Here are some of the most notable K-12 education milestones in California of the past half-century —

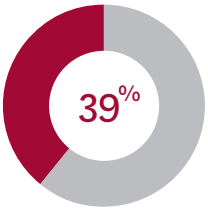
1971

In *Serrano v. Priest*, the California Supreme Court rules that the wealth-based funding system of California public schools was in violation of the U.S. Constitution's Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

1978

Proposition 13 places limitations on property taxes, which has a lasting impact on California public schools.

1988



Proposition 98 requires at least 39 percent of the state's budget be spent on K-12 education, with annual increases dependent on per capita growth and student enrollment numbers.

1992

The first charter school opens in California, second in the nation following one in Minnesota in 1991.

1998

Proposition 227, also called the English Language in Public Schools Statute, is approved by voters and effectively eliminates bilingual classes. In 2016, Proposition 58 effectively repeals Proposition 227, thereby allowing non-English languages to be used in public educational instruction.

2000

Proposition 39 requires "that public school facilities should be shared fairly among all public school pupils, including those in charter schools." The amendment further requires school districts to provide facilities that will sufficiently accommodate all of a charter's in-district students, while being "reasonably equivalent" to other classrooms, buildings or facilities in the district.

2001

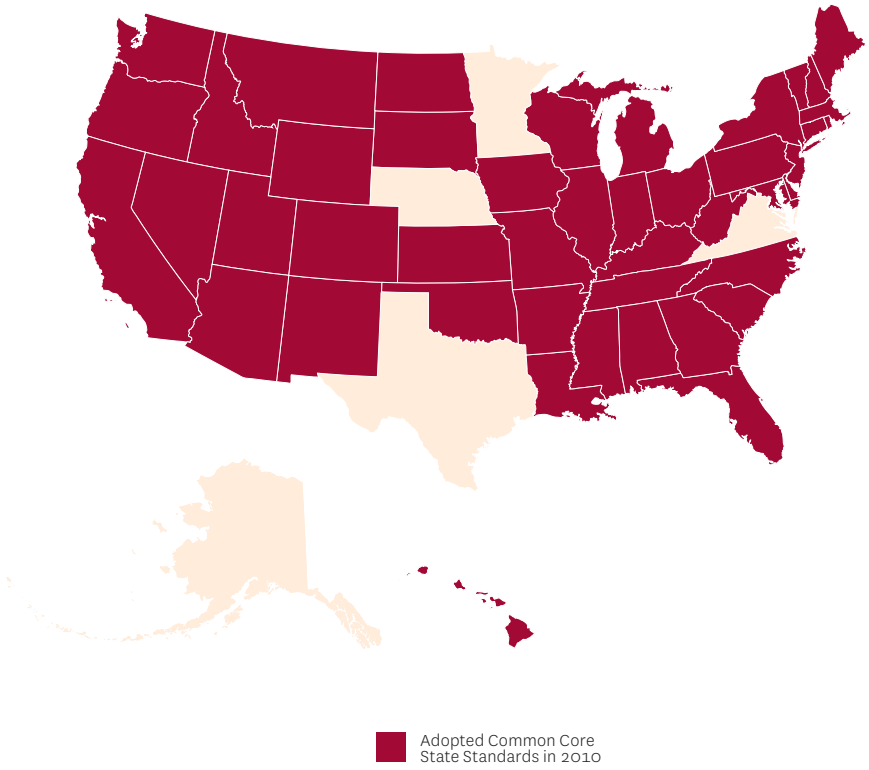
The No Child Left Behind Act reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. To receive federal school funding, states are required to administer assessments to all students at select grade levels.

2004

Williams v. California argues that teaching quality, books and school conditions were worse in low-income schools, offering less educational opportunity for low-income children and English language learners than for middle-income children. The case settles out of court and results in an extra $1 billion dollar allocation to equalize conditions, including the phasing out of the "multi-track" year-round school calendar.

2010

California Joins 45 other states, Washington, DC, and two territories in adopting the Common Core State Standards.



2012

Proposition 30, also known as the "Schools and Local Public Safety Protection Act," temporarily increases the sales tax rate for all taxpayers and the personal income tax rates for upper-income taxpayers. In 2016, voters approve Proposition 55, extending the personal income tax increase measures of Proposition 30.

2013

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) replaces the previous K-12 finance system that had been in existence for roughly 40 years.

2015

President Obama signs the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), reauthorizing the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

SETTING THE PACE

By Susan L. Wampler

How a research center based at USC Rossier, Stanford and UC Davis is helping California forge its own path in advancing its education system —

In May 2016, on the Monday following USC Rossier's two commencement ceremonies, more than 50 policymakers, philanthropists and researchers gathered bright and early across the street from the USC campus for a two-day conference. The goal? Hashing out a research agenda that would inform teacher policy in California and beyond.

USC Rossier Professors Julie Marsh and Katharine Strunk hosted the convening under the sponsorship of PACE — Policy Analysis for California Education. Founded in 1983, PACE is based at three academic institutions — the USC Rossier School of Education, Stanford University's Graduate School of Education and the School of Education at University of California, Davis.

By late January 2017, Marsh and Strunk, along with USC Rossier graduate student Paul Bruno, had synthesized the proceedings into a brief that debuted at a one-day PACE seminar in Sacramento that once again addressed the broad landscape of education in California, including the latest research on school funding adequacy, teacher policies and cross-system alignment.

It might have been one week into the start of an uncertain presidential era, but it was also six years deep into an unprecedented era of synergy among California's researchers, policymakers and practitioners. Together — and with the help of an organization like PACE — they are working to sustain a continued focus on improvement for students up and down the state and within each of its 1,100 districts.

RELEVANT, IMPACTFUL RESEARCH

"The California academic community is uniquely committed to research that is relevant to policy discussions" and to getting that research into the hands of decision makers, says David Plank, executive director of PACE. "Academic research has a much more direct and powerful impact on education policy in California than in any other state I know of." Plank previously taught at universities in Pennsylvania and Michigan and is now based at Stanford.

One area of PACE's focus has been the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which dramatically changed the state's 40-year approach to K-12 budget allocation. "Up until 2013, California had among the most — if not the most — state-centric education policy in the country," Plank says. "The legislature controlled all of the money and basically made the rules for a thousand school districts."

The new formula delegates much of that power to individual school districts. Plank says this shift also has significantly broadened the audience for PACE's work. For instance, as districts struggle with how to facilitate meaningful stakeholder engagement — which is required under LCFF's accountability system, the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) — or whether LCFF is complementing or conflicting with Common Core State Standards (CCSS), they benefit from studies conducted by PACE's academic partners.

In spring 2017, Marsh, Rossier's faculty director at PACE and an expert on accountability and instructional reform policies, was among a team of researchers that shared their emerging findings on LCFF at a PACE forum in Sacramento. She was also part of another team that presented research on the most recent PACE/USC Rossier Poll, which found that while public interest in participating in school goal-setting and resource allocation decisions was high among California voters, actual participation — such as voting in school board elections or attending board and LCFF meetings — lagged significantly. Now in its sixth year, the annual poll addresses a wide range of topics, from perceptions of teachers and public school performance to standardized testing.

> "We hope to provide some policy guidance and an understanding of who's participating and why."
>
> — Julie Marsh, associate professor at USC Rossier and faculty co-director at PACE

Julie Marsh at a PACE seminar in January 2017.

Insights gleaned from USC Rossier research and the latest poll could drive novel approaches to foster engagement, Marsh notes. "We hope to provide some policy guidance and an understanding of who's participating and why."

PHOTO COURTESY OF PACE

Marsh has co-authored several papers and policy briefs on lingering challenges in LCFF implementation. While superintendents and educators remain enthusiastic about local control (see "A Tale of Two Districts," p. 10), additional clarity is needed around the LCAP's purpose, as well as how districts are interpreting the law's equity mandate.

"There needs to be some real hard thinking about whether the LCAP can accomplish all of its goals — engagement, strategic planning and accountability," Marsh says. "There may be more innovative approaches, such as piloting different methods to achieve those goals."

Thanks in part to ongoing research by PACE and USC Rossier, and the statewide discussion it has helped generate, LCFF is in its third iteration as lawmakers continue to refine the policy based on study data and district feedback.

THE CALIFORNIA WAY: FROM LOCAL CONTROL TO A COLLABORATION OF CORE DISTRICTS

While the research suggests that LCFF is still a "work in progress," Plank highlights one of its key strengths. "Rather than identifying who's doing badly and either punishing or sanctioning them, it's identifying who's facing challenges and trying to provide them with support," he notes. "That's quite different from other states."

According to postdoctoral fellow Michelle Hall PhD '16 — who wrote her dissertation on the new law — "LCFF and LCAP are unique. The only state with something similar is Hawaii, but it has only one school district for the entire state." She says that, since California implemented the new model, other states are watching and are interested in trying similar policies.

"It's not as though the ideas in California are brand new, but they are working together here in a way that stands out," Plank adds.

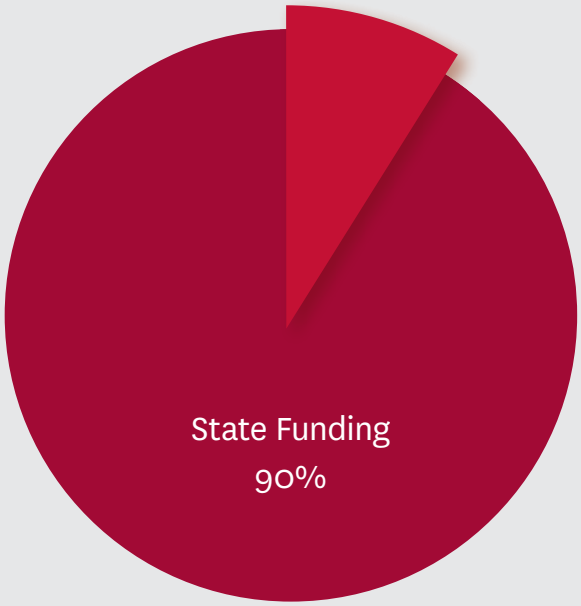
California State Board of Education Vice President Ilene Straus EdD '00 explains one of the reasons the state is forging its own path. "We have about $88 billion in our state education budget, of which $8 billion — or approximately 10 percent — is federal dollars. So our bias is that 90 percent of the budget is state money. And we have a really big state."

> "Academic research has a much more direct and powerful impact on education policy in California than in any other state I know of."
>
> —David Plank, executive director of PACE

PHOTOS BY MARGARET MOLLOY

FORGING OUR OWN PATH

Only about 10% of California's $88 billion budget comes from federal funding.



Straus explains that California continues to try to align with the federal government, but its priority is on what works best for California students.

Plank adds that California was curiously often at odds with the U.S. Department of Education under the Obama administration. When the state was in a pilot phase with Common Core State Standards the federal government expected California to use the old standardized tests. "We would have been administering tests that were not aligned to our new standards," he says. "California refused."

The California Office to Reform Education (CORE) — a consortium of eight large districts across the state — sought and obtained a waiver from federal policy to implement a new system to evaluate school performance rather than using the accountability systems under the former No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), now replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, see "Influencing the Conversation," p. 14).

"A lot of folks think of CORE as early adopters of an ESSA-like acountability system," says Marsh, who, along with PACE colleagues, has been conducting research to support CORE's efforts. "We've been documenting their experiences early on in adopting this new policy as a way of helping the rest of the country see some of the issues that might come up when you implement a system different from what we had in the past."

One of the distinctive aspects of CORE's system of measuring school performance, she says, is not just inclusion of English-language arts and mathematics achievement but also nonacademic measures, such as social-emotional learning. Unlike NCLB, CORE's system also moved away from sanctions as a consequence for low performance to a more collaborative, capacity-building approach, Marsh adds.

STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

Besides the quality and breadth of research coming out of USC Rossier, the school location provides PACE with another significant advantage, Plank says. "Strategically, Rossier is actually, in some respects, the key to PACE's future because Southern California is where the kids are and it's where the issues arise," he adds, noting that Los Angeles alone has more than one-quarter of the state's K-12 students.

"As we move into this new LCFF era, the importance of learning from our experiences and disseminating what we learn to other districts, to other educators, is only going to increase," he says. "We have a really solid foundation with the work Rossier does here, with the work we do at PACE, and I think we're leading the way into the future." —R

Alex Cherniss EdD '08, superintendent of the San Marino Unified School District, visits an 8th grade science class at Huntington Middle School.

A TALE OF TWO DISTRICTS

California's school funding model is changing the concept of local control —

By Susan L. Wampler

Of California's 1,100 school districts, no two are alike. So why would they all follow the same approach for deciding how to allocate funding? That's the thinking behind the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which ushered in sweeping changes to the state's K-12 resource distribution. Case in point: the San Marino and Rialto school districts.

PHOTOS BY MARGARET MOLLOY

With two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school, the San Marino Unified School District educates some 3,000 students in a leafy, predominantly residential suburb with wide, well-maintained streets, plentiful parks and gardens and some of the most expensive home prices in Los Angeles County. Low-income students make up fewer than 5 percent of overall enrollment, which is overwhelmingly Asian and white, reflecting the San Marino demographics.

Some 50 miles inland to the east, in San Bernardino County — a major industrial center — enrollment at the 26,000-student Rialto Unified School District mirrors the community's largely Latino population, with Rialto High School's student body, for instance, at 89 percent Latino. While the 29 different schools comprising the district vary demographically, all maintain relatively high percentages of low-income students and English-language learners. As an example, the district's Sam V. Curtis Elementary School includes 43 percent English-language learners, with 85 percent of its student body coming from low-income families.

PRIORITIZING NEED

When LCFF passed — giving school districts much more freedom in allocating resources — Alex Cherniss EdD '08, was chief financial officer for the Los Angeles County Office of Education. There he oversaw 81 school districts and was a strong advocate for the new funding model, which prioritizes low-income students, English-language learners and foster youth. Now superintendent of the San Marino Unified School District, he also teaches school finance at USC Rossier, giving him a broad outlook on the subject.

"From a practical perspective, more money is flowing to districts with a higher percentage of students that qualify for funding based on language or other needs," Cherniss explains. "At San Marino, we don't have a high degree of students on free or reduced-price lunch, so the funding we receive is easily 30 percent to 40 percent less per student than, say, in L.A. Unified."

Implementation of LCFF coincided with a California ballot initiative — Proposition 30 — that halted a large funding cut. Nonetheless, districts like San Marino often must seek philanthropic support from foundations, individual parents and the Parent Teacher Association to raise money to reach the state's average level of funding. San Marino receives approximately $7,500 per student compared with the $10,000 state average.

For 14 consecutive years, San Marino was the state's highest-performing school district under the former accountability measurement system, the Academic Performance Index. It remains a top performer under the new system, although LCFF does not rank districts or individual schools.

The district emphasizes "the three A's": academics, athletics and arts, and is expanding its curricular offerings in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). While many districts have had to cut back on arts education, San Marino prides itself on being a champion of the arts, with extensive programmatic offerings in band, choir, dance, drama, instrumental music and more. Much of that support comes from philanthropy, and the district is actively raising money for its new Barth Athletics Complex.

"It's a challenge," Cherniss says, noting that San Marino recently passed a parcel tax to help fund its school district. "We're doing everything we can to have an adequate level of funding close to what the average school district in California receives."

LOCAL CONTROL

Superintendent Cuauhtémoc Avila EdD '11 took the helm of the then-troubled Rialto Unified School District in 2015. He is widely credited with launching a significant turnaround for the district, with two schools garnering California Gold Ribbon recognition and programs at several others winning awards.

Due to its high concentration of low-income students and English-language learners, the district now receives an additional $66 million a year through LCFF, which is helping the Rialto district focus on three priorities: early childhood literacy, pre-K through third grade; college and career readiness with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM); and ongoing professional development for teachers. He says a remaining challenge is encouraging teachers in his district to let go of past practices or programs that are not showing desired results.

San Marino serves 3,000 students in two elementary schools (including Valentine Elementary), one middle school and one high school.

However, for Avila, the most important provision of LCFF has been the local control aspect — not the increased funding. The previous resource allocation formula was so restrictive and complicated that it tied the hands of local districts to serve the unique needs of their students, he says. "You couldn't use the money where you really needed it." He also took the concept of local control a step further, giving principals in the district more authority as well.

The newfound flexibility, however, has brought its own challenges. The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) — a centerpiece of LCFF — lacked clarity in purpose and structure. It was intended to serve as a device for strategic planning as well as community engagement but, in many parts of the state, has been used as more of a compliance document.

Superintendent Cuauhtémoc Avila EdD '11 of Rialto Unified School District with students from Rialto High School's Mathematics, Engineering, Science and Achievement (MESA) program.

The state continues to refine the LCAP, with input from education leaders and scholars from USC Rossier, including Associate Professor Julie Marsh and postdoctoral fellow Michelle Hall PhD '16, who co-authored a report in April for the LCFF Research Collaborative.

"Our findings point to some clear areas where the state and districts need to make adjustments," Marsh says. "Districts need help in understanding the intent of the policy and more support in key areas, such as how to relate investment decisions to outcomes, how to evaluate progress toward goals and how to broaden and deepen stakeholder engagement."

"Because it was local control, there was so much interest it almost seemed like an internal free-for-all fight for resources," Avila says. "We had so many areas we wanted to focus on as a district that it was difficult to home in and prioritize." Still, he notes, the resulting process was a positive one. "It opened up a lot of discussion. Then you come up with a viable program that's going to really benefit the kids in the community."

ADEQUACY VERSUS EQUITY

Despite benefiting from the new formula, Avila agrees that additional funding is needed throughout the system. "Because one of the eight target areas of the new law is to provide a quality staff, an immediate focus was the statewide demand — as we came out of the recession — to provide pay increases to staff. It limited the money that would be used to provide programs directly to kids," he says.

Personnel expenses can be as high as 80 percent of a district's overall budget, Cherniss notes. "It's hard to measure how much

Rialto High School is one of 29 schools in the district.

PHOTOS BY MARGARET MOLLOY

has gone to other things that improve the education of the kids, like technology or lower class sizes," he says.

"California public education is underfunded," he adds. "We're clearly in the lower tier of per-pupil funding in the United States. Districts are having to make huge increases in retirement contributions every year, and it's beginning to outstrip their annual revenues. Many districts right now are deficit-spending."

He shares the example of the Inglewood Unified School District's bankruptcy — the result of long-term deficit spending — which had to be resolved through a state loan. "If funding slows down, we could see another really challenging time for public schools," he says.

"In my Rossier classes, we talk a lot about adequacy versus equity," Cherniss says. "We need to make sure that all kids in the state are getting adequate funding. Equity is critically important as well. Many districts face a lot of real challenges, so there's a lot of justification for large urban districts to have more funding than other districts. I see both sides of it."

"We definitely could do a lot more with more money," Avila says. "But that's not always the answer. You can pour money into problems and still end up with the same results if you don't come up with a viable plan and commit yourself to it. It's really about the practices, and developing the strategic planning that can make your practices more effective."

LOOKING FORWARD

While Cherniss notes that districts ranking high in standardized test scores typically have been located in more affluent communities, the state has developed indicators — the new California School Dashboard — that show performance isn't necessarily tied to socioeconomics.

"The goal is to change the paradigm of how we identify high-performing schools," he says. "There are great schools all over Los Angeles and throughout the state that are not in high socioeconomic communities. It's hard to capture the reasons why certain school districts are high-achieving. It's not all about dollars and cents." — ***R***

Great Expectations

Edgar Zazueta, a second-year student in the USC Rossier Doctor of Education (EdD) in Organizational Change and Leadership program, serves on the advisory board of PACE's LCFF Research Collaborative. There he teams with Associate Professor Julie Marsh and other experts — many of them USC Rossier alumni — in exploring new and better ways to measure how districts hold up their end of the bargain.

"When LCFF was being debated, I was on the front lines in Sacramento on behalf of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) trying to push that forward — not only because it would benefit the district but because an equity-based formula was the right thing to do," he says.

Zazueta spent nine years with LAUSD — first as chief legislative representative and later as its director of government relations and then external affairs. Prior to that he worked with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans and in the office of a California state senator focusing on education issues.

In November 2015, Zazueta joined the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), where, as senior director of policy and government relations, he led the organization's advocacy efforts in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

"I've seen the opportunities and challenges of LCFF from the perspective of California's largest district to now hearing from ACSA members around the state," he says.

Among those challenges is a lack of sufficient resources. "The system is still very much underfunded," Zazueta notes. "I visit schools and districts around the state, and I've yet to encounter a teacher, school administrator or superintendent who says, 'OK, we're good. We don't need any more.' LCFF really has to be the mechanism to go to your community and, in a time of scarce resources, determine what to prioritize."

Another issue is measuring whether the new approach is driving accountability and stakeholder engagement. "In some places, the LCAP is being used as a strategic planning document for school leaders," he says. "In others, it does feel like a compliance exercise. This is an experiment in many ways, about the whole notion of local control and giving so much authority to those districts. We all have a responsibility to continue to evaluate that, analyze it and draw on best practices to ensure we're really driving systemic change."

Zazueta's path may have taken him away from his original dream to teach, but he has devoted his entire career to advancing education.

"Being on this side of things, getting my doctorate and getting to work with these researchers, I have a better appreciation that the data is so underutilized," Zazueta adds. "Whether it's LCFF, charter schools or other public policy issues, we really should rely on the best thinking and research. That's what I find exciting now." — ***Susan L. Wampler***

PHOTO COURTESY OF EDGAR ZAZUETA

Influencing the Conversation

By Martha Groves

A collaborative partnership among school districts is becoming a game changer in California —

Garden Grove Superintendent Gabriela Mafi ME '00, EdD '02 keeps fellow Superintendent Stefanie Phillips EdD '05 in nearby Santa Ana on speed dial, and the pair meet for lunch once a month.

"We know each other well," says Mafi. "We share issues and best practices across districts, including issues with our boards or collective bargaining."

Mafi and Phillips are more than just fellow alumnae of USC Rossier — they represent districts that are part of a consortium called CORE, the California Office to Reform Education. They agree that the ability to reach out regularly to other urban superintendents is one of the many benefits of their CORE connection.

The CORE partnership began in 2010 as a collaboration of districts — all facing such challenges as poverty and racial gaps in learning — to explore ways to improve teaching and academic success. In addition to Garden Grove and Santa Ana, the CORE districts include Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento and San Francisco. Combined, these urban districts serve about 1 million students.

CORE districts have thrust themselves into the vanguard of the nationwide accountability discussion by working collaboratively to create a shared data system that helps them work within and across local districts to improve student outcomes.

CORE's unique system seeks to measure not only academic results but also nonacademic factors. Those include chronic absenteeism, suspension and expulsion rates, students' social-emotional skills (growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-awareness, social awareness) and school climate and culture (feelings of safety and connectedness, opportunities for meaningful participation and the quality of relationships between students and staff).

Stefanie Phillips EdD '05 (at left) and Michelle King EdD '17 (above) became superintendents last year at Santa Ana Unified and LA Unified, respectively.

"A REALLY GREAT THINK TANK"

Member superintendents meet formally once a quarter and informally — by phone or in person, in twos or threes — much more often.

Michelle King EdD '17, a CORE colleague who leads the Los Angeles Unified School District, says the collaboration with other CORE superintendents has helped her handle the stresses of the pressure-cooker job she took on in January 2016 in California's largest school district. (Mafi is the veteran of the trio, with nearly four years at the helm of Garden Grove's schools, and Phillips is also relatively new, having taken over Santa Ana Unified in July 2016.)

> "CORE has allowed our district to have a greater voice with state and federal officials. Our students and needs are being discussed at an advocacy level in a way they haven't been before."
>
> — Gabriela Mafi ME '00, EdD '02, superintendent of Garden Grove Unified School District

"Being a superintendent is a rewarding, albeit an extremely challenging, job," says King, who was recently named Superintendent of the Year by the National Association of School Superintendents. "Having other superintendents to talk to and share insights with is so important. CORE has given me the opportunity to make and expand these key relationships across the entire state."

Phillips says she feels like part of a "really great think tank" that encourages the sharing of best practices and ideas. "It has been a safe place to really explore not just what the research says but how that has been implemented in real life," she says.

Researchers are also benefiting from the connections that are taking shape in CORE.

"We've found that educators are overwhelmingly supportive

of this notion of measuring schools in a more holistic way," says Julie Marsh, an associate professor at the USC Rossier School of Education. "They have been frustrated by the overreliance on test scores in two subject areas — math and English-language arts."

Marsh is part of a team tracking the CORE districts' progress for PACE, Policy Analysis for California Education (See "Setting the Pace," p. 6). PACE and CORE are partners in the effort to weigh results and share an agenda that not only supports the districts' own goals but also informs state-level policy.

The research is helping to make CORE districts part of the broader conversation about education accountability and continuous improvement in California and throughout the nation.

"CORE has allowed our district to have a greater voice with state and federal officials," says Mafi. "Our students and needs are being discussed at an advocacy level in a way they haven't been before."

GETTING TO THE CORE OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

CORE districts are among the most multicultural in the nation. As schools grow more varied — in terms of race, culture and economic backgrounds — many educators are finding it valuable to look at students' "social and emotional" skills to learn why some children thrive and others struggle.

CORE is delving deeply into an exploration of how these factors affect student performance. Is their school welcoming? Do they feel they belong? Do they feel comfortable asking questions in class, or do teachers discourage them? Do students give up easily, or do they have the sort of grit and determination that would serve them well in college and career? The districts are also seeking to engage more with parents on these topics.

Researchers like Marsh and postdoctoral fellow Michelle Hall PhD '16 are then using the data to examine how districts are using this information to advance social-emotional learning and build supportive climates.

School staff and human resources consultants are working together in this regard, says Phillips, who also has an MBA from UC Davis. "They see what's working, and it really changes the conversation," she says. "People then ask: Is our school climate suitable? How is that district able to offer this or that program, yet I'm not able to do the same? Is there a training gap? A program gap? Where are we missing the boat?"

King has also seen the benefit of CORE's wider research to her own district.

"We didn't have concrete data on how kids feel and the relationship that has to attendance and dropouts," she says. "We're starting to look at achievement levels based on some of these pieces. Self-regulation [how students control their own behavior] is another one. We hadn't looked at it that much until CORE introduced us."

The new emphasis has made Mafi realize that districts need to look more closely at issues like bullying and teacher expectations around poverty's effect on students to see how those factors are affecting learning.

In Phillips' view, "the research is phenomenal." Over time, she and others acknowledge, CORE will be able to provide much more robust analysis than any district could on its own.

"I wouldn't have been able to design data systems without CORE," she says.

One example: The superintendents say CORE recently identified a troubling math gap for African American and Latino students in fourth through eighth grades. The superintendents enlisted the help of consultants from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to dig deeper into the phenomenon.

"Traditionally in Garden Grove," says Mafi, "our math scores have been higher than our English-language-arts (ELA) scores because we have a large number of English learners. Now our ELA scores are higher than the math scores. That's perplexing, and we need to dig deeper."

CORE hopes to benefit from what Carnegie calls "improvement science" — the use of vigorous inquiry to solve a specific problem of practice. Marsh says she and other PACE researchers are in the field now, gathering information from educators in CORE districts and schools that they hope will identify practices that advance students' social and emotional learning and relate them to students' ability to learn math.

Although it's too soon to evaluate CORE's effect on student achievement, Mafi, Phillips and King agree that CORE is influencing the conversation about school accountability and student success.

As for what lies ahead, King says: "The most exciting thing is the ability to change the game."

"You have a group of large urban school districts coming together, and you have the synergy that comes from that," she says. "We have voice and influence at the state level. We're going to be able to trailblaze in the future and have an impact on what public education looks like in the state of California." —R

Gabriela Mafi ME '00, EdD '02 has been superintendent of Garden Grove Unified since 2013.

Leading the Way

Collaboration of CORE districts influencing state's accountability strategies

After relying for many years primarily on standardized-test scores to evaluate schools' success or failure, the state of California recently embarked on a shift to multiple metrics. As early adopters of more robust data-driven accountability strategies, CORE districts are helping to lead the way.

"Luckily for California, there is much to be learned from the CORE districts about how local leaders can work together to improve student outcomes." That was one conclusion of a 2016 report by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE).

"The ultimate goal of CORE is that you would glean lessons around policy and practice that could be shared and taken up across the different districts," says Julie Marsh, an associate professor at the USC Rossier School of Education and co-director of PACE.

Rick Miller, executive director of Sacramento-based CORE, applauds the change to a broader array of metrics.

In 2010, Miller was a deputy superintendent at the California Department of Education when the superintendents of Long Beach and Fresno unified school districts approached him about developing a means for big urban districts to collaborate to raise the quality of education. Miller left the state agency and raised money from philanthropy to launch the nonprofit California Office to Reform Education (CORE).

"Teachers working together can get better," says Miller. "Why not districts? There is no need for them to be in isolation. They can work together, share struggles and get better together."

Miller praised the CORE districts' superintendents for setting priorities germane to their individual districts even as they collaborate. Santa Ana, for example, has focused on how to assess and improve math performance. Garden Grove, meanwhile, has demonstrated how a central office can lead change by interacting effectively with school sites. Los Angeles, the state's largest and most complex district, has worked to develop robust data on schools' "social-emotional" factors, a tricky realm.

"Think of the complexity of what CORE is trying to do," says Marsh. "Measuring math skills and knowledge on a standardized test is more efficient. Measuring additional outcomes, such as social-emotional skills, is more expensive and complex."

CORE districts, she adds, need time to help educate teachers, staff and parents about these notions and how to build best practices into the classroom.

— Martha Groves

PHOTO BY MARGARET MOLLOY

Changing the Formula

Using social media to impact policy —

By Matthew Kredell

PHOTO BY MARGARET MOLLOY

Associate Professor Morgan Polikoff received the Early Career Award in April at the conference of the American Educational Research Association.

Sometimes it can take a long while for professors to see their research make a real-world impact. By taking his scholarship public through social media, USC Rossier Associate Professor Morgan Polikoff has become one of the most influential experts in national and state education policy.

The most notable example is a letter to the U.S. Secretary of Education that Polikoff wrote last July expressing that the Department of Education should not mandate the use of proficiency rates as a metric of school performance.

Scholars knew that the performance-based metrics of No Child Left Behind were not working, but with its successor — the Every State Succeeds Act (ESSA) — it seemed as though the Department of Education was going to repeat the same mistakes when it came to measuring and reporting student achievement.

When the window opened for public comment on ESSA rules, Polikoff felt it was his duty as an expert in education policy to advocate on behalf of policies that would improve education for the nation's children.

Rather than submit the letter on his own, he first posted it on his blog in hopes of gaining support from other education-policy experts. He ended up getting a total of 93 signatures from educational researchers, K-12 educators and other interested parties.

"I was thinking if I could get 10 prominent education researchers who wanted to sign it, that would be great," Polikoff says. "Once I posted it, it went as viral as anything a professor does goes viral. It got much more buzz than I was expecting, and I was getting a few emails a day from people I didn't know saying they liked the letter and wanted to sign it."

His main point was simple: By holding schools accountable based on the average standardized test scores of students rather than the percentage of students who are proficient, it would incentivize schools to focus on every student rather than those just below the proficiency cutoff.

The final rules were changed to reflect Polikoff's recommendation. While the Trump administration has since repealed the regulations, states can move forward with some of the ideas put forward in the letter.

Representatives from departments of education in four states — Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa and Massachusetts — have contacted Polikoff to discuss changes they could make as states exert more freedom from federal education policy, with Colorado citing the letter in its accountability plan.

> "To have your research be influential in policy and practice, you have to be more intentional about it."
>
> — Morgan Polikoff, associate professor at USC Rossier

"His recommendations to use average scale score and performance indexes were very much in sync with Connecticut's approach and evolution," says Ajit Gopalakrishnan, chief performance officer for the Connecticut Department of Education. "Our commissioner met with Dr. Polikoff at a national event, and I followed up with Dr. Polikoff after that event to share what Connecticut was doing and express our appreciation for his advocacy for a better approach to student achievement."

Polikoff also is making an impact in California's education policy. He served on the state superintendent's task force to overhaul the accountability system, which informed the development of the California School Dashboard using multiple indicators to measure a successful school rather than focusing solely on standardized test scores.

A mathematics major in college who once planned to be a secondary math teacher, Polikoff takes a personal interest in research into the effectiveness of math textbooks in California and other states. He is continuing research this year on a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as co-principal investigator of a project titled "Never Judge a Book by its Cover, Use Student Achievement Instead." In April, he received the Early Career Award at the conference of the American Educational Research Association.

Polikoff indicates that he's always thinking about how he can take the work he's doing and make it more relevant through policy briefs, blogging, presentations to academic and non-academic audiences, and on Twitter, where he's one of the most prominent USC professors, with more than 4,500 followers.

"If you want to bring your work to bear on policy issues, I think you have to do more than just publish it in peer-reviewed journals," Polikoff says. "To have your research be influential in policy and practice, you have to be more intentional about it. For me, being an engaged, public intellectual is essential."—R

KEEPING THE DREAM OF EDUCATION ALIVE

PHOTO BY MARGARET MOLLOY

Belmont High School Principal Kristen McGregor '85, EdD '07 offers support to students concerned about presumed changes in immigration policy.

A principal and her staff allay the fears of students caught in the middle of the national debate over immigration policy —

By Elaine Woo

"This Room is a Sanctuary" reads the poster pinned to the blackboard in teacher Mike Bin's classroom at Belmont High School in downtown Los Angeles. Since Donald Trump won the White House on a platform of tighter immigration control, that message has resonated at this campus with 1,050 students, many of whom are immigrants or the children of immigrants from Central America and Mexico.

"These are children coming from war-torn, difficult, dangerous places, who are coming here for the American Dream," says Principal Kristen McGregor '85, EdD '07, who is also an adjunct assistant professor in USC Rossier's Master of Arts in Teaching program.

Many of the students identify as DREAMers, a term coined from the 2010 DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors). Although that policy did not pass the House of Representatives, two years later President Barack Obama signed into law the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which offers a work permit and temporary reprieve from deportation to people who were brought to the United States as children and remained in the country without authorization.

"So there is fear when you say we're going to build a wall and kick out all of these people," says McGregor.

She and her staff have responded by opening their arms wider.

"I say I'm mom to 1,000 kids. I tell them, 'You're my babies. I'm going to protect you,'" the veteran educator says.

To address their concerns, McGregor has met individually with students and their families to answer questions. She has encouraged teachers to discuss the controversy over immigration policy in class without taking sides and with an emphasis on the resources available to students to move forward with their education.

Through classroom presentations, Belmont has provided students with information about their rights and referrals for legal advice and other services. More basic needs of the predominantly low-income student body are also met. In storage areas near her office, McGregor stocks donated canned food items, coats, sweaters and other used apparel.

"My job is to make sure we have an educated society," she says. "I want to keep these kids in school and give them as many opportunities as possible."

SAFE ZONES

Belmont is part of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), where schools were declared "safe zones" by the Los Angeles Board of Education last year. The board instructed campus administrators that any Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents who attempt to enter schools in search of students be sent to district headquarters.

So far the policy has not been tested, but anxiety runs high. In March, federal agents detained a man near a public charter school in Lincoln Heights, where he had just dropped off his 12-year-old daughter. The incident further rattled students already worried about themselves or friends and family who lack authorization to live in the United States.

"The level of anxiety for these students is very difficult for a teacher to see," says Bin, an algebra and English-language development teacher in his 21st year at Belmont.

"You hear it in the way they talk to each other," he continues. "I hear things like, 'Did they actually deport somebody who was walking down the street? Am I going to be grabbed next? Do I have to start hiding now? Are they going to take my father or mother away from me?'"

The toll on students could be gauged in the first few months of 2017 by at least one important measure: Applications for college financial aid were down (see "Quit does not exist," p. 25).

According to McGregor, 70 percent of Belmont's seniors completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, last year. This year, only 42 percent had applied through early March. Principals at other district high schools had noted similar declines, she says.

Alarmed by the drop, McGregor and her staff redoubled their efforts and brought the total up to 77 percent, better than last year.

Extra resources from a federal grant to prepare low-income students for success in postsecondary education have helped

> "My job is to make sure we have an educated society. I want to keep these kids in school and give them as many opportunities as possible."
>
> — Kristen McGregor '85, EdD '07, principal of Belmont High School

Belmont keep track of college-bound students while providing support for students needing help writing essays and filling out applications.

Bin says he wished that President Trump and others calling for a crackdown on illegal immigration could meet his students. Three days a week after school, up to 45 pupils in various stages of learning English voluntarily gather in his room to be tutored by other students. The tutors get free popcorn and community service credit while their pupils receive free help in math and English.

For many students, it isn't easy to give up an hour out of their day. Like other students who entered the country without parents, Marcus (not his real name), an undocumented 17-year-old from El Salvador, has to work to support himself. He starts most days at Belmont after working from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. as a busboy.

It's an exhausting schedule, but Marcus has progressed rapidly in English and has a solid B in Bin's math class. "I want to have a better future," Marcus says. He is considering college.

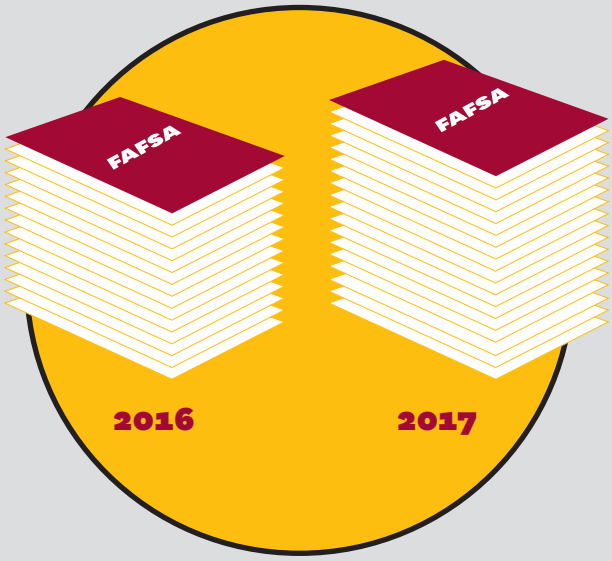
Melvin came from El Salvador at age 17 with his mother and had a job as a mechanic before enrolling at Belmont. Now 20, he is in the 11th grade and working toward his diploma and legal residency.

After he graduates from Belmont, he would like to study mechanical engineering in college.

"It will be hard," he says, "but not impossible." —R

The walls of Belmont High School include messages of reassurance and inspiration for its students.

FAFSA APPLICATIONS HOLDING STRONG



Last year, **70 percent** of Belmont's seniors completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. This year, the number went up to **77 percent**, despite initial concerns among students.

PHOTOS BY MARGARET MOLLOY

"Quit does not exist"

DREAMer and SCCAC adviser Omar Hernandez draws on his personal experience

By Elaine Woo

Omar Ivan Hernandez was only one when he left his native Mexico with his mother and brother in 1993 and entered the United States illegally. He grew up in Garden Grove and graduated from Santiago High School in 2009. He is now back at his alma mater as a member of the Southern California College Advising Corps (SCCAC), a program run by USC Rossier's Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice (CERPP).

He sees himself in many of the students he is advising, especially in light of the uncertainty emerging in the new national administration.

The day after the election in November, students filled his office, spewing tears and anxious questions about the new president's vows to crack down on illegal immigration.

"They were asking me, 'What's going to happen to my parents? What's going to happen to me? Should I apply to college anymore?'" Hernandez recalls.

At one point, Hernandez went to his car, shut the door and gave in to his own raw emotions. "I cried for 30 minutes," he says. "Then I regrouped and went back to work. My students were asking me questions they weren't asking their teachers. Having been in their shoes, I was able to bring them some comfort."

Eight years ago, Hernandez enrolled at Cal State Fullerton after graduating high school but dropped out after a year because he could not afford to pay for tuition and books despite working several jobs. Financial aid was not an option because of his undocumented status, so he continued his education at a community college, unsure if he would ever have the resources to return for a four-year degree.

Then, in 2012, President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program allowed Hernandez to apply for financial aid, which enabled him to resume his studies at Cal State Fullerton. In 2015 he earned a bachelor's degree in human services and became the first member of his family to graduate from college.

After graduating, he joined SCCAC, launched in 2013 by CERPP in partnership with the national nonprofit College Advising Corps. The program places recent college graduates in 23 high schools to serve as full-time college counselors for two years, with the goal of improving college outcomes for first-generation, low-income and other disadvantaged students.

By coincidence, Hernandez was assigned to his former school, where he oversees college planning for 470 seniors. A few dozen students are undocumented.

When they have voiced their fears that applying for college or financial aid will expose them to immigration authorities, Hernandez thinks about his hard-working parents, particularly his father, who installs flooring for a living. His father's work is literally backbreaking: The long hours bending over have led to two surgeries and several metal screws that hold his spine together.

"He always told me, 'Go to school, work your brain. Don't work your back like I do. Get your education.' That stuck with me. So I tell my kids: 'Quit does not exist. Push forward, keep working, get your education. No one will ever take that away. That diploma will always be there.'"

Superintendent Paul Gothold EdD '17 (center, in tie) celebrates with Lynwood students.

THE LYNWOOD WAY

By Diane Krieger

College Board's AP District of the Year honors go to district led by Paul Gothold EdD '17 —

How do you take a faltering urban school district from a 58 percent graduation rate to over 90 percent in just seven years?

Ask Paul Gothold EdD '17, superintendent of Lynwood Unified School District, whose effective strategy included the expansion of the Advanced Placement (AP) program.

In late February, Lynwood Unified was named 2017 AP District of the Year. The national honor recognizes three outstanding school systems out of the hundreds that meet the College Board's rigorous criteria. To be eligible for the award, districts must both increase the number of students taking AP classes and increase passage rates on the exams. Only three percent of districts nationwide have done so.

Lynwood's first-place finish is all the more extraordinary given that its AP students are 96 percent underrepresented students of color and 94 percent of them qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. National data from 2016 show that among students of color with a high degree of readiness for AP, only about half enroll in the college-level courses.

FULL EQUITY AND ACCESS

When Gothold arrived as deputy superintendent in 2010, Lynwood Unified was a failing system.

"Financially, we were on the brink of receivership," says the new USC Rossier doctoral graduate, who was a member of the first cohort of Rossier's executive EdD program, designed for current and rising superintendents.

PHOTOS COURTESY LYNWOOD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

A four-day huddle with 50 stakeholders — including parents, students, teachers, administrators, union leaders, the mayor and the school board — yielded a laser-focused new mission: Full equity and access emerged as the "Lynwood Way."

"There wasn't any guesswork about what we were doing," Gothold recalls. "Collectively, we built a system that would ensure equity and access to college for all students. It should be our students who make the choice whether they go to college, not the educational system."

"EVERY CHILD CAN LEARN ANYTHING"

Gothold's roots are in the L.A. County Department of Education Principal's Administrative Unit schools — the system that serves juvenile corrections facilities, youths on probation and students who have been expelled from other schools.

"When I started teaching there, I just fell in love with the work," he says.

Told that his pupils were functioning at the fifth-grade level, Gothold refused to lower the standards of the high school curriculum. "Did they have holes in their learning? Yeah. Those kids had a litany of issues coming into the classroom. But my experience is that when you raise expectations, kids are going to exceed them. I believe every child can learn anything. I haven't changed that philosophy in 23 years," he says.

"We have the freedom to accept the challenge of an AP class," says Apisaloma Siufua, a junior at Lynwood High School. "If we feel we are ready, then that's all we need."

At Lynwood, the road toward higher education begins in pre-kindergarten. The push for college-readiness permeates the system's 12 elementary schools, three middle schools and two comprehensive high schools.

"I'm very impressed with what's happening at Lynwood, and very heartened by the work of Paul Gothold. We need more leaders like him," says Al Mijares, Orange County superintendent of schools. He speaks from knowledge. Mijares helped launch the AP District of the Year award program as vice president of the College Board's western regional office from 2006 to 2012, and he continues to serve as a College Board trustee.

"What Paul Gothold has managed to do is provide the template for others to follow," says Mijares, who holds a PhD from USC's Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work.

IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

Student participation in AP classes at Lynwood spiked by 17 percent annually between 2014 and 2016, and the percentage of students scoring a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam grew by 4 percent per year.

To achieve these results, the district — which borders Compton and South Gate — provided AP teacher training, arranged extra office hours to support AP students, created free AP summer camps, gave access to online tutoring courses and covered AP exam registration fees.

"There's really no rocket science behind our work," Gothold says. "Preparing every kid for college. That's our mantra. What's good for one kid is good for all. There are no prerequisites. No tracks. Any child can take these classes." —R

The district's graduation rate went from 58 percent to over 90 percent in just seven years.

*National data from 2016 show that among students of color with a high degree of readiness for AP, only **about half** enroll in the college-level courses.*

About the AP District of the Year Award

Three districts — grouped by size — are honored each year with this national accolade. Lynwood Unified, with 15,000 students, took the 2017 trophy in the mid-sized district category. It was chosen from among 433 qualifying districts in the United States and Canada, identified in the 2017 District Honor Roll. Lynwood was one of only 22 California districts (out of the state's 1,100) making the honor roll. The other two winners are Illinois' Joliet Township High School District 204 for small district, and Georgia's Gwinnett County Public Schools for large district. The schools will be recognized in July at the 2017 AP Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.

In May, Paul Gothold was named superintendent of schools, San Diego County.

VISION

The Imagination Economy

California's two great exports are disrupting and transforming teaching and learning —

By Alan Arkatov

The Age of Engagement is upon us, and it's having a profound impact on how we educate the world's population. The most important factor — finding ways to get (and keep) students interested in learning — is being solved by the plethora of new content and interactive learning vehicles. No region of the world is better equipped and positioned to lead this education transformation than California, thanks to our two unmatched exports: technology, led by Silicon Valley; and entertainment, led by Hollywood.

There's probably no better example of this than the impact of California's Khan Academy. Sal Khan's initial attempt to tutor his cousin via the internet has led to the delivery of more than 1 billion lessons around the world in the past decade, forever changing how teachers, parents and students teach and learn.

This kind of disruption is no longer the purview of just a few talented folks like Sal. Quite the contrary. The sheer volume of outstanding new educational content and distribution platforms is unprecedented. And the speed with which they have emerged has created quiet chaos and huge challenges for the traditional gatekeepers of education (school districts, colleges, textbook publishers) and the world of efficacy and research. Meanwhile, teachers and students have been entrusted to sort through the abundance of choices, with limited guidance.

To be clear, "traditional" education will not disappear anytime soon. Rather, a simultaneous, parallel universe is beginning to take hold, driven by powerful new content for the arts and sciences. Constantly evolving technology will be key to this exciting new world, such as interactive games boosted by virtual reality and augmented reality. Importantly, for the first time in history, we'll not only have the ability to properly understand and utilize the neuroscience that is inherent in how every individual thinks and learns, we will integrate it into the education framework.

What we now have is no longer really an education problem — great teaching, great content and great learning environments can be quantified. We know what works, along with what is scalable and sustainable.

What we actually have is a communications problem — cutting through the clutter and disseminating (for all students) what works. How it all gets sorted, effectively and efficiently, is the real challenge that we now face. As always, politics, bureaucracies and vested interests will create frustrating roadblocks to improving the education ecosystem.

Thankfully, California's huge population, along with its increasing accountability demands and the profusion of creators and storytellers who drive the imagination economy, will be powerful countervailing forces. Inevitably, the Golden State will lead the way as the latest content and products connect with the wholesale (school) and retail (individual consumer) education markets.

California — whose film studios propelled the entertainment industry, and whose research universities brought the internet into being — is once again in the right place at the right time (with the right people) to fundamentally change how society thinks, teaches and learns. And USC's expertise, led by the convergence of its faculty in the schools of education, cinematic arts, communications, engineering and medicine, will be front and center in this Age of Engagement. —R

Alan Arkatov is the Katzman/Ernst Chair for Educational Entrepreneurship, Technology and Innovation at USC Rossier.

Q+A

Dara Zeehandelaar Shaw

PhD alumna leads education policy for state of Maryland —

Dara Zeehandelaar Shaw PhD '12 has spent much of her career addressing education policy issues as the national research director for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an education policy think tank located in Washington, DC. In February, she became executive director for research, assessment and accountability for the state of Maryland Department of Education. We asked her to reflect on her new role.

How has your focus shifted moving from a national organization to a state agency?
At national education policy think tanks, researchers like me are looking at issues that affect education in every single state. Most education policy decisions happen at the state level. For example, rules determining policies for gifted and talented education are made by each individual state. The same with state standards and accountability. There's no federal policy on these issues.

At Fordham, I conducted research and made policy recommendations for state leaders, so in that sense, my work was nationwide in scope. Whereas at my new job, I design and implement an agenda that produces useful, actionable research for just one state — Maryland.

What are the big education issues that Maryland is facing?
I would say that the number one issue that Maryland is dealing with — and I would imagine every other state as well — is implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We are devoting tremendous resources to shaping the state's ESSA accountability plan to make sure, first, that there is an appropriate standard of rigor for the students and, second, that our schools are meeting that bar.

And within this larger focus, we're looking at how we are ensuring equity across student populations, supporting educators and schools that aren't meeting their goals, and how we are going to pay for everything in our plan.

California has a population of 40 million, whereas Maryland has just 6 million residents. Are your challenges also smaller in scale?
Maryland might be a lot smaller than California, but it's not necessarily simpler here. Yes, there are advantages to only having 24 districts, but that does not mean it is any easier. In California, your sheer numbers might pose obvious challenges but that large size can also be an advantage. For example, it might be a lot easier to get funding for an intervention for a small percentage of your students because that number still represents a significant size overall.

But in Maryland, one percent of students is a very small number. And regardless of size, we still have to make sure we are addressing the diverse needs of every student and student group in our state, regardless of numbers.

Are there lessons California can learn from Maryland?
It's not so much what California can learn from Maryland specifically, but what states can all learn from each other right now. For example, both California and Maryland — and a host of other states — are figuring out how to hold schools accountable under ESSA. We all have the same questions to which there are no absolute "right" answers. Should the components of the accountability system be "rolled up" into a single, summative score, or left as components? What concepts should those components capture, and how will they be defined, measured and calculated?

California's accountability system is going to look different from Maryland's, but we're both going through the process of figuring out the answers to these questions. We're looking at what evidence research can provide us. We're listening to what stakeholders like educators, parents, students, lawmakers and taxpayers have to say. And we're determining how to proceed based on the needs of our unique student populations. While California shouldn't copy Maryland's system, or anyone else's, states can learn a lot by studying how others are developing their systems, regardless of what system they choose in the end. —R

PHOTO BY ADAM MASON

15

A leap forward in national rankings

USC Rossier moved up six places in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings of U.S. graduate programs in education.

New dual master's in language teaching launches in Hong Kong and South Korea

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. (Photo/Courtesy of HKUST)

Beginning this fall, the World Masters in Language Teaching program will bring USC Rossier together with Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea. It will help address the growing demand for bilingual education teachers in Chinese, Korean and other languages.

Students will spend time at USC and either HKUST or Yonsei earning two degrees: a Master of Arts in Teaching–Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MAT-TESOL) from USC and either a Master of Arts in International Language Education for Chinese Language through HKUST or a Master of Arts in Korean Language and Literature through Yonsei.

project tomorrow SpeakUp
www.tomorrow.org

SPEAK UP

A new partnership with Project Tomorrow will give USC Rossier researchers access to data from the national education nonprofit's Speak Up Research Project for Digital Learning. That includes feedback gleaned from annual surveys of 500,000 students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members about the role of technology for learning in and out of school. USC Rossier faculty will help develop questions for future surveys that can be used by districts to inform policies and programs.

SPEAK OUT

"The need to defend academic broadmindedness by resisting political narrow-mindedness would be hard to exaggerate in India today. The future of India will matter a great deal on how India is able to confront these transgressions that imperil academic freedom."

— Amartya Sen, Harvard professor of philosophy and economics, speaking of academic freedom in the 39th annual Pullias Lecture in March.

Two new research centers

Shaun Harper

Shafiqa Ahmadi and Darnell Cole

National expert **Shaun Harper** will launch the **USC Race and Equity Center** when he arrives at USC Rossier July 1 as the Clifford H. and Betty C. Allen Professor in Urban Leadership. The new center will unite dozens of professors across USC's academic schools whose scholarship focuses on people of color, racial inequities, immigration and related topics. Harper previouly led the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, which he founded in 2011.

The **Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice** will be co-directed by Associate Professor of Clinical Education **Shafiqa Ahmadi** and Associate Professor **Darnell Cole**. Their first projects include a survey of the higher education experiences of more than 100 Muslim college students in California, and a five-year study of two cohorts of USC Hybrid High School graduates (see p. 32).

Estela Mara Bensimon

Bensimon inducted into National Academy of Education, earns AERA honors

Estela Mara Bensimon, professor of higher education and director of the Center for Urban Education, has been inducted into the National Academy of Education, only the fourth USC Rossier faculty member to earn this distinction. In April, she also received the 2017 AERA Social Justice in Education Award at the conference of the American Educational Research Association.

Polikoff receives AERA distinction

Morgan Polikoff, an associate professor, became the third USC Rossier professor in four years to receive AERA's Early Career Award (see p. 18).

Morgan Polikoff

VIDEO SPOTLIGHT: "YOU OPENED MY EYES"

"You opened my eyes to how inequitable our system of education was. ... Not only did the system of public education fail you, Michael, but it failed so many kids just like you, for no reason of your own making."

Katharine Strunk, an associate professor of education and policy at USC Rossier, explains in a note to a student she once knew why she decided to pursue a career investigating the structures that reinforce inequities in the education system, and how the problems created by those inequities can be mitigated.

VIDEO:** Go to **rossier.usc.edu/magazine/KatharineStrunk

Fight On!

Below are many of the 45 new alumni from the first cohort of the online EdD in Organizational Change and Leadership program. In all, USC Rossier graduated 631 students from 11 master's and doctoral programs.

USC ROSSIER NOW HAS 71 ALUMNI OF THE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM WHO ARE SITTING SUPERINTENDENTS.

USC Rossier alumna Allyson Felix BS '08, a nine-time Olympic medalist, received USC's Young Alumni Merit Award in April (pictured here with Dean Karen Symms Gallagher). She also delivered a commencement address to graduates at the USC Rossier Master's Ceremony in May.

"Your job is to make change, to transform schools, to lead the debate in this country. And that means revolutionizing the craft of teaching by trying new methods and questioning how things are done."

—Michael Bennet, U.S. Senator from Colorado, speaking at the Master's Commencement Ceremony.

Stay Connected

A new tool is making it easier for you to form meaningful connections within the Rossier Family. With the USC Career Network, an online networking and mentoring platform, you can search alumni based on experience, location, expertise and areas they have indicated they are willing to provide assistance. Ask questions, view job opportunities or be a mentor to fellow USC Rossier alumni.

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Two Added to Board of Councilors

Reveta Franklin Bowers

Frank E. Baxter

Reveta Franklin Bowers is an alumna of the USC School of Dramatic Arts and the recently retired head of school of the Center for Early Education in Los Angeles.

Frank E. Baxter is chairman emeritus and retired chief executive officer of the global investment bank Jefferies LLC and served as U.S. ambassador to Uruguay from 2006 to 2009.

BOARD OF COUNCILORS

Ira W. Krinsky, Chair, Consultant, Korn/Ferry International

Carol Fox MS '62, Vice-Chair, Teacher Education Lecturer; Former President, USC Alumni Association Board of Governors

Robert Abeles, USC Chief Financial Officer (retired 2016)

Frank E. Baxter, chairman emeritus and retired CEO of Jefferies LLC

Jim Berk, CEO, PodcastOne/Courtside Entertainment

Reveta Franklin Bowers, retired head of school, Center for Early Education in Los Angeles

Margaret (Maggie) Chidester EdD '95, Law Offices of Margaret A. Chidester & Associates

Greg Franklin '83, EdD '97, Superintendent, Tustin Unified School District; Chair, Dean's Superintendents Advisory Group

Mary Atwater James, Prime Group, Los Angeles Executive Board Member

John Katzman, Founder and CEO, The Noodle Companies

Lydia Kennard, President and CEO of KDG Construction Consulting; USC Trustee

Cindy Hensley McCain '76, MS '78, Chair, Hensley & Co.

Brent Noyes '75, MS '79, Chair, The Academy; Retired Principal, Arroyo Vista Elementary School

Margo Pensavalle EdD '93, USC Rossier Faculty Council Chair

Doreen Peterson MAT '10, USC Alumni Representative

Steve Poizner, Technology Entrepreneur; former State Insurance Commissioner of California

Sheree T. Speakman, Founder and CEO, CIE Learning

Peter Weil, Co-Managing Partner, Glaser, Weil, Fink, Jacobs, Howard & Shapiro, LLP

New gift to fund long-term study of college retention

Mary and Daniel James want to help researchers find out what helps first-generation college students persist —

By Ross Brenneman

A half-million dollar gift from Mary and Daniel James will allow USC Rossier professors to study the transition of students at USC Hybrid High School to college. The couple is particularly interested in the persistence of first-generation college students, who often enter higher education at a disadvantage.

USC Hybrid High School, founded by USC Rossier in 2012, is overseen by the charter management organization Ednovate Inc. The Ednovate model emphasizes personalized learning in combination with modern technology and a college-going culture. The model has already demonstrated early success, with 100 percent of the school's 2016 and 2017 graduating classes getting accepted into four-year colleges.

Still untested is whether that model will lead to college success.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, two out of every five matriculated U.S. students won't graduate college within six years. And the persistence rate for first-generation college students is even worse. Eighty-five percent of USC Hybrid High's students who graduated in 2016 became first-generation college students.

Mary James says that while college recruitment has taken notice of underprivileged populations, the "bigger challenge is getting them college-ready with the goal of college graduation."

FULFILLING A MISSION

USC Rossier Dean Karen Symms Gallagher says that the James' gift will be an essential part of tying USC Hybrid High to college success, one of the main intentions behind the creation of Hybrid High.

"Mary and Daniel's support and vision are allowing us to gather new data that will show in tangible ways how these students are succeeding, bringing us closer to fulfilling the promise of the Ednovate model," Gallagher says.

The study will be led by Associate Professor of Clinical Education Shafiqa Ahmadi and Associate Professor of Education Darnell Cole, the co-directors of the recently launched Center for Education, Identity and Social Justice. The researchers will use surveys, focus groups and a case study to understand participants' college-going behavior, the quality of their college experiences and why they are or are not able to persist to graduation.

The James gift will fund the first two years of the study, and USC Rossier is seeking funding for an additional three years of research, creating a five-year study in total.

Mary James, who is also on the USC Rossier Board of Councilors, was an early supporter of USC Hybrid High, a long-time mentor for first-generation college students and has been an active member in the Los Angeles charter community, serving on the board of directors for the Los Angeles Leadership Academy, a K-12 charter.

Discussing why she and her husband were interested in this research, she pointed to Hybrid High's unique connection to USC Rossier and the potential of such a partnership to turn research into action. The ultimate goal, James says, is to see whether the research findings on college retention can be valuable to teacher training as a whole — with USC Rossier being a possible test subject.

"We can learn from a student's college experiences and translate this to teacher education and curriculum development," James says. "It would be pretty exciting to close the loop there." —R

PHOTO BY MARGARET MOLLOY

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PHOTO BY MARGARET MOLLOY

In May, Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Michelle King EdD ’17 (above right, with Dean Karen Symms Gallagher) earned her doctorate from USC Rossier and was named Superintendent of the Year by the National Association of School Superintendents. In this issue we spotlight how she is collaborating with superintendents throughout California.