

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Stronger Education System for California's Students

Getting Down to Facts III Policy Recommendations

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California's future depends on its young people. Our schools prepare the next generation of Californians to build strong communities, participate in our democracy, and power one of the world's largest economies. Yet too many students are not getting the education they need to thrive—and the state's education system often makes it harder, not easier, for schools to improve.

California now has an unusually robust body of evidence about why. Getting Down to Facts III offers a comprehensive look at what is working, what is getting in the way, and where state leaders have the greatest opportunity to make a difference. The good news is that California has invested billions of dollars in promising efforts to improve education, from early literacy and community schools to teacher preparation and high school redesign. But too often, good work happens despite a fragmented system and an overwhelming number of disparate initiatives. **New initiatives are unlikely to succeed without parallel work to fix key aspects of the state system.**

The evidence points to three critical areas of focus to strengthen California's education system.

1

Set a few clear goals for students—and align the system to achieve them.

California asks schools to pursue too many priorities at once. State leaders should establish a small number of ambitious goals for students—from the early years through readiness for college, career, and life—and organize the state around achieving them. Accountability should use multiple measures of student progress while eliminating reporting that documents process rather than results. And new policies and investments should reinforce the state's priorities rather than continually adding competing demands.

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Initiate a process led by state and district leaders to set these goals. In the interim, give district leaders immediate relief from burdensome state reporting, freeing them to focus more attention on their schools and students.

2

Make sure every district can get the help it needs to improve teaching.

California gives local districts enormous responsibility for the quality of teaching in their schools, but the help available to them varies dramatically depending on where they are and what they can afford. Unlike other states, California currently provides districts with overly long lists of possible curricula rather than a short list of the most effective materials. And while California's 58 County Offices of Education are responsible for holding districts fiscally accountable, no entity is responsible for ensuring that districts receive high-quality support for improving teaching and learning. A strong state role should focus on ensuring that every district can count on effective, sustained help improving teaching—including high-quality professional learning for teachers and principals.

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Choose fewer state-approved curricula and provide support to help schools implement them.

3

Make sure new teachers are ready to teach.

A strong education system depends on a strong teacher workforce. Yet California's reliance on a 1-year postbaccalaureate training model makes becoming a teacher expensive and, too often, does not provide aspiring teachers enough preparation for the realities of today's classrooms. California should modernize teacher preparation so 4-year programs that combine strong academic preparation with substantial classroom experience become the norm.

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Continue investing in programs that reduce the cost of becoming a teacher, including tuition assistance and paid student teaching.