



# IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE IN CALIFORNIA: REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

**Friday, June 27, 2014**  
**East End Complex Building**  
**1500 Capitol Avenue – Auditorium, Sacramento**

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## **Biographical Statements**

**John Affeldt** is a Managing Attorney and the Education Program Director at Public Advocates in San Francisco, where he focuses on educational equity issues through litigation, policy advocacy and partnerships with grassroots organizations. John served as a lead counsel on [Williams v. California](#), which resulted in a breakthrough 2004 settlement guaranteeing California's students sufficient instructional materials, decent facilities and qualified teachers. He is also lead counsel on [Campaign for Quality Education v. California](#), a landmark state school funding challenge filed in 2010 and currently on appeal.

John works closely with grassroots, community-based organizations to help build the capacity of local communities to positively affect state education policy. As part of these advocacy efforts, John helped give shape to California's new Local Control Funding Formula statute and implementing regulations with key accountability, community engagement and transparency provisions.

John has been named a California Attorney of the Year twice, once by *California Lawyer Magazine* in 2005, and again in 2010 by the *Recorder*.

**Helio Brasil**, Superintendent of the Merced River School District, oversees all aspects of the district, which includes 160 students, 25 employees and a budget of roughly \$1.8 million. He joined Merced River School District in 2001 as Superintendent/Principal.

Helio began his career in education as a high school social studies and reading teacher in the Oakdale Joint Union High School District. After three years in the classroom, he became the Activities Director and Assistant Principal with the same district at Riverbank High School. Three years later he joined the Sylvan Union School District as Principal of Ustach Middle School in Modesto and then left after two years to his current position. His focus is to support students and staff by supporting teachers to engage in whole-school, standards-based reform aimed at closing the achievement gap.



A native of the Azores, (Portugal), Helio graduated from the California State University Stanislaus, and earned a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Saint Mary's College. He also holds a doctorate in Political Science and International Relations, from the University of Toulouse, France.

**Shannan Brown** has been in education for 15 years. Her experiences include teaching 4th and 5th grades, as well as English Language Development (ELD) and 1st grade Intervention classes in the San Juan Unified School District. At Edison Elementary, she served as Student Council Advisor, Site Leadership Team member, Co-Chair of the Edison Community Organizing Project, and Co-Chair for the Home Visit Project. Shannan has helped to create and lead professional development for school sites as well as for district-wide trainings in such areas as: Behavior Management, Lesson Design, Writing, Leadership, and Assessment Literacy.

In 2011, Shannan was chosen to be San Juan Unified Teacher of the Year and later named both Sacramento County and California Teacher of the Year. She currently serves as President of the San Juan Teachers Association.

**Nancy S. Brownell** is the Senior Fellow for Common Core Systems Implementation with responsibilities for working with both the California Department of Education and the State Board on transitioning to the Common Core.

Nancy has many years of experience as a teacher, administrator and educational leader, supporting the goals of increased student achievement and equity for all students. She has taught grades K-University and has administrative experience and expertise in implementing standards-based curricular and instructional programs, developing assessments, and coaching district and school teams. Nancy is also a school board member in Rescue, California.

Prior to joining the SBE/CDE, Nancy was Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services at the Sonoma County Office of Education.

**Elise Darwish** has been on the leadership team of Aspire Public Schools since its founding and currently serves as the Chief Academic Officer. In this role she supports principals, oversees research and development pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and manages internal professional development programs. With over 25 years of experience in charter schools, traditional public schools and private schools, Elise was well-poised to design the Aspire education model and oversee its implementation. She began her teaching career as a kindergarten teacher in the inner city of Chicago; since then, she has worked in the roles of teacher, mentor teacher, assistant principal, administrator and curriculum coordinator.

Prior to Aspire, Elise was the Instructional Coordinator at the San Carlos Charter Learning Center, California's first charter school and the nation's second. During her tenure, the school grew from three grades to a full K-8 program with an extensive waiting list and became internationally recognized for its innovation. She also coordinated instructional technology for the San Carlos School District, managed Net Day, and implemented a Local Area Network and a Wide Area Network. Elise holds a B.S. in Early Childhood Education from the University of Illinois and a Master's degree in Educational Administration from San Francisco State University.



**John Fensterwald** is Editor at Large at EdSource Today, a news and information website that explores education policy issues in California. It expands on the work that he began in 2009 when he started Thoughts on Public Education (TOP-Ed.org) with the Silicon Valley Education Foundation. Before that, John wrote editorials for 11 years at the Mercury News in San Jose with a focus on education. You can contact him at [jfensterwald@edsources.org](mailto:jfensterwald@edsources.org) or follow him on Twitter@jfenster.

**Erin Gabel** is the Chief Education Consultant for California State Senate President pro Tempore, Darrell Steinberg. Her fiscal and policy portfolio includes preschool and early learning, kindergarten through Grade 12 public education, and higher education.

Prior to joining the pro Tem's policy team, Erin was the Director of Government Affairs for California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson, and the California Department of Education. She was responsible for the Superintendent's and the Department of Education's involvement in all state and federal budget and legislative processes. Erin served SPI Torlakson as a policy advisor under different hats in the Department, Assembly, and the Senate over an 11-year tenure.

Before working at the state Capitol, Erin served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia. She was one of the founding staff members of the Partnership for Children and Youth, as their first Children Nutrition Project Director, and now serves on their Board of Directors. She also served as the first coordinator of the California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness, an initiative of the California State Legislature to address the childhood obesity epidemic. Erin is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley.

**David W. Gordon** is the Superintendent of the Sacramento (CA) County Office of Education. He holds a B.A. from Brandeis University and an Ed.M. and Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Administration from Harvard University. He has served on the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, the Governor's Advisory Committee on Education Excellence, as an Associate in Education at Harvard, and a visiting scholar at Stanford University. David has presented at the White House, before the U.S. Congress and the California State Legislature. He serves on the Sierra Health Foundation Board, on the Sacramento First 5 Commission, the State of California Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission, and formerly served as Chair of the Reporting and Dissemination Committee of the National Assessment Governing Board (The Nation's Report Card).

**Carrie Hahnel** is the Director of Research and Policy Analysis at the Education Trust–West, an education advocacy organization committed to closing achievement gaps in California schools. She focuses primarily on issues of funding equity, accountability, teacher effectiveness, and public transparency in California. She joined ETW in 2010 after working for the KIPP Foundation as Director of Research and Evaluation, where she promoted the use of data for strategic decision-making in KIPP schools, launched a large-scale randomized control study of KIPP's impact on student outcomes, and developed "school health" dashboards and performance metrics. Carrie previously worked in research and evaluation for Citizen Schools, a national afterschool provider headquartered in Boston, MA, and in program coordination and policy analysis for Americans for the Arts, an arts advocacy organization in Washington, DC. She also participated in AmeriCorps VISTA, supporting afterschool, tutoring, and arts education programs in Riverside, CA. Carrie holds a B.A. from Carleton College and an Ed.M. from Harvard Graduate School of Education.



**Charles Taylor Kerchner** is a Research Professor in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University and a specialist in institutional change, the politics of education, and teacher unions.

Since March, Chuck has been writing the 'On California' blog at EdWeek.org, an examination of the state's politics and policies as reflected in current issues. Follow the blog at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on\\_california/](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on_california/)

Chuck's most recent book is *Learning from L.A.: Institutional Change in American Public Education* (Harvard Education Press). The book was the subject of a PACE policy brief in 2011, and more recently he wrote a PACE brief on "Educational Technology Policy for a 21st Century Learning System." His work on teacher unions includes *United Mind Workers: Teachers, Unions, and the Knowledge Society* and *A Union of Professionals*.

Before coming to Claremont in 1976, Chuck was a journalist and worked for seven years at *The St. Petersburg Times* in Florida.

**Joel Knudson** is a Senior Researcher at the American Institutes for Research, where he has contributed to educational research and evaluation projects in California and across the country since joining the organization in 2003. His primary research interests include school leadership, secondary education, and district reform. Joel currently serves as the Deputy Project Director for the California Collaborative on District Reform. In that capacity, he has written about issues of Common Core State Standards implementation, teacher quality, and school turnaround and the ways in which they unfold at the district level. Joel holds a Master's degree in Policy, Organization, and Leadership Studies (POLS) from the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Stanford University.

**Julie A. Marsh** is an Associate Professor at the Rossier School of Education at USC and a Co-Director of PACE. Julie specializes in research on policy implementation, educational reform, and accountability. Her research blends perspectives in education, sociology, and political science. Over the past 15 years, her research has examined the implementation and effects of various accountability policies, including studies of the No Child Left Behind Act, school turnaround, teacher evaluation, and charter schools. Julie has also closely examined school districts as central actors in educational reform, including the roles played by central office administrators in both interpreting and creating policy, as well as the roles of other district actors—school board members, union leaders, citizens, parents, university partners, and community organizations—in advancing system-level reform. Much of this research has focused on decision-making, including the role of data, the democratic nature of these efforts, and the politics of such processes. Her expertise lies in case study methodology and survey development and analysis. She is currently co-PI of two federally funded studies in the Los Angeles Unified School District—one examining district efforts to implement portfolio management and turnaround reforms, and the other analyzing the district's Teacher Incentive Fund-supported human capital reforms.

**Milbrey McLaughlin** is the Founding Director of the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Co-Director of the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, and David Jacks Professor of Education and Policy, Emerita, in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University.



**Rick Miller** serves as the Executive Director of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE). CORE is a learning partnership between ten California districts, representing over a million students.

Prior to joining CORE, Rick was a Deputy Superintendent at the California Department of Education, a communications specialist for Microsoft Corporation, a communications advisor to the California State University Chancellor and the Press Secretary to the U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley.

He is also currently a Partner with Capitol Impact, LLC, as well as a Senior Partner with California Education Partners. He serves on the Education Advisory Board for the Region IX Equity Assistance Center as well as on the Board of Directors for Rocklin Academy Family of Schools.

**David N. Plank** is the Executive Director of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), Research Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, and Research Faculty in the Stanford University Lemann Center for Educational Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Brazil. Before joining PACE in 2007, David was a Professor at Michigan State University, where he founded and directed the Education Policy Center. He was previously on the faculties at the University of Pittsburgh and at the University of Texas at Dallas, where he taught courses and conducted research in the areas of educational finance and policy. He is the author or editor of six books, including the *AERA Handbook of Education Policy Research*. He has published widely in a number of different fields, including economics of education, history of education, and educational policy. David's current interests include the role of the state in education, the relationship between academic research and public policy, and the development of state policies to encourage and support the use of digital technologies in schools. In addition to his work in the United States, he has extensive international experience. He has served as a consultant to international organizations including the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United States Agency for International Development, the Ford Foundation, and also to governments in Africa and Latin America.

**Arun Ramanathan** is the newly appointed CEO of Pivot Learning Partners, the leading non-profit provider of leadership development and Common Core implementation support for districts and schools in California. Prior to his appointment, Arun was the Executive Director of the Education Trust—West (ETW), California's leading policy, research and advocacy organization focused on closing achievement and opportunity gaps for low-income students and students of color. Arun has been a teacher and paraprofessional in New England and California and has also worked in large urban school districts as a Research Director, Executive Director of Government Relations, and Chief Student Services Officer where he had responsibility for ten departments and a budget of \$350 million. His work on education policy has been published in an array of journals including the Teachers College Record and the Phi Delta Kappan, and his editorials have been published in a wide array of newspapers including the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, and the San Jose Mercury News. Arun received his Bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College, his M.Ed. from Boston College, and his Ed.D. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His family immigrated to the U.S. in 1976 and he began his schooling as an English Learner.



**Deborah (Deb) Sigman** is the Deputy Superintendent of the District, School & Innovation Branch, California Department of Education, which promotes improved student achievement. Programs include student assessment, intervention, federally funded educational programs, state and federal accountability, educational data, and charter schools. Deborah is an elected member of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium Executive Committee and also services as the Vice-Chair of the National Assessment Governing Board-CCSSO Policy Task Force.

Deborah has over 30 years of experience in assessment and accountability in the kindergarten through Grade 12 (K–12) California public school system. She served as California’s State Testing Director for the California Department of Education (CDE) from January 2004 to May 2008.

Prior to joining the CDE, Deborah was the Administrator of Assessment, Research and Evaluation for the Sacramento City Unified School District and a Program Administrator for the Elk Grove Unified School District, where her primary responsibilities were developing district-level assessments and training teachers in the interpretation and use of assessment data. She holds degrees in psychology and counseling and is trained as a school psychologist.

**Rick Simpson** is Deputy Chief of Staff for the Speaker of the California State Assembly, Toni Atkins. Rick has spent more than 36 years working in and around the State Capitol, primarily on issues of public education. He served as a Senior Advisor for eight Assembly Speakers and has staffed the Education Committees in both the Assembly and the Senate. In 1999, Rick served as the first Legislative Secretary for California Governor Gray Davis. Last June, Rick was also appointed by the Speaker to a 4-year term on the Commission on Judicial Performance, the constitutional body that is responsible for discipline of the judicial branch of state government.

Rick is one of California’s experts on education policy and school finance. He has either written or played a key role in developing most of California’s major education reforms of the past three decades including the Class Size Reduction program, the laws governing school facilities financing, the laws creating California’s system of academic standards and assessment, and the recent law creating a new structure for school finance and accountability. Rick is the Assembly’s lead negotiator on the annual budget for public education. He is also active in his local community. He served for 12 years as an elected trustee of the Sacramento County Board of Education and was elected president of that board three times.

**Tom Torlakson**, as elected chief of schools for all of California (State Superintendent of Public Instruction, California Department of Education), oversees the education of 6.3 million children attending over 10,000 schools in 1,100 districts across the state. Every day, he applies his experiences as a science teacher, high school coach, and state lawmaker to fighting for our students and improving our state’s public education system.

Tom began his career as a teacher and championship-winning coach before going on to be elected to the Antioch City Council, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, and the California State Assembly and Senate.

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In the Legislature, he worked to protect and increase education funding, improve student health, ensure school safety, cut the dropout rate, and develop the largest system of afterschool programs in the nation.

Born in San Francisco, Tom served as a fireman in the United States Merchant Marine, earning the Vietnam Service Medal.

**Andrea Venezia**, Associate Professor of Public Policy and Administration, and Associate Director of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership & Policy, earned her Ph.D. in Public Policy from The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin. Prior, she was Senior Policy Associate and Project Director at WestEd from 2006 to 2013, and Senior Policy Analyst and Project Director at the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education from 2003-2006.

Andrea has extensive experience in many areas including research, policy development and implementation, public speaking and writing. Her main professional interest is access to postsecondary readiness and success for traditionally underserved students, about which she has published a wide variety of reports, book chapters, journal articles, and other materials. Andrea focuses intensively on the dissemination of applied research to ensure that it is accessible for practitioners and policymakers.

