Recommendation Seven

Access

"In any one of California's thousands of classrooms, we could have future workers with the ability to understand a dozen different cultures and the wherewithal to connect and communicate with people all over the globe on terms they can understand. But, we have not yet tapped the tremendous potential we have. Quite simply, the demanding global economy and a stubborn achievement gap not only threaten the future of our students, but also the future economic health and security of our state and nation."[1]

Recommendation 7 — Access. Provide *all* middle grades students with equal access to a well-prepared, qualified, caring staff and a rich learning environment that includes grade-level standards-based instruction; academic interventions; learning resources; leadership and recognition opportunities; exploratory programs; sports, clubs, and enrichment activities; and, to the extent possible, placement in heterogeneous classes.

Access is one of the Recommendations in the Focus Area on Social Equity.

Contents

Footnote

[1] Jack O'Connell, "Outlines Plan to Improve Schools in Third Annual State of the Education Address," Sacramento: California Department of Education, Press Release 06-15, February 7, 2006.

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Equity in the middle grades

Equity means fairness, justice, or impartiality. In education, equity means providing equal access to a standards-based education. California policymakers have taken great strides in providing equal access to education by developing a coherent system of standards-based education that includes reliable state assessments to measure student achievement. Students across grade levels are making gains in English language arts and in mathematics on the California Standards Tests (CSTs).

However, equal access alone does not automatically ensure equal outcomes in terms of student achievement, which may be affected by more variables than the school can control. Some communities that have high levels of poverty and/or gang violence, however, still face huge odds in providing standards-based, grade-level education.

One way to provide equity is to recognize how the school's culture and climate affect learning for students from various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Culturally responsive instructional practices help students connect to learning because it is more relevant to their daily lives. According to the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), culturally responsive educational practices have the following attributes:

- Curriculum content reflects the cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity of society and the world.
- Instructional and assessment practices build on the students' prior knowledge, culture, and language.
- Classroom practices stimulate students to construct knowledge, make meaning, and examine cultural biases and assumptions.
- Schoolwide beliefs and practices foster understanding and respect for cultural diversity, and celebrate the contributions of diverse groups.
- School programs and instructional practices draw from and integrate community and family language and culture and help families and communities to support the students' academic success.

The Williams case (Eliezer Williams et al. v. State of California et al.) attempts to make the playing field level by calling for public schools to provide students with equal access to instructional materials, safe and decent school facilities, and qualified teachers. These three components are an important part of providing equal access, but they do not cover all aspects of social equity. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (Outside Source) is a national nonprofit organization that established the Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage program to highlight effective middle grades strategies. The forum's criteria for high performance, detailed in its School Self-Study and Rating Rubric (DOC; 413KB; 9pp.), identify the following factors that promote social equity:

- To the fullest extent possible, all students, including English learners, students with disabilities, and gifted and honors students, participate in heterogeneous classes with high academic and behavioral expectations.
- Students are provided with the opportunity to use many and varied approaches to achieve and demonstrate competence and mastery of standards.
- Teachers continually adapt curriculum, instruction, assessment, and scheduling to meet their students' diverse and changing needs.
- All students have equal access to valued knowledge in all school classes and activities.
- Students have ongoing opportunities to learn about and appreciate their own and others' cultures.
- The school community knows every student well.
- The faculty welcomes and encourages the active participation of all its families and makes sure that all families are an integral part of the school.
- The school's reward system is designed to value diversity, civility, service, and democratic citizenship.
- Staff members understand and support the family backgrounds and values of the students.
- The school rules are clear, fair, and consistently applied.

Equity is critical for California's economic future. Studies indicate California jobs that require higher education are growing faster than overall employment. Demand for jobs requiring a college degree will grow by 48 percent, while jobs not requiring a degree will grow by 33 percent. Technical services, education, and health care will require the largest number of highly educated workers. However, the fields of finance, manufacturing, and information will face significant economic impacts if California schools do not provide an adequate number of highly educated workers. "The increasing demand for highly educated workers combined with the loss of the retiring highly-educated Baby Boomers is equal to more than 3 million new workers, which is more than the population of the cities of San Diego, San Jose and San Francisco combined."[1]

As noted above, 33 percent of new jobs do not require a college degree. However, automotive technicians, sheet metal workers, computer

repair technicians, plumbers, electricians, and agricultural managers are a few of the skilled tradespeople who will need reading and comprehension skills. Many of these professionals will also need moderate to advanced computational skills.

In spite of the sometimes global challenges educators face in improving student achievement, many schools are making gains. The content for this Recommendation looks at the strategies that help students excel by promoting fairness and equal opportunity.

Related Links

- North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) (Outside Source)
- Seizing the Middle Ground, Why Middle School Creates the Pathway to College and the Workforce (Outside Source)

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Footnote
[1] Keeping California's Edge: The Growing Demand for Highly Educated Workers—Executive Summary (PDF; Outside Source). Prepared for the California Business Roundtable and the Campaign for College Opportunity. Sacramento: Applied Research Center, California State University, 2006.

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The chance to engage potential dropouts

The middle grades are a critical juncture in a student's academic career, and warning signs that a student may drop out are often easy to spot. Researchers in Philadelphia found that educators could identify as early as sixth grade 50 percent of all students who eventually drop out of high school. The four indicators are low attendance, poor classroom behavior as noted by one or more teachers, failing mathematics, or failing English.[1]

In California, the number of ninth-grade students who drop out of schools over the past five years has been approximately 12,000 students per year. A major concern is that an increasing number of ninth-grade students from lower socioeconomic households drop out. Therefore, the middle grades is the last chance for many students who fall into the achievement gap to catch up to their grade-level peers.

Dropout prevention research has emphasized the need to identify students at risk of dropping out of high school and to develop interventions that result in students graduating. Research shows that integrating and analyzing data—student attendance, grades, and course failures—can accurately identify students at the greatest risk of dropping out. A systematic approach to at-risk student identification coupled with effective interventions can help keep students in school and on track to graduate.

In its issue brief, Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts (Outside Source), the National High School Center presents an overview of research related to dropout prevention and provides a tool designed to help high school educators identify students and implement interventions. The early warning system provides the research and theoretical framework to help schools think through how their existing data and interventions can be integrated to identify and respond to at-risk students.

The California Department of Education (CDE) is partnering with the National High School Center and the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd to focus attention on dropout prevention in the middle grades by identifying and assisting at-risk students before they reach high school. Using the high school program as a model, CDE is leading the way to adapt the tool for use in the middle grades. Attendance, grades, and course failures also appear to be valid indicators of identifying at-risk middle grades students. The earlier students are identified as at-risk of dropping out, the sooner supports and appropriate dropout prevention strategies can be provided to those students.

The article, Defining Dropouts: A Statistical Portrait (U.S. Department of Educaiton Archived file), cautions:

> Dropping out of school is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon. Researchers find that dropping out is a process, not an event. It is relatively rare for students to make a snap judgment to leave school. The reasons students commonly offer for leaving school—for example, low grades, inability to get along, working, and pregnancy—may not be the true causes but rationalizations or simplifications of more complex circumstances.[2]

Preventing Student Disengagement in Middle School, Robert Balfanz, Liza Herzog, Douglas J. Mac Iver (2007) is a study that follows 12,000 students from 1996-2004 to demonstrate how four predictive indicators reflecting poor attendance, misbehavior, and course failures in sixth grade can be used to identify 60 percent of the students who will not graduate from high school. Fortunately, by combining effective whole-school reforms with attendance, behavioral, and extra-help interventions, graduation rates can be substantially increased. A summary of the study is available from Johns Hopkins University.

In the Spotlight

Sierra Vista Middle School, Hacienda La Puente School District
During her doctoral coursework, Sierra Vista principal, Sue Kaiser, noted that research by Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (Preventing Student Disengagement in Middle Schools, 2007) identified four **high yield** characteristics of sixth grade students who have a strong likelihood of slipping off the graduation pathway. As Kaiser thought about the four characteristics

(attendance, failing English, failing mathematics, or behavior sanctions such as suspensions), she wanted staff members to know the strengths and risks of each student. So Kaiser instituted a program called **Who Owns Our Students?** to give responsibility for a group of students to each third period teacher. Teachers keep a log that tracks each of the four high yield characteristics for each of their students by name**.**

Translating the **high yield** research has proven to be a powerful experience for Sierra Vista staff. The research suggests practical recommendations such as shepherding **at risk** students by pairing them with mentors. The data-tracking method used by Sierra Vista staff members to shepherd the children of Sierra Vista is producing favorable results. For example, as a result of the homeroom reporting, students who need interventions are identified more quickly, and a teacher advocate is always present in any intervention team meetings. The system has resulted in a 47 percent reduction in tardy students and an 18 percent reduction in suspensions. While Sierra Vista continues to be labeled as a Program Improvement (PI) school, it has achieved a similar school rank of seven out of ten in achievement when measured along side of schools with similar demographic. Sierra Vista students and teachers have continued to exceed the goal each year for the Academic Performance Index (API), ensuring the closing of the achievement gap in this school.

- Sierra Vista Middle School DataQuest Reports
- Sierra Vista Middle School (Outside Source)
- Hacienda La Puente School District (Outside Source)

Developmental responsiveness is critical at the middle grades to engage young adolescents before they give up on school. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years are designated as being in Program Improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As a consequence those schools may provide additional time for reading and math interventions. As a result, they often eliminate science, social studies, and electives to make room for more mathematics and reading classes. However, researchers caution schools about **narrowing the curriculum**.

> The negative consequences of curriculum narrowing are even greater for low-income students, which means the practice can end up magnifying achievement gaps. That is because more affluent students have alternative ways of gaining 'world knowledge' even when their schools do a poor job of teaching about art, culture, history, geography, and the natural world. They can pick it up from trips and vacations, visits to museums and other cultural settings, and even from conversations with other family members in the household. In contrast, disadvantaged students are highly dependent on schools to provide them with a rich vocabulary and broad knowledge about the world outside their neighborhoods. For many poor urban and rural children, schools provide the primary access to that background knowledge. For example, a seminal study of vocabulary development in very young children found that by age 3, the spoken vocabularies of children with professional parents exceeded the spoken vocabularies of parents in welfare families.[3]

In the Spotlight

Holmes International Middle School, Los Angeles Unified School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
Seventh- and eighth-grade students at Holmes take a semester-long exploratory wheel that includes art and music (learning to sing and play instruments). In addition, students learn to use the computerized piano lab. This exploratory wheel helps to prepare students who want to join one of the school's many performing musical groups.

- Holmes International DataQuest School Profile
- Holmes International Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Holmes International Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)

Related Links

- California Research Dropout Project (Outside Source)
- Dropping Out is Hard To Do (PDF; Outside Source), The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. This issue brief discusses research studies on students who drop out.[4]
- Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System (PDF, Outside Source), Achieve, Inc., American Diploma Project Network.
- Keeping Students on a Graduation Path in High-Poverty Middle-Grades Schools (PPT; Outside Source), Early Identification & Effective Interventions, Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver (2007).
- National Dropout Prevention Centers (Outside Source)
- Predicting Success, Preventing Failure: An Investigation of the California High School Exit Exam (PDF; Outside Source), Public Policy Institute of California.
- Preventing Student Disengagement in Middle Schools (Outside Source) Robert Balfanz, Liza Herzog, Douglas J. Mac Iver (2007).
- Youth Who Drop Out (Outside Source), Focus Adolescent Services.

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Footnotes

[1] R. Balfanz and L. Herzog, Keeping Middle Grade Students on Track to Graduation: Initial Analysis and Implications. Presentation given at the second Regional Middle Grades Symposium, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 2005.

[2]Defining Dropouts: A Statistical Portrait, an archived file from the U.S. Department of Education.

[3] Craig D. Jerald, The Hidden Costs of Curriculum Narrowing (PDF; Outside Source), *The Center Issue Brief* (August 2006), 4.

[4] Craig D. Jerald, Dropping Out Is Hard to Do (PDF; Outside Source), *Issue Brief* (June 2006), 1-6.

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Closing the achievement gap by providing access

> "We can't be serious about closing the achievement gap if at the same time we seek to water down accountability. Indeed, those kinds of mixed signals give fodder to the many that still believe that accountability for student learning is an imposition, and an unrealistic one at that. One reason this critique garners so much support is the pervasive belief that disparate outcomes for different groups of students are inevitable, or at least beyond the power of public schools to change."[1]
> Russlynn Ali, former Executive Director of the Education Trust—West.

Jack O'Connell, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction (2002-2010), defined the achievement gap as "one that exists between successful students who are often white or Asian and financially well off, and struggling students who are often poor, Hispanic, African American, or disabled."[2] Unfortunately, in spite of the exemplary efforts of many middle grades educators, testing results reveal a lingering achievement gap for particular subgroups of students in many of California's schools. For example, according to the Education Trust—West , California's Latino and black eighth graders read at the level of fourth-grade whites.[3]

A 2006 study by Policy Analysis for California Education, a think tank shared by the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University, found that after seven years of school accountability, achievement gaps in California's schools are widening in some grades. The study showed that the share of eighth graders from middle-class families proficient in English language arts in 2003 was 28 percentage points higher than the share of English-proficient students from low-income families. In 2006, the gap grew to 33 percentage points.[4]

A 2006 study by The Education Trust showed that the achievement gap widened in California middle grades even though the state's middle grades students as a whole experienced a nine percent increase in reading scores and a seven percent increase in math scores. The gap in reading scores widened between African American and white middle grade students by four percent, while the math gap widened by one percent. Likewise, the reading gap between Latino and white middle grades students widened in California by three percent, and the math gap widened by one percent.5

A difficult challenge lies ahead for all educators in closing the achievement gap. There is no quick fix, and there are no easy answers. In fact, a look at the API results of many distinguished schools reveals a continuing achievement gap even in these high-performance schools. The research included in the recommendations of Taking Center Stage—Act II serves as a guide for a long-term endeavor. While educators continue to work on what schools can do, city, state, and national leaders need to look at other social issues that affect children and their ability to learn.

90-90-90 Schools report is an extensive study of schools from a variety of communities and grade spans, Doug Reeves and researchers from the Center for Performance Assessment found strong evidence against the predictive power of demographics. According to their findings, 90/90/90 schools have the following characteristics:

- More than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, a commonly used surrogate for low-income families.
- More than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities.
- More than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards, according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement.

The study examines instruction, assessment, and interventions at the 90-90-90 schools to determine which strategies are common to success. There is additional information about the study at MiddleWeb. To explore successful instruction, assessments, and intervention strategies in the middle grades, please refer to the related links below.

Doug Reeves describes the 90-90-90 schools, and many other successful practices in the following four videos:

- Rigor in the Classroom Video Presentation (WMV; 22:59) | Flash
- Making Assessment Work in the Real World (WMV; 18:35) | Flash
- Accountability in a Learning Organization (WMV; 15:49) | Flash
- Teacher Leadership: Making a Difference (WMV; 25:41) | Flash

Related Links

- 90-90-90 Schools (Outside Source)
- Achievement in California 2006: Small Gains, Growing Gaps (PDF; Outside Source), Education Trust—West
- Education Trust—West (Outside Source).
- MiddleWeb (Outside Source)
- Recommendation 2— Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.

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Footnotes

[1] Russlynn Ali, Testimony to the State Board of Education, (PDF; Outside Source) Sacramento: California, The Education Trust—West, March 13, 2008.

[2] Jack O'Connell, Third Annual State of the Education Address, Sacramento: California Department of Education, Press Release 06-015, February 7, 2006.

[3] Closing Achievement Gaps in California: What, Why and How. A presentation by Education Trust—West at the California Curriculum and Instruction Leadership Symposium, Asilomar, Pacific Grove, California, February 2005, slide 20.

[4] Linda Jacobson, Some California Achievement Gaps Are Widening, Study Finds (Outside Source), *Education Week,* November 29, 2006.

[5] Daria Hall and Shana Kennedy, Primary Progress, Secondary Challenge: A State-by-State Look at Student Achievement Patterns (PDF; Outside Source). Oakland: The Education Trust, March 2006, 11-13.

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The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) Assessment Requirements

One of the primary goals of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) (NCLB) Assessment Requirements is to provide high-quality content experts in the classroom. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform goes a step further by calling for teachers who also understand the developmental needs of the middle grades student and will center their instructional strategies on student needs.

The Title I section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by NCLB, aims to help end the achievement gap by ensuring that **all** children meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards. Title I provides financial assistance through state educational agencies to local educational agencies and public schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income households.

According to the Harvard Civil Rights Project, NCLB has not yet made significant progress toward closing the achievement gap.[1] Nonetheless, the intent of the Act is to provide qualified and caring teachers, high standards for all students, equal access for students with disabilities, and parental involvement as components of an educational system that will close the achievement gap by 2014.

Related Links

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Outside Source), U. S. Department of Education.
- Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A) (Outside Source), U. S. Department of Education.
- National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (Outside Source)
- No Child Left Behind, California Department of Education.
- Title I, California Department of Education.

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Footnote
[1] Jaekyung Lee, Tracking Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps: An In-depth Look into National and State Reading and Math Outcome Trends (PDF; Outside Source). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2006, 5, 10.

Access to qualified and caring teachers and staff

A comprehensive study by the nonprofit Education Trust found that low-income and minority children benefit the most from good teachers. The study also demonstrated that students—even those in middle- and upper-income families—gain higher scores on state exams and demonstrate better preparation for college if they attend schools where teacher quality is high.[1]

Although No Child Left Behind delineates requirements for highly qualified teachers, effective middle grades faculties seek to engage **all** staff members. Office staff, custodial staff, school monitors, and other non-certificated teaching personnel are part of a caring community that engages students in the pursuit of excellence. However, teacher effectiveness is the most critical element for student success. ". . . [R]esearchers found that all else being equal, students assigned to the most effective teachers for three years in a row performed 50 percentile points higher on a 100-point scale than comparable students assigned to the least effective teachers for three years in a row."[2]

In her book, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*, author, researcher, and education expert Linda Darling-Hammond makes the case for the U.S. to move beyond its current education system that provides "ambitious learning" for a select group of students and toward a more equitable approach that serves all students.

Darling-Hammond also urges educators and policy makers to focus not on the achievement gap but on the opportunity gap—"the accumulated differences in access to key education resources that support learning at home and at school." She compares the current U.S. system with those in three countries—Finland, Singapore, and South Korea—that have rebuilt their education systems from the ground up in the last several decades. To address the opportunity gap, these countries expanded access by:

1. Funding schools adequately and equitably.
2. Organizing teaching around national standards and a core curriculum.
3. Eliminating examination systems that had once tracked students into different middle schools and restricted access to high school.
4. Using assessments that require in-depth knowledge of content and higher-order skills.
5. Investing in strong teacher education programs.
6. Paying salaries that are equitable across schools and competitive with other careers.
7. Supporting ongoing teacher learning.
8. Pursuing consistent, long-term reforms.

The article, Soaring Systems: High Flyers All Have Equitable Funding, Shared Curriculum, and Quality Teaching, (PDF; Outside Source) which appeared in American Educator in Winter 2010-11, provides additional details about these eight "investments" in education and how Finland, Singapore, and South Korea have catapulted their students to the top in terms of academic achievement as measured by international assessments.

Many of California's lowest-performing schools are unable to attract and retain the most qualified and experienced teachers and administrators. In some districts, veteran teachers may perceive assignment to low-performing schools as punitive and administrators may prefer to work in schools with fewer challenges. Districts bear a significant responsibility for equitable placement of experienced and highly qualified teachers and administrators in challenging schools.

Related Links

- A Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Middle Grades Classroom: What States, Districts, and Schools Can Do (PDF; Outside Source), Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).
- California Standards for the Teaching Profession (PDF; Outside Source), Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
- FAQs for English Learner Teacher Authorizations, California Department of Education.
- Improving Teacher and Principal Quality, California Department of Education.
- Qualified and caring teachers, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Solving the Dilemmas of Teacher Supply, Demand, and Standards: How We Can Ensure a Competent, Caring, and Qualified Teacher for Every Child (PDF; Outside Source), National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NACTAF).

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Footnotes

[1] Heather G. Peske and Kati Haycock, Teaching Inequality: How Poor and Minority Students Are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, 2006.

[2] Kevin Carey, The Real Value of Teachers: Using New Information about Teacher Effectiveness to Close the Achievement Gap (PDF; Outside Source), *Thinking K-16,* Vol. 8, Issue 1 (Winter 2004), 4.

Subgroups

To ensure that schools address the achievement gap, the current California accountability system requires subgroup reporting on the STAR tests and on the Academic Performance Index (API). The California system predated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for improved scores for each subgroup, and, in the Base API 2006 reporting, strengthened targets for each group.

California law defines a subgroup as being "at least 50 students who make up 15 percent or more of the school's total population with valid test scores, or at least 100 students with valid test scores."[1]

Under the accountability system, the subgroups include:

- African American (not of Hispanic origin)
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Filipino
- Hispanic or Latino
- Pacific Islander
- White (not of Hispanic origin)
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged
- English learners
- Students with disabilities

Both NCLB and the California accountability system focus on subgroups to avoid the unintentional obscuring of inequities in subgroup performance.

> Many a school problem has been hidden under a blanket of 'average' scores. That can be especially easy in schools where most students are high achievers because underachieving subgroups tend to get submerged in schoolwide numbers. That . . . is why NCLB insists on making sure that each subgroup, and not just the overall student body, makes adequate yearly progress.[2]

It may be necessary for accountability calculations to look at statistically significant subgroups, but high-performing schools must look at all student populations—even those that are calculated as statistically insignificant—for accountability purposes. Although the numbers of a group such as English learners or Native Americans may not reach statistical significance, social equity means public schools have an ethical responsibility to teach those students even if the group consists of a few students.

Report Examines Educational Progress of Students by Race/Ethnicity
A report from the U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics examines current and trending student achievement by race/ethnicity. Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups delves into demographic information; preprimary, elementary, and secondary education participation; achievement (including advanced placement classes and college entrance exams); persistence (such as absences and drop out rates); student behaviors; postsecondary education; and educational outcomes.

Related Links

- 2009-10 APR Glossary-Demographic Characteristics, California Department of Education.
- American Indian, California Department of Education.
- English Learner Subgroup Self Assessment (ELSSA) (XLS; 264KB; 33pp.), California Department of Education.
- English Learners, California Department of Education.
- Migrant Education Resources, California Department of Education.
- Migrant Student Information Network (MSIN) (Outside Source), WestEd.
- No Child Left Behind, California Department of Education.
- PALMS . . . College Within Their Grasp: Postsecondary Access for Latino Middle-Grades Students (Outside Source)
- Race and Ethnicity (Outside Source), U.S. Census Bureau.
- Recommendation 11—Accountability, TCSII.

- Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups (PDF; Outside Source)
- Title III Immigrant Students, California Department of Education.

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Footnotes

[1] California *Education Code* Section 52052 (a)(3) .

[2] William Raspberry, Now We Don't Have Any Underperforming Subgroups (Outside Source), *The Washington Post,* June 7, 2004.

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Socioeconomic status

Researchers continue to study the effects of poverty on student achievement and find that it is a significant deterrent to success. To ensure the success of disadvantaged students, No Child Left Behind:

. . . holds a school alone responsible if the students—whatever social, economic, physical, or intellectual handicaps they bring to their classrooms—fail to make sufficient progress every year. Yet a growing body of research suggests that while schools can make a difference for individual students, the fabric of children's lives outside of school can either nurture, or choke, what progress poor children do make academically . . . reforms aimed at education alone are doomed to come up short, unless they are tied to changes in economic and social policies to lessen the gaps children face outside the classroom.[1]

Factors affecting student achievement that stem from poverty and that, for the most part, are out of the direct control of educational leaders include:

- Low birth weight, lead poisoning, hunger, lack of health care, and poor nutrition.
- Parent availability as a role model or as an active participant in a child's education.
- Mobility—moving from school to school as parents seek work or affordable housing.[2]

Additionally, socioeconomically disadvantaged students often live in overcrowded housing conditions that are not conducive to having a **quiet place to study**. Students in middle grades may be called upon to care for younger siblings while parents go to work. Older adolescents may feel pressured to drop out of school and get a job to help support the family. The prevalence of technology and the necessity for the use of computers to complete assignments outside the classroom creates a **digital divide** between those who can afford the technology and those who cannot.

In the Spotlight

Holmes International Middle School, Los Angeles Unified School District, is a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
There are computers in each classroom at Holmes, where 61 percent of the students live in poverty. In addition, the school provides three roving computer labs that allow students to become proficient in technology. Students use software programs to improve learning in English language arts and mathematics. Students learn to create and manage electronic portfolios and take virtual field trips.

Computer technology is used in all curricular areas to support students in mastering the standards. Students can choose from several technology-based elective classes that teach them to create PowerPoint presentations, learn effective Internet search techniques, create brochures, learn Web design, and increase information-processing skills. In addition, students complete a ten-week unit on computer programming using a robotics program. The learning resource center is equipped with assistive technology tools to assist students with disabilities.

Lemon Grove Middle School, Lemon Grove Elementary School District
Lemon Grove Middle School serves a student population that is over 60 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged. In one year since implementing a program that provides students with e-Pad computers for home and school use, the school's API jumped 26 points. The e-Pads provide social equity by allowing all students and their families to access textbooks, support materials, teacher Web sites, and grades through the district's broadband Web portal, thus helping to close the "digital divide." For more on the program, read a February 2007 article from the *San Diego Union Tribune, or* view the e-Pad segment on Channel 10 News located below..

Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District
The district received recognition for having one of California's best-planned programs for homeless students. A grant from the state's Education for Homeless Children and Youth program supports the enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless students up to age twenty-one. Lack of access to technology tends to magnify the effects of poverty. According to a 2003 study released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 67 percent of white students use the Internet, compared with 44 percent of Hispanics and 47 percent of blacks. Fifty-four percent of white students use the Internet at home, while only 26 percent of Hispanics and 27 percent of blacks do so. The report's authors suggest that schools can help to reduce the **digital divide** by providing access to computers and the Internet.[3]

- Holmes International DataQuest School Profile
- Holmes International Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Holmes International Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

- Lemon Grove Middle School (Outside Source)
- digital divide (TCS II Glossary)
- e-Pad computers (Outside Source)
- view the e-Pad segment on Channel 10 News (WMP; Outside Source) (San Diego)

- Norwalk-La Mirada DataQuest District Profile
- Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District (Outside Source)
- Education for Homeless Children and Youth
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (Outside Source)

In the Spotlight

Moreno Valley Unified, Napa Valley Unified, Rowland Heights Unified, and Santa Ana Unified School Districts
To avoid losses of learning time and state funding over absenteeism due to migrant and immigrant students' travel abroad to visit relatives, many districts extend winter break to three weeks. The districts make up the difference by adding extra school days at the beginning and end of the school year. According to Don Trigg, associate superintendent of business services at Santa Ana Unified School District, the district (with nearly 59,000 students) lost tens of thousands of dollars a day because of increased absenteeism around the holiday break in the past.[4]

- Moreno Valley DataQuest District Profile
- Moreno Valley Unified (Outside Source)

- Napa Valley DataQuest District Profile
- Napa Valley Unified (Outside Source)

- Rowland Heights DataQuest District Profile
- Rowland Heights Unified (Outside Source)

- Santa Ana DataQuest District Profile
- Santa Ana Unified (Outside Source)

Children from low-income homes may face an additional "conversation gap." A 2002 study by the Economic Policy Institute found that middle-class parents converse with their children in ways that build confidence, reasoning, and negotiating skills that are useful in school,

college, and the workforce. However, some low-income parents tend to give orders to their children, mirroring what they face in their own work world. Additionally, parent–child time in low-income families may be limited due to the longer hours spent working one or two jobs.[5]

The large number of children living in poverty or in low-income households complicates the drive to close the achievement gap in California. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (Outside Source) at Columbia University, 19 percent of California's children live in poverty, and another 24 percent fit the designation as low income. Although this designation does not necessarily mean that low-income children will struggle in school, experience shows that these students come from households where schooling is interrupted by lack of income, frequent moves, and absenteeism due to lack of transportation and other factors related to poverty. Additionally, poor students often miss school to take care of family obligations and experience intermittent parent support (particularly when parents or guardians work several jobs). They also may lack study resources at home such as books, technology, and a quiet room in which to study or sleep. Additional data show that 42 percent of California's low-income children live with a single parent, and a disproportionate number of children of Hispanic and black families live in low-income homes.[6]

In the Spotlight

Edna Hill Middle School, Brentwood Union Elementary School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
To help close the **digital divide**, the computer lab is open to parents mornings and evenings. One of the school's bilingual secretaries provides computer training to parents as needed.

- Edna Hill DataQuest School Profile
- Edna Hill Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Edna Hill Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)

The 2010 status report by Children Now, California Report Card 2011 (Outside Source) presents a new approach, the Children's Agenda which identifies the top ten high-priority, high-impact actions California policymakers should take to improve the status of children. The Agenda covers topics that include a comprehensive pre-school to 12th grade education reform and funding package, a coordinated and streamlined delivery of children's' services, and implementation of federal health care reform and reduction of childhood obesity rates.

Similar to previous years, the Report Card studies and evaluates the essential elements of children's welfare. The overall grade point average for this year is C-, primarily due to the drastic cuts in the state budget. Statistics that highlight critical areas include the following:

- In California, 694,000 (22 percent) children, ages five and younger, live in poverty. Nearly 1.4 million (45 percent) live in low-income families (below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, or $44,100 annually for a family of four).
- California ranks near last among the 50 states on a number of measures of education spending. In per pupil spending that is adjusted for cost of living, California ranks 44th.
- One out of every two students is below proficient in English Language Arts; 54 percent are below proficient in mathematics; and 64 percent are below proficient in science. Additionally, approximately one-fifth of California's students fail to graduate from high school.

According to the 2010 data from the National Center for Children in Poverty: Demographics of Poor Children (Outside Source), there are 4,669,483 families in California with 9,250,111 children. Poor children account for 20 percent of those children as defined as families with income below 100 percent of the federal poverty level. Parental education of low-income families demonstrate that 37 percent have less than a high school education, 26 percent have a high school education, and 37 percent have some college or more.

In the Spotlight

Holmes International Middle School, Los Angeles Unified School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
The Holmes student body celebrates cultures from around the world. The school's international flag court mirrors bulletin boards throughout the school that feature diversity. In addition, the school library includes an array of books representing cultures from around the world.

- Holmes International DataQuest School Profile
- Holmes International Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Holmes International Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

Previous
Subgroups

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Language acquisition

Footnotes
[1] Diana Jean Schemo, It Takes More Than Schools to Close the Achievement Gap (Outside Source), *New York Times,* August 9, 2006.
[2] Anne Nelson, "Overcoming the Income Gap" (Outside Source), *Infobrief,* No. 47 (Fall 2006).
[3] Matthew DeBell and Chris Chapman, Computer and Internet Use by Students in 2003—Statistical Analysis (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, September 2006, iv.
[4] Seema Mehta and Jennifer Delson, "Schools Learn a Lesson, Schedule Longer Holiday Break to Aid Traveling Families," *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 2006.
[5] Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Heather Boushey, *The State of Working America 2002–03* (Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 2002.
[6] Julian Palmer, Younghwan Song, and Hsien-Hen Lu , The Changing Face of Child Poverty in California (Outside Source). New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, August 2002.

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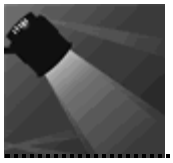
Language acquisition

The middle grades demand much from students—even those who are just beginning to learn English. Title III of No Child Left Behind requires schools to provide language instruction for English learners (ELs) and immigrant students.

However, a 2006 study from the UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute found that California's ELs attend highly segregated schools. According to the researchers, segregation limits educational opportunities for ELs in the following ways:

- Many ELs in California do not have access to native English speakers to serve as language **role models**.
- Many of the ELs in California come from low-income households, so a high concentration of ELs also means that many of them attend low-income schools. As noted under **socioeconomic status**, attending a low-income school is a significant disadvantage in itself.
- Schools with high concentrations of ELs are less likely to have fully certified teachers even after differences in school poverty are accounted for.[1]



In the Spotlight

Canyon Middle School, Castro Valley Unified School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
Teachers use a wide variety of differentiated instructional strategies to address the learning of all students. For example, teachers use lecture, group activities, projects, field trips, posters, 3-D models, skits, and musical presentations to deliver standards-based curricula. Teachers have learned to modify and scaffold lessons to assist English learners and students with disabilities. Quarterly Saturday Academies provide preteaching in content areas along with homework assistance. In addition, Canyon's California Junior Scholarship Federation students provide tutoring in the library after school.

Millikan Middle School, Los Angeles Unified School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
In an effort to encourage parents and students who are learning English to **reclassify** as fluent English proficient (RFEP), Millikan staff members host large ceremonies to celebrate when students reclassify. The events double as parent education, and show both students and their family members the benefits of working toward proficiency. In addition to the fun of the ceremony, one of the benefits that motivates the students is the ability to take electives.

- Canyon DataQuest School Profile
- Canyon Middle School (Outside Source)
- Canyon Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

- Millikan DataQuest School Profile
- Millikan Middle School (Outside Source)
- Millikan Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

In school year 2003-04, national data showed that in nearly two-thirds of the states, the percentage of students with limited-English proficiency scoring proficient on language arts and mathematics tests was lower than the state's annual progress goals.[2] Teacher training

on sheltered English and differentiation will help incrementally but may not be enough to move students to grade-level standards.

In the Spotlight

Sacramento City Unified School District
An analysis of district tests revealed an achievement gap among Asian children. Although Chinese and Japanese students scored well on tests, southeast Asian students struggled. To close that gap, the district holds a summer school session that preteaches material the students will face when they return to regular school. All the teachers are southeast Asian, and they tie lessons to the culture and learning styles of the Hmong, Mien, and Laotian students.

- Sacramento City DataQuest District Profile
- Sacramento City Unified School District (Outside Source)

Although the effectiveness of specific approaches continues to be a source of debate, there are many resources to help schools provide language acquisition supports to students.

Related Links

- Address Student Needs: English Language Acquisition (Outside Source), U. S. Department of Education.
- Bilingual instruction, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- California's statewide assessment system, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- CAPA and English learners, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Defining an Adequate Education for English Learners (PDF; Outside Source), Gandara and Rumberger, 2007.
- English language development (ELD), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- English language proficiency and the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- English Learners, California Department of Education.
- Interventions for Bilingual Students, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Meeting the Literacy Development Needs of Adolescent English Language Learners Through Content Area Learning, Part One: Focus on Motivation and Engagement (PDF; Outside Source), The Education Alliance, Brown University.
- Meeting the Literacy Development Needs of Adolescent English Language Learners Through Content Area Learning, Part Two: Focus on Classroom Teaching and Learning Strategies (PDF; Outside Source), The Education Alliance, Brown University.
- National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (Outside Source), Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Primary language assessment, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Student Achievement is More than Academic, (PDF; Outside Source), Professional Learning Exchange.
- Title III (Outside Source), U. S. Department of Education.
- Title III Immigrant Students, California Department of Education.

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Footnotes
[1]Paul Desruisseaux, Widespread Segregation of California's English Learners ,UC Newsroom: University of California, April 2006.
[2] Marnie S. Shaul, No Child Left Behind Act: Assistance from Education Could Help States Better Measure Progress of Students with Limited English Proficiency (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C: Government Accountability Office (GAO), July 2006.

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Gender

There is still much social commentary about the **glass ceiling** and gender gap when women's salaries are compared with men's in business. Whether or not that gender gap is closing, studies show that girls continue to be underrepresented in science and math.[1] However, a 2006 study on mathematics, science, and gender found that the difference in academic and psychological outcomes for males and females is generally small, suggesting that gender similarities vastly outweigh any gender differences.[2]

Sally Ride, a former astronaut, spoke at the first annual National Summit on the Advancement of Girls in Math and Science (May 15, 2006) and suggested two strategies for keeping girls interested in math and science:

- Involve them in after-school or summer science and math programs.
- Create mentoring partnerships to pair girls with women scientists.[1]

Programs that encourage young women in mathematics, science, and engineering show promise. Examples are as follows:

- The Santa Cruz County Office of Education sponsors a Girls in Engineering Program (Outside Source) to help girls in middle school consider careers in math and engineering.
- Environmental and Spatial Technology (EAST) Project: An Industry/Education Collaboration That Works for Females and Minorities (Outside Source).
- Dr. Pam Clute (University of California at Riverside) has developed Project CONNECT (Outside Source) to enhance the math skills of middle school girls.

The disproportionate number of boys in science and math stands in contrast to another area in the schools that shows boys at a disadvantage. For example, boys make up two-thirds of students in special education—including 80 percent of those diagnosed with emotional disturbances or autism. Boys are two and a half times as likely as girls to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).[3] In addition, boys scored an average of 21 points lower than girls did on standardized writing tests and 11 points lower on standardized reading tests.[4] According to William S. Pollock, author of *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* and a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, "It's not just that boys are falling behind girls. . . . It's that boys are falling behind their own functioning . . ." [5]

Despite the high interest in gender studies, it may be artificial to compare boys to girls. In fact, some research indicates that boys have not fallen behind previous achievement levels. Instead, the apparent gender gap arises from the ways in which female students have made strides in all areas of accomplishment, in academics, leadership, and sports.[6] For example, an analysis of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data since 1971 indicates that boys have improved steadily in both math and reading scores. Meanwhile, female students are taking over leadership positions and excelling in academics throughout the educational system.

> Girls are being told, 'Go for it, you can do it.' They are getting an immense amount of support. Boys hear that the way to shine is athletically. And boys get a lot of mixed messages about what it means to be masculine and what it means to be a student. Does being a good student make you a real man? I don't think so . . . It is not cool.[7]

Researchers point out that some groups of boys are struggling because of race and social class, not gender. "Closing racial and economic gaps would help poor and minority boys more than closing gender gaps, and focusing on gender gaps may distract attention from the bigger problems facing these youngsters."[8]

Another aspect of the gender gap emerges during timed tests. Vanderbilt University researchers found that girls in both primary and secondary schools perform much better than males do in timed situations. According to the authors of the study, this time-advantage could explain why girls generally do better in school, where many tests and assignments are time-based.[9]

Middle schools can help to prepare the next generation of young people to take equal responsibility for leadership and scholarship by deliberately encouraging both male and female students of all races and ethnicities to participate actively in all aspects of student life. Mentors can support young people in setting and reaching high personal goals for academics, leadership, service, and athletics. Tutoring centers and mentors can also help young adolescents by giving them practice in the skills they need to succeed, down to details such as giving them practice in completing timed assignments and tests.

Previous
Language acquisition

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Universal access for special education

Footnotes

[1]"Spellings: Encourage Girls in Math, Science" (Outside Source), *eSchool News,* May 17, 2006.

[2] Dan Laitsch, "Mathematics, Science, and Gender", *Research Brief,* Vol. 4**,** No. 12, December 22, 2006.

[3] Office of Special Education Programs, 25th Annual Report to Congress (Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2003. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; "Mental Health in the United States: Prevalence of and Diagnosis and Medication Treatment for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder—United States, 2003" (Outside Source), *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Sept. 2, 2005.

[4] P. Tyre, The Trouble with Boys, *Newsweek,* January 30, 2006.

[5] The New Gender Gap (Outside Source) from Kindergarten to Grad School, Boys Are Becoming the Second Sex, *Business Week Online*, May 26, 2003.

[6] Sara Mead, "The Truth about Boys and Girls" (PDF; Outside Source), Washington, D.C.: *Education Sector*, 2006, 6.

[7] Interview with Dr. Michael Thompson in "The Gender Gap: Boys Lagging" (Outside Source), *60 Minutes,* May 25, 2003.

[8] Sara Mead, The Truth about Boys and Girls (PDF; Outside Source), Washington, D.C.: Education Sector, 2006.

[9] Melanie Moran, "Boys vs. Girls: Research Finds Girls Have Advantage on Timed Tests" (Outside Source), *Vanderbilt Register*, May 26, 2006.

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Universal access for special education

Under federal regulations, states must ensure universal access to a standards-based education for special education students. The requirement stipulates that teacher- and district wide assessments and classroom assignments must be universally accessible. If students have processing difficulties or if they lack specific academic vocabulary, direct instruction may be one method of teaching the material. Direct instruction includes different formats for presentation. As necessary, materials will need to be available in braille, large text, and on tape or compact disk (CD). The No Child Left Behind Web site includes many technology solutions to the challenge of universal access (Outside Source).

It is important to note that the API compares **a different cohort** group each year. As a result, assessment results for **students with disabilities** may not give teaching teams an adequate picture of the challenges facing their *current-year* cohort of students with disabilities. Instead, continuous progress monitoring of current students will help teachers target specific learning needs—for example, whether the student faces processing problems or physical challenges.

Related Links

- Assessing students with special needs, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Instructional Strategies, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Least restrictive environment (LRE), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Quality Assurance Process (QAP), California Department of Education.
- Special Education, California Department of Education.
- Strategic interventions—reteaching, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.

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Strategies Common to Effective Middle Grades Programs

Researchers have studied both high-performing and low-performing middle schools to answer the following questions:

- Why do some middle school students perform poorly on standardized assessments?
- Why do high school students require so much remediation?
- Why are some middle schools effective and others are not even when they may have similar student populations?

Findings from the research indicate that high-performing middle schools have managed to overcome the organizational problems that traditionally hurt high challenge schools. Effective middle schools provide:

- Resources for rigorous instruction
- Support for teachers, administrators, and students
- Relationships that foster student achievement

The success of high-performing middle schools is encouraging because the health of a school is easier to improve than the socioeconomic character of a community.[1]

The National Center for Educational Accountability identifies (Outside Source) two fundamental beliefs about the qualities of a higher performing school:

1. Consistency: Higher performing schools meet a more stringent set of criteria than the schools listed . . . some of which only appear successful in that single grade or year.

2. Fairness:

   Higher Performing Schools are compared with other schools in the same state with similar school-wide demographic levels.

   The analysis of performance focuses on students who have been in the school long enough for their achievement level to reflect the effects of that school. In the middle and high school analysis, the prior achievement of each school's students is considered, so that the "value-added" of the school can be assessed.[2]

The degree of fidelity in implementing a *comprehensive* strategy for middle grades reform is also key.

Results of this longitudinal study indicated, "across subject areas, adolescents in highly implemented schools had higher achievement (as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the California Test of Basic Skills) than those in non-implemented schools and substantially better than those in partially implemented schools' . . . 'Broad-range enhancements and adjustment are not obtained until implementation is quite mature, comprehensive, and conducted with a high degree of fidelity."[3]

Elective programs such as AVID Advancement Via Individual Determination (Outside Source) help low-income and historically disadvantaged youths who show potential (a 2.0 to 3.5 grade point average) to prepare for college. These types of programs prepare students with study skills, leadership opportunities, college awareness, and goal setting. The programs have demonstrated results. For example, middle grades students in the AVID program enroll in algebra at a 42 percent rate, whereas the national average is 24 percent.

In the Spotlight

Holtville Middle School, Holtville Unified School District
To provide access to advanced mathematics classes, this high-poverty school near the California-Mexico border employs a teacher who lives in Arizona to teach students. A Viacom camera is used on both sides and a document camera is used allowing the image to come through on the television. The school is fortunate to have fiber-optic lines coming into the district which is helpful. The teacher had to get a business line in his house, so he could have enough capacity to broadcast to the school.

- Holtville DataQuest School Profile
- Holtville Middle School (Outside Source)

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Universal access for special education

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Access to facilities and instructional materials

Footnotes
[1] W. K. Hoy and J. W. Hannum, “Middle School Climate: An Empirical Assessment of Organizational Health and Student Achievement,” *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 33(3), 290-311.
[2] Higher Performing Schools and Districts. Austin, Tex.: National Center for Educational Accountability.
[3] Vincent A. Anfara, Jr., and Richard P. Lipka,Relating the Middle School Concept to Student Achievement (PDF; Outside Source), *Middle School Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (September 2003), 3.

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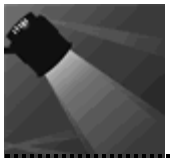
Access to facilities and instructional materials

The importance of adequate instructional materials was highlighted by the Williams case (Eliezer Williams et al. v. State of California et al.). It calls for public schools to provide students with equal access to instructional materials, safe and decent school facilities, and qualified teachers. “The California content standards were designed to encourage the highest achievement of every student . . . "[1] "Districts must still insure that every students has standards-aligned instructional materials in the four core subjects (state-adopted in grades K-8 and locally adopted for grades 9-12).”[2] California Education Code "(EC) Section 1240.3 states the following: '1240.3. (a) For the purposes of Section 1240, for the 2008-09 to 2014-15 fiscal years, inclusive, sufficient textbooks ore instructional materials include standards-aligned textbooks or instructional materials, or both' . . .”[3] The California Department of Education (CDE) Web site contains considerable information about instructional materials. For more information, please refer to Instructional Materials FAQ on the CDE Web site.



In the Spotlight

Canyon Middle School, Castro Valley Unified School District, a 2007 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
Canyon’s computer labs make use of an individual handheld response system to facilitate the interaction of all students—even those who lack confidence to participate in regular class discussions. In addition, mobile computer labs give all students access to the Internet for research projects and enrichment such as a stock market game, historical simulations, and English language arts sources.

- Canyon DataQuest School Profile
- Canyon Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Canyon Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

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Footnotes
[1]Content Standards, California Department of Education.
[2]Instructional Materials FAQ, Question 10, California Department of Education.
[3]Instructional Materials FAQ, Question 11, California Department of Education.

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Access to grade-level, standards-based instruction

Teachers communicate high expectations by delivering grade-level, standards-based instruction through developmentally responsive strategies. Frequent informal and periodic formal assessments help teachers know when students are falling behind and when to provide early, accelerated interventions for specific areas of difficulty.

The actual delivery of standards-based instruction is difficult work that requires daily modifications, planning, and care. The collaboration of professional learning communities is required. By working in teams, teachers share strategies, develop common assessments, review assessment results to modify instruction, and brainstorm new solutions for specific learning difficulties. In addition, they collaboratively develop and review grade-level student assignments and create rubrics. By reviewing assignments collaboratively, teachers ensure a consistent level of rigor.

Ensuring equity is especially important in science and mathematics, the two academic areas that historically have not been widely open to females, ethnic minorities, or students from less affluent communities and families. Jobs of the future will require workers to be highly skilled in technology, science, mathematics, and writing.[1] It is up to the schools to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to gain meaningful employment. The article, On Equity and Inclusion in Math and Science Classrooms, analyzes equity issues in mathematics and science as they apply to subgroups identified in the No Child Left Behind Act.[2] The article includes comprehensive resource lists on providing accommodations for students with special needs, as well as contact information on centers that specialize in equity issues.

Related Links

- Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- SchoolsMovingUp (Outside Source), WestEd.

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Access to heterogeneous groupings to the fullest extent possible

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Footnotes

[1] Keeping California's Edge: The Growing Demand for Highly Educated Workers—Executive Summary (PDF; Outside Source). Prepared for the California Business Roundtable and the Campaign for College Opportunity. Sacramento: Applied Research Center, California State University, April 2006.

[2] Arlene Hambrick and Asta Svedkauskaite,Critical Issue: Remembering the Child: On Equity and Inclusion in Math and Science Classrooms (Outside Source). Naperville, Ill.: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), n.d.

Access to heterogeneous groupings to the fullest extent possible

Effective middle schools avoid segregating English learner students and those who struggle with English into permanent groupings in less rigorous tracks. Typically, such tracking minimizes student engagement in the broader school community.

In contrast, heterogeneous groupings avoid stigmatizing and segregating students who are most at risk.

The success of this method, also called mixed-ability grouping, depends on the teacher's skill in differentiating instruction so that all students feel challenged and successful. Advocates say heterogeneous grouping prevents lower-track classes from becoming dumping grounds and ensures that all students have access to high-status content. Opponents say it is difficult for teachers to manage, hampers the brightest children from moving at an accelerated pace, and contributes to watering down the curriculum.[1]

Many studies support the educational benefits of heterogeneous grouping.[2] As noted above, however, mixed-ability grouping requires more lesson preparation and supports for slower learners—something that professional learning community team members can develop and share.

Access also implies, in some cases, providing non-heterogeneous classes for students taking advanced courses such as geometry and calculus. In cases where only one or a few students need such access, partnerships may offer a viable alternative. In addition, distance learning may be an alternative for providing specialized or advanced course work for students who have completed and excelled at grade-level work.

In the Spotlight

Richard Henry Dana Middle School, Wiseburn Elementary School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School
To provide an advanced math course for two students, the faculty at Dana developed a partnership with a nearby private high school that agreed to allow the students to participate in an advanced mathematics course.

- Richard Henry Dana DataQuest School Profile
- Richard Henry Dana Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Richard Henry Dana Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

Related Links

- Accelerating Mathematics Achievement Using Heterogeneous Grouping, (Outside Source) American Educational Research Journal.
- Access to advanced programs (gifted and talented education—GATE), Recommendation 7—Access, TCSII.
- Heterogeneous Grouping (Outside Source), National Middle School Association.
- NMSA Research Summary Heterogeneous Grouping (February 2007), (PDF; Outside Source) National Middle School Association.
- Opportunities to Cooperate (Cooperative learning), Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.

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Access to differentiated instruction

Footnotes

[1] Heterogeneous Classes, (Outside Source), Small Schools Project.

[2] Heterogeneous Grouping, (Outside Source), Naperville, Ill.: North Central Educational Laboratory (NCREL).

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Access to differentiated instruction

Students learn in different ways and at different rates. As a result, differentiated instruction is essential to help all students achieve.

According to a 2006 study by the National Center for Educational Accountability:

> 'Differentiation, not remediation' is a statement we heard continually when querying our high-performing schools about [their instructional programs, practices, and arrangements.] Using flexible grouping with an intense focus on individual learners, educators in New York told us they had shifted from placing students in appropriate programs to providing appropriate [differentiated] instruction within every classroom.[1]

Related Link

- Differentiated instruction, Recommendation 2— Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.

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Access to special education supports

Footnote
[1] Just for the Kids Study of Best Practices in Schools Across 20 States (Outside Source). Austin, Tex.: The National Center for Educational Accountability, April 2006.

Access to special education supports

No Child Left Behind does not give schools the option to let special education students fall behind. As one of the subgroups that affect the school's Adequate Yearly Progress scores, students in special education have taken a front seat in discussions about education reform.

In the Spotlight

Special Education Students Gain Access to Regular Education Science Classes

Twin Hills Charter Middle School, Twin Hills Union School District, Sonoma County, is one of the 2009 California Distinguished Schools. Twin Hills Middle School is featured on the California Department of Education's (CDE) Closing the Achievement Gap Web site for its "Signature" Practice, Access to Science. This exemplary practice addresses several of the CDE's 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success, including access; rigor, instruction, assessment, and intervention; and time.

At Twin Hills Charter Middle School, special education and science teachers worked together to create and implement a mainstreaming and support program that would address the high failure rate of special education students in science. The program called for special education and resource students with a variety of disabilities, such as Asperger's Syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), and neurological disorders, as well as other significant cognitive delays that severely impact student reading and writing skills, to be mainstreamed into regular education science classes in grades six through eight.

Intended to help students by providing access to additional support both inside and outside of the science classroom, the main components of the program include:

- A special education support person in class.
- A science study group outside of class.
- Accommodations for specific disabilities.
- Additional support time for labs and projects.

For some students, science is their only mainstreamed class; for others it is their first class outside of special education. In the past, the majority of special education and resource students were unsuccessful either due to their specific disability or because they lacked basic study skills. Goals of the program include:

- All students will pass science with a grade of C or better.
- All students will score above Far Below Basic on the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) science test regardless of disability.
- All students will complete 90 percent of assignments.
- All students from special education will be mainstreamed in science.
- All students will be exposed to the regular education science classes without major modifications.

Results of the Practice

For students who have participated, most of the goals of the program were met or exceeded. All students were mainstreamed, and the majority experienced success in the classroom as measured by their grades, homework completion rate, and STAR test scores.

The success of special education students in mainstream science classes was tracked for three years, and during this time 100 percent of students scored above Far Below Basic (17 percent Advanced, 22 percent Proficient, 37 percent Basic, 24 percent Below Basic) on the grade eight science STAR test. Eighty-six (86) percent of students have received semester

grades of C or better (52 percent B, 34 percent C, 7 percent D, 7 percent F). Itemized progress reports from teachers show that the majority of students are completing over 90 percent of their assignments.

There were also unanticipated impacts of the program. As special education students began to achieve more, their status in the classroom improved. They experienced an increase in demand as lab and project partners because they were seen as students who could “get the job done.” Classroom behavior improved and their academic success resulted in a more positive attitude toward school. Students also realized that asking for assistance was a strategy that their successful regular education peers employ, rather than seeing it as a sign of weakness or failure. In addition, regular education students were exposed to a more positive cultural view of students with disabilities, seeing them as students who struggle but who can ultimately succeed.

Building on Success

To bolster the program’s effectiveness, other areas are being targeted including:

- Professional development for paraprofessionals and teachers to assist them in helping students with the most severe disabilities, including training on how to deal with reluctant and oppositional students.
- Psychological counseling for students to address social or emotional reasons for failure.
- Adoption of teaching materials specifically geared for students with disabilities.
- Methods of involving parents in programs that provide them with strategies targeted to their child’s disability.

Twin Hills Charter Middle School is one of the schools featured on the CDE Closing the Achievement Gap Web site. The site contains helpful information, research, and success stories including “Signature” Practices from some of California’s Distinguished Schools.

- Twin Hills Charter Middle School DataQuest Profile
- Twin Hills Charter Middle School (Outside Source)
- Signature Practice: Access to Science (PDF; Outside Source)
- Closing the Achievement Gap's School Profile: Twin Hills Charter Middle School (Outside Source)
- Practices In the Spotlight Index

Related Links

- CAPA Core Adaptations, California Department of Education.
- Least restrictive environment (LRE), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Response to Intervention (RtI) and special education, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Universal access for special education, Recommendation 7—Access, TCSII.

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Access to differentiated instruction

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Access to English learner (EL) supports

Access to English learner (EL) supports

Although students who do not speak fluent English face difficult hurdles, effective middle schools are delivering standards-based learning to nonnative speakers.

A 2006 report by the National Council of La Raza, the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the U.S., examined the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act on students who are English learners (ELs). The report concluded that although full implementation of the law had not occurred by the time of the report, NCLB holds considerable promise for closing the achievement gap between ELs and other students.[1]

Related Links

- California's statewide assessment system, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) and English learners, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- English language development (ELD), Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Interventions for Bilingual Students, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Language acquisition, Recommendation 7—Access, TCSII.

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Access to special education supports

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Access to advanced program (gifted and talented education—GATE)

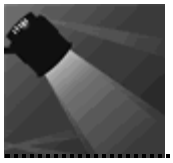
Footnote

[1] Melissa Lazarín, Improving Assessment and Accountability for English Language Learners in the No Child Left Behind Act (PDF; Outside Source), National Council of La Raza *Issue Brief,* No. 16, April 2006.

Access to advanced programs (gifted and talented education—GATE)

Just as struggling students need access to supports so they can achieve grade-level proficiency, students who have progressed beyond grade-level expectations need access to academic challenges that will keep them engaged, motivated, and continually learning. The Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program, authorized by *Education Code* (*EC*) sections 52200 through 52212 (Outside Source), provides funding for local educational agencies (LEAs) to develop unique education opportunities for high-achieving and underachieving pupils who have been identified as gifted and talented. The program calls for special efforts to ensure that pupils from economically disadvantaged and varying cultural backgrounds have equal access to these opportunities.

In some cases, gifted students can participate in heterogeneous classes because effective differentiation provides them with more challenging projects. In other cases, separate classes are needed to provide advanced course work such as geometry or advanced scientific processes.



In the Spotlight

Sutter Middle School, Sacramento City Unified School District
To provide gifted students with increased academic rigor, Sutter opened several sections of GATE science. In one unit called "Crime Scene Investigation," students work in small groups to gather and analyze data from a mock crime scene. They must analyze handwriting samples, shoe prints, clothing fibers, and blood type reports to eliminate suspects and to draw conclusions about the data.

- Sutter DataQuest School Profile
- Sutter Middle School (Outside Source)

With the tight academic schedule in middle grades, it is a challenge for staff members to add extra opportunities. However, providing mentors, establishing partnerships with neighboring schools or universities, and online (distance) learning are ways of helping gifted students to stay engaged.

Related Links

- Gifted & Talented Education, California Department of Education.
- Gifted and Talented Education Program Resource Guide (DOC; 431KB; 56pp.), California Department of Education.
- Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program (Outside Source), U.S. Department of Education.
- National Association for Gifted Children (Outside Source)
- Recommended Standards for Programs for Gifted and Talented Students (DOC; 97KB; 9pp.) , California State Board of Education, California Department of Education.
- The National Research Center on Gifted and Talented Education (NRC/GT) (Outside Source), Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, University of Connecticut.

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Access to accelerated academic interventions

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Access to accelerated academic interventions

Disadvantaged students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds often come to middle school with learning deficits. However, the practice of **tracking** these students into remedial classes will not close the achievement gap. Instead, underperforming students need accelerated academic interventions that give them more than one year of academics in a school year so that they can catch up to grade level.

In effective middle schools, teaching teams create schedules that include enough flexibility to allow students to move into regular classes as soon as they master intervention. For example, when both the regular seventh-grade math and accelerated intervention classes occur during the same period, then students can transfer out of the intervention class without changing their entire schedule.

Related Links

- Intervention, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Time for accelerated academic interventions, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.
- Time for before- and after-school programs, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.
- Time for multiple opportunities to succeed, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.
- Time for tutoring and mentoring, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.
- Time to Meet Student Needs, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.

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Access to advanced program (gifted and talented education—GATE)

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Access to electives and exploratory programs

Access to electives and exploratory programs

Often middle schools place struggling students in additional English language arts and mathematics intervention classes. In most cases, these accelerated intervention classes take the place of electives and exploratory programs. However, effective middle schools find ways to engage these students in elective courses and exploratory programs during the lunch hour, before, and after school. As noted in Recommendation 4—Relevance, TCSII, these types of developmentally responsive programs are critical for helping students feel engaged in the school community.

Career exploration is an important part of providing access—particularly for those students who may not be able to, or do not wish to, attend college after high school. All students benefit from early career exploration so that they can begin making plans for the types of careers they are interested in—whether the career path requires a college degree or not.

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Access to leadership and recognition opportunities

Access to leadership and recognition opportunities

Just as it is important for all students to have access to electives and enrichment activities, it is also critical that they have equal access to leadership and recognition opportunities. Even if a struggling student does not have room in his or her schedule for a leadership elective, caring teachers can encourage poor and disadvantaged students to take leadership roles in:

- Clubs
- Multicultural event planning
- Community service projects
- Classroom activities

Participation in these activities helps students gain leadership skills needed for later participation in community, career, and home life.

In the Spotlight

Safe School Ambassadors: From "Cool to be Cruel" to "Cool to Care"

Big Bear Middle School, located in San Bernardino County, offers a unique student leadership program focused on a fair, safe, and healthy school environment. Safe School Ambassadors (SSAs) are middle grades students chosen by their peers as being influential leaders in the schools many "cliques," resulting in a diverse student leadership group.

Forty student ambassadors and seven adult advisors participate in an off-campus, two-day interactive training. The training prepares them to "notice the hurts" and mistreatments students inflict on one another. Students are taught anti-bullying strategies and learn six techniques to empower themselves as peacemakers.

The student ambassadors and adult advisors are divided into five- to eight-member "family groups." For the first few months, each individual group meets weekly (then every other week) for support, further training, and bonding. All 40 student ambassadors and their adult advisors meet once each month for team building and to share experiences. Throughout the school year, each student ambassador completes action logs based on incidents to note which mistreatment is observed and which skill is needed to diffuse student conflicts.

Often, the most uncooperative participants—those who have exhibited patterns of negative behavior—emerge as some of the best leaders in the program. These students experience a powerful change—from "cool to be cruel" to "cool to care."

The program has already made a significant impact on school safety. During the 2009-10 school year, 219 incidents (fighting, defiance, and/or peer problems) occurred among students in grade seven. The SSA program was implemented in November 2010. At the end of the 2010-11 school year, 101 incidents occurred among students in grade eight (the previous year's students in grade seven).

- Big Bear Middle School DataQuest Profile
- Big Bear Middle School (Outside Source)
- Practices In the Spotlight Index

Similarly, struggling students need people to recognize their strengths so that they are encouraged to keep trying. A student who receives only deficiency marks is unlikely to remain in school.

Related Links

- Academic celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Celebrations—a culture based on caring and success, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Character celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- DROPPING OUT Is Hard to Do (Outside Source), Issue Brief, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, Learning Point Associates.
- Effort/motivation celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Promotions, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- School spirit celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- The chance to engage potential dropouts, Recommendation 7—Access, TCSII.

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Access to electives and exploratory programs

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Access to student clubs, sports, and community involvement

Clubs, sports, service-learning, and community involvement, such as leadership roles and electives, provide the richness and engagement that encourages students to keep trying in school. Those activities are particularly important for students at risk of dropping out—ironically, the same students who are least likely to participate in sports or clubs.

To help at-risk students engage in school life, teachers and other caring adults must take a proactive role and invite students to participate. If grades keep low-achieving students out of mainstream sports events, teachers can organize lunch and after-school leagues. Sports and other kinds of physical activities can also be provided in cooperation with the local parks department or area businesses.

Caring teachers know their students and can develop after-school clubs that address the interests of at-risk students. Personal invitations to join a club often draw in shy students. Teachers can encourage members of a club or team to invite new students to join. Student outreach promotes leadership ability as students extend the invitation. Students may be more likely to respond to an invitation from a student rather than from an adult.

Related Links

- Opportunities to cooperate (cooperative learning), Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Relationship building through student clubs and connections, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Relationships with Peers, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Sports, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.

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Access to leadership and recognition opportunities

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Access to transportation

Access to transportation

Providing access to before- and after-school programs is critical for at-risk students because they often lack transportation options.

Related Links

- Electives and exploratory courses (interest-based), Recommendation 4—Relevance, TCSII.
- Transportation issues, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.

Previous
Access to student clubs, sports, and community involvement

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Access to equitable disciplinary referrals and suspension practices

Access to equitable disciplinary referrals and suspension practices

Equal access to high expectations also implies the reverse: No student or group is unfairly targeted for disciplinary actions, including suspensions or expulsions. Teams must review disciplinary actions to ensure that consequences are fairly determined and applied. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform developed criteria for high performance. The School Self-Study and Rating Rubric (DOC; 413KB; 9pp.) is a tool designed by the Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage program. The rubric asks school communities to report their disaggregated data on suspensions and to explain any rates that exceed those of the general student population. In cases where the rate is higher, the professional learning community needs to discuss what might be causing the high rates and brainstorm possible solutions. Regular data checks will help the team determine whether the strategies have an impact on making disciplinary actions fair and effective.

Related Links

- A Safe and Healthy School Environment, Recommendation 8—Safety, Resilience, and Health, TCSII.
- Attendance, tardiness, truancy, and the School Attendance Review Board (SARB), Recommendation 8—Safety, Resilience, and Health, TCSII.
- Classroom management, Recommendation 8—Safety, Resilience, and Health, TCSII
- Discipline: a fair, consistent, and positive approach, Recommendation 8—Safety, Resilience, and Health, TCSII.

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Access to transportation

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Nonpromotion issues

Nonpromotion issues

Professional learning communities in effective schools regularly look at data to ensure that none of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) subgroups experience disproportionate rates of failure to achieve at grade level by the end of eighth grade.

Related Links

- Social promotion versus summer school and bridge programs, Recommendation 6— Transitions, TCSII.

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Access to equitable disciplinary referrals and suspension practices

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Conclusion

Conclusion

The middle grades are a gateway to high school and beyond. As such, they are a strategic playing field for ending the achievement gap.

> California must close the academic achievement gap that is threatening the futures of too many of our students and indeed threatens the social and economic future of our state. We need to set the same high expectations for all students within our accountability system. I know when you raise the bar, students and schools reach to meet it.[1]

California schools have made tremendous gains in student achievement since the advent of standards-based education. However, many of the factors that affect students and their ability to learn lie outside the classroom. The collective will of local, state, and national leaders is needed to build the kinds of economic, health, and social structures that will help overcome the hurdles many students face when they are not in school.

The appendixes at the end contain a recommendation and various resources on the topic of access.

Previous
Nonpromotion issues

Footnote
[1] Jack O'Connell, "Schools Chief Announces New Accountability for Schools Under Academic Performance Index." Sacramento: California Department of Education. Press Release No. 06-50, May 10, 2006.