



California Dropout Research Project

An Affiliated Project of the University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute

UC Santa Barbara | Gevirtz Graduate School of Education

SOLVING CALIFORNIA'S DROPOUT CRISIS

California Dropout Research Project
Policy Committee Report
February 2008



“...talk to them
and tell them it’s
actually worth
staying in school...
whatever’s going
wrong in their life...
they think that if they drop out
of school, it’s the only answer.
But, it isn’t.”

–California High School Student



“Why do students drop out of high school? It's probably because *they have no hope...*”

–California High School Student

“...sometimes it's that nobody cares. *Nobody cares if they stay in school or not.* So they just drop out.”

–California High School Student



“What really gets me not wanting to come to school is when I try and fail; that's what discourages me, that's what makes me think I don't need school ... after you've got so many F's and F's and F's you're just, like, *why even bother?*”

–California High School Student

ABOUT CDRP

The purpose of this project is to synthesize existing research and undertake new research to inform policymakers and the larger public about the nature of—and potential solutions to—the dropout problem in California. The project is producing a series of research reports, policy briefs, and statistical briefs addressing four facets of the issue: (1) the measurement and incidence of dropout and graduation rates; (2) the educational, social, and economic costs of dropouts for individuals and the state; (3) the short-term and long-term causes of dropping out; and (4) interventions and policy responses.

The project began in December 2006 and is scheduled to conclude in September 2008. The project is directed by **Russell W. Rumberger**, Professor of Education, UC Santa Barbara (russ@education.ucsb.edu).

ABOUT THE CDRP POLICY COMMITTEE

To formulate a policy agenda, the project formed a Policy Committee composed of researchers, policymakers, educators, and a community activist:

- State Assemblywoman **Jean Fuller**, Republican, Assembly District 32
- **David W. Gordon**, Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools
- **Marqueece Harris-Dawson**, Executive Director, Community Coalition, Los Angeles
- **Rowena Lagrosa**, Superintendent, Moreno Valley Unified School District
- **Lorraine McDonnell**, Professor of Political Science, UC Santa Barbara
- **Gary Orfield**, Professor of Education, Law, Political Science, and Urban Planning and co-Director of the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, UCLA
- State Senator **Darrell Steinberg**, Democrat, Senate District 6 (Sacramento)

The committee met three times over a nine-month period and discussed the dropout problem, research knowledge, and policy options for improving California's high school graduation rate. The committee also reviewed draft versions of this report.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report draws on the deliberations of the CDRP Policy Committee, CDRP research, and a variety of other information to develop a policy agenda for addressing the dropout crisis in California. The report is meant to inform policymakers, educators, parents, community leaders, and the public at large about the nature of the problem and a framework for solving it.

The report was written by **Russell W. Rumberger**.

CDRP publications are referenced in this report as follows:

- **RRI** refers to CDRP Research Report and Policy Brief 1
- **SBI** refers to CDRP Statistical Brief 1.

The titles and authors of all CDRP publications can be found on Page 17.



RECOMMENDATIONS

California is facing a dropout crisis. Funding and implementing dropout prevention programs for at-risk students alone, even programs that have been proven to be effective, cannot solve it. Instead, the solution requires a systemic approach based on building the capacity of the key educational institutions in the state—the California Department of Education, districts, and schools—a strategy that will also improve student achievement.

Because the dropout crisis is concentrated within relatively few schools and districts, the state can have an immediate impact by focusing its initial attention on those schools and districts—even in the current, limited budget climate.

The following recommendations are designed to effect change through a combination of pressure and support: (1) pressure to get educators, policymakers, and the public to stay focused on the problem and to seek solutions; and (2) support for educators and educational institutions to build their capacity to address the problem.

WHAT THE STATE SHOULD DO *(pages 8-11)*

1. Fix the accountability system in order to maintain pressure and to allow sufficient time to address the problem.
2. Collect and report more useful data on dropouts and the state's progress in improving graduation rates.
3. Develop high school reform standards and create “lighthouse” districts to implement them in schools with high dropout rates.
4. Undertake middle school reform modeled on the same strategies used for high school reform.
5. Make strategic investments in other proven dropout prevention strategies, targeting the most disadvantaged students and schools.
6. Re-examine state high school graduation requirements.

WHAT DISTRICTS SHOULD DO *(pages 12-13)*

1. Mobilize the community to address the dropout problem.
2. Adopt proven strategies to keep students in school and support their successful graduation.
3. Implement these strategies in all targeted schools through a participatory process with clearly-specified benchmarks, timelines, and outcomes.
4. Develop and use data to monitor the implementation of the strategies and to modify the implementation plan.
5. Partner with outside support organizations to identify strategies and to support and monitor implementation.

WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO *(pages 14-15)*

1. Create a personalized learning environment for both students and teachers.
2. Provide academic and social supports for students.
3. Provide rigorous and meaningful instruction.
4. Create connections to the real world.

THE NATURE OF THE CRISIS

► The problem is severe

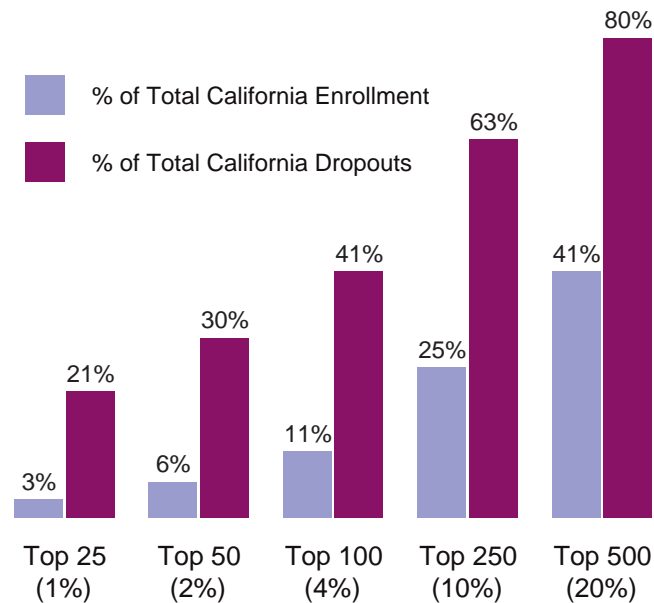
The exact number of students who fail to graduate in California remains unknown because the state is still developing a system that can accurately calculate the proportion of entering ninth grade students who graduate four years later. Available estimates, however, suggest the problem is severe. In 2005-06, 349,191 California high school students graduated (see Figure 2). Comparing that figure to the number of ninth-graders four years earlier (520,287) suggests that only about two-thirds of California's students graduate on time, with more than 170,000 students dropping out or failing to graduate. For that same year, the California Department of Education (CDE) estimates a graduation rate of 83%, with 70,000 students dropping out. Estimates by the U.S. Department of Education and other outside agencies are substantially lower than those reported by the state, ranging from 65% to 74%.¹

Despite the lack of accurate estimates, available data suggest the problem is concentrated among particular students, schools, and districts. Estimated graduation rates in California are substantially lower for Blacks (57%), Hispanics (60%), and Native Americans (52%) compared to Asians (84%) and Whites (77%).² English learners, who comprise 15% of all California high school students, represent 30% of all dropouts.³

Dropout rates are notably high in particular schools and in particular *kinds* of schools. According to CDE data, one hundred high schools with the highest number of dropouts—representing 4% of all high schools in the state and enrolling 11% of all students—accounted for 41% of California's dropouts in 2005-06 (see Figure 1). Forty-two of those one hundred schools were non-traditional schools: 25 alternative schools with an average dropout rate of 50%, and 17 charter schools with an average dropout rate of 67% (SB 7).

Graduation rates also vary substantially among school districts. According to estimates by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, in 2003-04 the graduation rate was 45% in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and 38% in the San Bernardino City Unified School District, compared to an estimated statewide average of 71%.⁴

Figure 1: California's Top Dropout Schools By Percent of Total Enrollment and Percent of Total Dropouts, 2005-2006



Source: California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS) [Electronic Version]. Retrieved October 2, 2007, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/studentdatafiles.asp> and the California Department of Education Academic Performance Index (API) Data Files [Electronic Version]. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/apidatafiles.asp>

► The cost of inaction is great

Compared to high school graduates, dropouts earn lower wages, pay fewer taxes, are more likely to commit crimes, are less likely to be employed, are more likely to be on welfare, and are less healthy (RR 1). For example:

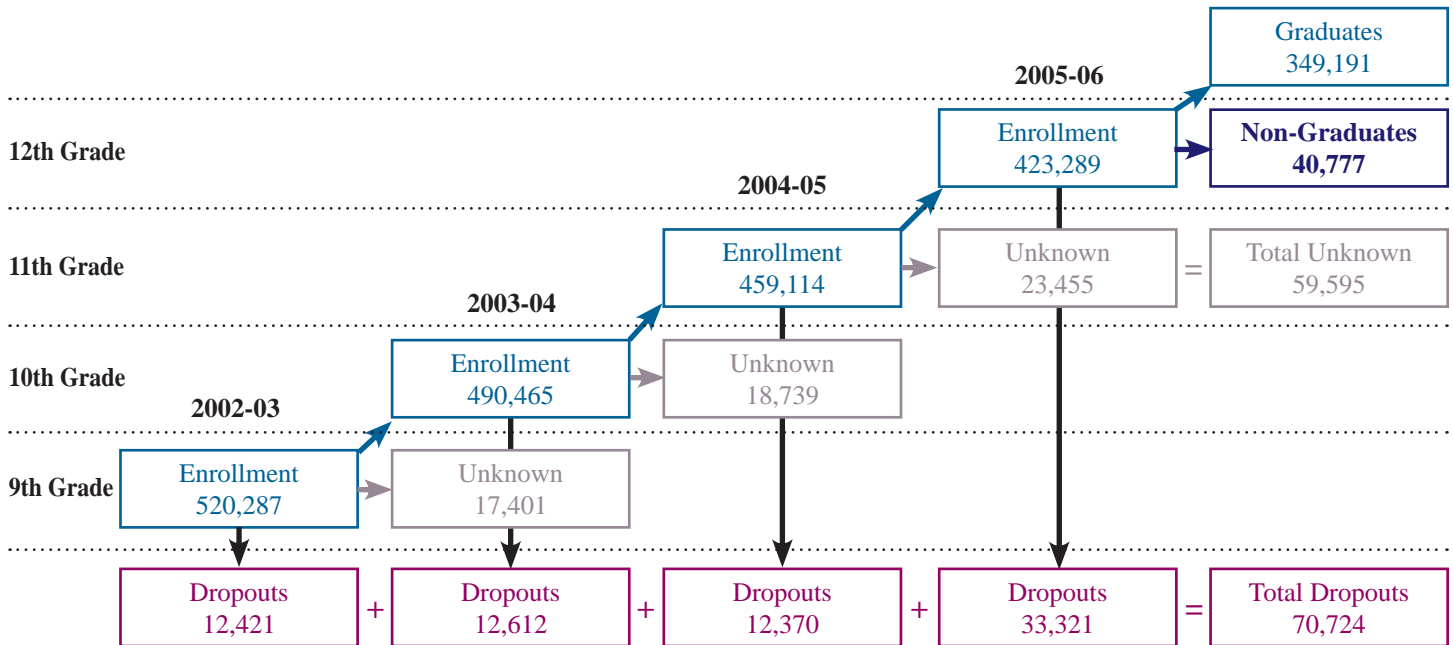
- more than two-thirds of all high school dropouts will use food stamps during their working lives;
- the probability of incarceration for a Black male dropout is 60%;
- an “average” high school graduate earns \$290,000 more over a lifetime—and pays \$100,000 more in federal, state, and local taxes—than a high school dropout.

In all, dropouts generate considerable economic losses to taxpayers and the economy (RR 1). California sustains \$46.4 billion in total economic losses—equivalent to 2.9% of the

(continued on Page 4)

The dropout crisis threatens California's future economy. If present trends continue, by 2020 California will have twice as many workers without a high school diploma as there will be jobs to support them.

Figure 2: A Pictorial View of California Dropouts and Graduates from the 2005-06 Graduating Class



SOURCE: California Department of Education. Dataquest. Retrieved November 1, 2007, from: <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
 NOTE: The figure excludes 3,248 students who dropped out of grade 7 in 2000-01 and 4,116 students who dropped out of grade 8 in 2001-02.

What is California's Graduation Rate?

Until California completes its longitudinal student data system, it will not be able to compute an accurate measure of the four-year graduation rate—the proportion of students who enter the ninth grade and receive a high school diploma four years later. Instead, the California Department of Education (CDE) and other organizations estimate the rate using three numbers that schools report each year: (1) **Enrollment**—the number of students enrolled at each grade level on the first Wednesday of October; (2) **Dropouts**—the number of students from each grade level who leave the school anytime during the school year and do not graduate or transfer to another school; and (3) **Graduates**—the number of students who receive a high school diploma during the previous school year.

Figure 2 shows these numbers for the high school graduating class of 2005-06. The CDE estimates the four year graduation rate by dividing the number of graduates by the number of graduates *plus* the total number of dropouts, which produces a graduation rate of 83.2%. This estimate is probably too high because it ignores two other groups: (1) students enrolled in grades 9, 10, and 11 who neither drop out nor advance to the next grade (Unknown), and (2) students enrolled in grade 12 who neither drop out nor graduate (Non-grads). Another way to estimate the rate is by dividing the number of graduates by the number of students enrolled in the ninth grade four years earlier, which produces a rate of 67.1%. This figure is probably too low because it ignores students who were retained in the ninth grade. If 10% of ninth grade enrollment consists of retained students, the graduation rate would be 73.8%.

THE NATURE OF THE CRISIS (CONTINUED)

Annual Gross State Product—from each cohort of 120,000 20-year-olds who never complete high school (see Figure 3).

The dropout crisis also threatens California's future economy. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates that the education needs of California's future workforce will rise substantially.⁵ If present trends continue, by 2020 California will have a shortage of college-educated workers—39% of California's jobs will require a college education, but only 33% of the workforce will have a college degree. At the other end of the spectrum, California will have twice as many workers without a high school diploma (22%) as there will be jobs to support them (11%).

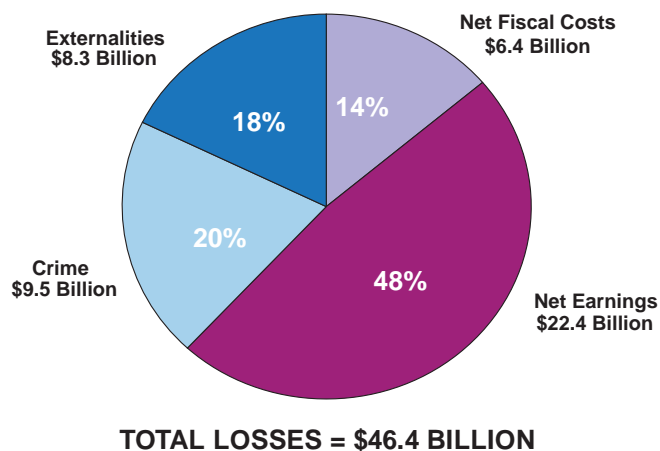
► The causes are complex

Dropouts report a variety of reasons for leaving school, from uninteresting classes to missing too much school (*SB 2*). But research suggests the causes are more complex, involving both more immediate and more distant factors related to students and their environment (see Figure 4).

Among student factors, the most immediate is *disengagement*. A growing body of research suggests that dropping out is but the final stage in a dynamic and cumulative process of disengagement or withdrawal from school (*RR 5 and 12*). Engagement refers to students' participation and involvement in both the *academic aspects* of school, such as doing homework, and the *social aspects* of school, such as participating in extracurricular activities. Engagement is influenced by three aspects of motivation: students' beliefs about their competence and control (*I can*), their values and goals (*I want to*), and their sense of social connectiveness or belonging (*I belong*).⁶ Student motivation and engagement in high school are, in turn, influenced by more distant factors related to their early academic achievement and engagement in elementary and middle school. For example, students who fail courses in middle school are more likely to fail courses and drop out in high school (*SB3, RR 13 and 14*).

Student attitudes and behaviors are shaped by three settings or contexts in which they live—families, schools, and communities. Family background remains the most powerful predictor of student achievement in school: students from

Figure 3: Economic Losses from One Cohort of Dropouts in California



Note: All figures represent lifetime consequences for one cohort of dropouts at age 20 in 2005.

low-income households, students with less educated parents, or students not living with both of their parents are all less likely to graduate from high school (*RR 15*).

The schools students attend also make a difference. Research has shown that students are less likely to graduate if they attend larger schools, schools with more disadvantaged students, schools where they feel unsafe, and schools with a weak academic climate (*RR 15*).

► Current approaches are inadequate

California uses a number of strategies to reduce dropout rates, but together they are insufficient to address the problem (*RR 3*):

- *Legal*. Compulsory attendance laws compel children between the ages of six and 18 to attend school, but the current enforcement mechanism—School Attendance Review Boards (SARBs)—is unevenly implemented and flawed both administratively and conceptually.
- *Fiscal*. The state creates an incentive for schools to keep children in school by funding based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rather than enrollment.

California's current accountability system not only fails to improve the dropout problem, it actually contributes to it.

- *Targeted programs.* The state has various programs targeted to youth at risk, but the effectiveness of these programs is unknown because they are rarely, if ever evaluated.
- *Alternative education.* California has created an increasing array of alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, but generally they are ineffective—non-traditional high schools enrolled only 12% of California's high school students in 2005-06, but accounted for half of all the dropouts in the state (SB 6).

California's current accountability system not only fails to improve the dropout problem, it actually *contributes* to it. Dropout and graduation rates are not currently included in the state's accountability system and the federal system requires only minimal improvement in graduation rates. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, the resulting focus on improving test scores puts considerable pressure on schools to push low-performing students into alternative schools as a way of evading accountability for them.⁷

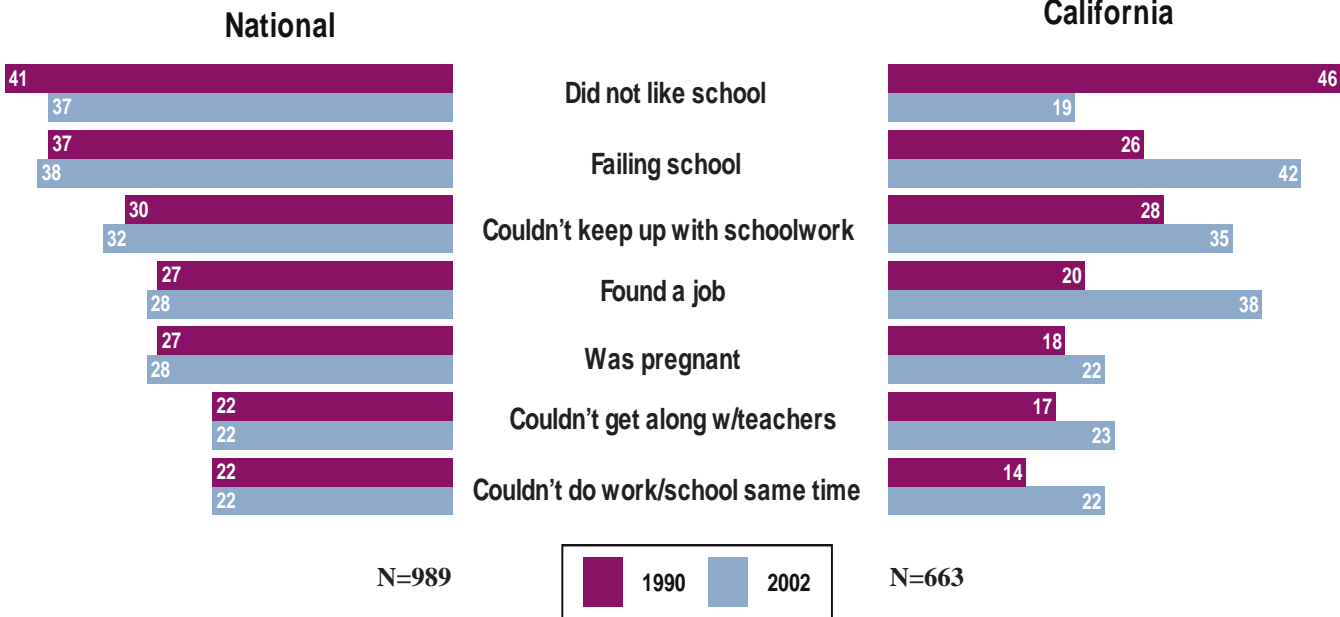
California's student information system does not now allow accurate estimates of promotion or graduation rates, or the ability to track students into college and the workplace.

California's current system of school reform, which relies on school improvement grants to underperforming schools, with little oversight and monitoring, has been shown to have little impact on improving student outcomes. A recent evaluation of one such program—the High Priority Schools Grant Program that allocated almost \$1 billion to under-performing California schools—reached the following conclusion:

...it appears that a short-term categorical approach to school reform is insufficient to overcome much larger system inadequacies that fail to provide the kinds of longer term support and assistance needed to substantially and consistently improve student performance in the state's most challenged schools.⁸

Clearly, a new approach is needed to address California's dropout crisis.

Figure 4: Comparison of Reasons 10th Graders Dropped Out: National and California, 1990 and 2002



Source: 1990 Data: National Education Longitudinal Study, 1988 (NELS:88)
 Source: 2002 Data: Education Longitudinal Study, 2002 (ELS:2002)



A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

► **Solving California's dropout crisis requires a systemic approach based on building the capacity of the key educational institutions in the state—schools, districts, and the California Department of Education**

The educational system in California is complex, involving a vast array of individuals and institutions, from classroom teachers to the California Department of Education. The system is also large, including 6.3 million students, 300,000 teachers, 9,674 schools, and 1,052 school districts.⁹ Educational improvement requires unprecedented coordination among all these players. In a state the size of California, this poses a great challenge.

California, along with many other states, relies on systemic reform—reform within the various levels of the educational system—to improve student outcomes.¹⁰ Two crucial elements of systemic reform are *standards* and *accountability*. California has adopted a comprehensive set of content standards detailing what teachers are expected to teach and what students are expected to learn. It has also adopted an accountability system that monitors how well students, schools, and districts are meeting the standards, and provides incentives and sanctions to improve performance.

But numerous research studies of systemic reform have found that many levels of the educational system lack the **capacity** (or ability) to provide support to the next level of the system—schools lack the capacity to support teachers, districts lack the capacity to support schools, and the state lacks the capacity to support school districts (*RR 9*).¹¹ Another problem is the lack of coordination among the various levels of the system in developing and providing capacity. California needs to address both problems.

Funding and implementing dropout prevention programs for at-risk students alone, even programs that have been proven to be effective, cannot solve California's dropout crisis. Such programs may be useful in schools where the dropout problem affects relatively few students, but since dropouts are concentrated in relatively few schools where a large proportion of students drop out, such schools must undertake comprehensive school reforms that have been

demonstrated to improve graduation rates. To undertake such reforms will require building the capacity of schools. Reforming existing schools can also be coupled with creating new schools.

Well-functioning school districts are uniquely positioned and integral to building school capacity and creating new schools to deliver quality education to students, but many districts lack capacity to provide the needed support to schools. Research on school improvement has found that many districts have relied on partnerships with external providers or support organizations to build their capacity, including County Offices of Education, nonprofit organizations, universities, and independent consultants.¹² **A systemic approach to solving California's dropout crisis must involve improving the capacity of school districts and external providers.**

A substantial investment in the education system, especially for the lowest-achieving students, is recommended; however, money alone will not improve California's schools

Finally, a systemic solution to California's dropout crisis must involve improving the capacity of the California Department of Education (CDE). The CDE serves a variety of functions, including setting standards, managing the state accountability system, and monitoring compliance with the federal accountability system. Yet to build the capacity of school districts and external providers, the CDE will have to improve *its own* capacity to monitor and support these organizations and to provide guidance for developing and sustaining statewide efforts to address the dropout crisis.

► **The solution must be implemented over time**

A capacity-building approach to solving California's dropout crisis will necessarily be time consuming. It simply takes time to improve the capacity of both individuals and institutions; but given the size of the state and the many

In order to effectively use the resources at their disposal, California's teachers and administrators must have both the will and the capacity to act.

individuals and institutions involved, **a capacity-building approach will yield the largest long-term dividends.** The challenge is not only determining what to do, but determining how to do it well.

Work can begin immediately. The state can begin building the infrastructure to support capacity-building statewide, including:

- modifying the accountability system to put pressure on schools to address the problem;
- developing a more comprehensive educational data system to monitor student progress and institutional capacity;
- creating standards for high school reform—organizational features, instructional practices, implementation timelines, and progress benchmarks—and guidelines for districts and external support providers;
- identifying and certifying qualified external providers to work with struggling districts;
- focusing initial efforts on those schools and districts where the problem is most severe;
- evaluating the effectiveness of those efforts.

Over time, these efforts can be expanded, and as more money becomes available, the state can make strategic investments in proven interventions in a larger number of schools and districts.

► **A systemic solution to the dropout crisis will also improve student achievement**

One advantage of undertaking a systemic solution to California's dropout crisis is that it will improve student achievement and help close the achievement gap. Research has shown that dropping out and low achievement have many shared causes such as poor attendance, low engagement, and low-quality instruction (*RR 15*). Dropping out and low achievement are also causally related—students with low achievement are more likely to drop out of school.

Finally, dropping out and low achievement have shared solutions. Evaluations of comprehensive reform models have demonstrated effectiveness in improving graduation rates and raising student achievement.¹³

► **The solution requires more than money**

Solutions to educational problems are often tied to increased funding. Adequate financial resources are clearly needed to improve California's educational system, and current inequities in the distribution of resources disproportionately impact schools with the most disadvantaged students.¹⁴ Both the recent *Getting Down to Facts* study of California's governance and finance systems and the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence recommend a substantial investment in California's education system, especially for the lowest achieving students (see State Resources, page 11). Yet both studies also suggest **money alone will not improve California's schools.**

Two other types of resources are also critical for educational improvement: *human resources* and *social resources*. In order to effectively use the textbooks, facilities, and other material resources at their disposal, California's teachers and administrators must have both the will and capacity to act.¹⁵ Although individual capacity can be developed through professional development, both will and capacity are more likely to be developed and sustained in supportive environments in schools in the form of professional learning communities where teachers collectively engage in improving instruction.¹⁶

Research has found that social resources, which represent the social relationships—particularly trust—among students, parents, teachers, and administrators, are a key component of effective and improving schools.¹⁷ Social resources can be developed through structures (e.g., small learning communities) and practices within those structures (e.g., participatory decision making, collective responsibility for student success).

All three types of resources—*fiscal*, *human*, and *social*—are necessary to build and sustain the capacity of individuals and institutions to undertake systemic educational reform to solve California's dropout crisis. In addition, systemic educational reform in California will require fundamental changes in its governance and finance systems, as recommended in the *Getting Down to Facts* study and by the Governor's Committee.



WHAT THE STATE SHOULD DO

The state government has the constitutional authority and ultimate responsibility for provision of education in California. This means that along with its authority to impose standards and sanctions comes a responsibility to ensure that teachers, schools, and districts have the capacity to meet these standards. In other words, the state must address both the *will* and *capacity* of the educational system to respond to the dropout crisis.

State policy can help through a combination of *pressure* and *support*: (1) pressure to get educators, policymakers, and the public at large to stay focused on the problem, and to seek solutions; and (2) support for educators and educational institutions to implement, evaluate, and disseminate promising solutions.¹⁸

► 1. Fix the accountability system in order to maintain pressure and allow sufficient time to address the problem

To demonstrate its commitment to addressing the dropout crisis, the state should establish bold, yet attainable goals for raising graduation rates in both the federal and state accountability systems that together comprise California's "Accountability Progress Reporting" system.¹⁹

The cornerstone of the *state* accountability system is the California Academic Performance Index (API), which measures the academic performance of schools and districts. Legislation establishing the API specifies that at least 60% of the index should be based on test scores, but currently 100% of the index is based on test scores. In order to maintain pressure on schools to address the dropout crisis, the remaining 40% of the index for high schools should be based on a combination of annual dropout, ninth grade promotion, and high school graduation rates. This should also apply to alternative schools that currently use the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM), which does not now require the inclusion of dropout and graduation rates.

These changes build upon and extend the provisions of Senate Bill 219 that modifies the API to include eighth- and ninth-grade dropout rates, as well as a provision that schools and districts maintain responsibility for their entering students, even if those students transfer to an alternative program later in their high school career.²⁰

The cornerstone of the *federal* accountability system is the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirement for schools and school districts. The AYP requirements for California include achieving a graduation rate goal of 82.9% or an an-

nual improvement of one-tenth of a percentage point (or .2 percentage points in two years). The current annual goal is meaningless—for example, the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center estimates that the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has a graduation rate of 45.3% (or 37.6 percentage points below the state goal).²¹ If LAUSD improved its graduation rate one-tenth of a percentage point per year, it could take 376 years to reach the state's graduation rate goal.

Instead, the state should require an annual improvement of a 5% reduction between a school's current graduation rate and the state's graduation rate goal.²² For LAUSD, whose graduation rate is currently 37.6 percentage points below the state graduation goal, this would translate into a 2% annual improvement, or 20 times the current state goal.

The accountability system should also be modified so that districts that adopt the state-approved district reform standards and implementation support "package" discussed below would be granted extra time to meet performance standards. The CDE could monitor progress in implementing reform standards through "progress indicators" such as attendance, ninth grade promotion rates, and student engagement.

► 2. Collect and report more useful data on dropouts and the state's progress in improving graduation rates

California is currently developing both a student and teacher longitudinal data system.²³ Yet even when these systems are in place, California will need a more comprehensive educational data system to better understand the scope and nature of the dropout problem, as well as the effectiveness of approaches to addressing the problem.

The state should expand the data system to include more information on students and on the educational institutions that serve them (*RR 10*). The student data system should be expanded to:

- track the educational progress of students not only from preschool to postsecondary education, as currently planned, but also their movements into other agencies (e.g., welfare, foster care, juvenile justice) and into the workplace;²⁴
- provide systematic early identification of at-risk students so they can receive needed support and services;
- monitor the services provided to students and their effectiveness in improving outcomes.

To demonstrate its commitment to addressing the dropout crisis, California should establish bold, yet attainable goals for raising graduation rates

In addition to student and teacher-level data, the data system should include institutional data that would provide useful information on the learning climate of schools and on the impact of reform efforts. Some of this information could come from other, ongoing data collection activities, such as the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and the California School Climate Survey (CSCS).²⁵ Since this expanded data system would include data from a variety of state agencies, the state should consider creating an independent state data warehouse, as several other states have done.²⁶

Schools that are effective could be expanded or replicated; schools found to be ineffective should be reformed or closed

Data from the expanded data system should be used to develop a series of accurate and meaningful dropout and graduation indicators. First and foremost, the state should create a four-year graduation rate based on the common definition adopted by the nation's 50 governors in July 2005.²⁷ In addition, the state should collect and report other indicators of students' progress toward graduation, such as: kindergarten through eighth-grade retention rates, grade 6-8 course failure rates, grade 9-10 promotion rates, and five-year and six-year cohort graduation rates.

The data should also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of all California high schools in improving dropout, promotion, and graduation rates that take into account the different populations of students served. Schools that are found to be effective could be expanded or replicated; schools found to be ineffective—particularly the almost 1,500 non-traditional high schools—should be reformed or closed.

Finally, the state should use the data to issue an annual California High School Graduation Report that documents trends in dropout, promotion, and graduation rates and statewide efforts to address the problem and the effectiveness of those efforts. These activities could be undertaken by the CDE or an independent research center funded by the state.

► 3. Develop high school reform standards and create “lighthouse” districts to implement them in schools with high dropout rates

Research has shown that school districts play a key role in supporting school reform efforts.²⁸ Yet districts may lack the capacity to provide meaningful support to the schools within their jurisdiction. Some reform proposals have recommended that schools located within districts lacking sufficient capacity “opt-out” and join other schools to form an alternative, regional support structure. However, such an arrangement will not help improve the capacity of school districts.²⁹

Instead, the state needs a mechanism to monitor the capacity of school districts throughout the state on an ongoing basis, and provide support based on their level of capacity.³⁰ Districts with high capacity and demonstrated success in meeting performance standards would be granted reduced state regulation and flexible funding.³¹ Districts with low capacity and failing to meet high school performance standards would require more prescriptive intervention and stronger supports to implement the intervention. This could be accomplished in a number of steps:³²

First, the CDE should develop high school reform standards based on research from comprehensive school reform models with proven effectiveness in boosting graduation rates in struggling high schools,³³ along with implementation timetables and benchmarks that can serve as blueprints for underperforming schools.

At the same time, the CDE should develop guidelines specifying the roles and responsibilities of districts and external providers in providing needed supports for schools to meet the standards. This work could be undertaken by convening expert panels, in a manner similar to the process for establishing subject matter standards and frameworks, which would review research evidence on features of effective high schools.

Second, the CDE should recruit (and certify the qualifications of) external providers to work with school districts to implement the standards.

Third, the CDE should recruit a small number of “lighthouse” districts that have multiple high schools with high dropout rates. The CDE should match the districts with certified external providers and perhaps regional district partnerships.

WHAT THE STATE SHOULD DO (CONTINUED)

The districts and their partners should begin by undertaking an in-depth analysis of the nature of the dropout problem in the districts' schools, and use this information to develop a "Plan for Improvement" that would be reviewed and approved by the CDE.

After the plan is approved, the districts should implement the high school reform standards in their underperforming comprehensive high schools and build their capacity to sustain and expand implementation of these standards. In exchange, they would be granted (a) waivers to use specified categorical state funds to support their reform efforts (see Table 1), and (b) temporary waivers from existing accountability sanctions during the initial implementation of the reforms.

Finally, after the "lighthouse" districts begin to demonstrate initial success, they would serve as training sites or "change agents" for other districts and providers, much the way teaching hospitals serve as training facilities for the entire system of medical practitioners.

The CDE could assist other schools and districts in developing their capacity by creating a state clearinghouse that would consolidate existing information on dropout and reform strategies from federal, state, and private sources, such as research centers, regional laboratories, foundations, and independent organizations. The CDE could coordinate these reform activities by establishing a District Improvement Office or Inspectorate Office.³⁴

Table 1: Categorical Funding available to High Schools

2007-08 Apportionment	
California High School Exit Examination Intensive Instruction and Services Program	\$72,752,000
Class size reduction—Grade 9	\$106,131,000
Quality Education Investment Act	\$260,718,773
High Priority Schools Grant Program (HPSGP)	\$101,987,400
Middle and High School Supplemental School Counseling Program	\$200,000,000
School Safety and Violence Prevention Act	\$100,553,000

SOURCE: California Department of Education, Consolidated Application, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fj/aa/col/>

► 4. Undertake middle school reform modeled on the same strategies used for high school reform

Research reveals that the transition from elementary to middle school is a critical transition for students, particularly for those who have had academic difficulties in elementary school (*RR 12*). Evidence strongly suggests that the magnitude of these declines at the shift into middle school—as evidenced by attendance, grades, and behavior—are a significant predictor of dropping out of high school (*RR 13 and 14*). In fact, 10,873 California students dropped out of grades 7 and 8 in 2005-06.³⁵

Research also suggests that the current design and instructional practices in the typical middle school do not provide an appropriate educational and social environment for early adolescents, resulting in a "mismatch" with their developmental needs. Reforming middle schools can address this mismatch. There is at least some evidence that a number of comprehensive school reform models and targeted middle school programs increase student engagement and achievement in middle school (*RR 12*).

After the initial focus on improving high schools, the state should adopt a similar approach to improving middle schools—creating middle school reform standards and implementing them in the same "lighthouse" districts.

► 5. Make strategic investments in other proven dropout prevention strategies targeting the most disadvantaged students and schools

The state should make strategic investments in interventions that have proven to be both effective *and* cost-effective in improving graduation rates. Some of these proven interventions, which cover all levels of the education system, include:

- Preschool and early childhood programs (full day kindergarten, after school care) through grade 3
- Smaller classes (15:1) in grades K-3
- Increased teacher salaries

An analysis that compared the costs of providing these interventions to their economic benefits found that each dollar invested would generate between two to four dollars in fiscal benefits to all levels of government (*RR 2*). In addition, at least eight other secondary school programs have demonstrated some evidence of reducing dropout rates or raising graduation rates, with some generating benefits of more than five dollars for every dollar invested. Targeted secondary

California should make strategic investments in interventions that have proven to be both effective and cost-effective

programs are best suited to schools and districts where the dropout problem impacts relatively few students.

The state will get the best return on its investment by targeting funds to the most disadvantaged students. This suggestion is also consistent with the recommendations of the comprehensive *Getting Down to Facts* (GDTF) study and the Governor's Committee on Excellent Education. Improvements in high school graduation rates, for example, were 50% higher for low-income children enrolled in smaller classes during elementary school than for students generally (RR 2).

To prepare students for life beyond high school, California should incorporate a full range of academic and non-academic skills into its graduation requirements

All such investments, however, should be accompanied by rigorous evaluations to determine their effectiveness and their cost-effectiveness.³⁶

► 6. Re-examine state high school graduation requirements

Both academic research studies and surveys of employers suggest that students need a wide variety of skills to be successful in college and in the workplace.³⁷ These skills include both traditional academic skills, but also applied, vocational skills, as well as so-called “soft skills,” such as punctuality, perseverance, and the social skills needed to work in groups. In fact, one recent study found that improvements in a range of non-academic skills were more valuable than improvements in math achievement for increasing chances for enrolling in and completing postsecondary programs, and for increasing earnings eight years after high school.³⁸

In his 2008 State of Education address, State Superintendent Jack O'Connell announced that California would join 30 other states in the American Diploma Project Network, a nationwide effort to better align K-12 standards and accountability with the demands of college and work.³⁹ Yet, to date, this network has only focused on academic skills, and not non-academic skills. If California wants to truly prepare its students for life beyond high school, it should examine a full range of academic and non-academic skills

and incorporate them in the state's high school graduation requirements and accountability system so that schools and students are encouraged and recognized for acquiring them.

The state should also re-examine the use of examinations as a way to certify the skills and competencies of its students. California's current exit exam only assesses a single level of proficiency on two academic skills. Alternatively, California should consider assessing a *range* of proficiency levels on a wider range of both required and optional subject areas, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of students' accomplishments and competencies.⁴⁰ Other states and other industrialized countries have taken a variety of approaches to determining the requirements for high school graduation (RR 7). California should examine these other approaches as part of its commitment to aligning its K-12 system with the demands of work and college.

Finally, the state should consider more options for students to meet the graduation requirements. An increasing number of states have pursued the idea of multiple pathways for students to meet high school graduation requirements, such as through career and technical education (CTE) courses (RR 4). Some states have also developed alternative assessments for some students—particularly English learners and disabled students—to meet state examination requirements.⁴¹ Such an approach would greatly benefit California where more than 40% of the state's dropouts are English learners and disabled students.

STATE RESOURCES

- *Getting Down to Facts: A Research Project Examining California's School Governance and Finance Systems.* <http://irepp.stanford.edu/projects/cafinance.htm>
- *Students First: Renewing Hope for California's Future.* Draft report of the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence. <http://mercextra.com/blogs/edreform/2008/01/04/read-the-excellence-committee-report/>
- *Closing the Achievement Gap.* Report of Superintendent Jack O'Connell's California P-16 Council. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/pc/>
- *Education Policy Convening, October 19, 2000.* EdSource. <http://californiaschoolfinance.org/PolicyConvening/About-theConvening/tabid/171/Default.aspx>
- *Ending the Silent Epidemic: Ten action steps to reduce high school dropout rates.* <http://www.silentepidemic.org/>



WHAT DISTRICTS SHOULD DO

School districts are uniquely positioned and integral to building school capacity to address the dropout problem. Districts have the authority to reform existing schools and to create new schools. They also have the responsibility to adopt strategies for addressing the dropout problem, and to provide support to schools to implement these strategies—only then can the district hold the schools accountable for achieving results. Districts also need to be accountable for all students in the district no matter where they attend school.

► 1. Mobilize the community to address the dropout problem

Districts must first recognize the scope of the problem and have the will to act. In some districts, the district itself may initiate the focus on the problem. In other districts, community members and community organizations may have to draw attention to the problem and compel the district to act.

Marshalling the will to act begins with a needs assessment—assembling accurate information on the nature and scope of the problem in the district and its schools. **This information must begin with answering a simple question: what percent of entering ninth grade students graduate with a diploma?** Unfortunately, it is a difficult question to answer without accurate longitudinal data. Some districts may have such data; other sources can only provide estimates. The California Department of Education reports annual dropout rates and a “derived” ninth-grade graduation rate that is widely considered an overestimate of the graduation rate, compared to other methods.⁴² Two other sources of information are:

- *High School Educational Opportunity Reports*, Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access, UCLA. (<http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/eor07/highschool/eor1.html>).
- *Graduation Briefs*, Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, Washington, D.C. (<http://www.edweek.org/ew/roc/2007/06/12/index.html>).

In addition to knowing the scope of the problem, it is important to know the nature of the problem, such as *when* and *why* students are dropping out. Useful information may be obtained by conducting follow-up surveys of dropouts and analyzing school record information to examine the attendance, achievement, and behavior patterns of dropouts. It is also important to know something about the schools that students leave, such as whether they have adequate resources,

qualified and committed staffs, effective leadership, and quality programs.

► 2. Adopt proven strategies to keep students in school and support their successful graduation

Districts should adopt proven strategies for keeping students in school and supporting their successful graduation. The particular strategies should depend on the nature and magnitude of the problem and on the capacity of districts to implement the strategies. In schools where the dropout problem affects relatively few students, and the school is making satisfactory progress on other student performance indicators, **districts should adopt programmatic strategies that provide targeted academic and social supports for at-risk students** (see District Resources).

Involving school and district staff in identifying strategies and designing implementation plans is one way to build will and understanding

In schools where the dropout problem is large and the school is *not* meeting other student performance standards, districts should adopt school-wide reform strategies. Intervention strategies should be adopted in both middle and high schools since research shows that dropouts often display patterns of poor attendance and behavior, retention, and low achievement in early middle and high school (*RR 13 and 14*). The strategies may include partnering with outside community agencies to provide needed services for students and their families.⁴³

Research suggests that a number of strategies are required to effectively address the variety of risk factors linked to school dropouts.⁴⁴ This requires identifying and packaging strategies to meet the specific needs of at-risk students—including English learners and students with disabilities—as well as identifying the current deficiencies of their schools in meeting their needs.⁴⁵ Alternatively, districts can identify and adopt existing dropout programs or comprehensive school reform (CSR) models that typically include a “package” of strategies designed to strengthen all aspects of school functioning that benefit all students in the school. Although schools can vary in what they need to do to fill gaps in effec-

Districts must recognize the scope of the problem and have the will to act

tive practices, there should be a district-wide focus on several key strategies, applied to both new and existing schools.⁴⁶

The strategies that are adopted should be integrated into an overall district plan for improving student outcomes in the district.

► 3. Implement these strategies in all targeted schools through a participatory process with clearly-specified benchmarks, timelines, and outcomes

Once a set of strategies is identified, teachers, administrators, and support staff must implement them. This requires both building their *will or commitment* to change, and developing their *capacity* to change. It also includes helping everyone who is expected to implement these strategies to make sense of the ideas and expectations, since **research shows that reforms are often poorly implemented because of a lack of understanding of the intent of the reform.**⁴⁷

One way to build will and understanding is to have school and district staff involved from the very beginning in investigating the nature of the dropout problem, identifying effective strategies, and designing the implementation plan.

The implementation plan should include developing standards or benchmarks to ensure the degree to which all the strategies are being implemented. In larger districts, implementation will likely be phased into a few schools at a time, to help build the capacity of the district to undertake and expand reforms in all schools that need them. This will facilitate evaluating the impact of the strategies by providing useful comparisons between students in the early and late implementing schools; it will also allow for modifications in response. Finally, the implementation plan should include a timetable for implementing the strategies to keep everyone focused and committed to the plan. External providers of model programs may supply standards and timetables along with their programs.

► 4. Develop and use data to monitor the implementation of the strategies and to modify the implementation plan

It is imperative to have good data to determine whether the intervention strategies are effective and to monitor implementation in order to facilitate modifications to the plan. It is particularly important to create a series of “early indicators” that can provide feedback on the initial impacts of the strategies. For example, it may take several years for the strategies to improve graduation rates, but they may have a more immediate impact on student attendance and

progress toward graduation (i.e., course completion). So the district should develop measures of these outcomes and use them to monitor progress toward longer-term goals, and to sustain the will and commitment to the reforms.

► 5. Partner with outside support organizations to identify strategies and to develop and monitor implementation

School districts often lack the capacity to initiate, implement, and sustain reforms, particularly comprehensive reforms. As a result, districts are turning to outside support organizations for assistance, including county offices, community organizations, national program developers, universities, and individual consultants.⁴⁸ Such organizations can offer technical expertise related to instructional practices, assessment, data systems, evaluation, and professional development.

Selecting the most appropriate support organization and developing a sustained, effective relationship is difficult. Studies have found that the most successful partnerships depend on the development of trust.⁴⁹ The district must ensure that the support organization serves the needs of the district. In addition, the long-term goal should be to develop district capacity to provide some of the needed supports. Inter-district partnerships may help support district capacity building, especially among districts using similar strategies or external providers.

DISTRICT RESOURCES

- *What Your Community Can Do to End its Drop-Out Crisis: Learnings from Research and Practice.* by Robert Balfanz. <http://www.silentepidemic.org/pdfs/balfanz.pdf>
- *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement,* Learning Point Associates. <http://www.centerforcsri.org/>
- *Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center.* American Institutes for Research. <http://www.csrq.org/>
- *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs.* National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/>
- *What Works Clearinghouse,* U.S. Department of Education <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>
- *Portfolio for District Redesign.* School Communities that Work Task Force. <http://www.schoolcommunities.org/Archive/portfolio/index.html#partnerships>



WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO

Schools have the most direct and immediate impact on student outcomes. Schools and their staffs create conditions that directly affect students' engagement, how much they learn, and whether they remain in school and eventually graduate.

A large body of research has been conducted in recent years aimed at identifying the critical strategies in high schools that improve student outcomes. From a wide range of studies, including those based on rigorous evaluations of comprehensive school reform models, a strong consensus has emerged on these critical strategies (*RR 6*).⁵⁰ These strategies involve changes in both the structure and functioning of schools.

As suggested earlier, districts have the responsibility to develop a district-wide plan to provide the resources and support for all schools to adopt these strategies; schools have the responsibility to implement them and then to be accountable for the results.

► 1. Create a personalized learning environment for both students and teachers

Both students and teachers benefit from a personalized learning environment where they know each other well—where adults can get to know their students, understand their problems, and provide the support they need to be successful in school (*RR 12*). This is difficult if not impossible to do in large schools where teachers may see up to 150 students in their classes per day.

All proven comprehensive school reform models instead create “small learning communities” (SLCs) within larger, comprehensive high schools (see *School Resources*). The SLCs consist of small groups (250-300) of students who share the same core, academic teachers (math, science, English, social studies/history). Case studies of successful high schools also reveal that such schools typically enroll no more than 500 students (see *School Resources*).

While SLCs may be sufficient for some students to develop strong, personal relationships with caring adults, it may be useful and in some cases necessary, to formally create more intensive personal relationships with adults. One comprehensive school reform model does this through a Family Advocate System where each adult in the school serves as a

counselor for 12-15 students and meets with them weekly. Many successful dropout prevention programs are based on establishing strong relationships between students and adults who serve as monitors, advocates, counselors and liaisons with parents (see *School Resources*). Another strategy is to strengthen connections between teachers and parents.⁵¹

► 2. Provide academic and social supports for students

All students need support. Some students receive adequate academic support from their schools and families. Some students may also receive informal support through participating in extracurricular activities. Other students may need extra support to address their academic and social needs in order to be successful in school. The amount of support will vary for each student, but all students should be guaranteed sufficient support to meet their needs throughout their high school careers. Providing timely support requires identifying at-risk students early, preferably before they enter school and experience problems.

Many students enter high school poorly prepared for rigorous, academic work. Schools must create mechanisms to improve their academic skills and behaviors. This may involve creating special “catch-up” courses to improve their reading and math skills, with a specially designed curriculum. Special curriculum may also be needed for English language learners and students with disabilities; such courses may require additional learning time, such as double periods, or an extended school day. Students may also benefit from double-block scheduling that permits fewer, but longer periods in the school day—four, 90-minute periods versus six, 50-minute periods in a typical high school.

Additional support can be provided through tutoring, after-school programs, and summer programs. Supports may include teaching study skills and other academic behaviors.⁵² But it's also important to provide supports that are truly helpful—students sometimes report that the extra services that schools provide are not useful or relevant (*RR 8*).

Some students may also need *social* supports in high school. Students may face a wide array of social problems concerning drugs and alcohol, gangs, home responsibilities, and pregnancy. Students who come to school tired, depressed, ill, or preoccupied with personal or family problems

All students should be guaranteed sufficient support to meet their needs throughout high school.

cannot engage in learning. Schools are often poorly equipped to address such needs. Traditional school counselors and psychologists may not be sufficiently trained or have time to address all the social needs of the students in their schools (*RR 8*). Instead, some programs recruit, train, and support specialized counselors or monitors to work with at-risk students to address their needs directly or to serve as a broker with organizations outside of the school.⁵³ In other cases, entire schools become “community schools” where they contract with outside organizations to provide a comprehensive array of services to students.⁵⁴

► 3. Provide rigorous and meaningful instruction

Providing rigorous and meaningful instruction is the most direct means to increase student engagement and school performance. Research on effective teaching in high school finds that it must be:

...challenging and focused on disciplinary knowledge and conceptual understanding. It needs to be relevant to and build on students' cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, and provide opportunities for students to engage in authentic tasks that have meaning in the world outside of school. Engaging instruction gives students multiple learning modalities to master material and represent their knowledge, and allows them to draw on their native language and other resources. This kind of teaching is not possible if teachers do not have a deep understanding of their subject matter, of how people learn, and of how to address students' developmental needs.⁵⁵

To develop this expertise, teachers need ongoing ways of expanding their knowledge and improving their skills. Research increasingly suggests that the most effective way is to develop professional learning communities where teachers collaborate on instructional design and provide collective feedback on their teaching, perhaps with the assistance of instructional coaches or mentors.⁵⁶ Such communities can easily be developed through small learning communities that structure collaborative planning time and provide training on how to use this time effectively.⁵⁷

► 4. Create connections to the real world

Creating connections to the real world can better engage students in learning and in school. Such connections can be

made through the instructional program and through other, non-instructional activities.

One of the main instructional avenues to make such connections is through career and technical education, or CTE (*RR 4*). Although historically CTE was designed as a separate, less-rigorous track in high school, serving more disadvantaged students, CTE is now more often integrated into the regular academic program, providing opportunities to simultaneously prepare for college and career, referred to as “multiple pathways.”⁵⁸ An increasing number of CTE courses are now being developed that satisfy both CTE requirements and college admissions requirements (*RR 4*). In some cases CTE is a key part of a comprehensive school reform model. Despite the widespread appeal of CTE as a strategy for engaging students, improving achievement, and reducing dropout rates, the existing research evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches is mixed. This underscores the need to conduct local evaluations of CTE-based approaches to determine their effectiveness.

A number of non-instructional activities can also help create connections to the real world. They include internships, apprenticeships, and service learning opportunities.

SCHOOL RESOURCES

- *High Schools for Equity: Policy Supports for Student Learning in Communities of Color.* School Redesign Network. <http://www.srnleads.org/press/news/hsfe.html>
- *National High School Center.* <http://www.betterhighschools.org/>
- *Elements of a Successful High School.* Alliance for Excellent Education. http://www.all4ed.org/what_you_can_do/successful_high_school
- *High School Improvement and Best Practices.* Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/UnitedStates/Education/ResearchAndEvaluation/Research/HSImprovement.htm>
- *Small Learning Communities.* Northwest Regional Laboratory. <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/>
- *The Career Academy Support Network.* CASN. <http://casn.berkeley.edu/>
- *Resources About Secondary English Language Learners.* National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/ells/>



BEYOND SCHOOLS

Schools alone cannot solve the dropout crisis. Many of the precursors to dropping out have their origins in families and communities that differ greatly in the resources and support they can provide to help students succeed in school.

One area for improvement involves government agencies with joint jurisdiction over populations of disadvantaged youth. One such population is homeless children. According to a California Research Bureau report, there were 169,722 homeless children and youth enrolled in California's schools in 2005-06.⁵⁹ Although federal funds are available to the 58 county offices and 1,054 school districts that serve these youth, these funds serve fewer than half of the homeless students. The report goes on to describe the need to better coordinate services among the various public and private agencies that serve these youth.

Another such population is foster care youth.⁶⁰ There were 78,278 children in the California foster care system as of July 1, 2006, with one third residing in Los Angeles County.⁶¹ A recent study found that youth in foster care do not receive appropriate educational services, in part because of confusion over who is responsible for them.⁶² The study goes on to recommend that foster care youth be disaggregated in the state accountability system so that more attention be given to this group of students. The study also recommends a statewide, online data system involving all state service providers. A promising direction for inter-agency cooperation is the recent establishment of the nation's first residential foster high school in the United States, the San Pascal Academy in San Diego.

While improving inter-agency cooperation can help address the needs of particular, vulnerable populations, such efforts will not be sufficient. **Ultimately, the solution to California's dropout crisis must involve providing more resources and supports to families and communities, including better housing, better healthcare, and better employment opportunities.** In particular, more support must be provided to the most disadvantaged populations.

Ultimately, the solution to California's dropout crisis must involve providing more resources and supports to families and communities; in particular, to the most disadvantaged populations.

Research Reports / Policy Briefs

- 1: **The Economic Losses from High School Dropouts in California** by Clive Belfield and Henry Levin (*August 2007*)
- 2: **The Return on Investment for Improving California's High School Graduation Rate** by Clive Belfield and Henry Levin (*August 2007*)
- 3: **Does State Policy Help or Hurt the Dropout Problem in California?** by Thomas Timar, Manuelito Biag and Michael Lawson (*October 2007*)
- 4: **Can Combining Academic and Career-Technical Education Improve High School Outcomes in California?** by Patricia Clark, Charles Dayton, David Stern, Susan Tidyman and Alan Weisberg (*December 2007*)
- 5: **Student and School Predictors of High School Graduation in California** by Russell W. Rumberger and Brenda Arelleno (*December 2007*)
- 6: **California High Schools That Beat the Odds in High School Graduation** by Miguel Socias, Lenay Dunn, Thomas Parrish, Mari Muraki, and LaRena Woods (*December 2007*)
- 7: **Alternative Pathways to High School Graduation: An International Comparison** by Stephen Lamb (*January 2008*)
- 8: **Giving a Student Voice to California's Dropout Crisis** by Margaret Bridges, Stefan Brauckmann, Oscar Medina, Laurie Mireles, Angeline Spain, and Bruce Fuller (*forthcoming*)
- 9: **Building District Capacity for Improving High School Graduation Rates in California** by Jonathan Supovitz (*forthcoming*)
- 10: **Improving California's Data System for Measuring Dropout and Graduation Rates** by Georges Vernez (*forthcoming*)
- 11: **Follow-up Study of Students Who Did Not Pass the California High School Exit Exam (CASHEE)** by Shane Jimerson, Michael Furlong, Jill Sharkey, Erika Felix, Mary Skokut and James Earhart (*forthcoming*)
- 12: **School Transitions, Adolescent Development, and the Potential for Reducing Dropout Rates** by Jacquelynne S. Eccles (*forthcoming*)
- 13: **Investigating Middle School Determinants of High School Achievement and Graduation in Three California School Districts** by Michal Kurlaender, Sean F. Reardon, and Jacob Jackson (*forthcoming*)
- 14: **A Profile of High School Completion in the Los Angeles Unified School District** by Marisa Saunders, David Silver, and Estela Zarate (*forthcoming*)
- 15: **Why Students Drop Out of School** by Russell W. Rumberger and SunAh Lim (*forthcoming*)

Statistical Briefs

- 1: **Graduation and Dropout Rates for 2002 High School Sophomores** by Susan Rotermund (*March 2007*)
- 2: **Why Students Drop Out of High School: Comparisons from Three National Surveys** by Susan Rotermund (*May 2007*)
- 3: **Early Predictors of High School Graduation and Dropout** by Russell W. Rumberger (*June 2007*)
- 4: **What is California's High School Graduation Rate?** by Russell W. Rumberger (*August 2007*)
- 5: **Educational and Economic Consequences for Students Who Drop Out of High School** by Susan Rotermund (*September 2007*)
- 6: **Alternative Education Enrollment and Dropouts in California High Schools** by Susan Rotermund (*December 2007*)
- 7: **Which Schools Have the Most Dropouts?** by Susan Rotermund (*February 2008*)
- 8: **Which Districts Have the Most Dropouts?** by Susan Rotermund (*February 2008*)



ENDNOTES

Nature of the Crisis

1. For other estimates see: Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters, *Leaving Boys Behind: Public High School Graduation Rates* (New York: Manhattan Institute, 2006), Retrieved August 12, 2007, from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_48.htm; Jennifer Laird, Mathew DeBell, and Chris Chapman, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2004* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2006), retrieved August 12, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubinfo.asp?pubid=2007024>; Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *Diplomas Count* (Washington, D.C. : Author, June, 2006), retrieved August 12, 2007, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2006/06/22/index.html>. For a general discussion of alternative methods for computing graduation rates, see: Lyndsay Pinkus, *Who's Counted? Who's Counting? Understanding High School Graduation Rates* (Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). Retrieved February 2, 2008, from: <http://www.all4ed.org/files/WhosCounting.pdf>
2. See: Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, *Diplomas Count 2007: California* (Washington, D.C. : Author, June, 2007) retrieved December 30, 2007, from http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/dc/2007/ca_SGB07.pdf
3. See UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute *2006-07 Annual Report*. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from: <http://lmri.ucsb.edu/about/annualreports/index.php>
4. Editorial Projects in Education Research Center *Graduation Rates Map*. Retrieved December 30, 2007, from <http://mapsg.edweek.org/edweekv2/default.jsp>
5. Public Policy Institute of California. *California 2025: California's Future Economy. Just the Facts*. (San Francisco: PPIC, September 2006). Retrieved December 30, 2007, from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF_FutureEconomyJTF.pdf
6. National Research Council (NRC), Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn* (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2004), Chapter 2.
7. See Paul Warren, *Improving Alternative Education in California* (Sacramento: Legislative Analyst's Office, 2007). Retrieved January 11, 2008, from: <http://www.lao.ca.gov/LAOApp/PubDetails.aspx?id=1547>
8. Jenifer J. Harr, Tom Parrish, Miguel Socias, Paul Gubbins, *Evaluation Study of California's High Priority Schools Grant Program: Final Report* (Palo Alto: American Institutes for Research, 2007), p. 4. Retrieved January 4, 2008, from: http://www.air.org/publications/pubs_ehd_school_reform.aspx

Blueprint for Action

9. Data taken from Ed-Data. Retrieved January 4, 2007, from <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/>
10. Systemic reform is based on the idea that each level of government has a distinct role to play in educational reform and those roles must be coordinated. See: Michael S. Smith & Jennifer

O'Day, Systemic school reform. In Susan Fuhrman & Betty Malen (Eds.), *The politics of curriculum and testing*, pp. 233-267 (New York: Falmer, 1991).

11. Richard Elmore argues that accountability and capacity should be reciprocal: "...for each increment in performance I require of you, I have an equal and reciprocal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to produce that performance..." See: Richard F. Elmore, Conclusion: The problem of stakes in performance-based accountability systems. In Susan H. Fuhrman & Richard F. Elmore (Eds.), *Redesigning accountability systems for education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2004), p. 294.
12. James P. Spillane and Charles L. Thompson, "Reconstructing conceptions of local capacity: The local education agency's capacity for ambitious instructional reform." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 19 (1997): 185-203; Jonathan A. Supovitz, *The case for district-based reform: Leading, building, and sustaining school improvement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2007).
13. See evaluations of several comprehensive school reform models by MDRC at: http://www.mdrc.org/subarea_index_29.html
14. See *Educational Opportunity Reports 2007* (UCLA: UC AC-CORD/IDEA). Retrieved January 5, 2008, from: <http://www.idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/eor07/index.html>
15. See David K. Cohen, Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Deborah L. Ball, "Resources, instruction, and research," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 25 (2003): 119-142.
16. See: Judith W. Little, "Inside teacher community: Representations of classroom practice." *Teachers College Record* 105 (2003): 913-945; Karen S. Louis and Helen M. Marks, "Does professional community affect the classroom? Teachers' work and student experiences in restructuring schools." *American Journal of Education* 106 (1998): 532-575; Milbrey W. McLaughlin and Joan E. Talbert, *Professional communities and the work of high school teaching* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
17. Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider, *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement* (New York: Russell Sage, 2002); Richard F. Elmore, *School reform from the inside out* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2004); James P. Spillane, *Standards deviation: How schools misunderstand education policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

What the State Should Do

18. The recommendations for state policy action in the areas of accountability, the state data system, and flexibility in the use of state funds are very similar to the recommendations made by the LAO for reducing dropouts in California. See Paul Warren, *Improving High Schools: An Analytic Approach* (Sacramento: Legislative Analyst's Office, 2005). Retrieved January 16, 2008, from: <http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/PubDetails.aspx?id=1322>
19. For an overview, see: *Overview of California's 2006-07 Accountability Progress Reporting System*. Retrieved January 13, 2008, from: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ay/index.asp>

20. See: http://www.legislature.ca.gov/cgi-bin/port-postquery?bill_number=sb_219&sess=CUR&house=B&author=steinberg
21. Figure from the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, Retrieved January 13, 2008, from: <http://mapsg.edweek.org/ed-weekv2/default.jsp>
22. This is the goal that Michigan uses. See Daria Hall, *Graduation Matters: Improving Accountability for High School Graduation* (Washington, D.C.: Education Trust, 2007). Retrieved January 15, 2008, from: <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Product+Catalog/centreports>
23. See: Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk, and Eric Hanushek, *Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California, Summary* (Stanford, Institute for Research on Education Policy & Practice, 2007), p. 5, retrieved January 6, 2008, from: <http://irepp.stanford.edu/projects/cafinance.htm>; Also, see recommendations from a number of organizations at the California Education Policy Convening, October 19, 2007 in Sacramento, available at: <http://californiaschoolfinance.org/PolicyConvening/AbouttheConvening/tabid/171/Default.aspx>
24. Florida currently has such a system in place. See: Jay J. Pfeifer, *Florida's K20 Data Resources and the Education Pipeline*, Retrieved February 3, 2008, from: http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/state_specific/#Florida
25. For a description of these two surveys and how they could better be used to improve outcomes for students, see: Gregory Austin and Bonnie Benard, *The State Data System to Assess Learning Barriers, Supports, and Engagement: Implications for School Reform Efforts*, Prepared for the EdSource California Education Policy Convening, Sacramento, October 19, 2007 (revised). Retrieved January 6, 2008, from: <http://www.wested.org/chks/pdf/edsourcepolicy.pdf>
26. See Terry Bergner and Nancy J. Smith, *How Can My State Benefit from an Educational Data Warehouse?* (Austin.: Data Quality Campaign, 2007). Retrieved February 4, 2008, from: <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/tools/>
27. See *Graduation Counts* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, 2005). Retrieved February 4, 2008, from: <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0507GRADCOMPACT.PDF>
28. See Spillane and Thompson, op. cit.; Supovitz, op. cit., 2007, 2006.
29. See Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, *The Turnaround Challenge*. Retrieved January 6, 2006, from: <http://www.massinsight.org/micontent/tmresources.aspx>
30. The CDE is currently undertaking a support effort for 15 districts identified as Program Improvement (PI) under Title I of NCLB (out 192 districts identified as PI status in 2007-08) through a joint initiative with the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), known as the District Intervention & Regional Capacity Building (DAIT-RCB) Project. But there is no ongoing mechanism to monitoring the capacity of California school districts. See: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/pi/>
31. See recommendations by AIR District Practitioner Working Group, California Collaborative on District Reform, *From compliance to getting the job done: Excessive regulations vs. accountability for results*. Policy brief prepared for the EdSource California Education Policy Convening, Sacramento, October 19, 2007. Retrieved January 6, 2008, from: <http://www.californiaschoolfinance.org/PolicyConvening/PolicyBriefsfromOctober19thConvening/tabid/169/Default.aspx>
32. Many of the ideas in this recommendation come from Russell W. Rumberger and James Connell, *Strengthening School District Capacity as a Strategy to Raise Student Achievement in California, Policy Brief* (Mountain View, CA: EdSource, 2007). Retrieved February 4, 2008, from: <http://www.californiaschoolfinance.org/PolicyConvening/PolicyBriefsfromOctober19thConvening/tabid/169/Default.aspx>
33. See Corine M. Herlihy and Janet Quint, *Emerging Evidence on Improving High School Student Achievement and Graduation Rates: The Effects of Four Popular Improvement Programs* (Washington, D.C., National High School Center, 2007). Retrieved January 6, 2008, from: http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_EmergingEvidence_010907.pdf; Janet Quint, *Meeting five critical challenges of high school reform: Lessons from research on three reform models* (New York: MDRC, 2005). Retrieved January 13, 2008, from: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/428/overview.html>
34. This system, modeled after the British system, would serve an *inspection* rather than an *audit* function. In an inspection function, trained professionals would visit schools and districts that have received state funds for school improvement and offer constructive feedback to the district and its external partner around agreed-upon benchmarks of implementation and student outcomes, to address any ongoing problems in the reform process. See: Norm Fruchter, *Urban schools, public will: Making education work for all our children* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007), pp. 48-53.
35. California Department of Education, *Dataquest*. Retrieved February 13, 2008, from: <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>
36. For an overview and rationale for cost-effectiveness evaluations, see: Henry Levin, "Cost-effectiveness and educational policy," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 10 (1988), 51-69.
37. For a short discussion, see: Lynn Olson, "What Does 'Ready' Mean?" *Education Week*, June 12, 2007. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/06/12/40overview.h26.html>
38. John Deke and Joshua Hiamson, *Valuing Student Competencies: Which Ones Predict Postsecondary Educational Attainment and Earnings, and for Whom?* (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 2004). Retrieved January 27, 2008, from: <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/valuestudent.pdf>
39. See: <http://www.achieve.org/>
40. The state actually has such a system in place in the form of the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma, which recognizes students who demonstrate proficiency on 6 out of 13 academic subjects. See: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sr/meritdiploma.asp>
41. For example, New York allows English learners to meet state examination requirements, other than English, in their native



ENDNOTES (CONTINUED)

language, either through native language versions of the exams or through direct, oral translations. See: New York State Education Department, Regents Examinations, Regents Competency Tests, and Proficiency Examinations. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/deputy/Documents/alternassess.htm>

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42. See: *Dataquest*, California Department of Education (<http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>). For a general discussion of graduation rates, see Pinkus, op cit.
43. One such organization is Communities in Schools (<http://www.cisnet.org/>).
44. See: Hammond, Cathy, Dan Linton, Jay Smink, and Sam Dew. 2007. *Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, Clemson University and Communities in Schools. Retrieved January 12, 2008, from: http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major_reports/communities_in_schools.htm
45. See: Deborah J. Short and Shannon Fitzsimmon, *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Language anAcademic Literacy Among Adolescent English Learnings*. Carnegie Coporation of New York. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from: <http://www.carnegie.org/literacy/pdf/DoubletheWork.pdf>; Norm Gold, *The high schools English learners need*. (Santa Barbara: UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 2006). Retrieved January 12, 2008, from: http://lmri.ucsb.edu/publications/policyreports.php#06_gold; Paul J. Riccomini, Loujeania Willaims Bost, Antonis Katsiyannis, and Dalun Zhang, *Cognitive behavioral interventions: An effective approach to help students with disabilities stay in school*. (National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, 2005). Retrieved January 12, 2008, from: <http://www.ndpc-sd.org/resources/monographs.htm>
46. A district-wide focus contrasts with a recent proposal from Mass Insight to create "Local Turnaround Zones" where clusters of schools within or between districts collaborate on school turnaround efforts. The problem with this strategy is that may drain talent and energy away from the districts efforts to support their other schools, creating divisions within the district. See: <http://www.massinsight.org/miccontent/trnresources.aspx>
47. See Spillane, op ct.
48. In some cases, the California Department of Education mandates that schools and districts that do not meet performance targets work with an external support organization. See footnote 30.
49. See: School Communities that Work: A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts, *A District Leader's Guide to Relationships that Support Systematic Change*. (Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, 2003). The study also found differences in the relationships between community-based organizations and external providers. Retrieved January 12, 2008, from: http://www.schoolcommunities.org/Archive/images/RR_summary.pdf

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50. The strategies discussed below derive primarily from the reviews of a range of models conducted in: National Research Council, op cit., Chapter 8; and the rigorous, large scale evaluations of three comprehensive models—Career Academies, First Things First, and Talent Development—conducted by Quint, op cit.
51. One way to do this is through home visits. See: <http://www.pthvp.org/about.html>.
52. See the Talent Development Freshman Seminar. Retrieved January 13, 2008, from: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/about/model.htm>
53. This is a central feature of one proven program designed to support special education students, Check & Connect. See: <http://ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/>. For an evaluation of the program, see the What Works Clearinghouse at: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.
54. See NRC, op. cit., Chapter 6.
55. Ibid., pp. 94-95.
56. See footnote 16 on professional learning communities.
57. See James P. Connell, Adena M. Klem, Julie M. Broom, and Mark Kenny, *Going Small and Getting Smarter: Small Learning Communities as Platforms for Effective Professional Development*. In *Critical Issues in Development and Implementation, High School Small Learning Communities*. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/pubs/edweek/SLC%20IssPap%20Book.pdf>
58. See "Multiple Perspectives on Multiple Pathways: Preparing California's Youth for College, Career, and Civic Responsibility," UCLA/IDEA. Retrieved January 16, 2008, from: <http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/mp/index.html>

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59. Patricia F. Julianelle, *The Educational Success of Homeless Youth in California: Challenges and Solutions* (Sacramento: California Research Bureau, 2007). Retrieved February 6, 2008, from: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/CRBSearch.aspx>
60. For an overview of the issue, see: Steve Christian, *Educating Children in Foster Care* (Washington, D.C.: National Convergence of State Legislatures, 2003). Retrieved February 6, 2008, from: <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/CPeducate.htm>
61. Barbara Needell, et al., *Child Welfare Services Reports for California* (University of California at Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research, 2007). Retrieved February 13, 2008, from: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/Pointintime/fostercare/childwel/ageandethnic.asp>
62. Tom Parrish, Cheryl Graczewhki, Abigail Stewart-Teitelbaum, and Nina Van Dyke, *Policies, Procedures and Practices Affecting the Education of Children Residing in Group Homes* (Palo Alto: American Institutes for Research, 2003), pp. v-viii. Retrieved February 6, 2008, from: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fr/se/>

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“...if you study hard it's going to pay off and you are going to be able to become something that you always wanted. You're not going to end up in the fields like everyone does here.”

—California High School Student



“...I want to break the cycle that's been going on in my family...I want to be the first to get out of it. That's what motivates me...the thought that I can be the first one to succeed in my family.”

—California High School Student

California Dropout Research Project

<http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/dropouts>

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“...when you have somebody to be there for you and really support you in all your school educational needs then *it boosts you up*, you feel better about yourself and your education.”

—California High School Student

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