



LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION: Written Testimony

My name is Stan Hitomi, and I am a teacher at Monte Vista High School in Danville, California. I have been teaching science in California for the past 20 years. I have also taught math and physical education in both public and private schools, at both the high school and middle school level, in both affluent and impoverished communities. I currently serve as our school site's School-Based Coordinated Programs coordinator, Digital High School grant coordinator, and the coordinator of the Research & Technology Academy (a Specialized Secondary Program funded through the Department of Education) on our campus.

I would like to thank you for the invitation to provide testimony at the Little Hoover Commission's hearing on January 25th. I have been very active in local, regional, and national program development over the past ten years, and am always excited when opportunities are provided for the "voice from the classroom" to be heard.

Below are my reflections based upon the five writing prompts that were provided:

- ***Teaching as a Career*** – From a classroom perspective the current efforts being made by the State appear to lack coherence, and are disconnected from the realities of the classroom and the teaching profession. There is a tremendous focus upon issues relating to the staffing of under-performing schools, and rightly so. But this leads to the perception that the shortage of qualified teachers is a localized phenomenon, when in reality it is a problem throughout the profession, throughout the State, and throughout the nation. On our campus (a high performing school in an affluent community) we have lost enough science teachers over the past seven years to replace the entire department three-times!

Recommendations:

- Adopt a more holistic approach to evaluating the profession of teaching.
 - Include data from a variety of sources, including data on school culture
- Adopt policies that will ensure overall growth in the capacity of the profession.
 - A shortage of qualified teachers exists in almost every school in the State, and is not limited by demographics or geography.
 - Provide special focus for hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-staff subject areas.

- Develop a Strategic Plan for improving the educational program in California. Much like strategic planning at the corporate level, a Strategic Plan for the K-12 or K-14 program in California should include a review of funding, facilities, credentialing, professional development, school year (calendar), administration, assessment, and school environment and culture. Policy formed in isolation ignores the synergy that exists in schools amongst these areas, and the impact that change in one area will have on another area.
- ***Community Supported Education*** – Over the past 10 years we have learned that collaborative partnerships are the key to program success in public schools. With the decline of resources, both human and material, we have come to depend more and more upon our community partners. These partnerships range from guest speakers to field trips, internships, equipment donation, shared training, certification, advisory participation, and research. Our partners include corporations, museums, professional organizations, community groups, national laboratories, and institutes of higher education.

Recommendations:

- Develop formalized programs for partnerships.
 - The formula of TSA should be used to guide the development of partnerships. T = training - provide both knowledge & skills training, as well as training in working in a culture of collaboration. S = sustainability – programs should be established with the goal of ongoing sustainability. Continued funding must either be insured, or seed money should be used with the specific goal of eventual autonomy. A sustained program can eventually be used to leverage the development of additional programs (I can elaborate more in person). A = assessment – all partnerships must develop tools to assess whether the goals of all parties involved are being met, and what changes must and can be made.
- Partnership programs should provide opportunities for teachers to engage in professional growth and challenging activities.
 - Community partnerships allow teachers to break the isolation of the teaching environment and gain insight into real-world practices.
 - Community partnerships allow teachers to be challenged and stay connected with state-of-the-art developments related to their content areas.
- ***Labor-Management Relations*** – A healthy relationship between labor and management will go a long way in attracting and retaining quality teachers. As I mention early in this testimony, teachers (as do all employees) look at the Big Picture for employment. Labor/management is another variable that will affect an individual teacher's assessment of a perspective employment opportunity.

Recommendations:

- An effective labor-management relationship would include trust built upon collaboration and communication.
 - Contact between labor and management should be frequent and highly visible.
 - The collaboration between labor and management should be a formalized component in decisions related to policy and program development.

- ***State Programs*** – This topic is perhaps the area of greatest concern by most classroom teachers. The State is committing a large investment of resources to a variety of programs, many of which appear to have a significant “disconnect” with the realities of the classroom and the teaching profession. Policy makers must realize that the policy that is developed may have little or no resemblance to the policy that is implemented at the site level. As policy is often misinterpreted and distorted as it follows the chain from the State to the County to the District to site administration, and finally to the classroom teacher. Many of the State’s policies also appear guilty of suffering from a lack of coherence. This appears to classroom teachers as policy that was made in isolation, without regard to the synergy of issues in education and without sufficient “voice” from the classroom perspective.

Recommendations:

- Implementation of programs should begin with pilot studies. This would allow time for the programs to gradually “ramp-up” and increase capacity. Program development should be scaled over a realistic timeline with realistic benchmarks. Pilot models would facilitate assessment of the impact of programs and the affect or synergy the implementation might have upon other school programs.
- State programs should model the incorporation of collaborative partnerships. By leaving out partnerships and collaborations in the development phase of programs, they are relegated to taking on the role of an “after-market” product. This greatly diminishes the ability of partners to leverage or make the best use of their participation.
- State programs should be based upon a well-defined strategic plan. Each program should have a designed relationship to other programs within the plan. The implementation of programs should be paralleled with data collection and assessment. Further implementation and program expansion should be based upon this data. The data should also serve as a basis for further program development. The plan, as a whole, should spiral in its development (similar to spiraling curriculum), with one program leading and linking, and complimenting another.

- ***School Administration*** – One area that is noticeably missing in the State programs is the issue of school culture. Yet, it is the culture of a school that may ultimately decide whether a teacher stays or leaves a school or the teaching profession. The recent increase in new programs, without a parallel increase in administrative capacity, has overwhelmed the administrative staffs on school sites. The new programs often require skills and knowledge that are often missing within the staffing of site administrations. The problem is often compounded by site administrations who are already working over capacity. The result is less effective management and a decline in staff confidence in its leadership.

Recommendations:

- Increase administrative staffing at school sites in response to the increased demands of new programs.
- Provide for leadership training and on-going support for administrators to enable them to develop a supportive school culture.
- Pilot models for Teacher Leaders to work in administrative roles to support administrative capacity and to establish a culture of shared responsibility for program success between the administrative and instructional staff.

I apologize for my remarks here that are made in very general terms. A discussion of specific programs, anecdotes, and findings are beyond the time elements of this written testimony. I am hopeful that the hearing will provide a forum where I will be able to provide more detailed testimony in specific areas identified by the commission. I look forward to the hearing, and thank you once again for including the “voice from the classroom”.