



Testimony of

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### **Introduction: How the System Works and How It Doesn't**

Since the 1990s, the school accountability movement has become one of the most potent forces in education. Facing years of poor student performance, advocates of school accountability have succeeded in creating and implementing state academic content standards, implementing standards-aligned state tests, and establishing state and national accountability systems. When done correctly, these accountability elements can have a dramatic effect on student academic achievement.

A 2001 study by the Education Trust, a non-partisan education research organization, identified 4,500 schools across the country with more than a million high-poverty and minority students that performed in the top one-third of schools in their states.<sup>1</sup> These high-poverty, high-performing schools often outscored schools in affluent white suburbs. Herbert Walberg, education professor emeritus at the University of Illinois at Chicago and one of the nation's top education researchers, summarized the Education Trust's findings for high-performing schools: "The common features of these exceptionally performing schools included (1) the use of standards to design curriculum and instruction, ongoing assessment of student work, and teacher evaluation, (2) comprehensive systems to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students as soon as needed, and (3) state accountability systems that have real consequences for professionals."<sup>2</sup>

Due in part to such findings, state and federal officials have tried to craft school accountability laws that will produce similarly beneficial results for all students. Referring to the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Walberg notes, "By instituting testing and accountability as centerpieces of the education agenda, President George W. Bush and Congress reinforced central themes of state policies aimed at improving education through testing and accountability."<sup>3</sup>

"The purpose of the NCLB Act," Walberg says, "is to ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on state academic achievement standards as revealed by state assessment."<sup>4</sup> NCLB requires that all students be proficient in math and English by 2013-14. Through effective school accountability, Walberg concludes, "It seems reasonable to think that all or nearly all students can make substantial gains in proficiency by the year 2014 as NCLB projects."<sup>5</sup> The key to meeting the federal requirements, however, is an

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<sup>1</sup> See Craig D. Jerald, *Dispelling the Myth Revisited* (Washington, DC: Education Trust, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Herbert J. Walberg, "Standards, Testing and Accountability," in John E. Chubb ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

accountability system that is not only in place, but also effective in raising student achievement.

California is fortunate to have some of the best foundational elements for an effective school accountability system. The state's academic content standards, which serve as the guidelines for what students must know in each grade level in their core subjects, are among the most rigorous in the nation. California's standards are routinely given high marks by education research organizations that survey and grade state standards, such as the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. In the late 1990s, California used the norm-referenced Stanford-9 (SAT-9) standardized tests in English and math to assess students. This test, however, was not aligned to the state standards, and there was legitimate criticism that information taught in the classroom was not assessed on the state test. This incongruity was corrected in 2001, when California instituted criterion-referenced standards-aligned tests, principally the California Standards Test (CST).

The CST is a so-called criterion-referenced exam that measures student performance relative to state standards, as opposed to a national sample of students. Scoring on the CST is grouped into five categories: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic.

As a component of the state's Standardized Testing and Reporting system (STAR), California also uses the norm-referenced California Achievement Test-6 (CAT-6), which is similarly aligned to the state standards, but measures student performance against a national sample of students. The CAT-6 was included in the state's testing regime to evaluate California's self-assessed progress as compared to national norms of performance. Ideally, the new CST and CAT-6 tests together would accurately measure how well classroom teachers were teaching to the standards.

With the institution of rigorous state academic content standards and tests aligned to those standards, the base was established in California for an effective school accountability system. Such a system would use student test results to identify poorly performing schools and attach real consequences for poor performance. The importance of consequences and mandated corrective interventions for poor performance cannot be understated.

Eric Hanushek, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and one of the nation's leading education economists, has found that accountability systems have a significantly positive impact on student achievement. But Hanushek attaches an important caveat: "The impact, however, holds only for those states attaching consequences to performance."<sup>6</sup> States that do not attach consequences to performance, he says, "do not get significantly larger impacts than those not having a formal accountability system."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, California's school accountability system is

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<sup>6</sup> Eric A. Hanushek, "Impact and Implications of State Accountability Systems," in John E. Chubb ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005), p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

severely deficient in this crucial area of consequences, mandated corrective interventions or options for parents of students attending consistently low-performing schools..

## **I. The California State Accountability System**

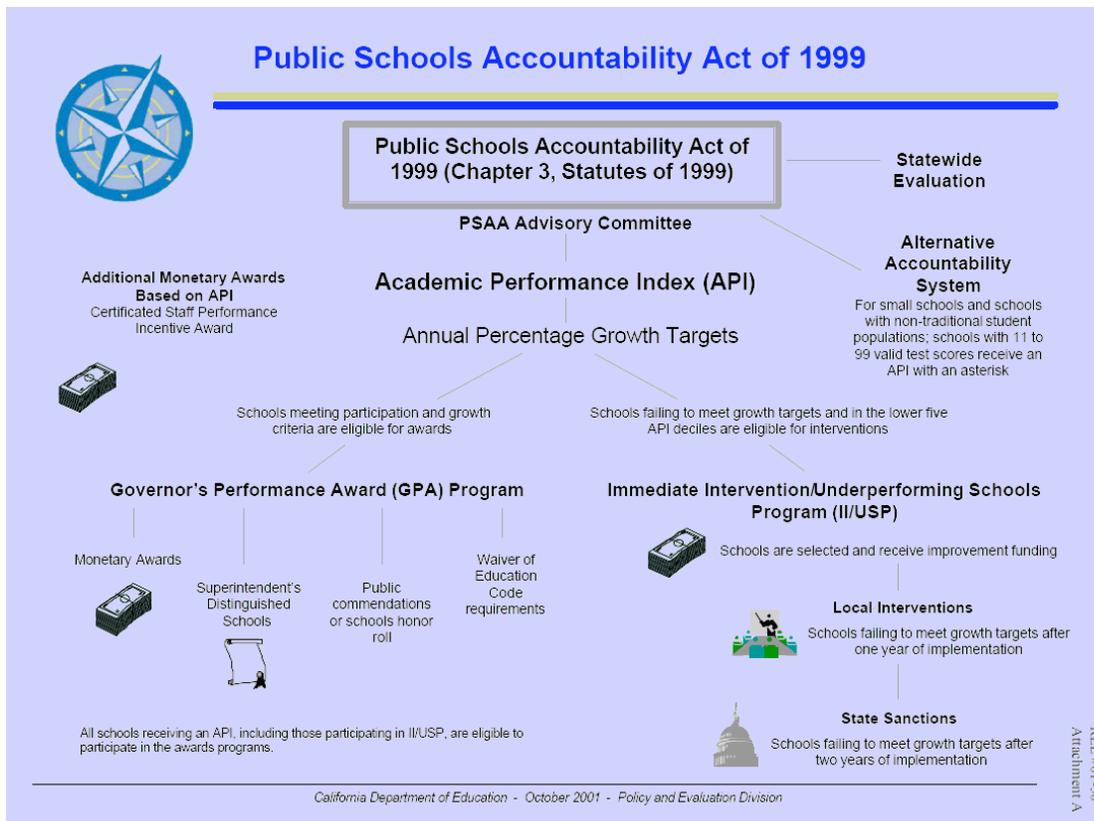
California's school accountability system was established under the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (PSAA), which predated the federal NCLB by two years. The system's key measurement device is the Academic Performance Index (API), the purpose of which is to measure the academic performance and test-score-based growth of individual schools. It is a numeric index (or scale) that ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1,000. Each school's exact score is based principally on the school's CST scores, though scores on other state tests for certain grades and types of are also part of the equation.

The API score is an indicator of a school's performance level. The State Board of Education set the statewide API performance target for all schools at 800. A school's growth is measured by how well it is moving toward or past that target. The API also ranks schools on a scale of one to ten, with one ranking as the lowest-performing. Each year, ten percent of all schools are placed in each decile ranking, and those in deciles one to five are considered low-performing.

Schools with an index below 800 are asked to meet annual growth targets based on five percent of the difference between the school's API score and the state goal of 800. Thus, a school with a score of 400 would have a growth target of 20 points, calculated as  $(800-400) \times .05 = 20$ . In contrast, a school with an API between 781 and 799 would have a growth target of only a single point. Using the 5 percent formula, it would take decades for a low-performing school to reach the state goal of 800, by which time generations of unfortunate students would have graduated from the sub-par institution.

It is important to point out early that California's accountability system and NCLB differ in the way they use test scores. California's API uses student test scores to measure school-wide performance and growth at individual schools, rather than assessing progress of individual students or groups of students. In contrast, NCLB puts the spotlight on student achievement, i.e. the percentage of students at an individual school who reach a certain level of achievement as they progress toward the ultimate goal of scoring at the proficient level on the state test. Thus, schools with significant populations of white students often make their school-wide growth targets while masking the achievement gaps of ethnic minority students. This difference and others will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

API has two components: (1) base information and (2) growth information. A school's API Base is subtracted from its API Growth to determine how much the school improved in a year.



These two components are referred to as a reporting cycle. Generally, base reports are provided after the first of the calendar year, and growth reports are provided in August. Thus, a school's 2006 API Base is calculated from 2005 test scores from the previous spring, while the 2006 API Growth is calculated from the 2006 spring test scores. These reports are based on APIs that are calculated annually with largely the same indicators. It is important to note, however, that each year schools receive a new base, and that a school may have a lower base in later years that would affect a school's growth in that given year, thus making it impossible to understand academic growth over time.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The educational research organization EdSource describes the technical calculation of the API as follows: "The first step in calculating the API is to divide the school's individual student scores into five performance bands. For the norm-referenced test (NRT), scores in each subject are placed into the five bands based on their national percentile ranking (NPR). NPR is the proportion of students in a national sample whose scores were lower than the California students' score on the national test. The California Standards Test (CST) results are also divided into five performance bands, labeled Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic. The next step is to apply weights to the percentage of students with scores in each performance band (least weight for the lowest bands). These are summed to give a value for the subject. Then each subject area and test is given a weight within the index. The weights depend on which tests are given to each grade in each school. For example, a high school's Base API includes CAHSEE results but no NRT scores. (For details of the weighting see <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/documents/infoguide05b.pdf>.) The Base APIs can therefore vary somewhat school by school, depending on their grade levels and number of students tested. The calculation also depends on the number of valid test scores at the school. Finally, the resulting scores are added to become one number for each school — its API. A school district's API is the sum total of all the student (not school) scores." See "Understanding the Academic Performance Index," EdSource, September 2006, available at <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Articles/Article.asp?title=Understanding%20the%20API>

One of the key problems with the API is that the statewide target score for all schools is not synonymous with grade-level proficiency. Under the PSAA, the State Board of Education adopted a statewide API performance target of 800 that all schools were required to meet. However, this target goal has been set well below the state's definition of proficiency, which is the level that the federal NCLB requires all students to reach. Grade-level proficiency is actually met with a score of 875. Thus, the state target goal of 800 is considerably lower than the grade-level proficiency scoring level. Schools, therefore, are striving to meet an API goal that is significantly below proficiency. Immediately, one can see the disparity between the goals of the state accountability system and the federal accountability law.

It was the intent of the PSAA legislation at the time it was enacted to also include rewards that would recognize high-achieving schools, while recommending interventions and, ultimately, sanctions for schools that are continuously low performing. The law was written and passed during a period of windfall budgets for providing schools monetary incentives for improvement. This aspect of the law is known as the Governor's High Achieving/Improving Schools Program. The appropriation for incentives was \$227 million in the 1999-2000 budget and \$157 million for 2000-2001. Due to economic conditions and consequent budgetary constraints, this incentive program has not been funded since 2001.

Also enacted under the PSAA was the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). This voluntary program invited schools to apply for an initial \$50,000 planning grant to be used for development of a local action plan to improve student achievement at that school. This action plan required the school to set short-term academic objectives for a two-year period that will allow the school to make adequate progress toward the academic growth targets on achievement tests, graduation rates, and any other indicators approved by the State Board of Education. In the following two years, the school would receive annual implementation grants of up to \$200 per enrolled student, with a third-year grant possible if the school continued to struggle to meet its API growth target.

II/USP was initially open to those schools that scored below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on the SAT-9 exam. The state changed the program in 2000 so that schools that rank in the lower half of the API and fail to meet their state-calculated growth targets are eligible to apply for the program. Because the program is voluntary, low-performing schools can choose not to apply for the program; others may apply but not be selected. For example, in 2000-01, of the 938 eligible schools, only 532 applied for 430 slots. In other words, 406 eligible low-performing schools voluntarily decided not to apply, and of those that did 102 were not selected.

As of 2003-04, three groups, or cohorts, of 430 schools have been funded, resulting in a total of 1,290 funded schools over three budget years. It is wrong to assume, however, that these 1,290 schools were chosen because they represent the worst

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schools in California. Focusing on schools that do not reach their growth targets makes sense because it funnels resources to schools that are struggling to improve. However, according to the state Legislative Office (LAO), this rule could result in the perverse possibility that “the school with the lowest API score in the entire state is not eligible for this immediate assistance program” if it had “reached its annual growth target.”<sup>9</sup> The LAO notes that, “such a low-performing school is likely to be in greater need of external assistance than a school in the fifth decile (close to the state average) which did not meet its annual API growth target.”<sup>10</sup> As the LAO’s observation indicated, there was no guarantee that only the lowest-performing schools in the lowest deciles be chosen for the program.

By definition, standard accountability mechanisms should serve as an obligation to accept responsibility for improvement, particularly when additional funds have been provided to support reform and improvement efforts. California’s school accountability system, though, was designed at a time when the state policy for incentives and accountability to improve was not well defined or understood in California. This is evidenced by the fact that 3,428 schools shared \$227 million in 1999-2000 and 4,562 schools shared \$157 million in 2000/2001 as a reward for improving student achievement. This focus on rewarding nearly 5,000 schools stands in stark contrast to the state’s acceptance of only 1,290 “underperforming,” volunteer schools for funding to encourage improvement.

In order to complete and exit the II/USP program, a participating school simply had to meet its growth target two years in a row. As has been noted, the growth-target formula produces a very minimal incremental growth requirement, so it is not hard to exit the program “successfully.” For those schools that failed to meet the exit requirements, the PSAA law theoretically allowed the state superintendent of public instruction to impose sanctions including state takeover of the school, reassignment of staff, appointing a state trustee, turning the school into a charter school, renegotiating the labor agreement, or closing down the school. In reality, however, the current options are relatively mild and ineffectual, such as assigning a school assistance and intervention team (SAIT).

The II/USP program was made voluntary because schools that took the money had to accept what were marketed as strict sanctions should they not improve. Initially, the contemplated sanctions appeared to meet Eric Hanushek and Herb Walberg’s requirement that accountability systems have tough consequences for failure to improve. However, not only have California’s sanctions been watered down, the benchmark for avoiding them has been set so low, it is difficult to see how the state’s system qualifies as an effective accountability program.

Given the low bar set for of the II/USP exit criteria, it is not surprising that 990 of the 1,290 schools have successfully met the minimal requirements for exiting the program.. An additional 78 schools remain under watch, and 222 schools have become

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<sup>9</sup> “Analysis of the 2001-02 Budget Bill,” Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, February 2001, p. E-101.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

or continue to be state-monitored. Again, because II/USP is a voluntary program, many low-performing public schools that refused to participate or were not accepted into the program perform worse than participating schools. These non-II/USP schools are not subject to any sanctions and may perform at lower levels than II/USP schools being sanctioned by the state for failure to improve.

Remarkably, of these 1,290 II/USP volunteer schools across the state, only six schools had any sanctions imposed upon them by the state superintendent of public instruction (SPI), and those sanctions came only after five years of failure to improve. The six schools that received strict sanctions, in 2005, were actually outperforming many others in the state. This disturbing phenomenon occurs for two reasons.

First, the law allowed only 1,290 schools out of more than 9,300 schools in California to accept improvement grants for II/USP. Second, the metrics for improvement were based upon the API, which in many cases allows the scores of ethnic minority and socio-economically disadvantaged subgroups within a school to decline. Often, these declining scores are masked by growth in the school's overall API score. This significant flaw of the state's API will be covered later in this analysis.

#### Analysis of the Six Schools That Received Sanctions Imposed by the SPI in 2005:

1) Wilsona Elementary School:

While Wilsona Elementary School, in Palmdale, Los Angeles County, was identified for sanctions in 2005, our analysis showed that 1,610 schools in the state performed worse based upon the schools' ability to get all students to grade-level proficiency, as measured by the CST.

State sanctions on Wilsona included: 1) contract with a county office of education for a new SAIT, 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need, and 3) ensure that 100 percent of the teachers are highly qualified.

2) Lexington Elementary School:

As for Lexington Elementary, in Cajon Valley, San Diego County, our research found that there were 617 schools in the state that performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for a new SAIT, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

3) Alicante Avenue Elementary:

In Alicante Avenue Elementary, in Lamont, Kern County, our research found that there were 389 schools in the state that performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for assignment of a trustee, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

4) Antelope Valley High School:

In Antelope Valley High school, in Lancaster, Los Angeles County, our research found that 200 schools performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for assignment of a trustee, 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need, and 3) ensure that 100 percent of the teachers are highly qualified.

5) Compton Junior High School:

In Compton Junior High School, in Bakersfield, Kern County, our research found 185 schools in the state performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for a new SAIT, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

6) Eastin-Arcola Elementary School:

In Eastin-Arcola Elementary, in Madera, Madera County, our research found 105 schools in the state performed worse.

State sanctions: 1) contract with the county office of education for a new SAIT, and 2) ensure that supplemental services are accessible by all students in need.

Clearly, as evidenced above, these schools are not the worst-performing schools in the state. More important, however, is the fact that these state sanctions are neither severe nor necessarily helpful in turning around a school's learning environment in need of improvement. For example, at Alicante Elementary, the mere assignment of a trustee from the county office of education and the provision of supplemental services do not address the major issues that often lie at the root of poor school and student performance, such as teachers' competence and knowledge of the subject matter, standards implementation in the classroom, instructional methods and practices, and curriculum usage.

The SAIT teams, which were established in 2004, have the potential to influence student achievement positively because of their emphasis on alignment of instruction with the state academic content standards, effective teaching of subject matter, and good management practices by the district and the principal. However, according to one analysis of the pre-SAIT efforts to improve schools under II/USP and HPSGP: "Independent scholars found that the process had negligible effects on student performance because the external evaluation teams gave schools divergent and idiosyncratic recommendations. The recommendations usually emphasized classroom processes and school operations rather than what teachers are teaching and how effectively."<sup>11</sup> "After these initial failing years," this analysis reported, "failing schools

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<sup>11</sup> Williamson M. Evers and Lance T. Izumi, "Fixing Failing Schools in California," in John E. Chubb ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005), p. 115.

continued to fail, and students did not learn.”<sup>12</sup> The SAIT teams offer a better approach linked to practices that have been shown to improve student achievement. Nonetheless, it is still unclear just how successful these teams will be in practice over the long term, and, in fact, the aforementioned analysis noted that “what remains troubling is the lack of current efforts to evaluate the success of SAIT officially.”<sup>13</sup>

The few schools subjected to sanctions receive \$150 per pupil for three years and are eligible to have the sanctions lifted if they make “significant” growth for two consecutive years during the three-year sanction period. “Significant” growth does not necessarily mean meeting the school’s state-calculated growth target, but can be a lesser amount.

In fall 2001, Governor Gray Davis signed a bill that layered yet another state funding program on top of the existing II/USP program. Under the new funding program, called the High Priority Schools Grant Program (HPSGP), Decile 1 schools may apply for \$50,000 initial planning grants and three to four years of implementation grants at \$400 per pupil, twice the II/USP rate, to fund their school improvement efforts. These Decile 1 schools are eligible to apply regardless of whether they are meeting their API growth targets.

Also altered by the grant program was the sanctions timeline, which was lengthened from two to three years. However, even if schools participating in the program do not hit their annual API growth targets, schools can receive another year’s reprieve if they simply show, as under II/USP, “significant” growth. Oddly though, “significant” growth in this case has been defined by the State Department of Education to equal one point of gain on the API. With this meaningless yet “acceptable” rate of improvement, “successful” schools exiting the program could still take decades to get their students to grade-level proficiency.<sup>14</sup>

Both of these reform programs have created for schools a false sense of improvement and a false sense of accountability. Formulas used for determining high performance and improvement are easily gamed and often produce exactly the opposite result from what would truly have a high impact on student achievement. In addition, the sanctions imposed on schools in California are limited even when they are applied.

The primary reason for the lack of high rates of improvement in schools in the state programs is that the systems of rewards and sanctions under API-based accountability

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> The state Legislative Analyst’s Office observes: “Schools that make significant growth after implementation receive another year of funding and avoid sanctions for one year. The [state Board of Education] defined significant growth as one point positive growth in either implementation year. This was done to limit the number of schools facing sanctions because of capacity constraints. . . . An examination of the schools classified as significant growth reveals that almost 19 percent actually had a net decline in API over two years. In addition, only 35 percent of significant growth schools had positive API growth in both years.” See “Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill,” Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, February 2003, p. E-129.

have very low expectations for academic achievement. Simply put, the academic achievement of California schools matches the expectations of the two programs, but that level of expectation is unacceptably low.

The public understandably assumes that accountability is for all schools, not just those that volunteer to participate in II/USP or HPSGP. In fact, based on the way these programs have been structured, many might argue that the result is simply throwing good money after bad. While the SAIT teams may be able to craft workable and effective improvement plans for individual schools, the fact remains that the state's expectations for improvement goals in II/USP and HPSGP are too low and are not connected to a tangible target such as grade-level proficiency for all students. The result is that the positive change in learning that the public wants for all students, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, does not often happen.

### Effectiveness and Impact of Spending More Than \$1 Billion

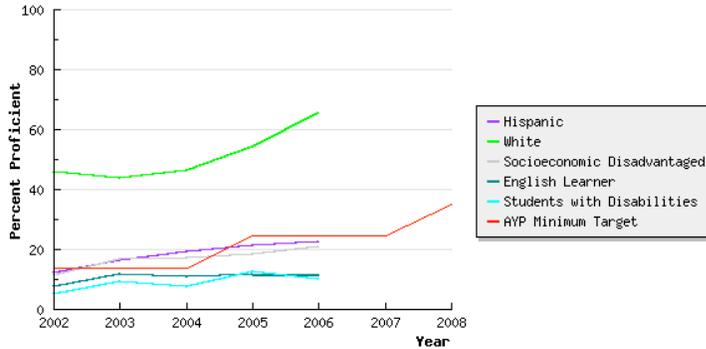
The following charts show the academic achievement results for those schools that participated in the II/USP and HPSGP grant programs. By accepting more than \$1 billion total from the state, they agreed to improve student academic achievement in specific ways, as measured by the API. For each of the following data charts from schools or cohorts of schools, a comparison is made with a school or cohort of schools that was eligible to participate in these state programs but declined to do so.

Comparatively speaking, there are no differences in academic achievement for the participating schools, as measured by improvement in grade-level proficiency on the CST over time. Despite this lack of significant improvement, these schools met the criteria established by the state for successful program implementation with sufficient achievement results for exiting the program. The point here is not that these schools did anything "wrong." Rather, the fact that they did just what the state asked them to do, but did not significantly improve their performance and yet exited the program, is a condemnation of the accountability system itself.

A school that accepted II/USP grant and exited program as successful

**Herbert Hoover Middle, San Jose Unified  
Language Arts Subgroup Performance Summary**

Update	Subgroup	All Students	Hispanic	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
	Number of Students	1211	939	132	828	513	127
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	77.5%	10.9%	68.4%	42.4%	10.5%
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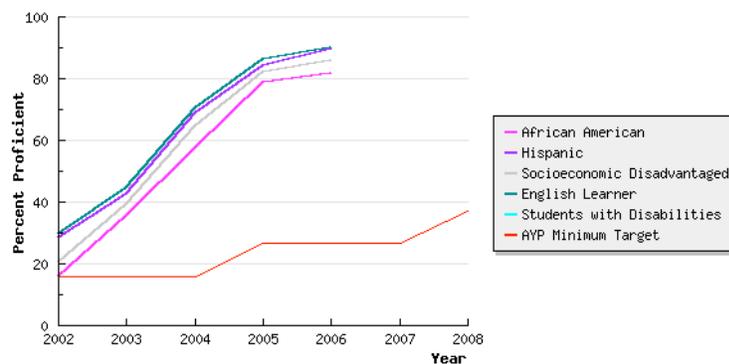


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A school that was II/USP-eligible but accepted no grants or state intervention

**Ralph Bunche Elementary, Compton Unified  
Mathematics Subgroup Performance Summary**

Update	Subgroup	All Students	African American	Hispanic	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
	Number of Students	269	133	130	269	113	15
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	49.4%	48.3%	100.0%	42.0%	5.6%
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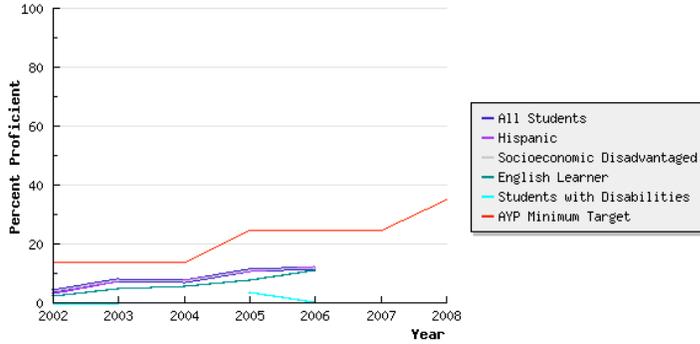


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A school that accepted HPSGP funding and exited program as successful

**Calwa Elementary, Fresno Unified  
Language Arts Subgroup Performance Summary**

Update	Subgroup	All Students	Hispanic	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
	Number of Students	511	474	511	299	39
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	92.8%	100.0%	58.5%	7.6%
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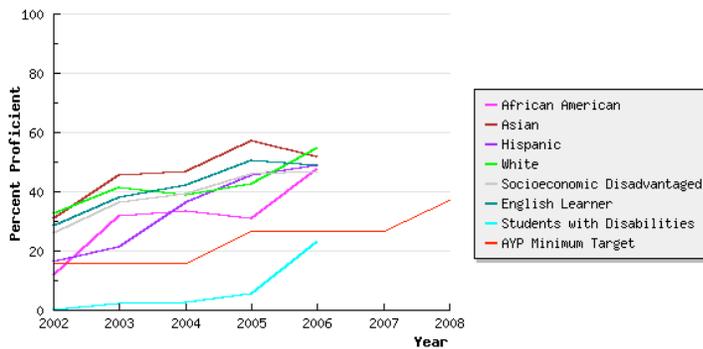


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A school eligible for HPSGP that accepted no grants or state intervention

**Linda Elementary, Marysville Joint Unified  
Mathematics Subgroup Performance Summary**

Update	Subgroup	All Students	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
	Number of Students	462	26	106	183	137	354	231	72
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	5.6%	22.9%	39.6%	29.7%	76.6%	50.0%	15.6%
	Include Subgroup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						



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CDS: 58-72736-6056717

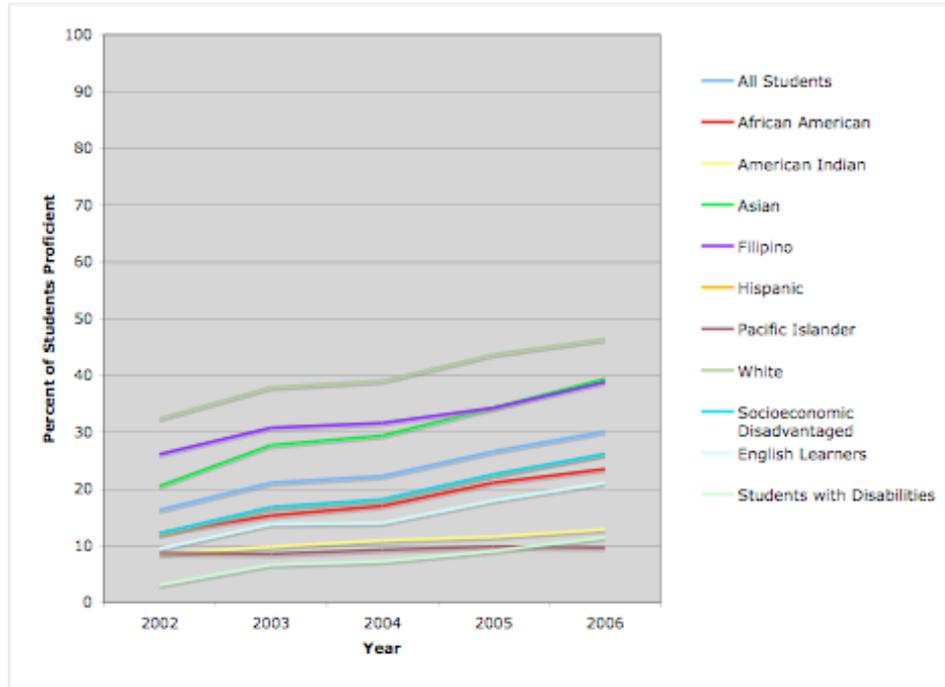
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Improvement over time for all Cohort 1 II/USP-eligible schools that accepted grants

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California

**II/USP Cohort 1**  
Performance Comparison

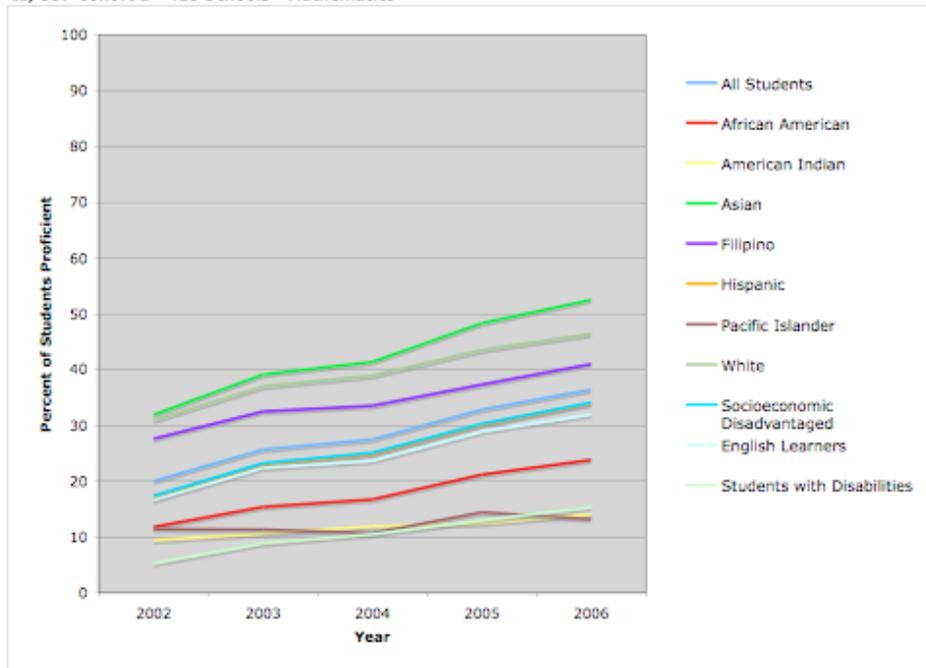
II/USP Cohort 1 - 415 Schools - English/Language Arts



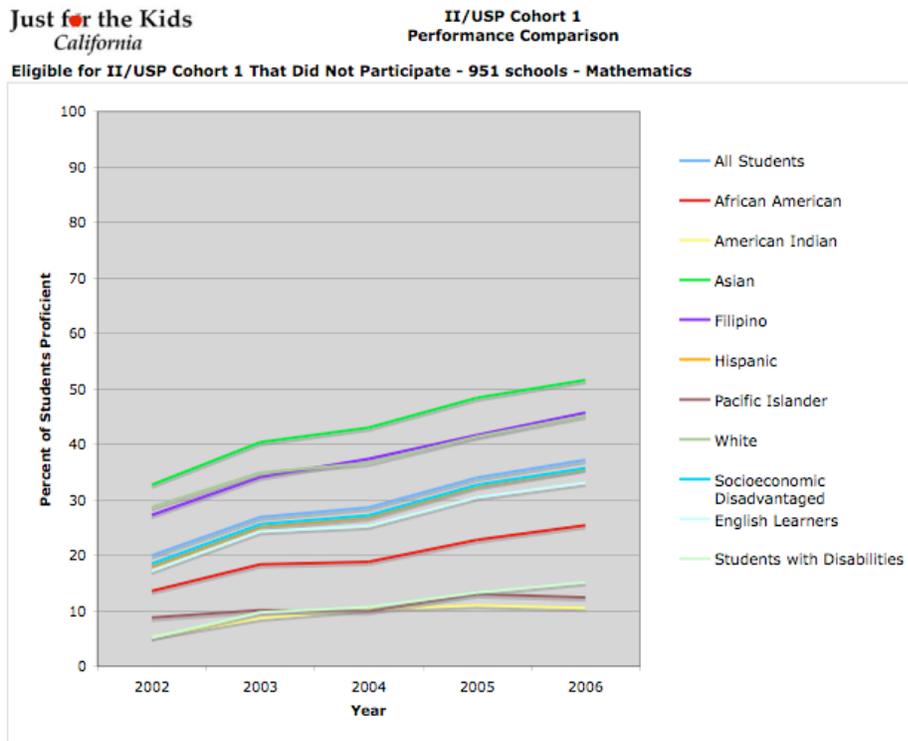
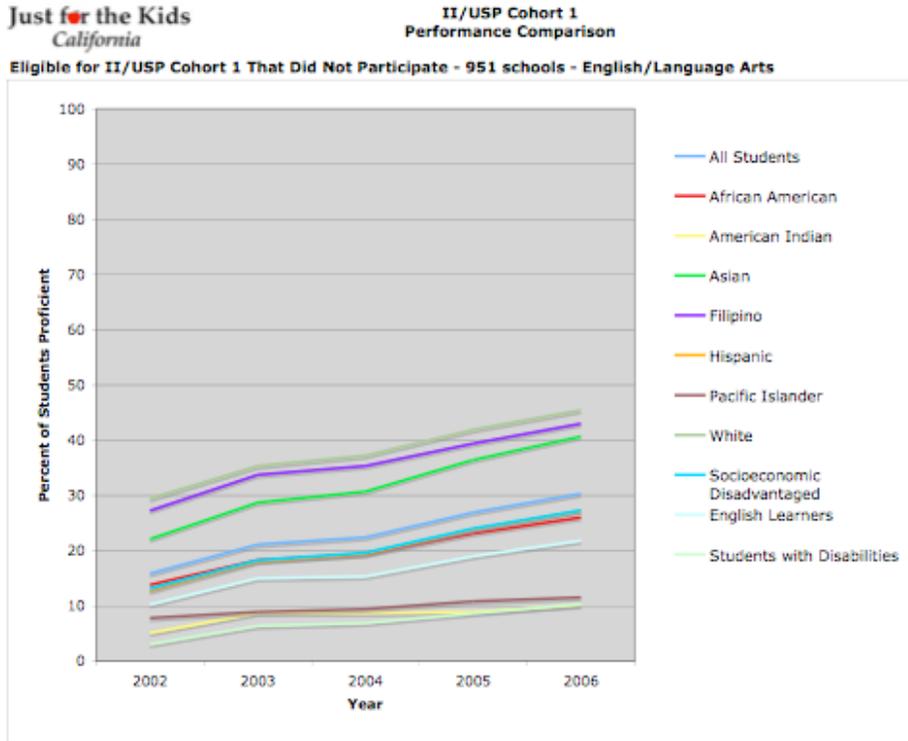
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California

**II/USP Cohort 1**  
Performance Comparison

II/USP Cohort 1 - 415 Schools - Mathematics



Improvement over time for all II/USP-eligible schools during the Cohort 1 startup year that did not accept the grants or state intervention



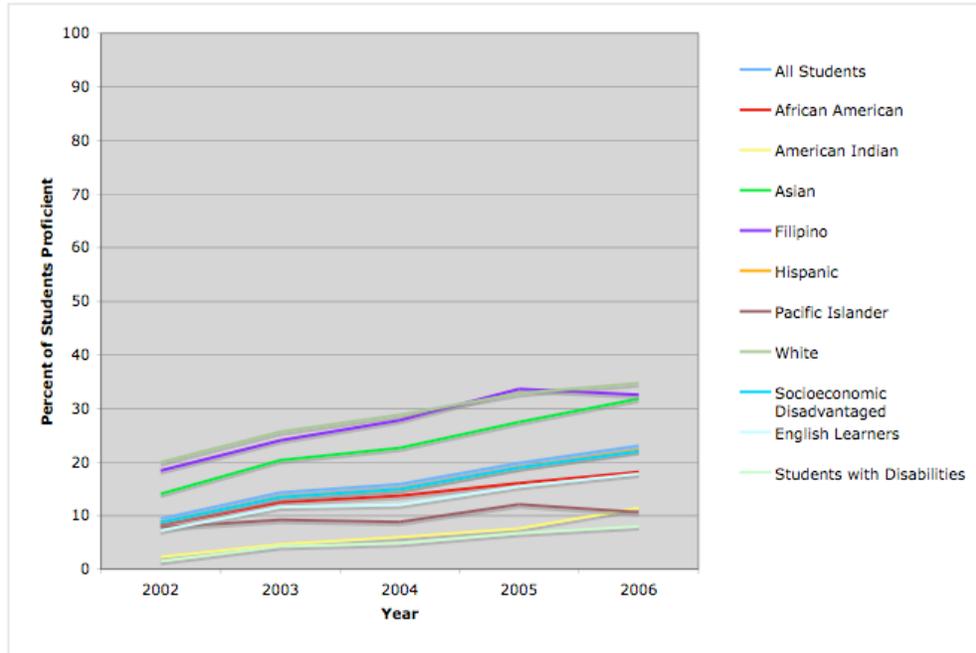
Improvement over time for all Cohort 1 HPSGP schools that accepted grants

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HPSGP Cohort 1  
Performance Comparison

9/1/06

HPSGP Cohort 1 - 340 Schools - English/Language Arts

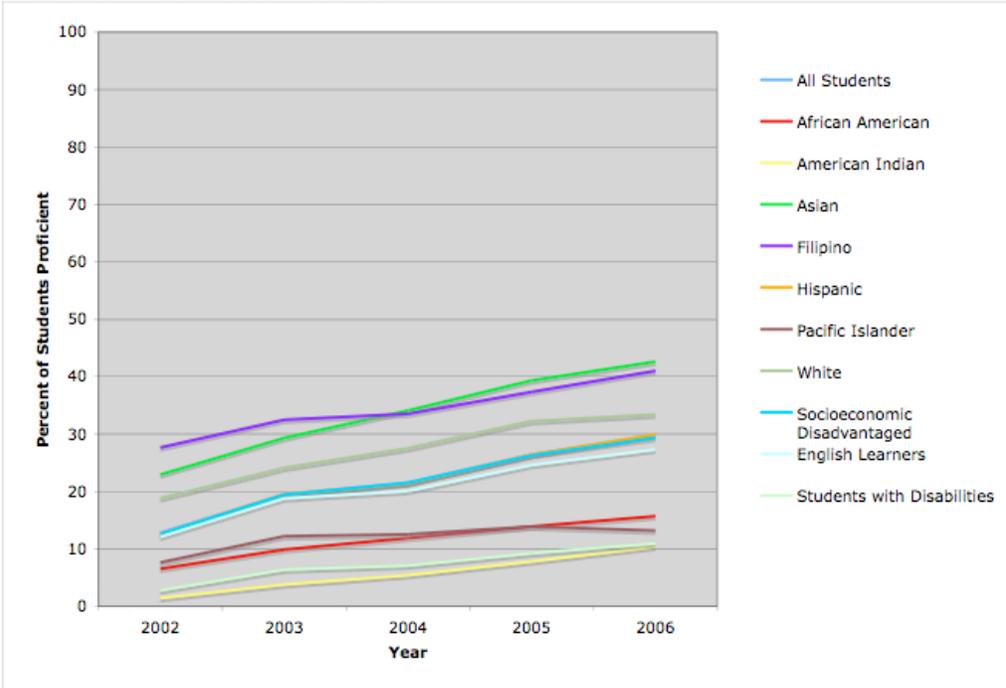


Just for the Kids  
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HPSGP Cohort 1  
Performance Comparison

9/1/06

HPSGP Cohort 1 - 340 Schools - Mathematics



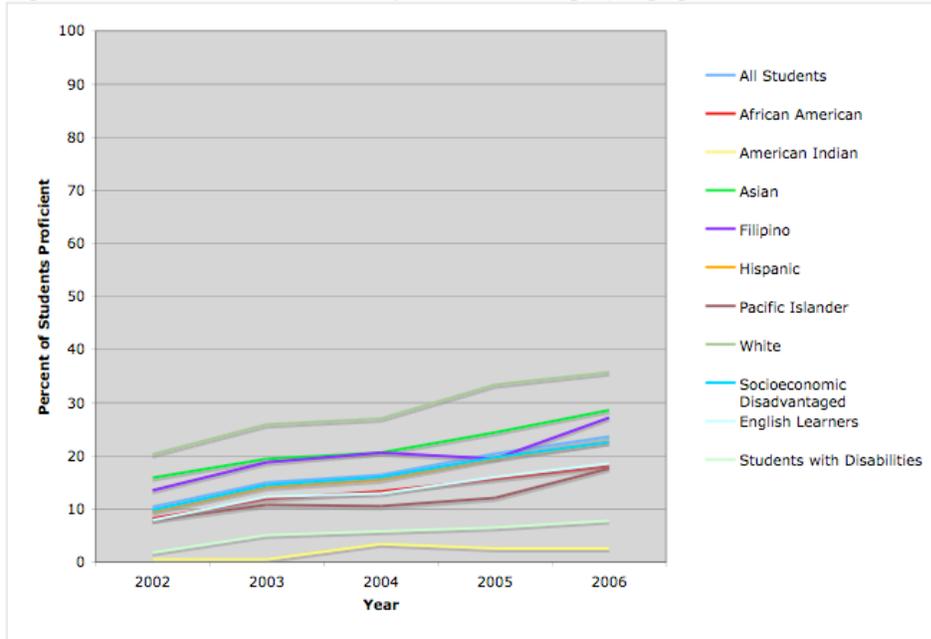
Improvement over time for all HPSGP-eligible schools during the Cohort 1 startup year that did not accept grants or state intervention.

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HPSGP Cohort 1  
Performance Comparison

9/1/06

Eligible for HPSGP Cohort 1 That Did Not Participate - 91 schools - English/Language Arts

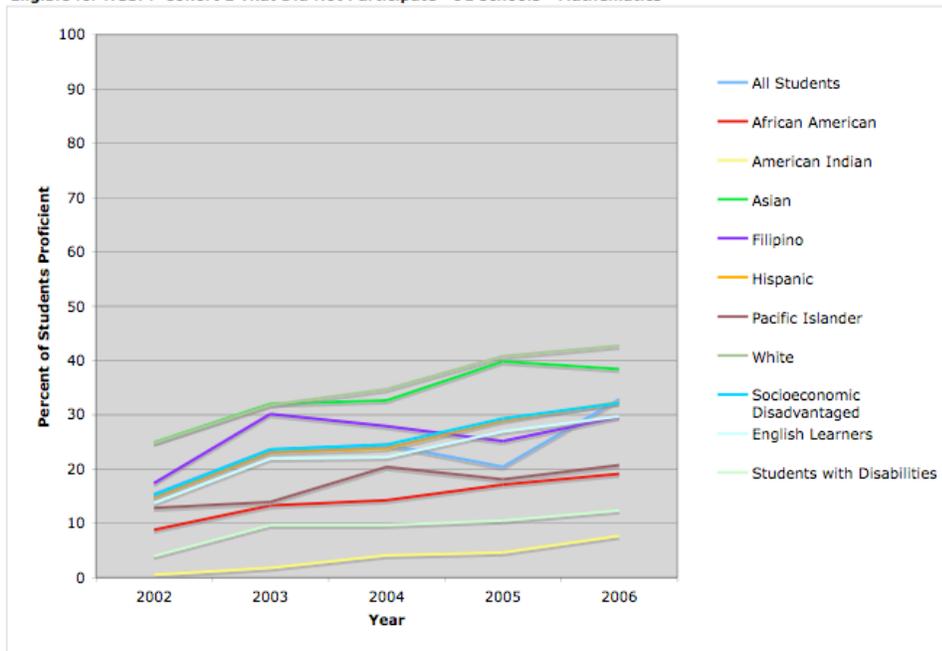


Just for the Kids  
California

HPSGP Cohort 1  
Performance Comparison

9/1/06

Eligible for HPSGP Cohort 1 That Did Not Participate - 91 schools - Mathematics



As these charts confirm, it made relatively little difference whether students attended schools that were part of a state improvement program or not. For example, if one compares the performance of African American students at schools that participated in II/USP or HPSGP to African American students who attended schools eligible for those programs that did not participate, one finds virtually no difference in the percentage of students who reached grade-level proficiency in reading and math. Thus, it appears that for all the tax dollars spent on the state improvement programs, they have delivered precious little bang for the buck.

## **II. The Federal Accountability System**

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) into law with overwhelming bipartisan support. The final votes were 87-10 in the Senate and 381-41 in the House. Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Judd Gregg (R-NH) and Congressmen George Miller (D-CA) and John Boehner (R-OH) were its chief sponsors in the Senate and the House, respectively.

As has been mentioned previously, NCLB requires, among other things, that all children be proficient in math and reading by 2013-14. In order to help students achieve proficiency, states must establish academic content standards, enact testing and accountability systems, and improve the subject-matter competency of teachers.

The key foundational concept upon which much of NCLB is constructed is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The state Legislative Analyst's Office explains this as follows: "States must define the meaning of proficient [on their state tests] and set annual objectives towards this goal [of proficiency], referred to as AYP. In order to meet AYP, schools must meet targets for all students and for the following subgroups: major racial and ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English Language learners."<sup>15</sup>

NCLB requires that all schools in a state administer the same test and have their progress measured according to the results of that test. The federal law focuses on the percentage of students meeting the target of grade-level proficiency in reading and math, while California's API-based accountability system focuses only on growth in a school's overall achievement from year to year. California, thus, has dual, or dueling, accountability systems.

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<sup>15</sup> "Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill," *op. cit.*, p. E-119.

NCLB aims to improve the performance of America’s elementary and secondary schools, while at the same time ensuring that no child is trapped in a failing school without options or access to additional educational resources. Thus, the emphasis is on improving individual student academic performance, rather than the average performance of a school. As Harvard economist Caroline Minter Hoxby observes: “Boiled down, AYP is simple: every student should be on a path that, if projected forward, will lead him to be proficient by 2014. The *every* is a core principle of NCLB: we must ensure that no group of students —minority, disabled, poor, limited English proficient, mobile — is left behind.”<sup>16</sup>

When the focus is only on the average performance of an entire school, as with California’s API-based system, there is no incentive to pay attention to lower-performing students as long as higher-performing students balance them out and keep the school’s average scores above state benchmarks. NCLB’s AYP-based framework requires considerable improvement in the performance of all significant subgroups of students, rather than simply improvements in a school-wide average score. As such, it ensures that schools, school districts, and the state focus their efforts on raising the achievement of all students, instead of allowing individual students to continue falling behind.

Just as important, NCLB strengthens federal Title I accountability. Title I is a federally funded assistance program for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. In California, approximately 57 percent of public schools receive Title I funding. NCLB requires the implementation of statewide accountability systems that cover all public schools that accept federal money. These accountability systems must be based on state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group of students is left behind.

Title I schools and school districts that fail to make AYP toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course to meet state standards. NCLB’s major effort in this regard is called Program Improvement, which has four levels of sanctions and interventions.

The first level requires that schools develop a two-year improvement plan and use 10 percent of Title I funds for professional development on school improvement. At this level, a key incentive for schools to improve is the requirement that students have the option to transfer to any public school in the district, including a charter school, and have the district pay for their transportation costs. The district must use at least 5 percent of its Title I funds for this purpose, if needed.

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<sup>16</sup> Caroline Minter Hoxby, “Adequate Yearly Progress,” in John E. Chubb, ed., *Within Our Reach: How America Can Educate Every Child* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005), p. 82.

At the second level, all level-one interventions are continued, plus schools must use Title I funds to create tutoring programs from state-approved public or private providers. Providers are selected by students and their parents and must meet state standards and offer services tailored to help participating students meet challenging state academic standards.

At level three, all level-one and level-two interventions are continued, plus the district must do one of the following: 1) replace responsible staff, 2) implement new curriculum, 3) significantly decrease management authority at the school level, 4) appoint an external expert to advise the school, 5) extend the school day or year, or 6) restructure the internal organization of the school.

The fourth and final level includes all the interventions at the previous levels and calls for another plan to be prepared and implemented within one year. This plan could include: 1) reopening the school as a charter school, 2) replacing most of the school staff, 3) hiring a private management company to operate the school, 4) turning the operation over to the state Department of Education, or 5) other major restructuring.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the schools that receive Title I funding, their school districts are also subject to Program Improvement sanctions. The State Board of Education must identify districts that do not make AYP for two years in a row and provide them technical assistance. Districts that fail to improve are subject to a variety of sanctions: reduced administrative funding, deferred programmatic funding, revised curriculum requirements, replacing district personnel, removing schools from district control, replacing the superintendent and school board with an appointed trustee, abolishing or restructuring the school district, or authorizing students to transfer to other districts.<sup>18</sup> To ensure that districts offer meaningful choices, NCLB requires school districts to spend up to 20 percent of their federal Title I allocations to provide school choice and supplemental educational services to eligible students.

It is important to note that the AYP targets were set by the State Board of Education, not the federal government. Under NCLB, each state is responsible for developing its own definition of AYP and setting a course for how to bring all children to grade level by 2013-14. In fact, each state is also responsible for determining what level of academic performance at each grade level constitutes proficiency. Thus, it is not only possible, but quite probable that most states have different definitions of what constitutes proficiency in reading and math. .

For AYP in grades two through eight, the California State Board of Education defines proficiency as scoring at the proficient or advanced level on the math and English-language-arts CST. For upper grades, a score on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) that corresponds to proficiency on the CST was selected, which is higher than the lower benchmark needed to pass the exit exam. According to the LAO, the Board “designed the proficient and advanced achievement levels to roughly represent

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<sup>17</sup> For a good summary of Program Improvement elements for schools, see “Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill,” Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, February 2003, p. E-116.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., P. E-117.

students achieving above grade level who are on track to attend the California State University or the University of California.”<sup>19</sup>

The LAO has recommended that California’s definition of proficiency for upper grades be changed so that simply passing CAHSEE constitutes “proficiency.” The agency also recommends, “the definition of proficiency for grades 3 through 8 could be defined at a level commensurate with being on track to pass CAHSEE.”<sup>20</sup> The LAO’s recommendation, however, is an admission of defeat. The agency acknowledges that, if implemented, its recommendation would “create a lower standard than what [the state Board of Education] approved for the definition of AYP.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, it would create a bar barely above the ground, given that students need only answer correctly 55 percent of math questions and 60 percent of English-language-arts questions in order to pass the CAHSEE. Recall also that the exit exam contains material mainly geared to upper-middle-school difficulty levels.

Aligning all grade levels to such a low-level test with its low-level benchmarks would make the word “proficiency” meaningless and certainly not prepare 12<sup>th</sup>-grade graduates to enter the workforce or college without extensive remediation from either their employer or higher education. Yet, the LAO promotes this change because it would slow the rate of schools entering NCLB Program Improvement.<sup>22</sup> As Caroline Minter Hoxby notes, states like California have “set proficiency levels on the basis of their true judgment of what their students ought to know, not what their schools can readily achieve.”<sup>23</sup> “Dumbing down” the meaning of proficiency would, therefore, harm the very children that school accountability systems are designed to help.

### How High is High and How Low is Low?

Other states have set “proficiency” levels for their tests at a lower level. This dichotomy has caused some to argue that California should lower its proficiency definition.

This argument will never be settled until the consumers of public education, the parents, the public and the business community decide upon what exit competencies they expect from graduating 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Recently, California took a big step forward by defending the California High School Exit Exam. However, even though the California business community and others applaud this as a good start for benchmarking purposes, it still falls far short of what a graduating senior should know and be able to do.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. E-125.

<sup>20</sup> “Analysis of the 2004-05 Budget Bill,” Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, February 2004, p. E-117.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Caroline Minter Hoxby, “Adequate Yearly Progress,” *op. cit.*, p. 84-85.

The bottom line is that there seems to be consensus by all stakeholder groups that a graduating high school senior should exit the 12<sup>th</sup> grade with their choice of entering the workforce or pursuing higher education. However, today, more than half of the nearly 40,000 first-time freshmen admitted to the California State University (CSU) require remedial education in English, mathematics or both. These 25,000 freshmen all have taken the required college preparatory curriculum in their high schools and have earned at least a B grade point average. According to the CSU, the cost in time and money to these students and to the state is substantial. Moreover, these students are confused by seemingly having done the right things in high school only to find out after admission to college that they need further preparation just to get started.

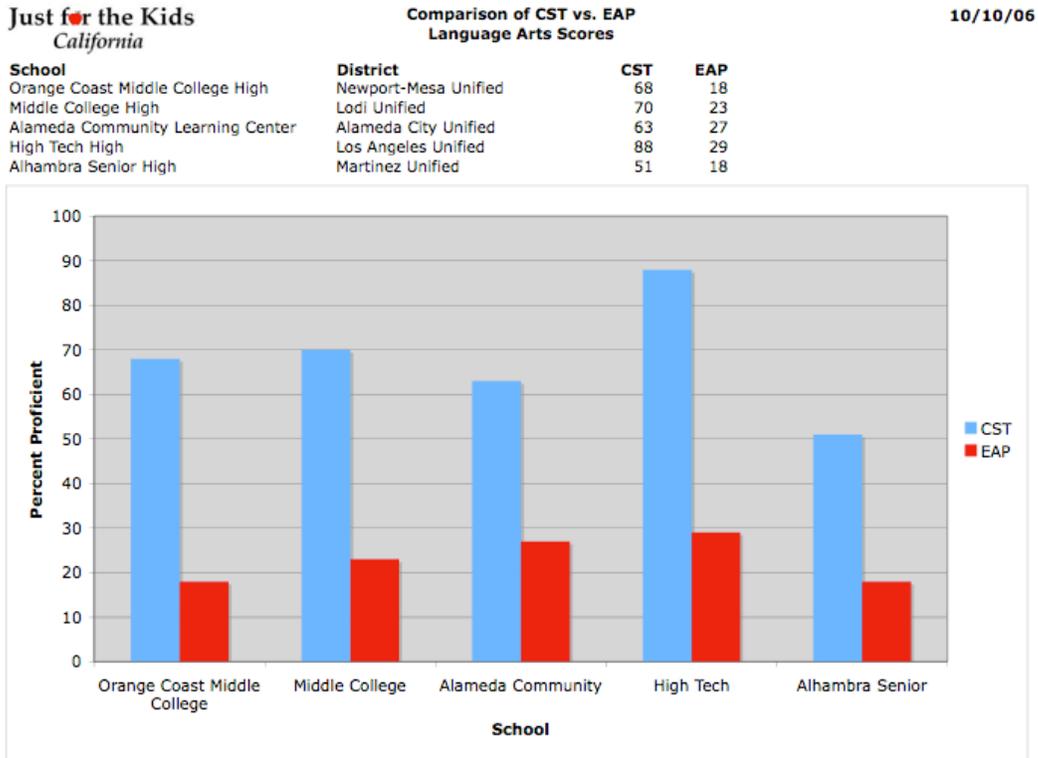
To mitigate this situation, the CSU designed and led a collaborative effort among state educational agencies to establish the Early Assessment Program (EAP). The program provides opportunities for students to measure their readiness for college-level English and mathematics in their junior year of high school, and to facilitate opportunities for them to improve their skills during their senior year.

The goal of the EAP program is to have California high school graduates enter the CSU fully prepared to begin college-level study. They do this by taking a voluntary EAP test in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade as an augmented CST. If they are considered proficient on the EAP, then they may enter their freshman year of college without remedial courses.

So, now begs the question. What is the relationship between proficiency on the CST and proficiency on the EAP? Does being at grade level in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade mean that the student can expect to get into college without paying for costly remediation?

An initial analysis, as displayed in the following chart, of five comprehensive California High Schools with high percentages of 11<sup>th</sup> graders at grade level in the CST clearly shows what many consider a benchmark set too high still is not very predictive of them getting into college without remediation. If the proficiency levels were “dumbed down,” this college readiness gap would dramatically increase, primarily because our expectations for their achievement levels would dramatically decrease. The bottom line is that teaching mastery of the state academic content standards would lose all meaning.

Comparison of CST and EAP results for Five California High Schools



California’s Response to Adequate Yearly Progress

In addition to the AYP component, NCLB sets several other goals for districts, schools, and teachers. These goals include annual assessments, annual measurable objectives (AMO), participation rates for students taking tests, other academic indicators (California chose a one-point gain on the API), graduation rates, average daily attendance, teacher quality, number of core academic subjects taught, paraprofessional quality, persistently dangerous schools and victims’ rights, and parent notification and involvement.

The federal legislation sets the goals to be reached in each of these areas, and it is up to each state to respond with a strategy.

In California, the State Board of Education is the State Education Agency (SEA) for all matters related to NCLB. Each state that accepts federal grants must complete and submit to the U.S. Department of Education the state’s implementation plan for the 10 critical elements required for approval of their state’s NCLB accountability system. California’s plan is known as the Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook.

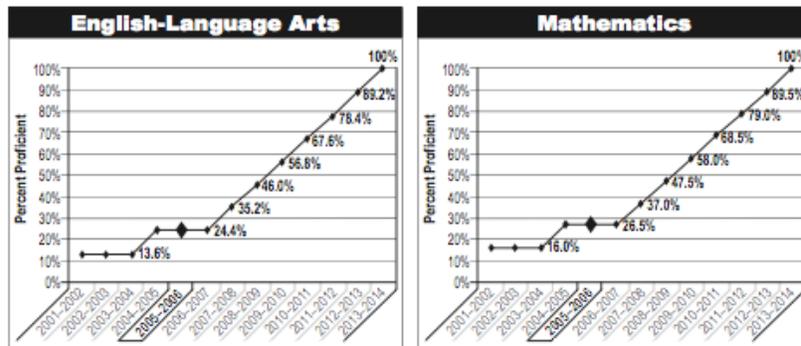
These critical elements are defined and described in 10 principles that embody the federal legislation. An example of a critical element is Principle #3:

The state definition of AYP is based on expectations for growth in student achievement that is continuous and substantial, such that all students are proficient in reading/language arts and mathematics no later than 2013/2014.

This AYP chart is California's response to critical elements of Principal #3 showing the timeline for getting all students to grade level by 2013/2014.

### AYP Targets, 2002-2014 Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, and Elementary School Districts

- Participation Rate – 95% (schoolwide/LEA-wide and subgroups)
- Percent Proficient – Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs)<sup>1</sup> (schoolwide/LEA-wide and subgroups)



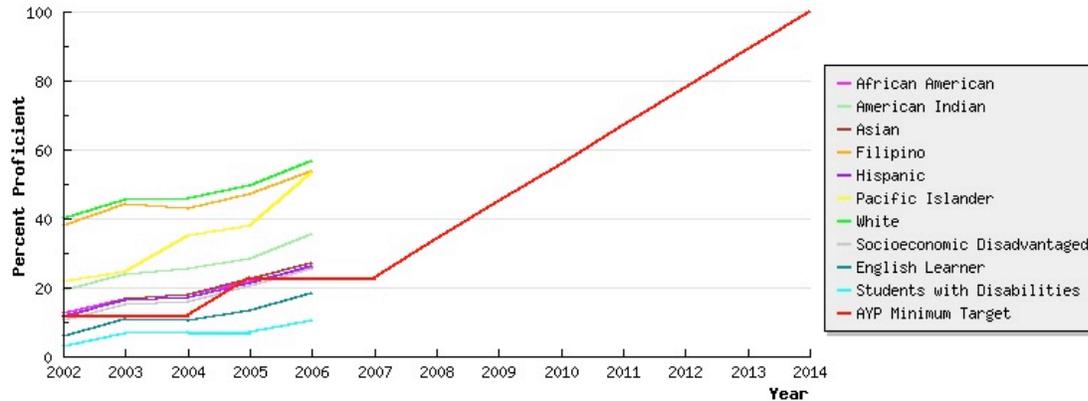
As shown in the graphic above, the State Board of Education chose to increase the rate of improvement in stages, with little or no improvement for the first three years, an increase in rate between years 3 and 4, and then another flat line. The flat line coincides with election years and does not provide for a continuous expectation of improvement between 2001/2002 and 2013/2014. During the first three years the expected rate of improvement was fixed over time at very low levels (13.6 percent at grade level for reading and 16 percent for math prior to 2004; and 24.4 percent at grade level for reading and 26.5 percent for math prior to 2008). Another way of saying this is that prior to 2004, it was acceptable for nearly 86 percent of students to be below grade-level proficiency in reading and 84 percent in math, and currently it is acceptable for more than 75 percent to be below grade level in reading and more than 73 percent in math.

One very negative aspect of the flat-line rate of growth in the early years is that it causes a steep, accelerated rate of improvement from 2007-08 and to 2013-14. A skeptical, and probably very realistic, view of this rather strange plan for getting all kids to grade-level proficiency is that the creators of the California plan hoped that NCLB would be altered before real improvement in achievement was required. With the reelection of President Bush that became unlikely at least until after 2008.

The following graphic shows the state-designed ramp and its relationship to various NCLB subgroups of students and their performance over time on the Language Arts California Standards Test. This example shows the improvement data for every significant subgroup in Fresno Unified School District with relationship to the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for achieving AYP for that year.

**District Summary, Fresno Unified  
Reading Subgroup Performance Summary**

Update	Subgroup	All Students	African American	American Indian	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic	Pacific Islander	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
	Number of Students	44109	5045	339	6545	215	24822	128	6979	37475	15668	4370
	Percent Enrollment	100.0%	11.4%	0.8%	14.8%	0.5%	56.3%	0.3%	15.8%	85.0%	35.5%	9.9%
	Include Subgroup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									



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CDS: 10-62166-0000000

September 7, 2006, 3:02 pm PDT

### III. A Tale of Two Accountability Systems

For nearly two years, led largely by the state superintendent of public instruction, there has been ongoing debate over the benefits of California's API and its so-called focus on growth, compared to the grade-level proficiency requirement called for in No Child Left Behind. In this debate, when the layers of the onion are peeled back on California's complicated and complex API, it becomes clear that the API is not a true accountability system at all. The API is confusing at best, and at worst, masks achievement gaps and the relative position of student subgroups and schools to a benchmark of absolute grade-level proficiency in reading and math.

As the LAO notes, "instead of measuring a particular *level* of achievement, [the API] measures *growth* in school-wide achievement from year to year." Yet, this growth is not targeted at grade-level proficiency. Recall that the state's API target score of 800 for schools is well below the proficiency benchmark of 875. "NCLB deliberately emphasizes *reaching proficiency*," says Caroline Minter Hoxby, "not just making gains every year" [emphasis in the original].<sup>24</sup> Growth, therefore, must be toward the goal of every child reaching proficiency, rather than schools making small incremental average gains de-linked from any proficiency goal or timetable focusing on all students.

The API, then, does little to provide educators, lawmakers, parents, and the public with data and information about a school's true academic performance. Without reliable and actionable data showing how schools are performing with respect to grade-level proficiency, it is impossible to identify the schools that are doing well and those that need additional help. There is no question that accountability is critically important to drive improved academic achievement. As such, it is all the more disturbing that true accountability is notably lacking when using the API as currently calculated and reported.<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that data should be used as a hammer, but simply that the state can do better than the current API system.

#### The API Holds Minority Students to a Lower Standard

Although the State Board of Education recently voted to change the discriminatory practice of setting minority subgroup growth targets at 80 percent of the school-wide growth target, draft language adopted by the board still allows schools to meet their growth targets and be recognized as successful even if they have subgroups

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>25</sup> The Legislative Analyst's Office has pointed out that the state Board of Education has put out a matrix that classifies schools based on a combination of API and AYP: "The matrix places schools in six categories: exemplary, commendable, on the move, some improvement, and academic watch. For example, a school with API growth equal to or less than zero that did not meet AYP would be on the academic watch and would be highest priority for intervention. A school that met school-wide API and AYP targets but did not meet subgroup targets would be characterized as 'on the move.' Exemplary schools would be those that met all API and AYP targets." The LAO notes: "The matrix is intricate and may add yet another layer of complexity to the accountability system." See "Analysis of the 2003-04 Budget Bill," *op. cit.*, p. E-122.

that do not meet their growth targets.<sup>26</sup> Even worse, these schools often have declining proficiencies among their minority subgroups, yet are considered successful.

It takes the California Department of Education more than 80 pages in its API Base Report Information Guide to try to explain and defend this system. The attempt is not only confusing, but also misleading because it focuses on overall school “growth,” without reporting whether students are achieving grade-level proficiency in reading or math. Under the API system, schools often reach their “growth” targets while at the same time achievement gaps among their ethnic minority groups of students were widening..

When the proposed amendment to change the lower growth targets for minority students as measured by the API came before the State Board of Education, an analysis was conducted of what exactly was being proposed. This analysis was not an easy task given the incomprehensible complexity of the API and the limited details of the two-page Board proposal. However, after reviewing the API Base Report Information Guide, the state’s Accountability Work Book submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, and the proposal from the California Department of Education, the onion layers began to peel back. The result was both confusing and disturbing.

The analysis showed that of the 7,808 schools that have a valid API, which is 1,434 or 15.5 percent fewer than the total number of schools in the state. 981 of these schools met their school-wide API growth target but had one or more subgroups that did not meet their API growth target. Until this point, the public had been operating under the belief that schools were being held accountable for subgroup academic achievement under the API, albeit at a discriminatory lower level of 80 percent of their school-wide growth target. However, this is not the case. In fact, the only schools to face any sort of accountability for not meeting their API growth target were those small percentage of schools that had volunteered and accepted money for the II/USP.

Peeling back the layers of the onion even further, an analysis examined the proficiency levels of the schools that had met their school-wide growth targets, but which had failed to meet their subgroup growth targets. A full 593 schools not only failed to meet their subgroup growth targets but actually had declining proficiencies for one or more of these subgroups. For years, the state Department of Education has been broadcasting that these were the schools making “tremendous growth” on the API; in actuality, these schools had declining proficiencies among their ethnic minority subgroups (therefore not making their Annual Measurable Objective as defined by the State Board of Education to determine if AYP was made). However, only after this

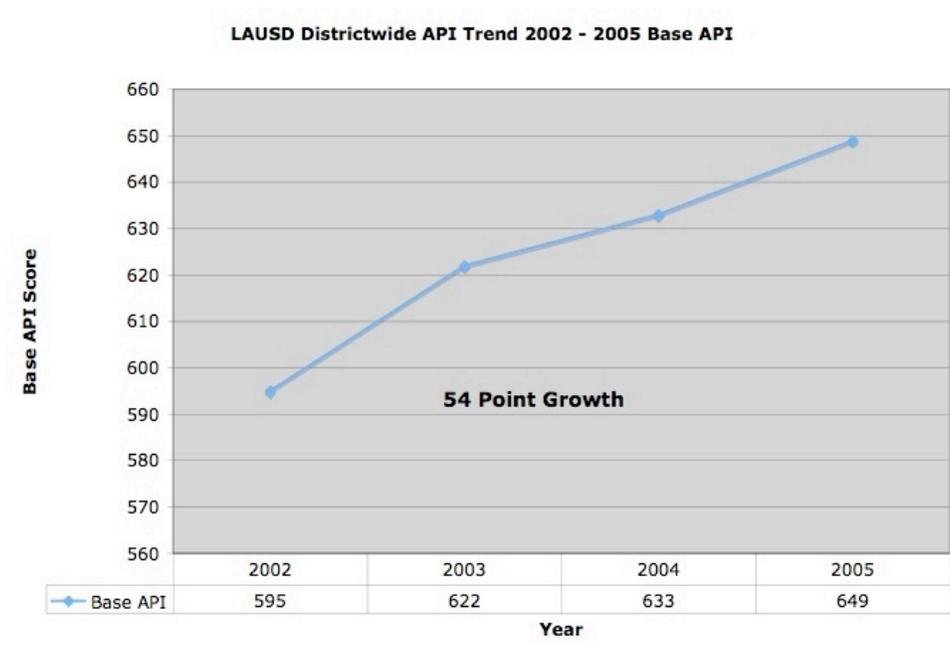
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<sup>26</sup> According to a California Department of Education document: “However, growth targets for numerically significant subgroups will change when the 2006 API Base is reported in march 2007 and will be parallel to the school-wide target calculation that has been in place since 1999. Specifically, starting with the 2006 API Base Report, each numerically significant subgroup will have to show API growth of at least 5 percent of the difference between its 2006 API base and 800. In addition, a minimum target of five points school-wide and subgroup growth will also begin with the 2006 API Base Report.” See “Overview of the 2005-06 Accountability Progress Reporting System,” Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, August 2006, p. 2.

analysis was an understanding gained of the absolute lack of connection or accountability between school-wide growth targets and subgroup growth targets.

API Going Up — Minority Grade-Level Proficiency Flat or Declining — Achievement Gaps Not Closing

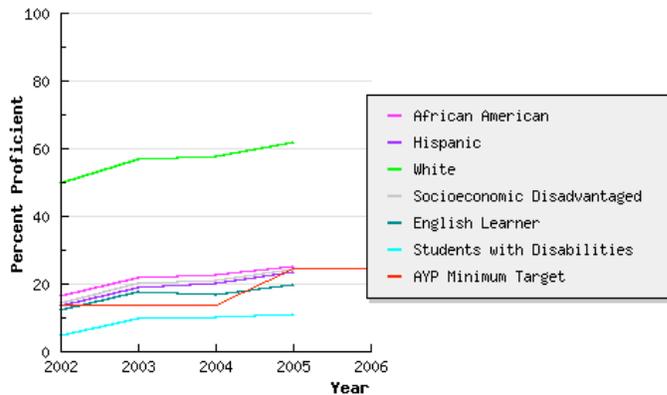
Below are two graphics showing the lack of a relationship between the API and grade-level proficiency improvement over time. The first graphic shows the information the public receives from districts such as the Los Angeles Unified School District or the state Department of Education, showing that the school district is improving achievement.



The second graphic shows that about eight out of 10 of LAUSD’s 380,000 Hispanic and African-American students are consistently performing below grade level, and that the district as a whole has seen negligible improvement over a five-year period, with no reduction in the achievement gap between those students and their white counterparts.

**District Summary, Los Angeles Unified  
Language Arts Subgroup Performance Summary**

Subgroup	All Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Socioeconomic Disadvantaged	English Learner	Students with Disabilities
Number of Students	448894	51878	327459	39401	370574	261777	52318
Percent Enrollment	100.0%	11.6%	72.9%	8.8%	82.6%	58.3%	11.7%
Include Subgroup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					



Just for the Kids California - <http://www.jftk-ca.org>

More than two-thirds of the students in California schools are ethnic minority students, and these students represent the state’s future workforce. Given this reality, it is very difficult to understand the justification for an accountability system that masks the underperformance of these key subgroups. More confusing still, California’s elected education leadership defends this situation as a better system. For instance, Jack O’Connell, the state superintendent of public instruction, has said:

*It is important to remember the dramatic escalation in the AYP targets when viewing this year’s results. The dichotomy in the progress reports released today underscores why we support our state API growth model as a more accurate reflection of trends in our schools.*

Yet it is the AYP that requires the focus on all students, including key subgroups of students. O’Connell chooses to ignore this fact, as well as the reality that the API system fails to detect or address stagnant or falling student minority subgroup performance. It seems clear that many officials want a system that offers comfort to adults rather than help to students.

As recently as August 31, 2006, the California Department of Education published yet another list of schools that made at least double the achievement gains as measured by the API, yet failed to meet AYP.

The chart below clearly shows that even though these schools nearly quadrupled their API growth target, this increase was not due to any achievement gains in the majority of their minority students, more than 82 percent of who were African-American and Hispanic. It is apparent that the school-wide API gains were the result of increases in the performance of the white and Filipino subgroups.

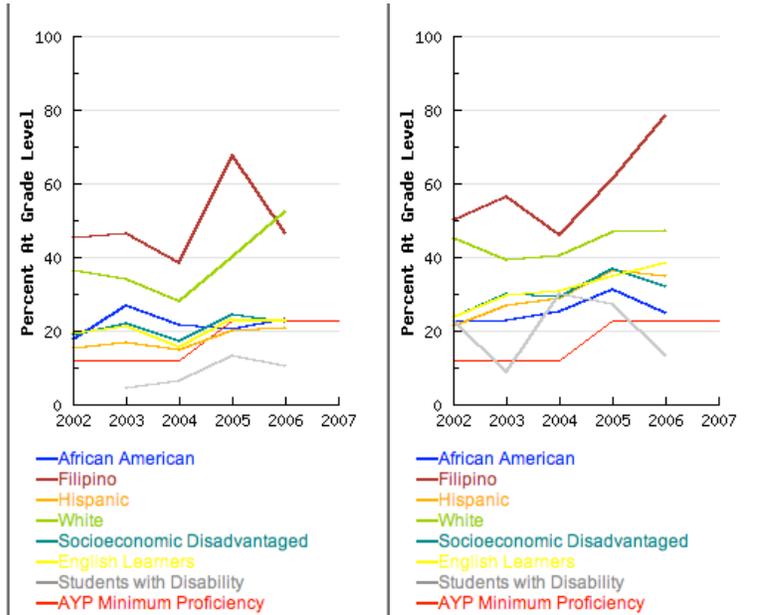
Parkside Elementary  
Pittsburg Unified  
Contra Costa County

Enrollment: 623  
FRSL: 533 (87.5%)  
Soc Dis: 283 (45.5%)  
EL: 336 (53.9%)  
African American: 100 (16.1%)  
American Indian: 0 (0.0%)  
Asian: 12 (1.9%)  
Filipino: 38 (6.1%)  
Hispanic: 381 (61.2%)  
Pacific Islanders: 7 (1.1%)  
White: 31 (5.0%)

2003 AYP Met: Yes  
2004 AYP Met: Yes  
2005 AYP Met: No  
2006 AYP Met: No

API Target: 7  
API "Growth": 26

[JFTK-CA Data](#)



### A History of Lowballing Academic Benchmarks

The State Board of Education requested using the CAHSEE as the metric of success for assessing AYP for high schools. However, the review by the federal government found the benchmarks for passing the CAHSEE were far too low as a measurement of secondary-school success, since the exam included low-level subject matter like seventh-grade math and tenth-grade reading. As noted previously, in order to pass the English/language arts portion of the CAHSEE, students need only answer 60 percent of the questions correctly. For the math portion, the passing benchmark is even lower, with students required to answer 55 percent of the questions correctly. Thus, for high schools to make AYP, students must do more than merely pass the exit exam, a fact largely unknown to most school districts and high schools across the state.

Passing CAHSEE  
(For a diploma)

Proficient CAHSEE  
(For making AYP)

Scaled Score	350	380
% correct math	55%	63%
% correct reading	60%	76%

## State Rewards a Focus on the Bottom

California's API places greater weight on rewarding schools that move children from far below basic to the next level of below basic than it does on moving children from basic to grade-level proficient. While this policy is no doubt driven by good intentions, there is no evidence to date that this focus on the bottom will encourage continued improvement of student achievement over time. The absolute goal must be to get all children to reach for the top and become grade-level proficient or advanced, not simply to settle for incremental improvement so as to avoid sanctions from the state. If the strategy is to focus on those students at far below basic, it will ultimately harm those students who fall outside of that category.

Further, if California is to be successful at moving all children to grade-level proficiency by 2013-14, settling for the incremental growth allowed by California's API is not an option. At the API rate of growth, it could take schools 40 to 80 years to reach the goal of 800, and they would still be below grade level. Because children do not have a shelf life nearly this long, the API growth rate could harm generations of students. The chart below calculates the number of years it will take for schools with particular API scores to reach the state's targeted score.

Starting API	Schools with that API or lower in 2005	Years allowed to reach 800
735	4,900	44
700	3,739	52
635	1,757	61
600	1,109	65
500	425	73
400	123	78
300	7	82
267	2	84

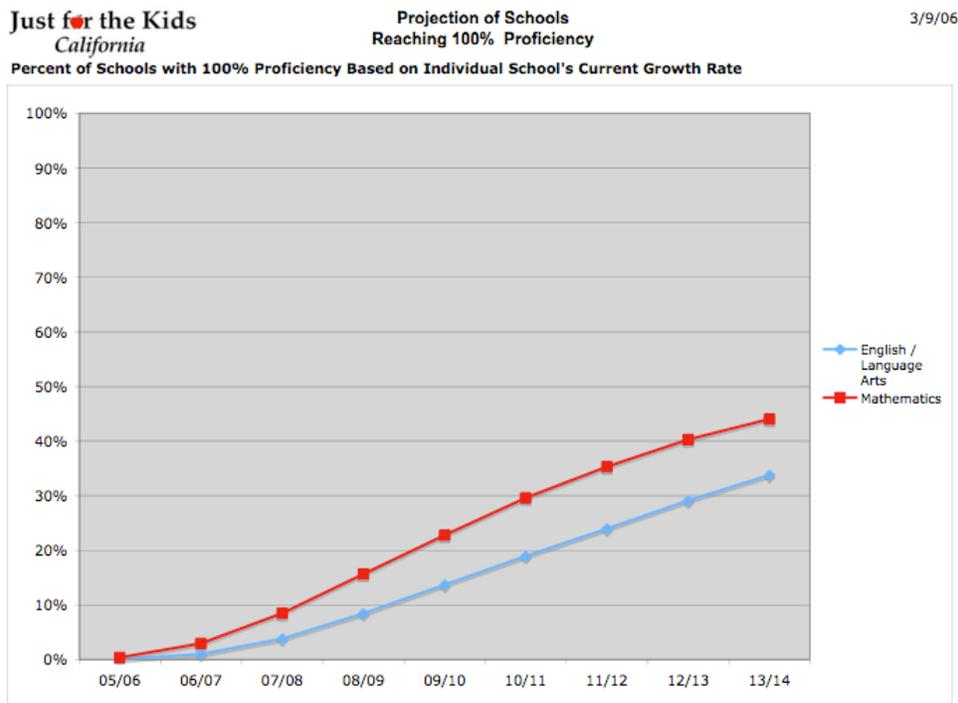
## **IV. Data: Beyond Opinion**

Controversial rhetoric has dominated discussion of the future of California's public schools. Recently, officials in California's Department of Education have projected that between now and 2014, the NCLB deadline year for improvement, 100 percent of California's schools will fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress for all subgroups of students. Using achievement data available from state databases, it is now possible to leave aside projections based upon assumptions, not grounded in fact.

The graph below projects the current rate of growth in grade-level proficiency for both math and reading between now and 2014. This "status quo" model projects the percentage of schools reaching 100 percent proficiency based on their rate of growth from 2004 to 2005 on the California Standards Test. That is, those schools that are

declining will continue to decline, those that are stagnant will continue to be stagnant, and those that are improving at a certain rate will continue at that same rate.

In other words, if nothing changes in our schools and they continue doing what they are doing today, only 44 percent will have 100 percent of their students to grade level in math, and only 34 percent will have 100 percent of their students to grade level in reading by 2014. Clearly, this data-informed projection suggests that far from 100 percent of schools will fail to meet grade-level proficiency goals for their students.



### Theory of Action for Bringing Improvement to Scale in California's Schools

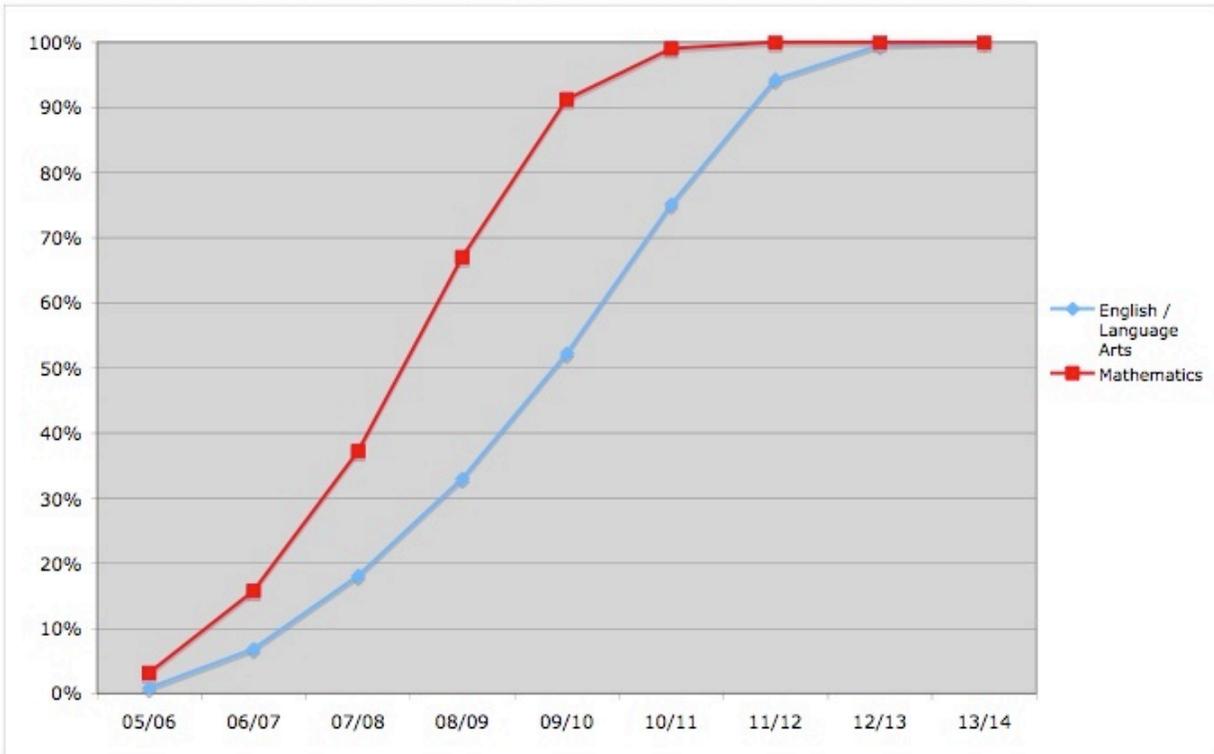
All public schools can reach high levels of academic achievement and successfully close achievement gaps. Indeed, schools are accomplishing this feat in all corners of the state, dispelling the myth that high levels of poverty or minority student populations will lead to lower achievement. By using student achievement data, it is now possible to identify the highest-performing public schools in California that are consistently raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps for all students.

The goal for all schools should be to exploit the proven best practices from these academic successes, through best-practice research, peer-to-peer contact, and site visits to learn what works. "Getting the job done" means bringing students to grade-level proficiency at accelerated rates and significantly reducing achievement gaps among racial and ethnic subgroups.

The chart below shows how schools across the state will reach 100 percent proficiency by 2014 if they match the average growth of the highly improving schools, designated Honor Roll schools by the education research and reform organization California Business for Educational Excellence (CBEE). In fact, charting only the 100 high-poverty Honor Roll schools' growth on a similar chart shows that these schools achieve 100 percent proficiency in English language arts in three years and math in two years.

The projection below shows the percentage of schools reaching 100 percent proficiency based on the average rate of growth from 2004 to 2005 of the Honor Roll schools on the California Standards Test. There are 304 total Honor Roll schools, which include both the so-called "Stars" and "Scholars" schools. The Stars showed increases in academic achievement and achievement gap reduction in all significant subgroups. The Scholars showed significant academic achievement. This projection was done for both English language arts and mathematics.

**Percent of Schools with 100% Proficiency Based on Average CBEE/JFTK-CA Honor Roll Growth Rate**



Clearly, the schools in the state should adopt the best practices of the 304 Honor Roll schools to bring improvement to scale. For this reason, the second part of this paper analyzes the best practices at two of these Honor Roll schools.

## **V. The Bottom Line: California Simply Has No Statewide Educational Accountability System, but Needs One That Aligns All Schools and All Programs**

Beyond No Child Left Behind, California has no real accountability system. Those 57 percent of schools that accept federal Title I grants under NCLB law are held accountable for delivering an effective educational service, including getting children served by Title I programs to grade-level proficiency by 2014. If they do not, then the schools and districts are subject to sanctions that allow the parents of the underserved children to use Title I funds in supplementary ways. The federal government does not take the money away; it simply moves it closer to the parents who are not receiving effective services.

The measurement the state of California chose to add to NCLB accountability was the school-wide API. However, the state only required a one-point gain (on a scale of 200-1,000) to meet the requirements for the state component of the AYP. Since this school-wide API has no connection to a school's subgroup performance, the school could have declining ethnic minority subgroup performance and still have a school-wide increase (usually due to a higher performance of white and Asian populations). This statewide component of the AYP does nothing to provide an incentive to reduce achievement gaps.

The only state-specific programs that purported to have accountability for results were the II/USP and the HPSGP. However, only a fraction of low-performing schools were eligible for the grants, and the accountability for results was very weak or completely absent. It is possible for schools to exit these programs with only a one-point school-wide API gain. More than a thousand schools have exited these programs and are considered successful, despite the lack of significant achievement gains from the "improvement" programs they were required to implement.

## **VI. Recommendations and Solutions**

California deserves to have an accountability system that matches our world-class standards. More importantly, for the government's K-12 enterprise, if the public trust is to be regained, an education accountability system that is clear and understandable to all must be constructed. If schools, parents, and the public do not have an understanding of how the accountability system works, they will ultimately have no faith in the system or the data that it presents.

California must work harder to identify those truly successful schools — those that are raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps — and share the best practices of those schools in a systemic and systematic way to raise academic achievement rapidly. In order to do so, California must move away from a complex accountability system understood by only a few and toward a widely supported and accessible system.

The following recommendations will help reform California's accountability structures:

1. Set Expectations High

We know from high-performing environments across the country that the most important thing education leaders can do will not cost them a penny or require legislation or countless committee meetings. It simply requires a will to set expectations high and accept no excuses for not meeting them.

2. Abandon Complicated API

California cannot continue to cling to the API simply because it is what has been in place. It falsely shows that schools are doing better than they actually are, when compared with grade-level proficiency expectations under the federal system. If that were the only reason to have an accountability system, testing could be dropped altogether.

Honesty about successes must be balanced with candid assessment of needed improvements. Too often, schools recognized as having achieved "tremendous" growth on the API are harming minority students.

3. Keep it Simple

Focus on grade-level proficiency as measured by the California Standards Test. By keeping the focus on grade-level proficiency, greater public understanding about the success of our schools can be achieved. Schools that are successfully raising academic achievement and closing achievement gaps can be better identified so that they can share their best practices. Conversely, focusing on grade-level proficiency will more easily allow the identification of those schools and students that need additional help in meeting the standards and ensure that resources are effectively allocated to leverage the best possible results.

4. Program Improvement Means "In Need of Improvement"

Too many California officials are afraid of having too many schools in NCLB's Program Improvement category. Rather than worrying about numbers, these officials need to acknowledge that thousands of schools in the state are in need of improvement and that the students in these schools will suffer if officials game the system in order to prevent the schools from becoming subject to reforming sanctions and interventions.

5. Replication of Best Practices from High-Performing Schools

High performing schools with low-income and minority populations need to be treated as models to be copied, rather than as statistical anomalies to be explained away. An intensive effort must be undertaken to find out what these schools are doing right and to transfer this knowledge to low-performing schools so that improvement efforts can be scaled up.