

Conclusion

The changes we propose will not happen overnight. It took years for California’s current convoluted and dysfunctional system to evolve; we’ll need a carefully phased process to dismantle it.

Change is difficult. The changes we propose challenge the comfort of the status quo. We understand that. But we trust that our recommendations will appeal to the common sense of the public, and in turn, strong public support will fortify the courage of policymakers to do what must be done if California is truly serious about putting students first.

The changes we propose do not come without economic consequences. Our approach has been to identify the systemic reforms needed to meet students’ needs and, only then, to determine the costs associated with our recommendations. We are confident that the changes we have suggested will create greater efficiency in the use of resources. Moving the kindergarten entry birth date to September 1, for example, will save the system an average of \$700 million per year for 13 years. But, to be clear, the real “efficiencies” we anticipate are not easily quantifiable; they are the efficiencies that arise when professionals are able to focus their attention on raising student achievement instead of figuring out how to work around a system that impedes them at every turn.

In addition, we believe that the changes we recommend will release more time and dollars back into the system, where they can be used more productively to increase student achievement. For example, eliminating the compliance reporting on categorical funding will give administrators back time they can spend working with teachers and students and will create actual dollar savings as districts and the state need fewer compliance officers and consultants to decode and manage the system. It will take time to understand the magnitude of these savings.

On the cost side, we are similarly cautious. Many of the changes we recommend will be phased in over time; the cost of others is determined by their scope; and, still others, notably a data system of the magnitude and quality we suggest, need to be estimated by experts. That said, it is clear to us that the system we propose cannot be funded with existing resources alone. Our proposal to create differential funding for students in poverty and English learners, when fully phased in, will cost an additional \$5 billion. Our proposal to fund targeted expansion of preschool will cost \$1.1 billion, and when fully implemented statewide, the teacher and administrator professionalization program would cost \$3 billion.

We have an opportunity, in the coming years, to make a down payment on the system we propose. Based on the most recently available economic projections (May Revision 2007), the state’s education budget will grow beyond base costs by \$6–7 billion over the next six years under Proposition 98. Because these dollars will come at a time when enrollment is forecast to be relatively flat, California has an extraordinary opportunity to use this money to implement these recommendations and so help produce the type of achievement that our students deserve — provided, of course, that the new investments are not used simply to perpetuate and expand a flawed system. And, while more recent economic forecasts (after the report was finalized) have been less optimistic for education, out year forecasts still project significant increases in Proposition 98 funding.

We envision a public education system that educates all students well and is committed to a cycle of continuous improvement. With student learning the focus of every action, our new system will build a powerful linkage among well-prepared, effective teachers and administrators; a funding process that targets resources fairly and rewards results; and a governance and accountability framework that allows those closest to students to make the key decisions, but intervenes when necessary to ensure that every student is being served. Such a system will embrace the use of data and information — to drive needed changes, to keep parents and the public informed, and to hold itself accountable for steady gains, year after year.

We are confident that California is ready for changes of this magnitude. Year after year, the public tells us that education is one of their highest priorities; they understand that a good education is the gateway to a good life and prosperous, vibrant communities. We have a Governor who has demonstrated strong leadership on issues ranging from stem cell research to global warming. We have a Legislature that has indicated an eagerness to improve our schools. We have some of the country’s strongest standards, most committed educators, and most talented students. With the public and our leaders aimed at creating a new system by which our schools improve continuously over time toward the high standards we have set for all children, we cannot fail, and we must not.

Combining common sense and courage, let’s work together to build on these strengths, make no excuses, and do what it takes to once again become the nation’s leader in creating opportunity for our children and hope for our future.