

California Education Policies - The Shell Game



The governing authority in California education policy is the State Board of Education led by President Michael Kirst; a politically appointed board and completely unaccountable to the citizens. They have a history of being a [rubber stamp](#) for the corporate & non-profit think tanks that donate to the politicians that appointed them. Over the last 8 years the California legislature has approved everything the state board wanted with little or no questions, accountability, or oversight. The Governor and the California Department of Education continually rave about the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the restoration of adequate funding. The program tied to funding is the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) which defines how the money will be spent based on state priorities. The statewide annual test results speak for themselves as we enter the 4th year of statewide failure on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) statewide testing. The new state accountability program is the “Dashboard” and reports on a myriad of indicators which are subjective. By every reasonable measure California is failing to adequately educate our children, and every resident of this state will eventually pay the price for these experimental policies that only benefit the political and donor class and not our children.

Local Control Funding Formula

The goal of the LCFF was restoring funding to the 2007 - 08 levels prior to the great recession. California education funding levels have been abysmal since the 80's. EdSource did a report on 1999 – 2001 [rankings](#), and a follow up report with 2013 – 2014 [rankings](#). California ranks near the bottom when it comes to funding education nationwide across decades. The state marketing campaign is armed with large numbers being throw at the public to indicate a commitment to funding education at the local level. A billion dollars spent on 6 million students is only about \$166 per student. It does not take much to end up with huge spending numbers which are used deceive the public. None of what I have described so far considers the massive long-term pension debt pushed from the state to local level. By 2023 - 2024 local school district will be contributing close to 25 cents on every dollar of salary to cover [pension](#)

[liabilities](#). This is the shell game being played with the Local Control Funding Formula. The “Control” is only for appearance because almost every dollar available is being spent on state and federal “Compliance” leading us to the real name for the California funding model which is the **Local Compliance Funding Formula**.

Local Control Accountability Plan

The best description for the LCAP is a super Individualized Education Plan (IEP). IEP’s are usually associated with a student considered to have a disability (SWD). From the perspective of a SWD student the concept makes sense. When the model is applied to over 1000 school districts, 6 million students, and compliance based funding due to the (LCFF) the Local Education Agencies (LEA’s / School Districts) do not have local control. What they have is a bill for accepting the LCFF funding. If a LEA is fortunate enough to have met all the compliance hurdles, then the LEA could begin looking at local solutions to real local education problems. What would the definition of a school district meeting the state and federal compliance measures look like, how would that accountability system work, and how would it be communicated to the public? That is the shell game being played within the LCAP. The LCAP hides the standardization of all English, Math, Science, & now History subject content. Compliance with the state standards are measured using the Smarter Balanced (SBAC) test which is wholly aligned to the **Common Core State Standards** leading to **Local Compliance** and not “Local Control”.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Annual Testing)

SBAC originally included 30 member states and as of 2017 – 18 has only 14 member states. The total student population of students in states not including California is 2,717,908 whereas California alone has over 6,000,000 public school students which is almost double the rest of the country combined. The only thing keeping SBAC in business is California. The testing headquarters was originally at UCLA and has now moved to UC Santa Cruz. The assessment has never been verified and validated by an independent 3rd party. By any objective measure the SBAC test is broken and serves no purpose other than providing a tool for collecting data on our students and locking in the Common Core state standards. Douglas J. McRae and Williamson M. Evers who both have impeccable credentials address the fundamental question of SBAC reliability in this [article](#). The SBAC is an optional assessment in California due to Education Code 60615, and why any parent would subject their child to a broken test with the only upside being data collection by the consortium and the state is beyond my comprehension. My children have never taken the test and they never will.

Dashboard Statewide Accountability Plan

The final piece in the shell game is the “Dashboard” which encompasses absenteeism, suspension rates, English learner progress, English and Math SBAC cores, basics, adherence to Common Core state standards, parental engagement, and school climate. I don’t know anyone who disagrees with reducing absenteeism and student suspensions, but resolving these issues

are historically difficult and local. There is a difference between using restorative justice with elementary students & high school students that are essentially adults. A 100% tolerance policy does not prepare students for life in the work place, relationships, or family. If actions do not have consequences, life lessons are not learned, classroom management can become a nightmare, and student's ability to learn will suffer at the expense of others. The metric on basics and adherence to standards is more state enforced compliance to ensure that all districts are doing what they are told and not what is best for the students and the community. School climate is a joke in my opinion because what a student feels about the campus will depend on what day of the week it is and what is going on in life. The use of student surveys to accomplish this metric is nothing more than another way of collecting personal data on students and their families. The cut scores used to create the dashboard report were modified by the state board in November because they knew how horrible the effects of current policy would look. The response from the US Department of Education to the California submitted plan is brutal and the worse than any of the other 49 states that have submitted plans. There is no indication of how the different indicators are weighted, no plan for long term academic achievement goals, little or no interim progress updates or goals. The academic achievement indicator is a collection of multiple indicators all of which are averages or an average of averages. There is no plan that defines what comprehensive or targeted support will look like, and there is no definition of what the entrance or exit criteria for state support would look like. This list is only 10 of the 23 complaints the DOE listed in response to California's application for federal ESSA grant funding.

Conclusion

In closing, the entire program regarding California education policy is a cloak and dagger shell game approach. From the LCFF compliance based funding model to the compliance based bill of reckoning that is the LCAP, to the unverified, invalidated, and by all indication broken SBAC assessment, to the federally rejected state plan there is more effort to the marketing policies than to addressing the needs of students statewide. The poverty rate has been reasonably estimated at close to or above 25%, the English learner population percentage is the highest in the nation, and we are ranked 41st out of 50 states in funding. Add on top of this the use of experimental common core standards, experimental teaching philosophies such as close reading, integrated discovery based math, and we are stuck with a recipe for disaster. The state legislature has made no effort to correct or even acknowledge the problems, and shows no sign of doing so soon. Junior colleges have lowered the bar such that degrees and certificates are being awarded without completion of college level mathematics course work. The California State University system will be teaching remediated high school English & math courses while giving college credit for the work. Our students and communities deserve better than a participation trophy. If we as a state are going to survive in a world of ever changing economic models we had better stop playing shell games with money, curriculum, test data, and our children's ability to leave high school ready to learn and adapt with life skills that matter.

