

California's Golden Opportunity

status note

Michael Fullan and Team

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This note is for all those committed to and interested in how California can improve its education performance statewide over the next four years—improvements across the entire system and all of its levels. We believe that there are enough forces aligned to make this result a distinct possibility. The actions and coordinated efforts we outline in this paper are practical and realistic. Our team is working in partnership with a number of groups at all levels of the state (see the Endnote for the list of our team members). It will be the internal leadership within the state that will lead and cause the change to happen (see the list of Acronyms at the end for the main agencies involved). We are fortunate and proud to be participants in this unprecedented endeavor. This is indeed a golden opportunity for system transformation that occurs once in a lifetime at best.

Our work in education focuses on 'Whole System Change' according to four criteria:

1. It must include the whole system, and affect the vast majority of schools and students;
2. It must have at its core new capacities including deep changes in pedagogy that engage all students (pedagogy is defined as: curriculum content, instructional practices, and assessment in relation to specific standards for learning);
3. The policies and strategies employed must have a causal and provable link to measurable impact on learning and well-being; and
4. It must generate widespread commitment to and consistency between uplifting means and uplifting ends. With these criteria the minimum size for success is a whole state or province.

In the shift from a series of individual projects and grants, which in a complex state like California can be lost in the mass of "noise" in the system, we are engaged in a movement or campaign-based strategy toward greater cohesion. We have described this broad strategy as shifting from the 'wrong policy drivers' (negative accountability, individualism, technology, and fragmented policies) to 'the right policy drivers' (capacity building (with internal/external accountability), collaborative team work, pedagogy (with digital innovations as a deepener and accelerator), and systemic policies that stimulate shared coherence. In this movement it is essential to build partnerships with all the major players in the state. The purpose of this shift is to build a broader understanding of systems change and, through strategic communication, build a statewide constituency. This is a challenge as there are 1,009 districts, and 58 County Offices not to mention the other agencies.

The content agenda in California, broadly endorsed at least directionally, is to shift away from the 'wrong drivers' into a new agenda based essentially on the 'right drivers'. More specifically, the state is leaving behind the outdated and complicated assessment of the Academic Performance Index (API) and replacing it with eight state priorities:

1. student achievement
2. student engagement
3. school climate
4. basic service
5. implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)
6. course access
7. parent involvement
8. other student outcomes

Part and parcel of this new agenda is the development of a new accountability system for the state, and its related assessment of student learning through the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) currently under development and pilot testing. This constellation of new standards, new implementation of pedagogy and related curriculum and assessment of progress represents a huge capacity development challenge that is spelled out in the rest of this document.

We have labeled the overall strategy, 'leadership from the middle' (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, pp.121-123). The approach derives from research on successful whole system change in Ontario where Fullan and Hargreaves are currently both advisers to the Premier and the Minister of Education. In this approach the idea is to build up the middle—districts, and districts with their schools working together—so that they are a force for cohesion and also instigators and drivers of change. Districts thus become better partners with each other (districts working together), with the counties, state and teacher professional agencies, and with local schools and communities. Leading from the middle is not just an intermediary layer of implementation but an improvement platform for change that has to be established initially by leadership at the top. In the past this is one of the few strategies that have successfully brought about significant change in the state. The leading from the middle concept that the team has articulated requires, at the state level, significant support for the professional associations as well as for advocates for children and equity. Leading from the middle can be challenging to the state infrastructure: the State Board of Education and the California Department of Education (CDE) as new partnerships form across districts, and as the state shifts

from a compliance to a capacity building relationship with districts, and county offices.

California Education Partners (CaEdpartners) and ourselves at Michael Fullan Enterprises (MFE) work together, as we both partner with parts of the system. EdPartners is a non-profit organization working to play a strong leadership role across the state by supporting collaborative learning opportunities as a key lever for building capacity “from the middle”. One of MFE’s funded goals from the Stuart Foundation is to monitor and interface with policy and strategy evolution. This note represents an initial status commentary on the whole system. We are involved directly and indirectly in several collaborative partnerships. The ideas in the following section are not intended as a specific action plan as much as stimulation for further thinking and action. We have tried to be comprehensive in capturing the key areas of action. The agenda we spell out is directed at all the agencies that have a role to play.

Action Goals

We should think of the goals in two interactive categories. One we would call articulation, the other, problem solving. The former pertains to position papers, op-ed pieces, and related statements that recommend policy and implementation directions. The latter concerns working on solutions. The two streams would feed into each other.

The main agencies of change (not in order, but simultaneously) include: CCEE, LCFF/LCAP, ACSA, CCSESA, County Offices, CDE, Governor/ State Board/CCSS/Accountability, CTA, Professional Associations and Advocacy Groups, and various ‘collaboratives’ (see list of Acronyms).

CCEE (California Collaborative for Education Excellence)

CCEE is a new statewide education agency established by legislation to stimulate local capacity with a 10 million annual budget. Its specific modus operandi is not yet clear. Here we need to figure out together what should be the mandate and actions of CCEE. The good news is that no one is talking about compliance and punitive intervention. But there is a lack of clarity about what CCEE should do. CCEE is intended to broker assistance, but what does that mean? At this early stage there are various noise factors as people and groups try to figure out and provide advice as to what CCEE should properly do. The California Collaborative on District Reform has just put out a call for ideas about what CCEE should do. County Offices are

attempting to figure out their relationship to CCEE, and the prestigious policy group, California Forward, is interested in influencing CCEE's direction in a direction consistent with the agenda set out in this paper.

Action: Because this is a critical window of opportunity we all need to work on 'articulation' and 'problem solving' relative to CCEE's mandate and functioning.

Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)

With decentralized resources and authority there is a great opportunity to develop local capacity but this is a big task. It would be easy for local districts to get stuck in compliance related processes and reports. More positively, the question is: How can LCAP be used as a tool for capacity building and local/regional coherence that makes a measurable difference in engagement and performance? We need to have a clear statement and corresponding assistance about how to develop LCAP as a mechanism that serves implementation of the new agenda. We need examples of counties and their districts jointly developing new models. LCAP provides the opportunity for substantial improvement across the state, but begs the question of how to develop capacity and coherence at the local level.

Action: Work with CCEE, County Offices, link to the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) to develop, support and learn from specific solutions.

Association of California School Administrators (ACSA)

We are working with ACSA to help establish their new presence as a leader in system capacity including a new mentoring program that will be a strong component of new leadership development across the state. ACSA has set three broad priorities which need to be integrated: visioning/system leadership, instructional leadership and technology/digital. We need to interact with ACSA regarding how they connect/partner with County Offices and CCEE.

Action: Develop mentoring program and ACSA's presence as a leader in system-wide improvement. Explore partnerships between ACSA and County Offices with respect to LCFF. Discuss ideas for influencing CCEE.

California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA)

There is a need to assess and clarify the role/capacity of County Offices relative to LCFF/LCAP, and to forge good partnerships with districts and ACSA. Relationships to CCEE also need to be developed.

Action: Help support County Office/Districts partnerships around focused work. Help build capacity at the county office level and support whole system change within counties and their districts. Discuss partnership ideas with ACSA/County Offices leaders.

California Department of Education (CDE)

The State Superintendent has committed to developing new capacities within CDE that are aligned with the 'right drivers'. We will work on the internal development of CDE and its partnership relative to the agenda identified in this note.

Action: The basic idea is to build the capacity of the state to influence and be a partner in the capacity building agenda around the education goals of the state. Part of this should involve helping to sort out how Federal compliance requirements can be met efficiently in the context of moving more fully into capacity building.

Governor/State Board/ CCSS/Accountability

This is clearly multifaceted, and affects everything. The agenda would include: policies and strategies at the state level with respect to: LCFF/LCAP, CCSS, and CCEE and their relationships. Two other critical tasks are to establish a new accountability framework vis-à-vis teachers and the overall performance of the system, and to establish a new student assessment system relative to the eight new state priorities and their relationship to CCSS as mentioned above.

Action: Write a paper for, and work with, Linda-Darling Hammond regarding her development of the accountability framework; meet with the governor and state board key people to discuss and recommend what is needed with respect to CCSS, and student assessment.

California Teachers Association (CTA): CTA is currently preoccupied with the teacher evaluation component, and the court case pertaining to tenure and seniority. However, the suspension of testing requirements in the state and possible CTA re-positioning represents a great opportunity to concentrate on the 'right drivers' for

future success. CTA has also strongly endorsed the ‘professional capital’ agenda (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) that is fundamentally compatible with the ideas and recommendations in this paper.

Action: Work informally with CTA reps around the ‘right drivers’ and professional capital agenda. Look for and establish joint projects. Perhaps develop a more formal partnership after the upcoming CTA Presidential election. Other unions with significant influence include the California Federation of Teachers, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA,) and CSEA (California State Employees Association)—representing classified employees.

Other Organizations with significant state level influence.

These groups include California Forward, Children Now, Parents Association, School Boards Association, and School Business Officials Association. All these groups have a proactive interest in the transformation agenda.

Action: Develop ongoing relationships with all these groups including close connections with their CEO’s and policy people.

Collaboratives/Networks

Everybody seems to endorse collaboratives and networks, but these are currently fuzzy concepts. Although there will not be one definition, there should be a core set of characteristics related to the nature of the work and how to cause and assess their impact. In response to our request, the Stuart Foundation commissioned a report on the existing number of collaboratives. The report by Danielle Hagood (2014) identified 61 various networks with a variety of overlapping purposes. We are involved with several networks, and there are many more including networks of charter schools and links to other schools in districts. California Ed Partners are also developing guidelines for collaboratives. Thus there is much to be learned and sorted out with respect to the functioning of networks and collaboratives within California.

We are tracking specific collaboratives/networks as a strategy that are evolving in other jurisdictions outside California. These networks include: Northwest rural networks that Hargreaves and his team are studying; England, where successful school-to-school collaboratives have been written about by Fullan and Boyle (2013), and Hargreaves, Boyle and Harris (2014), and where academies and federations of

schools working together are widely in existence (we have an agreement with Cfbt in England to share information and contacts about the evolution of networks); and New Zealand where Fullan is adviser to the Minister with respect to implementing their new policy to network all 2500 schools in units of ten or so schools on the average (the specifics of this policy will be defined as it is adapted for implementation).

Action

Track and assess the evolving evidence base about the nature and efficacy of collaboratives/networks.

Conclusion:

We have not addressed the role of universities in the whole system improvement agenda. Teacher and administrator preparation, ongoing professional learning, research and evaluation, and partnerships for implementation are all crucial but beyond the scope of this paper.

As we consider the whole picture we need to build relationships, write policy and strategy papers, co-author op-ed pieces, and facilitate and engage in specific partnerships and related actions to further the goals of system transformation. There needs to be a clear vision and strategy built around what California learners should experience and become; a commitment to leadership that uplifts the students of California and also uplifts the educators who serve them; a concentration on the right drivers of change; a move from leadership at the top or bottom to more leadership from the middle; and a commitment to investing in, growing and circulating the professional capital of teachers and leaders across the state.

In short, this represents a golden opportunity for California to transform itself with enormous benefits for the state, and for the nation.

Endnote

Our team consists of Andy Hargreaves, Joanne Quinn, Eleanor Adam, Claudia Cuttress, Santiago Rincon Gallardo, Carol Campbell, MaryJean Gallagher, Nancy Watson and Michael Fullan. In California our formal relations are with the Stuart Foundation, CORE, ACSA, California Ed Partners, UC Davis, and Linda Darling-Hammond. We also link with the various agencies and associations in the state.

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Acronyms

- ACSA: Association of California School Administrators
- API: Academic Performance Index (former California student assessment program)
- CaEdpartners: California Education Partners
- CCEE: California Collaborative for Education Excellence
- CCSEA: California County Superintendents Educational Services Association
- CCSS: Common Core State Standards
- CDE: California Department of Education
- COE: County Office of Education
- CORE: California Office to Reform Education
- LCFF/LCAP: Local Control Funding Formula/Local Control and Accountability Plan (in force from 2013).
- SBE: State Board of Education