

# **FROM PROGRAMS TO PATHWAYS**

## **ASSESSING CALIFORNIA'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH INTERRUPTED EDUCATION**

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## Introduction

*Please note that as this paper was developed, state policymakers, district leadership and the courts are developing and challenging policies that impact struggling students and students with interrupted education. Thus, the findings here are based on the policy debate as of April 2006.*

The cover story, *Dropout Nation*, in the April 17<sup>th</sup> Time Magazine describes the tide of young people leaving high school before completing their degree. Across the state, newspapers are following the story of students who have stayed in school but will not receive a diploma because they did not pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). It is critical to remember that as the attention on students that dropout increases, the story continues to be shaped by the implementation of reform policies. Although it is easier to understand the crisis of the dropout rate as a behavioral problem – students drifting away from their studies because of lack of internal motivation, a constrained sense of their future or tremendous demands in their family or work responsibilities – it is critically important to understand that the design of our current high school and policies shape young people’s choices.

As we begin our discussion on shaping pathways to ensure that students have every opportunity to complete their degree, let us hold in our minds the story of a young woman who has overcome tremendous challenges through the help of an alternative school, the East Bay Conservation Corps High School in Oakland<sup>1</sup>.

Sheila Campos, a member of the 2005 EBCC Corpsmember High School graduating class, is a student who beat the odds. Having entered the foster care system at the age of two, Sheila continually left home without permission in a desperate search for her natural brother, from whom she had been separated at the age of 13. She did not find him until they were both in their early 20s. By that time, her brother was serving 13 years in prison for armed robbery, and Sheila found herself unable to help him due to her own drug problems.

Sheila first came to EBCC in 1996, but lacking the motivation and desire to study and work, she quickly fell away from the program. “I came in 1996, but I didn’t want to do anything and have people telling me what to do. I wanted to go out on the streets and do drugs, hang out, see men, and you can’t do that here,” she said. Then, in October 2003, she returned to EBCC as an unwed mother of two children, having lost custody due to drugs, but with a new resolve to succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Campos’ story is found in *Whatever it Takes: How Twelve Communities are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth*, American Youth Policy Forum, 2006. [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org)

Sheila graduated in June 2005 after simultaneously attending classes and working “on the grade” (field work) for two years. “If it wasn’t for this place, I’d be dead. I was being killed slowly,” she said.

Now free from drugs, Sheila credits her successes in large part to a caring and persistent staff. Each time her motivation flagged, one or more staff actively worked with her to rekindle it: “They were really there for me. You could feel it.” Continuing into Field Operations after graduation, Sheila has been promoted to crew leader and is working hard to clear her driving record to become eligible for a field supervisor position. She also helps out in the EBCC office and is planning to enroll in Merritt College in the near future. Having personally encouraged at least five youth to apply to EBCC, she insists: “No one can make you do it. It has to come from inside. If they want to change their life, however, this would be a good place to come.” After all, as Sheila points out: “Life is about moving on. It’s not about staying in one spot.”

## Background

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, representatives of foundations from the fields of youth development and high school reform began to hear of a handful of cities that were beginning to address the issues of dropouts with a systemic approach rather than the traditional patchwork of programs. Supported by the Youth Transition Funders Group<sup>2</sup>, a collaboration of national and regional foundations including Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, William Penn Foundation, Meyers Foundation and Walter S. Johnson Foundation invested in supporting five of these leading cities. With a small investment, San Jose, Philadelphia, Boston, New York City, and Portland, Oregon have been shaping their systems to increase graduation rates and increase recovery of students that have dropped out, building on innovative partnerships between districts, alternative education providers, and community organizing groups.

In 2005, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation requested assistance in integrating what is known about dropout prevention and recovery into their district reform efforts. It was clear that approaches solely focused on increasing alternative education programs are inadequate. Increasing graduation rates and recovering drop-outs require the attention of the district’s leadership in order to apply multi-faceted strategies. The product from that work, developed by J.D Hoyer, Keep the Change and Chris Sturgis, MetisNet, was the Alternative Pathways Framework<sup>3</sup>. The Alternative Pathways Framework, outlined below, places the elements of alternative pathways in the context of the larger district reforms:

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<sup>2</sup> You can find out more about the Youth Transition Funders Group at [www.ytfg.org](http://www.ytfg.org)

<sup>3</sup> The Alternative Pathways Framework is available at [www.metisnet.net/papers.htm](http://www.metisnet.net/papers.htm)

### Two Framework Prerequisites:

1. Balanced school reform
2. Early intervention strategies

### Six Framework Elements:

1. Shared responsibility and systemic coordination
2. Adequate supply of choice-based, high-quality alternatives
3. Ability to refer, transition and re-enroll
4. Guidance and advocacy
5. Flexible demonstrations of proficiency
6. Policy incentives

In 2005, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation began to investigate to what degree the Alternative Pathways Framework could be applied in California and how it would need to be modified. The hope was that we would then be able to identify a number of districts that were advancing alternative pathways. Thus, we began with a look at state policy and how it shapes the opportunities and challenges districts will face in reforming their systems and creating alternative pathways to graduation.

### **Recommended Modifications to Alternative Pathways Frameworks**

The original Alternative Pathways Framework was designed based upon research at the district level. It only took state policy into consideration to the degree that it provided enabling conditions to providing schooling for students with interrupted education. Based upon this investigation into the policy context for California, the following revisions should be considered.

- Add a third section that focuses on *state policy context and underlying issues*. The findings of state policy as offered in this paper will greatly inform any district level investigation. Furthermore, it is critical to take into consideration issues such as shortages of EL and SPED teachers in thinking through approaches.
- Create sub-set of struggling students to include those that stay in school but do not complete diploma or are off-track to graduation. Include focus on students aging out of the K-12 system. Include discharge practices as a type of practice that leads to excluding students from school.
- Increase attention to EL and special education students in terms of providing an adequate supply of options and policies.
- Ensure that discussion about alternatives includes discussion on transitions to post-secondary education and training.
- Revise section on demonstrations of proficiency to include approaches to rapid credit accumulation.

### **Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

The primary finding from this investigation is that California state policy offers minimal focus on dropout prevention and recovery. The focus on expanding the college track by aligning the K-12 system with the university system overshadows all other efforts. The full implementation of the CAHSEE is creating a new group of students – those that stay in school but do not get a diploma. Yet California policy barely recognizes that nearly 1/3 of the students

are not in school to even take the CAHSEE. The implementation of the policy to require passing the CAHSEE to get a diploma has focused attention on struggling students. Yet it does nothing to support students that are not even in the classroom to take the exam.

California is showing a renewed interest in career and technical education. The expansion of career and technical education is important as it begins to create a more supportive policy environment for talking about pathways rather than a single college-track system driven by the university system.

The primary dropout recovery mechanism is continuation schools. The majority of the other educational options are focused on students deemed to have behavioral issues. The most disturbing finding is that there is little accountability for the students that are excluded from school or leave because of academic or life pressures. Simply put, no one knows where the 30% of high school students that are not in class have gone, even if they are enrolled in any one of the patchwork of programs including charter schools, federal program or state-managed school. Furthermore, there is no way to determine the effectiveness of these schools.

I recommend the following steps for developing alternative pathways in California to support the 30% of the students that do not complete high school:

- Fully implement the unique student identifier and build the capacity of districts to use it to increase graduation rates and help struggling students complete their diploma. All other efforts rely on the identifier to determine their effectiveness and to move from a set of programs to a pathway.
- Establish a high level point person in California Department of Education (CDE) or preferably a team of people representing CDE, legislature, Workforce Investment Board, Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and key state agencies to focus attention on students with interrupted education and review policies to ensure balanced school reform efforts.
- Support districts in building pathways. The Educational Options division of CDE is positioned well to have expanded functions including reviewing and assisting districts (and their county partners) to make sure they have the right set of alternative schools and systemic practices to help them reduce dropout rates. This should include reviewing push-out practice, use of dropout prevention and supports for struggling students, and educational options. Review patterns and trends in disciplinary policies to ensure that they are not being used to have a disproportionate impact on young people of color or to exclude students from education. Ensure that disciplinary schools are effective in helping to address both emotional-behavioral and academic issues. Monitor the effectiveness of districts to re-enroll students after disciplinary actions are complete.

- Require school districts to offer a rapid re-enrollment process and a list of alternatives in their community on their website. Require districts to submit plans based on segmentation of dropout population to offer adequate number and mix of alternatives.
- Ensure that all students who have not met high school graduation requirements are able to take advantage of K-12 funding until the age of 23. This includes those students that have not passed CAHSEE.

### **California Context for Building Alternative Pathways**

California is one of only seven states where the overall graduation rate (based on cumulative promotion index) has improved, going from 64% in 1992 to 71% in 2002.<sup>4</sup> However in the central cities, the graduation rate remains at 64%. The racial disproportionality is horrifying with only 50% of African-American males and 54% of Latino males graduating.<sup>5</sup>

The state has been ridiculed because its expectations of districts to improve graduation rates are so minimal that it would take centuries to see any significant change. If California truly wants to increase its graduation rates it will require setting meaningful goals and assessing reforms based on the ability to meet those goals. In the meantime, the California education reform movement cannot be complete without having an alternative pathway to support students that have left school prematurely regardless if it was due to behavioral issues, academic challenges, or life circumstances. The following section outlines issues in California that need to be taken into consideration in developing alternative pathways.

### **Framework Prerequisites: Balanced School Reform**

A balanced education reform strategy is one that takes into account the consequences (intended and unintended) of policies on all the children in a community. A balanced approach to education reform builds multi-faceted strategies that aim to improve educational outcomes for each group of students so that all benefit from reforms.

Developing balanced school reform strategies requires the following:

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<sup>4</sup> California reports a 87% graduation rate based on the formula used by the National Center for Education Statistics whereas based on the cumulative promotion index used by the Urban Institute, it is 71%. Harvard Civil Rights Project citing *One Third of the Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*, by Educational Testing Service.

<sup>5</sup> Harvard Civil Rights Project citing Christopher Swanson, Urban Institute

1. Devising strategies to address the needs of the full secondary school population;
2. Offering multiple pathways that lead to post-secondary education; and,
3. Minimizing policies that push students out of school or inhibit their ability to complete their degree.

## 1. Understanding the full secondary school student population

One of the critical policy shifts that leading districts working to increase graduation rates make is moving from the label of drop-outs to perceiving students as having an *interrupted education*. These districts develop balanced reform efforts that manage multiple reform strategies; expand the college track; provide more choices for students that are meaningful to their current lives as well as expand their horizons; focus specific attention on supporting struggling students; and develop alternative pathways for students that dropout for a period of time. In addition, the districts begin to develop many different types of educational environments based on the different reasons students may have interrupted their education.

Research by the California Legislative Analyst's Office suggests the breakdown of students in California is the following:

*College Track:* 25% of students entering high school complete the A-G curriculum required for admissions to state universities;

*Struggling Students:* 45% of students earn a diploma but may not be college ready.

*Students with Interrupted Education:* 30% of students do not graduate or in essence dropout of school<sup>6</sup>, with much larger rates in cities, rural areas, and among young people of color.

Yet in California, it is important to understand that there is another set of struggling students – those that are staying in school but are not going to even graduate because they are not passing CAHSEE, they are aging out of the K-12 system or because they are not able to accumulate adequate credits to graduate. Two policies are creating this pool of *struggling students not earning a diploma*:

**CAHSEE:** Research released by HUMRRO suggests that up to 100,000 students (22%) who are completing the 17 course requirements required for high school graduation may not pass the CAHSEE<sup>7</sup>. These students are not dropping out of school, nor are they graduating by the end of their senior year. Although

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6 Hill, E. (2005, May) Improving high school: A strategic approach. Sacramento, CA. Legislative Analyst's Office.

7 Independent Evaluation of the California High School Exit Examination: 2005 Evaluation Report, Human Resource Research Organization.

this paper will not focus on the degree to which the CAHSEE policy is consistent with educational principles<sup>8</sup>, there is certainly no reason that these students shouldn't be able to stay in school, focusing on building their skills until they pass the CAHSEE.

**Age Limit:** A group that overlaps with those not passing the CAHSEE is students that are aging out of the K-12 system. Again, these students have not dropped out. California appears to have no clear policy regarding whether schools can receive funding for students as they pass their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Thus the age that students are able to leave school voluntarily appears to be used as the general limit for their participation in the K-12 system. Policies relating to charter school are more precise. Charter schools<sup>9</sup> have limitations on claiming individuals over 19 years of age for K-12 average daily attendance (ADA). Once enrolled, attendance for apportionment purposes can be generated by 19 through 22 year old students only if they are continuously enrolled in the charter school and making satisfactory progress toward completion of a high school diploma. When the student turns 23 years old, charter school apportionment can no longer be generated.

There are two different implications for these policies. First, the issue of continuous enrollment does not reflect the reality of students that have competing responsibilities of work and family. If we want students to complete their degree, policies need to be designed to offer as much flexibility as possible. Second, many CA districts are referring students at their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to adult schools based on their progression towards a high school diploma. They are discharging students based solely on their age, even though there is no clear policy that says they must do so.

By implementing discharge practices, they avoid facing the issue head on of students that are over-age and haven't completed the necessary credits, or haven't passed the CAHSEE. In several cities across the country, many districts are beginning to look more deeply at how district and high school policies are generating a group of students that are over-age and under-credit, i.e. students unlikely to get a degree by their senior year. In addition, they are also looking at ways to help these students complete their degree or move towards a transition to post-secondary education and training upon completion of a GED.

## **2. Offering Multiple Pathways That Lead To Post-Secondary Education**

Until recently, California has been expanding the college track through implementation of the A-G curriculum and raising overall standards through the

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<sup>8</sup> There are strong disagreements with the policy regarding CAHSEE as not consistent with the educational principles that multiple forms of assessment should be used in understanding a student's educational progress.

<sup>9</sup> Education Code Section 47612(b)

CAHSEE exam. The recent increase in career and technical education (CTE) is the first indication that CA may be willing to build multiple pathways.

The interest in CTE is accompanied by an increase of funding from the state and foundations. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has included \$50 million to expand CTE in his proposed budget for FY 2006-2007. The focus appears to be primarily on community colleges and the regional occupational centers rather than on potential investments in high school based programming such as career academies or those developed under the National School to Work Act. Another sign of the interest in CTE is the Workforce Investment Board's Lifelong Learning Committee's inclusion of career technical education as one of its four focus areas.

Philanthropic investments in CTE are being led by the Irvine Foundation and Gates Foundation. Irvine is supporting the development of the California Center for College and Career (ConnectEd<sup>10</sup>) as a center for promising practices and policy to promote academically rigorous CTE that meets A-G requirements.

### **3. Assessing the Risk of Push-Out Policies and Practices**

When alternative education is well-managed and focused on getting students to re-engage in school, it is a critical part of alternative pathways to graduation. When alternative education is used as part of a process of excluding students it becomes part of what is called the "school to prison pipeline." The only way to guard against this is to have a balanced reform effort in which districts and state education agencies seek out and eliminate policies and practices that lead to students being excluded from education.

Punitive or rigid policies are often referred to as "push-out" policies as they exclude a student from school, prevent flexibility in helping students educationally progress and send the message that they do not belong. *Thus, districts that are focused on increasing graduation rates must ensure that their practices related to school climate and parent relationships are balanced or aligned with their instructional goals.* This requires districts and schools to review how they manage issues related to attendance, tardiness, make-up classes, credit recovery and discipline. To fail to do this, allows push-out practices to undermine the culture and academic goals of the school.

Although understanding the dynamics of push-out policies as they relate to increasing the graduation rate in CA would require quantitative analysis, there are three areas that indicate immediate attention:

**Disciplinary Policy:** Short-sighted disciplinary policies are likely to be a contributing factor for students becoming overage and under-credited, or dropping out altogether. Current zero tolerance disciplinary policies are a one-

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<sup>10</sup> Information on ConnectEd can be found at [www.connectedcalifornia.org](http://www.connectedcalifornia.org)

size fits all response to behavioral issues and do not take into consideration student's educational progress. When students that have some type of behavioral issues are suspended they often miss even more class leaving them farther and farther behind. In some cases a suspension can help correct the underlying issue. However in many situations, suspension fails to address the behavioral issue and further inhibits educational progress. Certainly when the underlying issue is a mental health problem or substance abuse issue, suspension alone is inadequate. Disciplinary policies need to take into account three goals – creating a safe learning environment, helping students address behavioral issues, and ensuring educational progress.

There is adequate evidence that across the state African-American and Latino students are suspended and expelled from school at rates disproportionate to their percentage of the student population. There have been several reports looking at different school districts and the same pattern has been found in all of them. Californians for Justice found that in Long Beach, African-American students who make up only 20% of the student population are almost half (46%) of the students suspended or expelled. In the Eastside Union High School District in San Jose, Latinos make up 40% of the student population yet they are 51% of the students suspended or expelled.<sup>11</sup> Applied Research Center found that in San Diego, Latino and African-American students made up 53% of the student body, yet accounted for 72% of suspensions and 76% expulsions in 2000-01.<sup>12</sup>

It is not clear to what degree CA districts are implementing intentional school-to-prison pipelines that not only exclude children from education but actually refer them to the court-system. Across the country we are seeing policies that make immediate referrals to the police upon suspension or even worse having students arrested on campus and taken directly to the police station without ever engaging their parents. Not only do these types of policies exclude children from education, they send a message that they are not valued in the school, and also create substantial barriers that they must then overcome including missing school to go to court.

CDE has taken a positive leadership stance in identifying disciplinary rates as an indicator of school climate on school accountability report cards. Yet on the state report card, only expulsions were included, not suspensions. Furthermore, there was no effort to break this down by race and ethnicity. Thus, there is no ability to determine the degree to which schools are providing effective school climates in which learning is the focus and exclusion is minimized. Furthermore, the minimal levels of data collection, which included monitoring the enrollments of students after their expulsion period was completed, ended in 2005. Once again, the state

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<sup>11</sup> Still Separate, Still Unequal: A look at Racial Inequality in California Schools 47 years after Brown v. Board of Education May 2001, Californians for Justice.

<sup>12</sup> Profiled and Punished How San Diego Schools Undermine Latino & African American Student Achievement, 2002, Applied Research Center.

is turning a blind eye to the issues related to students not completing their education.

**Disciplinary Education:** The state has developed several different models of disciplinary education run by districts or country boards of education. In California, counties<sup>13</sup> have statutory authority for alternative education programming that is primarily designed around students with disciplinary issues or court-involvement. However, the provision of alternative education services by counties is based on a variety of funding mechanisms including contracts with districts. Furthermore, counties may decline to serve students, thus leaving districts as the primary institution responsible for the education of young people. The education code requires counties to plan for the provision of disciplinary education for students that are expelled, although ironically they are not funded (thus not required) to provide it. Where they are in operation, students do not proactively choose to enroll, but are simply referred to them as their school of last resort. In addition, many of the programs are transitional so that efforts to determine the quality are quite complicated.

This alone is not a problem. However, there has been no method to determine if the disciplinary education is effective in helping students either academically or with the underlying issues. There are numerous questions regarding disciplinary education: the quality of educational programming, the degree to which students are able to re-enroll in school at the end of their disciplinary actions, or if they are able to gain a diploma. California is in the middle of implementing a unique student identifier and systems that would enhance the accountability of the overall systems.

The CDE monitors these programs but does so within each of the categorical programs rather than as a district or county system. The staff in the Educational Options division should be commended for their innovative ways to support program quality including the Model Continuation High School initiative and incubating professional associations among the providers to offer professional development. However even if some of the programs are high quality, because the system is not designed to help students re-engage in education and complete their degree, one has to assume that the overall fragmentation means that that California's educational option programming is set up as part of process of pushing students out.

**Discharge and Transfer to Adult Schools:** As students "age out" of the K-12 system, there is a concern that districts are discharging students or transferring them to the adult schools which do not offer the same transitional services to college. Although data are not available for the numbers of students discharged,

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<sup>13</sup> In most states, counties play a strong role in the provision of social services, especially for the child welfare system. Thus, they would be expected to be an important entity to involve in any inter-agency efforts. In California, with the county board of education being elected officials, an additional layer of complexity is added.

in 2001, 219,000 students under the age of 21 were enrolled in adult schools. Discharge practices in other parts of the country have been legally challenged and resulted in the development of schools designed for students that are over-age and do not have enough credits for completion of their degree.

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In determining to what degree the Alternative Pathways Framework could be used in California, there is reason to be concerned that California's current system is excluding students from school rather than helping students re-engage in education and earn their diploma. Let me be clear, on the most part everyone I spoke with demonstrated a deep caring for students, pushing the limits of their jobs to ensure high quality programming. However, the lack policy and a systemic framework means that the system is actually designed to let students float out of the K-12 system. The lack of a positive policy means that there is no countervailing force or accountability to look at the educational well-being of all the young people in a community. Thus it is too easy for policies and practice to lead to exclusion or become barriers for certain groups of students.

Across the country, when districts take responsibility for re-engaging the students that are dropping out of their system, they begin by analyzing the patterns, trends and resources that will help them understand the dynamics of the system as well as the students. The research involved in understanding what it takes to keep students in school, on track to graduation, and able to complete their diploma requires savvy analysis and listening to the experiences of students as they negotiate the school system. They segment the population to understand when students are leaving school, how many credits they have, to what degree they have floated between disciplinary and alternative schools, and how many are parents or have to work. They also look at indicators to determine what led to the students becoming disengaged from school. They look at patterns of suspensions, attendance, and academic failure. They start to look at the responses of district and school practices to understand how the school engages students in learning.

In order for California educational leadership to create a balanced reform model, they must take the first step towards acknowledging that policies and practices may be leading to the educational exclusion of students and pushing them from the system to the streets.

### **Framework Prerequisites: Early Intervention Strategies**

Recent research by Robert Balfanz of Johns Hopkins and Liza Herzog of the Philadelphia Education Fund has identified indicators for dropping out.<sup>14</sup> Their

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<sup>14</sup> More information on this research can be found at <http://www.philaedfund.org/>

research shows that a sixth grade student with attendance below 80 %, poor behavior, a failing math grade, and a failing English grade, has, at best, only a 10 % chance of graduating from high school on time, and only a 20 % chance of graduating one year late.

Thus early intervention can start as early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and should certainly start in middle school, to increase attendance, provide behavioral interventions (and or mental health services), and extra tutoring for students showing this set of indicators.

California's primary dropout prevention policy<sup>15</sup> is SB 65 (1985). It originally included three components:

- Motivation and Maintenance Program<sup>16</sup> (FY 2005-06: \$16.6 million) that is offered in 350 schools. The program offers a dropout prevention specialist (outreach consultant). Other key components of the program are positive attendance and discipline programs, Coordination of Service Teams (COST), Student Success Team (SST) and resiliency-creating strategies.
- Alternative Education Outreach Consultant Program offers student dropout recovery and educational re-entry services that offers classroom instruction, vocational training, General Educational Development Test preparation, and academic and career counseling. It currently has \$2.5 million for 50 districts and serves 15,000 kids.
- The Educational Clinic Program, designed to help students that had been out of school for 45 days or more, is not directly funded at this time.

Several people interviewed spoke highly of this effort. It is possible that simply expanding it to reach more students could provide valuable support in reducing dropout rates. Further investigation is needed to determine the degree to which the program is able to meet the demand and if it needs to be upgraded in any way in terms of its design.

### **Framework Elements: Shared Responsibility and Systemic Coordination**

At this point, responsibility for dropout prevention and recovery is very diffuse. Although there are collaborative entities such as the CA Collaborative for Youth Development, there is no interagency team with enough political clout to address the need for alternative pathways.

At the state level, California's Youth Council under the Workforce Investment Act is currently not operational. The Workforce Investment Board has embraced the U.S. Department of Labor's vision for youth services that places more focus on

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<sup>15</sup> Several people interviewed mentioned that CDE is directing more attention on dropout prevention but I didn't find anyone actually able to point to any specific memos, meetings, or press releases.

<sup>16</sup> The California Dropout Prevention Network is a 501c3 designed to support the Motivation and Maintenance Program. <http://www.edualliance.org/cdpn/>

highly vulnerable youth including those in foster care and juvenile justice. In addition, the Lifelong Learning Committee, with co-chairs Mark Drummond, Chancellor of Community Colleges and David Rattray from the LA Chamber of Commerce (and a strong youth advocate) are focusing on youth issues. However, it should be remembered that youth service funding has almost been eliminated over the past decade with funding serving no more than 3% of all eligible young people in California. At this point, given the limited funding it is better to use the funds for high quality services than to try to do systems-building efforts.

At the local level, shared responsibility and system coordination would require at a minimum three public institutions – the district, county board of education, and community college. Counties play a special role in many ways. They manage many of the social services including mental health and child welfare services. In addition, the County Board of Education provides services for special populations including migrants and court-involved youth. Yet, a complicating factor is that both the county board and the county board of education are both elected positions, thus are dependent on the overall political context of the community. This can in fact be an advantage when adequate efforts are in place to have an empowered and informed electorate. But it can also add to the complexity of the political environment in building inter-agency efforts. Furthermore, the role the county plays in alternative education varies substantially across the state.

### **Emerging Opportunity: The Unique Student Identifier**

The development of a unique student identifier introduces opportunities for the state and districts, along with their partners, to create the much-needed level of accountability and analysis to revise education reform strategies around increasing graduation rates for all groups of students, especially those that are bouncing around between schools. Districts often dodge their responsibility by saying that they do not know where students have gone once they leave the district. With the student identifier, we can begin to create a “no excuses” approach to education reform.

Districts are well on the way for being able to use the identifier system. However, the full implementation of the identifier, providing state level capacity as well as more sophisticated uses of the identifier beyond tracking, is well out of reach. The status of the implementation is as follows<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>17</sup> This information has been collected by a dozen sources that were willing to talk with me. However given the sensitive nature of these issues I have not provided information on the sources. Furthermore, I would presume that there are many other perspectives on what it will require to fully implement the student identifier.

- Through the direction of the California School Information Services (CSIS), schools were required to assign student identifiers by the end of 2005. CSIS has begun to clean up the data so that CDE, districts, and counties should be able to begin to track students. It is hoped that by the end of this year, assessments will begin to include student identifiers. A few districts, including San Diego, have begun to use the identifier to examine the issues related to dropouts.
- Over 250 districts are participating in the CSIS State Reporting and Records Transfer System cohort. These districts are working with different providers to design the use of the identifier to support their district efforts. Funding was provided for the last two years through CDE for districts to assign and maintain the identification number.
- The data system, California Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) sponsored by CDE, has not been funded, thus no work has started on it. The very earliest it could be completed is 2008-09. The data system is expected to provide accurate reporting to the U.S. Department of Education, help with state level analysis, and reduce duplicative reporting required by districts. At this point no design has been approved by the Department of Finance. There may be other complicating factors related to the ability of CSIS and CALPADS (managed by CDE) to establish the collaborative structures needed to share data to make the system work. Finally, there may be some political pressure against CDE implementing CALPADS coming from the business community (not confirmed).
- Districts and states are just beginning to think about how they can use the student identifier to support their work, increase accountability, and provide more effective approaches for students. For example, the Student Attendance Review Board has begun considering how to use the identifier.

Based on this understanding of the student identifier, CDE can encourage districts and counties to work together to support individual students falling through the cracks and to begin to use the information to better support students. In addition, based on the system designed by each district, there is the ability of districts to engage in the level of analysis needed to reshape their reform efforts around all sets of students. However, the full system involving CALPADS that would allow the longitudinal database to provide analysis of the state and across districts within the state is at risk of not being implemented without on-going political pressure.

## Framework Elements: Adequate Supply of Choice-Based, High-Quality Alternatives

Once districts have completed the prerequisites – 1) ensuring that their reform efforts are balanced and will not produce a second-class education for students; and, 2) have begun to reduce the flow of students that are likely to fall through the cracks or complete high school without a diploma – they are ready to begin to build an alternative pathway to support students that are dropping out or ready to re-engage in their education.

The ability to create an adequate supply of alternatives for students requires three sets of analysis:

- **Assessment of Demand:** The quantitative analysis to determine demand looks at how many struggling students are likely to need alternatives to keep them engaged in school and how many out-of-school youth are not currently enrolled.
- **Assessment of Student Needs:** Districts must segment the demand. This requires looking through at least three lenses; the stage of their adolescent development (age is often used as a very rough indicator); their educational skills; and, their life circumstances (do they care for siblings or a child? do they have to work to support their families? do they need to go to meetings with a parole officer, mental health therapist or AA meeting?). This often includes understanding the proportion of over-age/under-credit students (longitudinally as well as a snapshot), ethnic make-up, and participation in child welfare or juvenile justice systems.
- **Assessment of Current Supply of Alternatives:** Districts that have analyzed the supply have looked at capacity to serve, quality of programs based on specific designs for segments of the student population, and the outcomes of the overall set of alternatives schools.

### Patchwork of Programs, Not a Pathway

California offers a range of educational options. The problem is that there is no understanding of what types of options are needed, where they are needed, or any systemic effort to ensure that students have access to them. Essentially, with the exception of continuation schools of which every district must offer at least one, the development of quality schools for re-enrollment is based on local leadership.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of the educational options inhibits any sense of building a pathway or making it easy for students to understand what their choices are at any given time. Although impressed with the knowledge and

dedication of the CDE staff in the Educational Options division, especially given the multiple programs managed by each, their understanding of the system is based on their programmatic responsibilities. On the other hand the Lifelong Learning Committee of the WIB had a broader view of the types of educational options that were available. Yet, the issue remains the same; the programs have developed as a patchwork rather than based on an analysis of demand or systemic goals.

Given that students are likely to “float” in and out of these options and between district and county services, it is difficult, if not impossible to determine if these services and schools are effectively helping students complete their education – or even know how many students are being served.

### **Alternative Education Models in California**

California has a number of mechanisms for providing alternative education options. In addition to the educational options managed by CDE described below, there are schools developed through the small schools legislation, magnet schools, alternative schools of choice, and charter schools. In 1997, AB 1106 passed to support 10-13 Middle College High Schools designed for at-risk high school students who are performing below their academic potential and place them in an alternative high school located on community college campuses. Regional Occupational Centers and Programs (ROCP) provide high school students, 16 years of age and older, and adult students with career and technical education. There are 73 ROCPs located statewide. In fiscal year 2003-04, approximately 500,000 students enrolled in Regional Occupational Centers and Programs.

### **Managed by California Department of Education, Division of Education Options**

The CDE within the Educational Options division oversees a number of alternative and disciplinary<sup>18</sup> education models. Only one, continuation high schools, is focused on dropout recovery. The others are all focused on students with behavioral issues. The Educational Options division has developed an alternative school assessment measure (ASAM) that is voluntarily used by schools.

*Continuation education* is a high school diploma program designed to meet the needs of students sixteen through eighteen years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their education. Of the 519 continuation high schools, 84 are considered high quality schools based on a set of quality standards. Research still needs to be done to determine if the sixty-seven quality

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<sup>18</sup> Please note that I distinguish between alternative education that is by definition student-centered and disciplinary education as they serve different purposes.

standards in fact are reliable indicators of a high quality educational program.

*County community schools* were designed for students that were expelled. Community schools offer 240 minutes a day of instruction some of which may be independent study. In 1995, AB 922 expanded the number of reasons a student could be expelled and clarified that an education option must be offered during the time of expulsion. The average stay in a community school is about two to three weeks. In 1998, AB 1845 introduced community day schools to provide higher quality programming as it offers a minimum of 360 minutes instruction, none of which can be independent study. Students stay for a semester and in some cases may stay to complete their education.

*Community day schools* are operated by school districts and county offices of education.

Community day schools serve mandated and other expelled students, students referred by a School Attendance Review Board, and other high-risk youth. The academic program provides challenging curriculum and individual attention to student learning modalities and abilities. Community day school programs also focus on the development of pro-social skills and student self-esteem and resiliency.

*Juvenile Court Schools* are administered and operated by the county boards of education. These schools provide an alternative educational program for students who are under the protection or authority of the juvenile court system and are incarcerated in juvenile halls, juvenile homes, day centers, juvenile ranches, juvenile camps, or regional youth educational facilities. Students are also placed in Juvenile Court Schools when they are referred by the juvenile court.

The division also oversees two programs that are not actually schools:

*Opportunity Education Programs* are established to provide additional support for students who are habitually truant from instruction, irregular in attendance, insubordinate, disorderly while in attendance, or failing academically. Districts or county offices of education may establish Opportunity Education Programs for students in grades one through twelve. My interviews indicated that OEP is most commonly used as a form of excluding students from the classroom rather than an effective intervention. CDE should review the outcomes of the students sent to OEP to determine the attendance, disciplinary actions and level of educational attainment for students referred to OEP.

*The High-risk Youth Education and Public Safety Program* is designed to serve two populations who are on probation: the First-time Offender and Transitioning High-risk Youth. The First-time Offender program serves youth who are on probation for the first time and are under the age of 16. The Transitioning High-risk Youth program serves youth who have been sentenced to a detention facility

for at least six months and have served at least 90 days. This program serves approximately 15,000 students per year.

The table below reviews the number of schools and enrollment based on data from Ed Data website<sup>19</sup>. However, students may “float” between these schools thus it is difficult to know the actual number of students.

<b>Type</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Continuation (recovery)	519	70,176
Community Day (discipline)	313	10,395
County Community (discipline)	50	17,161
Opportunity (discipline)	12	1655
Juvenile Court (discipline)	60	12,990
CA Youth Authority	10	2,654
	964	113,033

### **Managed by California Department of Education – Independent Study**

This is one of the greatest challenges in terms of thinking about educational options for students that are far off-track. A well constructed and supported independent study program in which students progress at their own pace can be very effective for some students. In Austin TX, Garza High School uses a highly supportive independent study model that appears to be as effective for the disaffected, highly mature young person that simply wants out of high school as for the disadvantaged youth that is challenged by homelessness, emotional trauma, and learning disabilities. In California, independent study has allowed for some districts such as Sweetwater to develop competency-based models. Yet, independent study for at-risk youth should be reviewed very carefully to ensure that the school offers adequate supports and methods to encourage challenging curriculum.

### **Federal Educational Options in California**

*Job Corps:* An education and vocational training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Job Corps offers a comprehensive program for young people, ages 16 to 24, to prepare them for successful careers. In California, nearly 3000 students are served in five sites in San Bernardino, Long Beach, Sacramento, San Diego, San Jose, Treasure Island (San Francisco). Evaluations of Job Corps have proven it to be cost-effective.

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<sup>19</sup> The numbers in this table are considered by members of the Educational Options Division of CDE to be underestimates of the enrollment and number of schools. Please note that the table does not include adult school, middle colleges or other alternatives.

*ChalleNGe Program:* Similar to Job Corps, but with a stronger military/disciplined focus, the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program runs the Grizzly Youth Academy in San Luis Obispo. The federal government is looking to move the funding of these programs to the states or private funding.

### **Youth Programs Provided by Community-Based Organizations**

Community-based organizations are increasingly providing educational services beyond GED preparation. A trend of “CBO Schools” has been growing across the country using a variety of funding sources. In general it is a combination of charter school funding and workforce development funds. It may be difficult to identify these CBO schools as they are identified as charter schools even though their main focus may be serving students that districts have pushed out or have been unable to serve. For example, Juveniles at Risk in Sacramento focuses on students with drug and alcohol issues.

There are two important networks of CBO schools in California that help students to complete their education.

*YouthBuild USA* is a national nonprofit organization, founded in 1990. In YouthBuild programs, young people ages 16-24 work toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills by building affordable housing. YouthBuild programs play a key role in helping many court-involved youth gain a diploma or GED. YouthBuild is one of the youth organizations selected to participate in the Alternative High School Initiative funded by the Gates, Mott, Kellogg and Walter S. Johnson Foundations.

There are a total of 25 YouthBuild sites in CA, with 17 offering diplomas. Six of these sites are part of the Alternative High School Initiative, with two more joining in 2006.

Youthbuild has also received a grant from the Lumina Foundation for three sites to focus on college placement and completion for YouthBuild graduates. In addition, CDE has provided planning grants to set up a charter management organization serving three districts. The California YouthBuild Coalition is very well-organized focusing on educational and juvenile justice issues.

The *California Association of Local Conservation Corps* has sites in Long Beach, East Bay (Oakland), Fresno, Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Sacramento, San Jose, San Francisco, San Gabriel Valley, Tulare County and San Diego. Several of these are running degree-granting schools. Youth Corps are similar to YouthBuild blending academics, hands on experience and youth leadership.

### **Community College**

Community colleges play a critical role in supporting students that have aged out of the K-12 system. They provide remedial education to young people right out of high school that did not receive adequate education to pursue college-level courses and also to older students that have dropped out and now want to return to their education. Numerous innovative programs can be found at community colleges, although the level of decentralization makes it difficult to ensure effective programming.

Substantial research has been done on effective models of community colleges serving young adults, low-income workers, and students needing developmental education. The Opening Doors project, led by MDRC worked with six community colleges across the country to test special programs designed to increase student persistence and achievement and, in the longer term, labor market success. Effective programs tend to offer academic guidance and counseling; academic supports; personal guidance and counseling; career counseling; and supplemental supports like childcare, and transportation help.

It is important to recognize that community colleges can also play a key role in shaping the alternative pathway by offering “bridge” programs that help students move from alternative schools and GED programs to community college. An example of a bridge program is *Gateway*, modeled on a Washington state program in which community colleges offer intensive basic skills, social support, financial aid package, and a direct transition to post-secondary training and degree programs. The pilots are now being implemented in six Bay Area and Central Valley counties.

For struggling students that are staying in school but not getting their diploma, the bridge programs are critically important to help students make the transition to community college to continue their education.

### **Emerging Models**

There are four school models generating interest in California. Again, without a deeper understanding of the issues underlying students dropping out, it is difficult to tell if these models are the most appropriate. Certainly, we need to find models that are going to be effective for ELL students and students that have to work.

DiplomaPlus	<a href="http://www.cyde.us/diplomaplus/about.html">www.cyde.us/diplomaplus/about.html</a>
Gateway to College	<a href="http://www.gatewaytocollege.org">www.gatewaytocollege.org</a>
Green Dot School	<a href="http://www.greendotpublicschools.org">www.greendotpublicschools.org</a>
AdvancePath <sup>20</sup>	<a href="http://www.advancepath.com">www.advancepath.com</a>

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<sup>20</sup> AdvancePath is a new for profit firm. The beta test will be in Gilroy. Leadership includes John Murray, previously CEO at Plato and Tom Williams, long-time alternative education practitioner.

### **Framework Elements: Ability to Refer, Transition and Re-Enroll**

California has substantial work to do to develop the capacity to refer students before they dropout and to help students re-engage in school. To date, I have not been able to find any districts that had a rapid re-enrollment policy, marketed a phone number on their websites that encouraged students to re-enroll or had a list of the alternatives that were available to them.

The student identifier should enable mechanisms that can begin to support the referral, transition and re-enrollment of students. In addition, the state should develop system indicators to measure district effectiveness in referring students who are dropping out (attendance is decreasing) or want to re-engage in school. Finally, it is important to develop district capacity to work with counties, charters, and community colleges to support referral processes that provide support to students in finding the right school for them to complete their education and includes an evaluation of the placement to ensure that students do not float between schools.

### **Framework Elements: Guidance and Advocacy**

One of the challenges facing California is the dearth of guidance counselors. California is estimated to have on average one counselor for every 966 students, whereas the American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of one counselor to 250.

There are several ways in which guidance and advocacy can be provided to ensure that students are able to negotiate the education system effectively. Guidance and advocacy services can be provided by guidance counselors, led by teachers in small groups or advisories, or by outside advocates who help students gain access to education and services. In addition, advocacy related to policy entails focusing on broader issues that will impact entire groups of students or the school system as a whole.

Although outside the scope of this work, surveying local advocacy groups to determine what types of issues they are hearing from students would be valuable. In my interviews I heard of districts discharging students at their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In addition research completed by Youth Law Center<sup>21</sup> found that students face tremendous challenges in re-enrolling in school. It is important to

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<sup>21</sup> See Getting Out of the Red Zone - Youth from the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems Speak Out about the Obstacles to Completing their Education, and What Could Help, Youth Law Center.

determine how much of these are unique to one district and how much they represent trends.

California has a very strong advocacy and organizing community. The primary focus has been on the efforts to raise standards and to direct resources to schools serving low-income communities. There has been little advocacy on issues related to dropouts with PICO affiliates demonstrating the strongest attention to these issues. Given that dropouts are so far away from CDE's and the legislature's agenda, it is unlikely that this issue will come to the top of the agenda in the next two years without some events changing the context. In the meantime, making sure that advocates and organizing groups are well-briefed on innovations from across the country will be very important, so that when the time is right, they can quickly move into action.

### **Framework Elements: Flexible Demonstrations of Proficiency**

California offers the CA High School Proficiency as one method to demonstrate that a student has mastered the required skills. However, there are no policies encouraging students to demonstrate competency for each of the 17 required courses. In general students must demonstrate that they attended the full semester-long course (often referred to as "seat time"). Without mechanisms that allow students to accelerate learning, focusing on the specific competencies rather than the time that they are sitting in a classroom, students that are well-below grade level when they enter high school or those with interrupted education have little opportunity to rapidly accrue credits except for after school and summer time.

At the district level, a few continuation schools are using competency-based instruction. In addition, independent study has been used to enable districts to provide competency-based instruction under contracts for independent study.

### **Framework Elements: Policy Incentives**

#### **Leadership**

##### **State Level**

As has been stated, there is little to no visible leadership at CDE or in the Governor's staff on the issue of dropout reduction. Certainly, career technical education is being promoted as a way to reduce dropout rates. However, the analysis of the Alternative Pathways Framework is that there have to be systemic approaches to reducing dropouts that are focused on students, not just instructional methodology. There are, of course, advocates within the department. For example, there is an effort to invest funds in improving the

quality of the educational options managed by CDE. Although several people interviewed said that there seems to be a growing interest in dropout reduction at CDE I was unable to confirm this with any actual memo, press release or meeting notes.

### **Advocates and Community Organizations**

Although many advocates raise the dropout issue as a problem, the solutions set that are being put forth are based on the current reforms to expand college track. Ed Source had little information on the topic and other than the report from Harvard Civil Rights Project, there has been little else published over the past year on this issue.

At the community level, several PICO affiliates are showing a strong interest in these issues. It is likely that this will increase as the ideas are shared across their network. In Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches continue to have a strong concern about the lack of alternatives for young people without a degree.

### **California Teachers Association**

It is important to engage the CTA in the discussion about dropout prevention and recovery as in many states the union is highly supportive of the efforts to exclude students through increased use of alternative disciplinary schools. It will be important to bring parent groups like PICO and ACORN to the conversations with CTA to help negotiate the different points of view about students that are perceived as interfering with the classroom.

### **The Role of Professional Associations**

California is a highly networked state with a multitude of associations. These associations should not be overlooked in any efforts to improve program quality or systemic approaches. Some of these associations have in fact been entrepreneurial efforts by CDE staff to create professional development for their programs when funds were limited. Yet, the offshoot has been to develop formal mechanisms for political support for programs. If the state begins to move from programs to pathways, it will require engaging these groups pro-actively.

### **Funding Policy and Incentives**

First of all CA should be commended for recognizing that students that the district has been unable to serve most likely have educational, emotional or life issues that require more supports, advocacy, and flexibility. This is reflected in policies that provide community school and community day schools with additional funding (with a cap) that provide support services.

Yet California lacks the type of enabling policies found in Oregon, Wisconsin and Illinois that provide an incentive for alternative schools to develop and enroll students with interrupted education.<sup>22</sup> The largest challenge is that districts wanting to re-enroll students must bear the cost of services for a year or year and a half before they receive the funding apportionment based on ADA. Under tight financial conditions, this can only be tolerated within very tight parameters, if at all.

Thus, it is imperative that enabling funding policies be to ensure re-enrolling students are able to receive high quality services. Policies should: a) recognize the need to provide additional services; and, b) expedite funding to alternative schools similar to charter school policies. In addition, higher funding levels should be provided to those charter schools serving the same populations as community day schools.

In addition, funding should be made available for all students until they complete their degree requirements (courses and CAHSEE) until age 21. This does not mean they should all continue their studies in their original high school. Rather schools to support students with family and work responsibility need to be developed so that they can complete their degrees.

Given the concern that many districts have about declining enrollment, appropriately shaped funding policies should act as an incentive to increasing the holding power of schools as well as re-enrollment.

### **Clear Policy from the Top that California Cares About All Students**

It is impossible to talk about high school issues without including dropout issues. To do otherwise ignores 30% of our students, most of which are poor and minority. California is tremendously behind the curve in acting as if these students do not exist. And this is not a slap on the wrist of the CDE alone. The legislature, the educational journalists, policy organizations, and even advocates focus on students in regular schools and fail to think about the 30% who are in search of an education in the other options that are available to them.

It is important that education advocates and policymakers including the legislature, CDE and the educational journalists, become more transparent about the denominator they use when thinking about issues related to high school. One of the first steps is to fully implement the cohort methodology for determining graduation rates agreed upon by the National Governors Association and the U.S. Department of Education. Second, more clarity is needed when providing statistics about the denominator being used. I recommend that statistics always

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<sup>22</sup> A note of caution, although funding policies that provide a 10-20% administrative fee to districts are useful incentives, they also reduce the amount of funding going to services for students.

show the ninth grade enrollment as a denominator so that people can understand the full implications as well as other additional information.

For example, according to Ed Data website, in 2004-2005 enrollment in California was:

	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>EL Students</b>
Grade 9	549, 463	103, 952
Grade 10	497, 197	80,880
Grade 11	459, 125	64, 474
Grade 12	409, 576	50, 719

These are back of the envelope numbers but it suggests that 139,887 students dropped out, with about 50,000 students dropping out between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. And over 50,000 EL students dropped out over these four years.

Thus as the state focuses on the students that did not pass the CAHSEE, they are ignoring that over 100,000 students were not in school to take the CAHSEE in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, of which 40,000 were EL students.

### **Recommendations: Creating Enabling State Context**

Given that California has made such little progress in establishing the capacity to offer alternative pathways for young people, the following set of recommendations for the state and district level is based on the initial things that should be done to advance the effort in the state.

#### **Promote Shared Responsibility and Systemic Coordination**

- Fully implement the unique student identifier. This is by-far the most important activity required for building an alternative pathway or even for determining if current resources are being effectively deployed. All other efforts rely on the identifier to determine their effectiveness and to move from a set of programs to a pathway.
- Invest in building capacity of district/county/community colleges to use student identifiers to increase graduation rates, ensure students in disciplinary education complete school, re-enroll students, and support transition to post-secondary education and training for students in alternative schools.

#### **Increase Statewide Capacity**

If CA wants to begin to build a reform effort directed at reducing dropout rate, the following steps should be considered:

- Establish a high level point person in California Department of Education (CDE) or preferably a team of people representing CDE, legislature, Workforce Investment Board, Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and key state agencies to focus attention on students with interrupted education and review policies to ensure balanced school reform efforts.
- Support districts in building pathways. The Educational Options division of CDE is positioned well to have expanded functions including reviewing and assist districts (and their county partners) to make sure they have the right set of alternative schools and systemic practices to help them reduce dropout rates. This should include reviewing push-out practice, use of dropout prevention and supports for struggling students, and educational options.
- Build capacity to disseminate best practices. Professional associations should be actively engaged in this effort. CDE can only be expected to do so much given its bureaucratic responsibilities. Thus, state intermediaries can play a critical role. Criteria for selecting organization(s) to provide technical assistance should include: a) have a staff respected by districts; b) demonstrate intentional strategies to address institutional racism; and, c) able to nurture networks/alliances with minority-led organizations. Initial focus should be on accelerated instruction and approaches for EL students.
- Integrate key data into accountability system. Identify key indicators for monitoring use of push-out policies, increasing graduation rates, and re-engaging students in education. Information such as disciplinary actions, number of students re-enrolled after disciplinary actions, and number of students in educational options that graduate are all important indicators for building an effective alternative pathway. All information should be disaggregated by race/language.

### **Understand Dynamics of Push Out and Re-engagement**

Increasing the graduation rate will require districts in California to better understand students' patterns of disengagement. Thus, in districts developing the capacity to use the student identifier to increase effectiveness, efforts should be developed to understand the issues from multiple perspectives. This information will be helpful in reviewing policies to create a more enabling policy context.

- Review patterns and trends in disciplinary policies to ensure that they are not being used to have a disproportionate impact on young people of color

or to exclude students from education. Ensure that disciplinary schools are effective in helping to address both emotional-behavioral and academic issues. Monitor the effectiveness of districts to re-enroll students after disciplinary actions are complete. Evaluate the effectiveness of disciplinary policies and disciplinary education. Determine to what degree the current disciplinary policies are effective in creating a safe learning environment and helping students to address behavioral issues and continue to progress academically.

- Analyze the underlying dynamics of students dropping out and failure to complete their degree. This will include determining the rationale for students leaving school, the characteristics of students and schools, and patterns of students re-enrolling in school. Based on this analysis, review policies to determine that districts/counties have the flexibility and funding to develop adequate programming.

### **Develop Enabling Policies**

- Establish a package of policies that clearly establish CA's commitment to all students, including struggling students that are at risk of not getting a diploma and those that are dropping out. Policies could include investments to support leading districts to build alternative pathways, commitment to the re-enrollment of court-involved youth similar to that developed by the Virginia Board of Education, and financial incentives.
- Ensure that all students who have not met high school graduation requirements are able to take advantage of K-12 funding until the age of 23. This includes those students that have not passed CAHSEE.
- Authorize competency-based instruction and assessment so that students can accelerate accrual of credits.
- Clearly authorize community colleges to grant high school diplomas so that students would not have to wait until after high school graduation to receive remediation (or bear that cost). Students that do not feel they are receiving adequate education should have immediate option to transfer to alternatives including community colleges.
- Require school districts to offer a rapid re-enrollment process and a list of alternatives in their community on their website. Require districts to submit plans based on segmentation of dropout population to offer adequate number and mix of alternatives.

## **Recommendations: Philanthropic Investments**

It is one thing to identify specific goals; it is another thing altogether to shape philanthropic investments that can bring about those goals. The following are a set of investment options. Shaping these into a full strategy requires determining the specific goals of a strategy as well as the availability of collaborative funders.

### **Promote Enabling Policies**

- Invest in collaboration of organizing, advocacy, research and communications to promote key elements of the enabling policies including raising age schools can receive funding for students to 21 or 23.
- Support a deep level of state-level policy analysis and development that includes building consensus among key stakeholders to develop balanced education reform approaches and build alternative pathways.

### **Address Challenges Faced by Specific Student Groups**

- Work with state to create more educational alternatives for students not passing CAHSEE or aging out of K-12 system.
- Build knowledge of districts to support EL students.

### **Develop Leadership**

- Support key organizations and leaders in becoming familiar with the work of leading cities across the country. This could include briefings for state entities such as CDE, legislature, Governor's staff, state school board; CTA; organizing and advocacy organizations; think tanks and research centers; and district and county boards of education leadership.

### **Implement Student Identifier**

- Support advocacy and communications efforts to complete the implementation of the student identifier.
- Build capacity in districts and partners to effectively use the student identifier in supporting students and in analyzing trends and patterns that relate to alternative pathways.

### **Support Districts Build Alternative Pathways**

- Invest in a set of five to seven districts and counties that have some degree of implementation of the student identifier to begin the analysis and planning for building an alternative pathway. Develop intermediary

organizations that can provide technical assistance and accelerate learning across sites. Examine potential for developing this in collaboration with CDE.

- Collaborate with CDE and specific districts to analyze the current set of alternatives and their effectiveness. Rather than examining specific program models, this analysis would serve as baseline data on the effectiveness of current system.

### **Build Knowledge Management and Dissemination Capacity**

- Identify 3-5 organizations that can serve as a collaborative network of researchers, technical assistance providers, advocates, on systemic approaches to support students with interrupted education. These groups should immediately establish relationships with leading districts so that learning can be quickly transferred into California and across California.
- Expand knowledge about issues related to alternative pathways. This should include extent of push-out policies, implications of discipline policies on graduation rates, and graduation rates of students in disciplinary and continuation schools. This work should be done in conjunction with advocates and communications work to have greater influence.

### **Improve Quality of Alternative Schools**

- In those communities with a significant number of alternative schools, invest in the development of consortiums that can begin to evaluate the effectiveness of their set of programs within the context of a fragmented system, invest in quality improvements, and filling unmet needs.
- Invest in development or replication of school models that meet the needs of specific groups of students.
- Collaborate with CDE to build quality of current alternative and disciplinary schools.

## Resources

Grubb, Norton. Using Community Colleges to Re-Connect Disconnected Youth, University of California, Berkeley

Jepsen, C., de Alth, S., English Learners in California Schools, Public Policy Institute of California.

Martin, N and Halperin, S. Whatever it Takes: How Twelve Communities are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth. American Youth Policy Forum. 2006.

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Walcott, C., Owens-West, R, Makkonen, Reino. High School Reform: National and State Trends, West Ed, June 2005.

Confronting the Graduation Rates Crisis in California, Harvard University, Civil Rights Project, March 2005

The Evolution of Career and Technical Education in California, Ed Source Brief, June 2005

Getting Out of the Red Zone - Youth from the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems Speak Out about the Obstacles to Completing their Education, and What Could Help, Youth Law Center

Independent Evaluation of the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE): 2005 Evaluation Report, Human Resource Research Organization

Still Separate, Still Unequal: A look at Racial Inequality in California Schools 47 years after Brown v. Board of Education May 2001, Californians for Justice

The California Workforce Investment Board [www.calwia.org/committees](http://www.calwia.org/committees)

Outline of Legislation to Support Charter Schools Serving "Community Day School Students"

### Networks

- Community Day School Network [www.cdsnetwork.org](http://www.cdsnetwork.org)
- CA Consortium for Independent Study [www.ccis.org/](http://www.ccis.org/)
- Juvenile Court, Community and Alternative School Administrators [www.jccasac.org/](http://www.jccasac.org/)
- CA Continuation Education Network [www.cceanet.org/](http://www.cceanet.org/)