PACE

Penalizing Diverse Schools?

Similar test scores, but different students, bring federal sanctions

John R. Novak
and Bruce Fuller

Policy Brief 03-4

POLICY BRIEF DECEMBER 2003

Washington policy makers aim to raise the achievement of all students, a keen desire now elaborated in the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). This well intentioned hope has spawned rules that require various student subgroups to be tested and display progress in every school across the nation.

In demographically diverse schools local educators must assess the performance of several subgroups—each ethnic group, students with limited English, those with disabilities, children from low-income families. Sometimes the same students are counted in two or three subgroups—often Latino children from low-income homes.

Many teachers and principals agree with Washington's policy thrust: to raise the achievement of all students, rather than focusing on high achievers or groups that would make their school look good but leave many children behind. Yet the complicated regulations pushed into schools to accomplish this virtuous goal have come to resemble, in the minds of many educators, a mine field—a harrowing set of trip wires that can easily detonate consequential explosions. Hit one trip wire, say, if a school tests just 94 percent of its kids with learning disabilities, and the

Key Findings

This brief details how schools serving diverse students in California are less likely to achieve their growth targets and be subjected to stiff federal sanctions. Schools enrolling more demographic subgroups do serve students who tend to score lower on standardized tests. Yet even when students display almost identical average test scores schools with more subgroups are more likely to miss their growth targets under federal rules set by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Schools serving middle-class children, for example, are 28 percent more likely to be labeled "needs improvement" by the feds when serving five student subgroups than schools serving one group. This disparity exists even though average test scores are just five percentile points apart between schools. Also, schools with large numbers of Latino students from low-income homes display especially low odds of hitting growth targets.

Is it fair or motivating to label a school as failing simply because it serves more diverse students, not because it's overall achievement level is lower?

school or entire district is stigmatized, labeled failing by the federal government. This then allows children to exit and requires that resources be shifted to tutoring and other services.

So, should Washington's elaborate set of hurdles be viewed as fair and helpful, enabling principals and teachers to distribute resources in ways that raise the learning curves of all children? Or, do educators now confront arbitrary trip wires that can bring down their school, even when performance is rising, differing only in demographic diversity?

Take the case of Manzanita Elementary. Situated in Oakland's downtown core, this school of 745 children has shown solid gains in recent years, according to the state's accountability system. Its academic performance index (API) for African American students has risen by 7 percent since 2002. This gauge has jumped 18 percent for Latino children. In fact, Manzanita met all its growth targets under Sacramento's rules. Its overall API rose 100 points, from 514 to 614, over the past three years.

Manzanita's energetic principal, Diane Schneider, attributes their success to sticking with an effective language arts program in recent years. "The student assessments that go with Open Court help (us) tailor instruction to the needs of students," she emphasized. "We check to see if comprehension or fluency skills are low," then adjust teaching practices. Schneider also works with her teachers, "looking at the data on reading, planning new strategies by grade level."

Yet unfortunately for Manzanita, it serves a diverse array of families, including Asian American kids, high numbers from low-income families, and many with limited English, beyond sizeable counts of black and Latino students. In the prior year, less than 95 percent of the youngsters in two subgroups sat for statewide testing. And only one subgroup met the achievement standard set under federal rules. In total, Manzanita had 18 targets it had to hit, and they met just 10 in 2002.

Then, Manzanita's staff dramatically boosted student proficiency levels—hitting 17 of the 18 necessary targets. But the African American subgroup just missed the proficiency target for mathematics. Hitting this one trip wire, the school failed to meet its federal adequate yearly progress (AYP) target. Manzanita was posted on California's burgeoning list of failing schools.

We asked principal Schneider if this seemed fair. "No, but we'd all be dead by now if we worried about everything… if we didn't meet every target in every subject every time," she said.

How to Raise Achievement of All Students?

Washington's earnest mandate aims to ensure that all children be proficient in (English) language arts and mathematics by 2014. Responding to this expectation, set with the passage of NCLB, each state first set baseline levels of student proficiency for language arts and mathematics—the bottom of a staircase that ascends to a point when *all children* are to be proficient in 2014. Every school must show adequate yearly progress (AYP), climbing from these baselines for the 2001-02 school year. If AYP growth targets are not met, an array of sanctions comes into play (Box 1).

California set the starting points of 13.6 percent of all students proficient in language arts and 16.0 percent proficient in math. The state board of education then created a pathway that moves up incrementally to universal proficiency by 2014. These interim steps are called *annual measurable objectives* (AMOs), and they must be the same for all student subgroups. Under the *safe harbor* provision of the No Child Left Behind Act, these gains can vary for subgroups, provided significant growth is evidenced each year.

These federal reforms display a strong focus on equity—advanced by keen attention paid to each student subgroup. In California, 100 students from an ethnic group, for example, comprise a subgroup that must meet federal growth targets. Or, if a subgroup has at least 50 students and comprises at least 15 percent of the school's enrollment they are deemed a significant cohort. At least 95 percent of children in each subgroup must sit for state exams.

Tough Love or Smothering Embrace?

Few question that Washington's reform elixir offers strong medicine

BOX 1

Feeling Federal Sanctions— What Happens to Failing Schools

Washington's accountability rules include a series of negative sanctions for schools that fail to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) over time. No positive rewards are built into the NCLB reform beyond continued participation in the federal Title I program, providing about $11 billion in aid nationwide.

Sanctions roll out for schools deemed as "needing improvement"—first a mild headache, moving toward sustained pain—

- Following the 2002-03 school year, over 3,000 California schools fell short of their annual measurable objectives for the second year in a row. They were dubbed "needing improvement" by Washington, and a letter had to be sent to parents of children attending these schools. Children were free to transfer to another public school.
- If a school fails to meet the AYP target for a third year, it must organize and fund special tutoring services, or contract out these programs, and continue the student transfer provisions.
- "Corrective actions" become more severe after four years of inadequate progress, including dismissal of school staff who are allegedly "relevant to the failure to meet AYP," appointment of an outside expert to advise the school, increased district control, and instituting a longer school day or year.
- After five years of "inadequate progress" the school staff is to be reconstituted, or the school is to be transformed into a charter school or handed over to a private management firm.

Each of these ameliorative efforts is to be funded out of the district's Title I allocation. This source of federal aid his risen about 6 percent annually since 2001, after adjusting for inflation.

for America's schools. Many policy makers and parents agree that local educators have too often failed to raise the learning curves of all children. But do the new federal standards fairly identify schools that are failing their children? Or, do these rules, crafted by the Bush Administration with bipartisan enthusiasm, stigmatize many schools simply because they serve a diverse range of students?

Pinpointing a truly effective school has always been a slippery task. Four decades of research show that children's learning curves are lifted more dramatically by parenting practices, community conditions, and a child's preschool experience than what unfolds later inside the walls of classrooms. Federal and state accountability reforms do wisely focus on achievement *growth*, not test scores in any one year. This helps to take into account differences in family backgrounds.

Still, a decade from now, all schools are to meet the universal proficiency standard in language arts and math, whether they serve children from rich or poor families. In stark contrast to the federal approach, California's own accountability program, created three years before NCLB, rewards year to year growth, rather than penalizing failing schools that may miss a standard for the share of kids tested in the two subject areas for several student subgroups. In addition, some states, including California, have set high curricular standards. These states are penalized, since it becomes even less likely that universal proficiency can be achieved over the coming decade.

We focus analytically on one part of these issues: Does the adequate yearly progress (AYP) strategy—with its emphasis on the performance of student subgroups—fairly label schools as failing, or are diverse schools penalized for serving a wider range of subgroups?

Playing the Odds: Student Diversity and Growth Targets

We examined which schools successfully achieved their AYP targets during California's initial two years under the federal accountability reforms. These results were recently announced, following the spring 2003 round of student testing. We then asked how the odds of hitting

AYP targets are driven by average test scores or the number of subgroups, after sorting schools into similar communities, ranging from well-off to poor neighborhoods. And we examined these patterns separately for elementary and high schools across California.

Table 1 shows how we divided schools into four sets, based upon the percentage of their enrollments made up of children who come from economically disadvantaged families. The top group of schools includes those with less than 25 percent coming from disadvantaged families. The bottom group includes schools where over 75 percent of their students come from such homes. We assumed that schools with more student subgroups were more likely to be situated in lower-income communities, so this grouping of schools helps to control for the effects of social-class background.

TABLE 1. Odds of Hitting AYP Targets by Count of Student Subgroups—All California Schools

Families economically disadvantaged	Count of student subgroups	Count of schools	Percentage of schools that met AYP
Less than 25%	1	616	83%
	2	458	80%
	3	364	76%
	4	215	58%
	5	107	55%
	6	30	53%
25% - 50%	1	54	67%
	2	259	76%
	3	389	63%
	4	567	55%
	5	303	49%
	6	77	39%
50% - 75%	2	141	74%
	3	360	59%
	4	746	55%
	5	274	38%
	6	110	21%
More than 75%	2	79	53%
	3	951	40%
	4	698	37%
	5	198	23%
	6	74	16%

Table 1 then splits the schools based on the number of student subgroups they enrolled during the 2002-03 school year. We included all schools with enrollments of at least 100 students and reporting complete data to the state department of education. Rows with fewer than 25 schools are not shown.

What's most striking is that the percentage of schools hitting their AYP growth target is strongly related to the number of student subgroups. In addition, schools serving lower income families and their children, *on average*, are less likely to have achieved their AYP growth targets.

Look, for example, at the top set of schools, those with enrollments of less than 25 percent disadvantaged children. Among schools with two student subgroups, 80 percent met their AYP targets in 2002-03. Even for those schools enrolling between 50 and 75 percent disadvantaged kids, fully 74 percent of the schools with just two student subgroups met growth targets.

But look *within* any of the four sets of schools split by economic disadvantage and observe the falling share who meet AYP targets as the number of subgroups increases. Within schools serving less than 25 percent of children who are disadvantaged, the share of schools meeting AYP growth

targets falls from 83 percent for schools with one subgroup to 55 percent for schools with five subgroups.

Among schools with 50-75 percent of enrollees from disadvantaged backgrounds, a similar drop in AYP pass rates is observed. Seventy-four (74) percent of schools in this band with just two subgroups met AYP targets, compared to just 21 percent for schools with six subgroups.

Are particular kinds of students driving these sharp differences? We did discover that schools with large concentrations of Latino children from disadvantaged families face the lowest odds of hitting AYP targets.

Let's look again at the poorest quartile of schools, those with more than 75 percent of their students designated as disadvantaged. The modal number of student subgroups equaled three for these 951 schools. Almost all these schools are predominantly Latino—with high proportions of children also designated as English learners and coming from low-income families. These same students often belong to two, three, or four different subgroups.

The major driving force appears to be a school's share of children designated as English Learners (EL). By definition they are not proficient in language arts. EL students often come from low-income families; many qualify for special education services. This creates a dilemma for school principals in terms of how to allocate scarce resources to aid several subgroups, each linked to the fact that children have low literacy and language skills in English.

A different pattern characterizes the other end of the social-class spectrum—among schools where less than 25 percent of their students are disadvantaged. Among the 616 schools in this top band with one student subgroup, 603 are overwhelmingly non-Latino white.

Over 83 percent of these schools hit their AYP target. When we move to schools with two subgroups, they are most likely to include an Asian American (148 of 458 schools), Latino (144 schools), or disadvantaged subgroup (109 schools). Among these subsets of schools, the percentage meeting AYP targets equaled 91, 75, and 76 percent, respectively.

A Tale of Two Schools: Dinged for Diversity?

Our story began with Manzanita Elementary School—situated in downtown Oakland, showing robust achievement growth and meeting AYP test-participation and performance targets in 2003 for 17 of 18 categories. But by hitting one trip wire, Manzanita is now deemed as failing under Washington's rules.

Just twenty minutes from Manzanita is Golden Gate Elementary, similarly situated in Oakland's urban core. But Golden Gate mainly serves African American children. In fact, it has just two overlapping subgroups, black children from low-income families. Golden Gate is also a smaller school, enrolling just 233 kids, compared to Manzanita's 745 youngsters.

This pair of schools illustrates the dilemma inherent in federal policy makers' attempt to better serve all subgroups. It turns out that students at Manzanita and Golden Gate are performing at statistically equal levels, on average. Manzanita's state API score equaled 614 in 2003; Golden Gate's API came in at 613. But with many more trip wires to avoid, linked to the diversity of its students, Manzanita failed to meet its federal growth targets. Whereas Golden Gate —with just two subgroups—hit its AYP targets in all six of the possible categories (share tested by subgroup, performance by subject area).

This seems unfair, simply an artifact of facing stiffer odds when serving more subgroups. Yet Golden Gate appears to be more effective in raising the performance of its black children, boosting the API for this subgroup by 11 percent between 2002 and 2003, rising from 560 to 621. Meanwhile, black children at Manzanita came in lower, displaying a 562 API in 2003. Washington's intense focus on subgroups illuminates such shortfalls, but meanwhile it penalizes Manzanita, despite its steady growth in children's performance—dinged because its African American children did not grow sufficiently in math.

Okay—But Don't Diverse Schools Serve Lower Achieving Students?

Is it any surprise that schools with greater diversity—based on ethnicity, language, class disadvantage, or disability—show greater difficulty in hitting their growth targets? Are not these schools situated in urban centers or impoverished rural areas that serve poor and working-class children? This is the operating assumption in many policy circles.

But under California's own accountability program, schools serving children from lower-income neighborhoods have shown the same rate of *growth* as displayed by schools in middle-class communities. State API scores have been rising, since 1999, at about the same pace for schools in poor and middle-class communities. But now the former group of schools is much more likely to be labeled as failing under federal AYP rules.

In addition, the results shown in Table 2 raise questions about whether schools with more subgroups are any less effective than schools serving more homogeneous students—even though the former have more difficulty hitting their growth targets.

The character of a school's surrounding community, not surprisingly, shapes its students' achievement levels. In Table 2 we have added average California Achievement Test 6 (CAT6) scores for language arts and math, expressed as normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores. Looking down the four sets of schools (from better-off to poor settings), focusing on those with three subgroups, the average reading score equaled the 56th, 46th, 38th, and 33rd NCE, respectively.

Yet within each of the four sets of schools, disparities in test scores are much narrower. For example, among schools serving more than 75 percent of children designated as disadvantaged, schools with three subgroups show an average reading score at the 33rd NCE (percentile), and 40 percent of these schools met their AYP target. Among schools with five subgroups, the average school performed at the 32nd NCE but just 23 percent of the schools met their target. Almost equal average student performance, but having two more subgroups reduces the odds by 17 percent of hitting the AYP target. It's difficult to argue that the latter set of schools is less effective *overall* than the former, but they are more likely to be pegged as failing by the federal government.

The same pattern is seen among schools serving populations comprised of between 25 and 50 percent disadvantaged students. In this band, schools with three versus six subgroups display almost identical average test scores. But the odds of reaching AYP growth targets fall from 63 percent for schools with three subgroups, to 39 percent for schools with six subgroups.

Another way to think about the fairness of these results is to ask, How would the stigma awarded to two failing schools prompt different remedies—say, responses considered by two school principals within a pair of middle-class or blue-collar communities when their average test scores are virtually identical but the schools differ only in terms of subgroup counts?

Principal A—running a school with proportionally more EL kids than Principal B's school—may already be allocating the bulk of resources and attention to her EL students. Should she pull resources from English-proficient Latino children who are scoring a bit better on standardized tests? Or, should resources be pulled from kids with disabilities to boost the pivotal EL subgroup?

Principal B remains in a somewhat advantageous position. With fewer EL kids, this principal may be able to move some resources to a smaller number of student subgroups that failed to meet the AYP target. Still, redistributing resources from one subgroup to another may be self-defeating.

Elementary and Secondary Schools

These patterns come into sharper focus when looking at elementary and secondary schools separately. Table 3 reports on elementary schools. Again, we see how schools serving higher proportions of economically disadvantaged children are less likely to meet their AYP growth target, independent of the number of student subgroups.

Yet enrolling additional subgroups further lowers a school's odds of hitting the AYP target, even for schools with similar achievement levels overall. For schools with between 50 to 75 percent of their pupils, disadvantaged, the odds of meeting their AYP targets drops by 16 percent between schools with three versus five subgroups, even though the latter group did one percentile point better in language arts and hit identical math proficiency levels.

Similarly, for schools serving children from the poorest communities, the odds of hitting growth targets fall by 30 percent between schools with two subgroups and those with five. This disparity in AYP success exists even though the latter set of schools scored just two points below the former set in reading and out performed the former in math. Middle school results closely follow these patterns.

The number of high schools with complete data is smaller than for elementary schools (Table 4). The overall share of high schools meeting growth targets is much lower —just 52 percent even among schools serving better-off communities (less than 25 percent, disadvantaged) and one subgroup.

Among the poorest set of schools, those with enrollments of over 75

TABLE 2. Similar Student Achievement Levels across California Schools

Families economically disadvantaged	Count of student subgroups	Percentage of schools that met AYP	Average CAT6 Reading NCE	Average CAT6 Math NCE
Less than 25%	1	83%	59	64
	2	80%	58	64
	3	76%	56	62
	4	58%	53	58
	5	55%	54	58
	6	53%	52	57
25% - 50%	1	67%	50	51
	2	76%	53	56
	3	63%	46	51
	4	55%	46	51
	5	49%	47	51
	6	39%	46	50
50% - 75%	2	74%	44	47
	3	59%	38	44
	4	55%	40	46
	5	38%	39	43
	6	21%	40	41
More than 75%	2	53%	35	38
	3	40%	33	40
	4	37%	34	39
	5	23%	32	36
	6	16%	35	38

Tough Luck for Glendale Unified School District

When Glendale schools chief, Jim Brown, analyzes whether his students have met their AYP growth targets, he stares at a mind boggling matrix. Brown must weigh test scores and shares of students who took language arts and math exams for each of his 29 schools. Then, this dizzying chart displays 34 columns, covering eight various subgroups, by share completing the test, by subject test. In all, Brown must check 986 cells into which student counts and test scores are entered. Trip wires lay just beneath many of these cells.

Growth was significant across Glendale's 29 schools between the spring of 2002 and 2003—with student participation and test score gains sufficient in over nine of every 10 of these cells. But unfortunately, Glendale Unified did not test 95 percent of its special education students. This single trip wire led the feds to label Glendale a failing district. Just two boxes could not be checked-off… despite strong test score growth.

Glendale Unified—A Failing School District?

- ✓ School wide test participation
- ✓ School wide achievement growth
- ✓ African American test participation
- ✓ African American achievement growth
- ✓ Asian American test participation
- ✓ Asian American student growth
- ✓ Filipino test participation
- ✓ Filipino achievement growth
- ✓ Latino test participation
- ✓ Latino achievement growth
- ✓ White test participation
- ✓ White achievement growth
- ✓ Socioeconomic-low test participation
- ✓ Socioeconomic-low achievement growth
- ✓ English-learner test participation
- ✓ English-learner achievement growth
- *FAIL* Learning disabled test participation—failed to test 95 percent of children
- ✓ Learning disabled achievement growth

percent disadvantaged, the odds of meeting AYP targets drops from 20 percent to 8 percent between schools with three and four subgroups, respectively. This gap is observed even though the latter schools out performed the former in average math proficiency by three percentile points.

How to Improve Policy and Implementation?

Debate over the efficacy of NCLB—in regulating and motivating educators' efforts to close achievement gaps—continues to grow. Never before has Washington tried to cajole every school in the nation to raise average achievement *and* ensure gains for every student subgroup. The accountability movement, with the passage of NCLB, shifted from a common set of principles guiding reform in most states, to a nationalized set of procedures aimed at tracking each school's progress. Like the spread of regulatory tentacles in other sectors, Washington's new education rules are fed by good intentions.

Yet policy makers now face two dilemmas. First, many remain committed to tough accountability standards. Indeed, this new focus on achievement, transparent data on children's progress, and some fresh resources have combined to push test scores higher, at least within elementary schools. Recent studies by scholars at the RAND Corporation and Stanford University provide evidence of this success, as realized in many states. Importantly, these encouraging effects stemmed from state-led reforms, prior to the passage and regulatory creep of NCLB. Still, achievement gaps among ethnic groups have closed slowly in the best of years.

Whether Washington's complicated rules for tracking subgroups, then stigmatizing schools which fail to test 95 percent and show progress for each, is legitimate—especially when overall achievement levels are rising—is a pressing question. California now has many schools that are praised by Sacramento for showing remarkable gains, then days later told by Washington that their school is failing. The dilemma for Washington is how to sustain sensible accountability measures

TABLE 3. Odds of Hitting AYP Targets—California Elementary Schools

Families economically disadvantaged	Count of student subgroups	Count of schools	Percentage of schools that met AYP	Average enrollment	Average CAT6 Reading NCE	Average CAT6 Math NCE
Less than 25%	1	449	90%	332	60	67
	2	326	89%	411	59	67
	3	237	89%	454	56	64
	4	111	77%	441	53	61
	5	37	81%	463	52	63
25% - 50%	1	30	87%	131	53	58
	2	195	86%	280	53	58
	3	280	79%	401	48	55
	4	376	72%	419	47	55
	5	164	70%	425	48	56
50% - 75%	2	106	87%	219	46	50
	3	274	71%	389	39	47
	4	573	65%	442	40	49
	5	161	55%	443	40	47
More than 75%	2	61	64%	209	37	41
	3	842	44%	485	33	40
	4	578	43%	506	34	41
	5	137	34%	461	35	42

while not regulating in ways that erode support for federal involvement.

Second, Washington's approach is heavy on testing, data, and punishments. Few positive carrots can be found. Title I dollars have increased in recent years but may not cover a panoply of new mandated costs, from testing expenses, to required tutoring and transfer programs. No effective business attempts to motivate its workforce by micro-managing and stigmatizing less productive employees. Many businesses focus on creating meaningful, positive incentives, viewed as legitimate by staff members.

Perhaps the starting point for this debate should not be whether the White House is fully funding NCLB, but what incentives *at the school level* will enable teachers and principals to thoughtfully attack achievement gaps. Presently, local educators are told to collect data and calculate progress for student subgroups—simply to avoid federal penalties. It's not a very motivating policy theory.

What Steps Could be Taken by Washington and Sacramento?

- Washington might rethink the principles of a *federal* education system, including the proper roles of the central and state governments.

State boards of education, for example, could include in NCLB plans their own method for closing achievement gaps, including attention to a simpler set of student subgroups. The triple counting of Latino children with limited English proficiency from

TABLE 4. Odds of Hitting AYP Targets—California High Schools

Families economically disadvantaged	Count of student subgroups	Count of schools	Percentage of schools that met AYP	Average enrollment	Average CAT6 Reading NCE	Average CAT6 Math NCE
Less than 25%	1	119	52%	349	58	61
	2	79	41%	482	55	60
	3	65	26%	555	55	59
	4	56	20%	497	52	55
25% - 50%	2	29	7%	212	50	50
	3	78	8%	399	44	45
	4	105	14%	524	44	47
	5	44	18%	630	46	49
50% - 75%	3	57	18%	378	35	38
	4	86	22%	523	39	42
	5	21	10%	644	37	40
More than 75%	3	35	20%	393	34	35
	4	36	8%	710	34	38

low-income families, for example, does little to help educators reallocate resources inside schools.

- Washington could respect *states' own methods for determining achievement growth* within schools.

It's plainly bizarre that many schools display strong growth in achievement—responding to state accountability pressure in spades—but then are stigmatized as failing by the federal government. Parents are rightfully miffed by these contradictory messages. Washington could require that information about progress for certain subgroups be distributed publicly while not necessarily triggering sanctions—perhaps for schools that show a certain level of growth overall.

- Washington might craft an accountability system that is viewed locally as *legitimate* and one that enables *better allocation decisions* within schools.

It remains unclear how federal rules are helping local educators allocate resources more wisely, including ways that close achievement gaps. When schools showing growth are penalized for having more diverse students, the credibility of federal policy comes into question. Or, when AYP targets are met for learning disabled children, but not for Latinos, are resources and teacher time to be shifted from the former to the latter? The focus on subgroups is well intentioned; yet its connection to not-so-fungible resources within schools remains hazy.

The federal weight placed on having 95 percent of all subgroups sit for testing, especially at the high school level, should be rethought. Educators alone can't force parents to get their children to school.

- Sacramento can *implement* NCLB provisions in more rational ways.

One example is the recent decision by the state board of education to raise the minimum count of students that define a subgroup. The state board or legislature could ensure that parents receive more coherent information about their local school's performance, rather than the mixed messages an increasing number now receive.

■ Sacramento must *target resources* on the achievement gap—if state policy makers are serious about addressing inequities.

Few positive rewards remain within Sacramento's accountability system, given the state's budget situation. The High Priority Schools Program is targeting modest resources on low-performing schools.

Still, significant disparities exist in how schools are financed across and within districts. Progress has been made in equalizing spending among districts. Yet essential school resources—qualified teachers, humane school facilities, and instructional materials—are not distributed equitably within many districts. These structural disparities eclipse the benefits that may stem from having better data on student subgroups. Cost-free incentives could be crafted, such as regulatory relief for schools meeting state growth targets.

The legislature and governor could better equip local educators to move from subgroup data to ameliorative action within schools. One step forward would be to consolidate various streams of professional development funding to help teachers and principals address achievement gaps. This would fit calls by the Legislative Analyst and others to consolidate state categorical aid programs, now over 120 in number. District flexibility could be advanced while focusing inservice teacher training on equity issues. One next step is to help teachers apply the subgroup data to human-scale improvements in pedagogy and classroom practices.

District Data

The percentage of schools failing to meet federal phase 1 AYP growth targets in 2003 for selected districts.

Fresno	73%
Long Beach	24%
Los Angeles	50%
Oakland	63%
Sacramento City	49%
San Diego City	45%
San Francisco	61%
San Jose	68%
Santa Ana	69%

Source: California State Department of Education, November 2003.

Acknowledgments

PACE's research on school accountability reforms—including new ideas for how to improve policy—is funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. A generous thank you is offered to Jim Brown, Terry Dutton, Brian Edwards, and Lynn Winters for their thoughtful advice. Melissa Buttles and Sandra Park at PACE investigated illustrative schools. Special thanks to the research and evaluation branch of the Long Beach Unified School District. Any errors are the fault solely of the authors.

Authors

John R. Novak is assistant director of research and evaluation, Long Beach Unified School District, and lecturer at the University of Southern California. Bruce Fuller is professor of education and public policy at the University of California, Berkeley.

For further information

For evidence on the positive effects of state-led accountability efforts, see Grissmer, D., Flanagan, A., Kawata, J., & Williamson, S. (2000) *Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Test Scores Tell Us.* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. Carnoy, M. & Loeb, S. (2003) Does external accountability affect student outcomes? A cross-state analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24,* 305-331.

- Education Commission of the States - www.ecs.org
- Ed Source - www.edsource.org
- Education Trust - www.edtrust.org
- PACE - pace.berkeley.edu
- California State Department of Education - ayp.cde.ca.gov/reports.html

PACE POLICY BRIEF

Policy Analysis for California Education
University of California
Tolman Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720

Stanford University
Graduate School of Education
Stanford, CA 94305

University of California
One Shields Avenue
Davis, CA 95616

PACE PUBLICATIONS—SCHOOL REFORM

- Elizabeth Woody and PACE researchers. ***Local Educators' Responses to State-led Accountability,*** forthcoming in February, 2004.
- Margaret Bridges and Jennifer Carlat. ***Training and Retaining Early Care and Education Staff: Child-Care Retention Incentive Program Evaluation.*** Policy Brief 03-2, February 2003.
- Bruce Fuller. ***Media Coverage of Education Issues: The California Recall Campaign.*** 2003.
- Fuller, Gawlik, Kuboyama, Park with Gibbings. ***Charter Schools and Inequality.*** 2003.
- Hart Associates. ***PACE Poll: Most Americans Prefer Smaller Tax Cut, Aid to Schools.*** 2003. Washington DC.
- Loeb, Fuller, and Hirshberg. ***Estimating Unmet Need for Child Care and Preschool: Alternative Definitions and Analytic Tools.*** November 2002.
- ***New Lives for Poor Families? Mothers and Children Move Through Welfare Reform.*** 2002. *From the Growing Up in Poverty Project.*
- Elizabeth Burr & Bridget O'Brien. ***Training and Retaining Early Care and Education Staff: Evaluation Progress Report.*** 2002.
- Bruce Fuller. ***Inside Charter Schools: The Paradox of Radical Decentralization.*** Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

To obtain copies, please send a check payable to UC Regents to PACE Berkeley ($25). The publications order form is available on the PACE website: http://pace.berkeley.edu.