

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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August 3, 2017

Hon. Tom Torlakson
Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N. Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Carl Cohn, Executive Director
California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
47-110 Calhoun Street
Indio, CA 92201

Mr. Tom Changnon
Stanislaus County Superintendent of Schools
1100 H Street
Modesto, CA 95354

Sent via email only

Re: Approach to Providing Assistance to Local Educational Agencies

Dear Tom, Carl, and Tom,

The State Board of Education recently discussed the approach to providing assistance within California's new accountability system. The Board materials outline the overall goal, characteristics, and structure for a coordinated approach that is focused on helping local educational agencies build internal capacity to identify and understand local needs and to develop and successfully implement improvement strategies responsive to those needs.

The materials provided a general framework for assistance that reflects the Local Control Funding Formula's principles, but details remain to be resolved. As you know, differentiated assistance for districts begins with this fall's Dashboard release, so there is urgency to this work, which the Board shares. Our upcoming Board agendas will continue to consider this topic, including regular updates on the ongoing cross-agency meetings convened by Board staff.

A key takeaway from the initial Board discussion was the importance of the state being accountable for developing an effective structure for delivering assistance that responds to local needs. The Local Control Funding Formula ushered in greater local flexibility. Our job is to develop supports and resources that increase the capacity of local decision makers and stakeholders to use that flexibility to improve teaching and learning for students – the ultimate goal of our K-12 education system.

This requires developing a structure that sets up the agencies charged with providing assistance for success. A critical component of this is clarifying the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the agencies with a direct role in providing assistance:

- By statute, **county offices of education** are the first-line assistance providers for school districts. In addition to ongoing work to support school districts through the development of local accountability plans, county offices of education must offer differentiated assistance to districts that meet the Board-approved criteria.
- The Board materials proposed selecting **“lead” county offices of education** through a competitive process. Within the proposed structure, county leads would be charged with supporting other county offices of education and aligning and coordinating assistance regionally, and could develop particular expertise as a resource for others within the broader system.
- The Local Control Funding Formula established the **California Collaborative for Educational Excellence** to provide advice and assistance to local educational agencies upon request or referral by another agency providing assistance. The Board materials proposed that the Collaborative work with the county leads to ensure the quality and consistency of supports provided statewide and help the leads and county offices of education tailor them to respond to local or regional needs.

Additionally, the Collaborative has a critical statutory role in developing expertise and capacity within the statewide support structure by contracting “with individuals, local educational agencies, or organizations with expertise, experience, and a record of success” in at least the following areas: the state priorities under the Local Control Funding Formula; improving the quality of teaching; improving the quality of school district and schoolsite leadership; and successfully addressing the needs of special pupil populations, including English learners, pupils eligible to receive a free or reduced-price meal, pupils in foster care, and individuals with exceptional needs. We are already seeing how important it will be to identify and mobilize existing expertise across the state to support local educational agencies and schools in improving the quality of teaching and leadership and addressing the needs of high-need student populations.

As we begin providing differentiated assistance, I encourage the Collaborative to focus on these roles. They are particularly appropriate for a statewide entity to fulfill in a state as large and diverse as ours and will be important in shaping our collective understanding of what’s working and what isn’t working in our approach and adjusting over time.

- The **California Department of Education** is responsible for implementing numerous state and federal programs that support local educational agencies and schools across its divisions. The Department would play an important role in developing and aligning resources and tools and leveraging programmatic expertise within the broader system. The Department also would provide support, infrastructure, and coordination among the agencies and programs, in addition to continuing its federal oversight responsibilities.

These roles and responsibilities provide a structure for providing assistance to districts and

schools. They also reinforce the expectation that we are collectively responsible for delivering assistance that responds to local needs and, ultimately, for whether teaching and learning in classrooms is improving in districts and schools receiving support. Continued collaboration among our agencies will be critical as we begin providing differentiated assistance and further define and develop our approach over time.

I want to thank you for your leadership and partnership in this work. There is much to be done, and I look forward to continuing our work together in the coming weeks and months.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael W. Kirst".

Michael W. Kirst
President, California State Board of Education

MWK:ds

cc. Glen Price, Chief Deputy Superintendent, California Department of Education
Peter Birdsall, Executive Director, California County Superintendents Educational
Services Association
Sue Burr, Chair, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
Karen Stapf Walters, Executive Director, California State Board of Education