

While reporting this story, CALmatters reporter Jessica Calefati sought interviews with State Board of Education President Michael Kirst and State Superintendent for Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. They declined.

Instead, their spokespeople, Janet Weeks and Bill Ainsworth, jointly answered the following questions in writing.

**Q: Given poor and minority students' low levels of achievement on the most recent state tests, I was puzzled by the relatively small numbers of districts on track to get help from the state for those students. For example, I recently wrote about San Francisco's lackluster black student achievement, but then San Francisco's black students weren't IDed by the dashboard as needing state assistance. I took a closer look and realized that San Francisco black students' math and reading test scores both rate "red" but that those black students didn't rate "red" in any other dashboard categories.**

**My data analysis shows there are close to 200 additional districts with at least one subgroup whose math and reading test scores rate "red / red" or "red / orange" that aren't slated to get any help from the state.**

**Why isn't the state offering assistance to these districts, too?**

*A: California, like other states across the country and the federal government through the Every Student Succeeds Act, is moving away from accountability based solely on test scores and toward a "multiple measures system." This shift is widely supported by partner organizations, researchers and the education community. As such, California's Local Control Funding Formula statute sets criteria for assistance based on student group performance across more than one measure, or performance indicator.*

*That said, test scores are important. If a subgroup in a district has very low test scores, they have met half (50 percent) of the requirement for assistance.*

*The Dashboard is revealing that students with disabilities, homeless students and foster youth have the greatest needs and need the most support to achieve success in school. This is precisely how the system was designed to work – the Dashboard was intended to bring to light inequities and highlight the most glaring gaps in California's educational system. Students with disabilities (i.e. special education), homeless students and foster youth are overwhelmingly low-income and are disproportionately English learners and students of color. The disproportionality of African American students is especially acute. It is important to also note that 70 percent of California's*

*students with disabilities are also members of one or more of the LCFF identified student groups. Strategies to improve outcomes for these most challenged students – professional development for teachers that helps them differentiate instruction, a focus on improving culture and climate through better classroom management and evidence-based discipline practices such as PBIS, social-emotional supports for students and families, for example – will improve outcomes for all student groups.*

*Further, the state is offering assistance to these districts through the new statewide system of support, which provides assistance beyond support for only those districts identified for differentiated assistance. The system has three levels of support: Level 1 is support for all districts. The support includes workshops for teachers, classroom coaches and sharing of “best practices” proven to help accelerate student learning. Level 2 is support to districts and schools struggling to lift up the performance of one or more student groups. Together with partners, these districts will examine the factors behind low performance and develop strategies for improving classroom learning. Level 3 is state intervention for districts that fail to improve student group performance in three out of four years.*

*Many districts tapped into Level 1 support long before the Dashboard went live this month. There are nine districts in the CCEE Pilot Partnerships and more than 300 districts in the CCEE Professional Learning Networks, for example.*

**Q: How does the state expect these districts to improve their subgroup test scores without any outside help?**

*Through the LCAP process, all districts are required to use the Dashboard to identify any state indicator for which performance for any student group was two or more performance levels below the “all student” performance. They are also required, as part of the summary, to address any state indicator that is red or orange for the district as a whole. They are also required to explain the steps they are taking to address these inequities and align resources to that plan. Some districts, in going through this process, have enlisted outside help already from county offices of education, CCEE, partner non-profits, university partnerships and other groups.*

**Q: Has the state considered modifying its assistance criteria so that more districts qualify for help that, based on their subgroup test scores, seem to need it?**

*Two new indicators will be implemented next fall – the College/Career Indicator and the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator. The addition of two new indicators will likely increase the number of*

*districts that qualify for Level 2 assistance. It should be noted as well that assistance criteria is established by California Education Code.*

**Q: Does the state, through the county offices, CCEE or CDE, have capacity to help more districts than the roughly 200 it is on track to help now?**

*A: The goal of the system is to increase and build capacity statewide so all districts that need support can get it.*

**Q: Also, some experts note that other dashboard categories, such as suspensions and graduation rates, are easier for districts to manipulate. Districts, for example, can lower their suspension rates by simply deciding to stop suspending students. They can boost their grad rates by relaxing requirements and giving out more diplomas.**

**Might some of these districts with "red / red" or "red / orange" test scores be manipulating their suspension and graduation data to avoid scrutiny? Does the state have any plans to examine this question?**

*A: The goal of continuous improvement is for districts and schools to improve performance over time. If you look at the suspension and graduation rates displayed on the CDE's DataQuest Website, it is clear that the four-year cohort graduation rates have increased since 2009-10 and that suspension rates have decreased since 2011-12. These trends began prior to the development of the Dashboard.*

*For the Suspension Rate Indicator, both "in school" and "out of school" suspensions are included, so suspension rates cannot be decreased by simply changing the discipline policy to use only "in school" suspensions. Also, classroom disruptions due to student behavior can negatively impact student performance. To simply stop suspending students, without improving classroom management and discipline practices, would most likely decrease the overall student performance. Artificially decreasing the suspension rate may be counter-productive. In addition, 236 out of 328 student groups (72 percent) in the 228 LEAs identified for LCFF support were identified as a result of low academic performance and high suspension rates. This data suggest that LEAs are not manipulating their suspension rate data.*

*In regards to the graduation rate, California Education Code specifies the requirements students must meet in order to receive a high school diploma. In addition, the College/Career Indicator will indicate whether or not graduates are likely to succeed after high school. If a school or district has a high graduation rate and a low CCI rate, it will reveal inconsistencies in results and*

*hopefully start conversations at the local level on how to better align the results of these two indicators.*