INTRODUCTION

ACSA has long advocated for a standards-based education system. It is our goal to improve not only achievement but also the learning experience for all students. Among the obstacles, delays and intricacies of implementing standards, one truth resonates: Standards-based education is the best way – and perhaps the only way -- to ensure that all students succeed. Together our efforts must focus on closing the achievement gap in our schools and districts and on ensuring that all students meet standards.

In the last several years accessibility to statewide testing data has given Californians a glimpse at how well schools and students are measuring up to state and local academic standards. Across the board these test scores show a gap in achievement for students from minority racial, cultural, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds.

As California's educational leaders, we must create the momentum for closing the achievement gap. Together we must reverse the predictable trends of educational access, achievement and success for some students and not others.

Enid Lee, visiting scholar to the New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz asserts, "While educational equality is the goal, educational equity must be our approach." According to Lee, educational equity "is the principle of altering current practices and perspectives to teach for social transformation and to promote equitable learning outcomes for students of all social groups." For Lee and others, equity can mean treating some students differently in order to treat them fairly. Different treatment is needed because students from various social groups enter our schools on an uneven playing field. Lee further states that "to ensure that all students, regardless of background have equal opportunities and outcomes in learning, system-wide transformation must occur that will create the chance for students on the margins of our educational system to become central to it and perform to their fullest potential."

MOVING TOWARD EQUITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

This position paper is designed to guide educators, lawmakers and community leaders in closing the achievement gap in all of our schools. It highlights nine specific areas of our education system: standards-based curriculum and instruction, assessment, professional learning, recruitment, hiring and coaching, community engagement, support structures, resources, leadership and relationships. For each area, it provides ACSA's beliefs about a standards-based, equity-driven education system and it offers conditions that would manifest if all stakeholders in the system held the same beliefs.

STANDARDS-BASED CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

ACSA believes:
Content standards, and standards-aligned tests must be embraced as the centerpiece of equity-driven curriculum and instruction.

A standards-based system must address system inequities and meet the needs of all students, especially those students who are under-performing.

Schools must adopt a curriculum that meets diverse students' needs and empowers all students to view concepts, issues, events and themes from multiple perspectives.

In an equity-driven system:
- All students are held to high standards and have access to rigorous curriculum and quality instruction that are intellectually challenging; develop reasoning ability; are calibrated to grade level; provide maximum time in meaningful learning activities; develop reading and writing for content area literacy; and integrate technology for learning
- All students have access to the core curriculum.
- All students have access to qualified teachers.
- Instructional resources support state content standards and are culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate.
- All students have good first learning experiences. Research shows that student success is correlated with early, consistent experiences with highly qualified teachers. (Haycock)
- Teachers maintain high expectations for learning of rigorous content, differentiate instruction for varied learning styles, and give students multiple opportunities to learn and demonstrate their learning.
- Educators understand and apply the following key concepts for closing the achievement gap: cultural background and daily experiences are valued and connected to classroom learning; intelligence is multidimensional and modifiable, not determined at birth or defined by I.Q. scores; resilient students exhibit social competence, problem solving skills and a sense of the future; and effort is closely linked to motivation and achievement. (B. Williams)
- All students have access to rigorous, standards-based curriculum, academic courses and learning paths for college and career.
- Specific student groups are not over or under- represented in honors, A.P., I.B., and/or special needs classes.
- Students have access to targeted intervention programs that are standards-aligned. Student placement in such programs must be based on specific, recent data about student progress. Student progress must be frequently assessed, and clear exit criteria must be set and applied.

ASSESSMENT

ACSA believes that student progress in meeting standards should be determined through multiple measures that are valid, reliable and fair.

In an equity-driven system:
- Regular and accurate assessment of student progress in mastering grade-level standards is essential to the success of any instructional program and ensures quality for all students. To guarantee that no student is left behind all assessments are sensitive to instruction and are based on content that every student has had the opportunity to learn and master.
- Students have multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned and are able to do in their primary language and English when ready, as well as in other appropriate modalities such as American Sign Language.
- Administrators are vigilant about promoting a comprehensive approach to assessment. On-going assessment provide students and teachers specific and constructive feedback to inform instruction and learning.
- Assessment does not result in negative educational consequences for students. Negative educational consequences result if disproportionate numbers of students from identified racial/ethnic groups are denied graduation or other forms of certification due to limited opportunities to learn. Likewise negative educational consequences occur if some students spend too much time in test- prep and remediation, thereby limiting their access to quality learning/teaching experiences.
- Decisions about instruction are driven by assessment data. Data (aggregate and disaggregate) are current, easily retrieved, analyzed, understood, and used to inform instruction and not to punish students or staff.
- On-going data collection, disaggregation and analysis ensures proportionate representation of Latino, African-American, and American Indian students in honors, Advanced Placement and special needs classes as well as in discipline referrals and consequences.
- Administrators are aware of and apply appropriate, legal accommodations for testing students with special needs including English language learners.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

ACSA believes:
Professional development must be a budget priority at state, district and school levels.

Professional development is essential for ensuring educational equity and achievement. Research-based guidelines should shape all professional development.

In an equity-driven system:
- All professional learning for administrators is aligned with the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSELS). These standards were created in an effort to identify the knowledge and skills needed for instructional leadership in a standards-based system and focus on student success for all.
- Specific data about student progress drives professional development. Data includes student work and instructional materials, strategies and activities that engender that work.
- While professional learning on state adopted materials is important for staff, it also focuses on materials and design to close the teachering-learning gaps that must be attained for some student groups. Current research supports that much of the improvement in math performance is attributed to professional development grounded in developing the deep content knowledge and mastering effective instructional practices.
- The following principles shape and prioritize professional development: Instructional change is a long multistage process; shared expertise is the driver of instructional change; the focus is on systemwide improvement; good ideas come from talented people working together; clear expectations and responsibility for achieving them are shared by all; instructional improvement occurs in an environment of collegiality, caring and respect for the students and the adults working to meet their needs; and the focus is on content and instruction. (Elmore)

RECRUITMENT, HIRING AND COACHING

ACSA believes:
Schools and districts must recruit and hire staff that reflects the community as well as develop capacity of staff to meet the needs of students in the community.

Educators must approach the moral challenge of ensuring the educational success of every child with passion, dedication, and enthusiasm, and that effective educators today must be more dedicated, talented and committed than ever before.

In the power of coaching to develop effective leaders who have clear vision, courage and skill to take action, and confidence to include diverse perspectives in making decisions.

In an equity-driven system:
- Leaders recruit, hire, support and develop staff that is most qualified to help all students achieve standards.
- Leaders assign most qualified staff to serve students most in need. Highly qualified staff includes teachers who are certified to serve English language learners when the student population includes a significant number of English language learners.
- Recruitment of staff reflects the community served.
- Leaders proactively recruit and hire teachers and other staff who evince a strong moral principle of educational equity and excellence and dedication to achieve it.
- Leaders develop capacity in themselves and others through cognitive coaching that promotes self-directed learning to enhance staff performance and improve student learning.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ACSA believes:
Districts and schools should reach out to the school community to learn about their customers and enhance the community relationship.

Administrators should develop strong community partnerships to learn about the community, address issues of diversity and educational equity, and to identify resources and strategies for ensuring student success.

In an equity-driven system:
- Inclusion and meaningful participation are evident from all segments of the community (language, cultural/racial/ethnic, socio-economic groups). Stakeholders have a voice in school/district decisions, policies and practices.
- Information and communication with parents/community reflects the languages, cultures, issues and concerns of the multiple stakeholders. Education and development opportunities are available for parents/community members to understand academic programs and goals; to understand the role, purpose and results of assessment(s); to participate in school/district decisions; and to become productive partners in making decisions about the education of students.
- Leaders respect all sectors of the community and develop and maintain trusting relationships and open communication.
- School leaders and staff participate in and host reciprocal events to meet and know members of the community in authentic ways within the community context.
- Leaders mediate conflict in ways that inform and educate all to higher levels of understanding rather than dividing staff and community about issues.
- Leaders incorporate multiple perspectives of the community in decisions, policies and practices related to teaching and learning.
- Leaders facilitate parent meetings in welcoming and friendly ways by providing beverages, snacks, interpreters and childcare. Parents are trained to help facilitate meetings and solicit information and feedback beforehand and afterwards. Often leaders promote the formation of parent advisory groups for specific student populations. Leaders meet frequently with specific advisory groups as well as with whole groups to learn about and integrate student and community needs into the school program.

SUPPORT STRUCTURES

ACSA believes the priorities at each level of the educational support system (legislative policy makers, California Department of Education, regional support centers, county offices of education, districts offices, school sites, and agency and community partners) must focus on the learning and achievement of students most in need.

In an equity-driven system:
- Policymakers work along with educators to identify leverage points for addressing the learning needs of under-performing students.
- State resources are reprioritized for equitable allocation to districts/schools whose student populations are most in need as determined by data about equal access, learning, achievement and school success.
- Districts provide assistance in relieving the managerial roles of principals so that instructional leadership and student achievement can be the priorities.
- Site-based reforms focus on improved achievement of lowest performing student groups.
- Leaders provide information and resources so all children have access to adequate health care, stable housing and good pre-school opportunities.
- Leaders frequently scan the school environment for opportunities that can be leveraged to help all students achieve, even when those opportunities are outside of the classroom. For example, a School Attendance and Review Board process (SARB) can become an opportunity to work with the family and staff to garner the support a student needs to stay in school, regain access to the standards and learning. As such, SARBs can be leveraged to achieve equity and access for a student and divert parents and students from the court system by focusing, instead, on an opportunity to help a student stay in school and achieve standards.

RESOURCES

ACSA believes:
State and district resources should be equitably allocated to schools whose students need the most and not equally apportioned to all schools, leaving schools and students who need the most with fewer or diminished resources.

All levels of the system must be accountable for the targeted allocation and effective use of funds to support and provide evidence of student proficiency in meeting state standards.

In an equity-driven system:
- All teachers are highly qualified and effective in developing and delivering curriculum and instruction in ways that ensure that each student meets or exceeds proficiency in state standards.
- All administrators are highly qualified and effective by the standards defined in the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders.
- Curricular materials are available, adequate, in-use by students, aligned to standards, and culturally, linguistically and developmentally appropriate.
- A variety of interventions are available to meet students' learning and achievement needs and help students reach proficiency in state standards.
- Technology is adequate, available and supports learning through simulation, applications and extension rather than drill and practice.
- All students have access to classrooms and learning labs that are adequate, safe and up-to-date.
- Facilities and grounds are safe, clean, and well maintained and do not impede access to school resources or disrupt teaching and learning.
- Block grants are monitored to ensure resources are allocated to students for whom they were intended.

LEADERSHIP

ACSA believes:
While our present school system has successfully served millions of our children, it has also failed millions, especially poor children and children of color. It is from this understanding that the impetus comes for educational leaders to create schools that work for all children. (Morefield)

To close the achievement gap, leaders must help others know and understand that all students can learn, but not in the same way or at the same pace. (Thomas and Bainbridge)

Closing the achievement gap requires shared leadership, both formal and informal, and shared accountability from staff, parents, students and community.

The most effective school leadership comes from the school itself, but that in order to close the achievement gap, district leadership must set the purpose and vision and create the context for high expectations, caring relationships, quality resources and community partnerships.

In an equity-driven system:
- Site and district leaders take risks to develop policies, programs and practices that ensure the achievement of under-performing students and to support others who do the same.
- District leaders facilitate and coach the staff and board toward higher level of cultural proficiency by providing information and resources about how to achieve educational equity and high achievement for all students and close the gaps that currently exist between identified student groups.
- District leaders broker and leverage community participation and empowerment to meet the needs of under-served student groups.
- District leaders ensure all parts of the system are aligned with the core purpose which is grounded in principles of equity to ensure academic achievement for under-performing student groups.
- Leaders embrace changing demographics as opportunities to assess and alter the ability of the system to meet the needs of students.
- Leaders embrace and mobilize diverse community members as resources for implementing policies and practices and for providing resources to ensure that all students meet or exceed state standards.
- Site and district leaders proactively engage in systemic transformation to create culturally proficient organizations and classrooms. Lindsey et all define cultural proficiency as the policies and practices of organizations and the values and behaviors of the individuals that enable them to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment; the way an organization treats its employees, its clients and its community; and the way classrooms, schools and districts mobilize and allocate resources to provide equitable outcomes for all learners.

RELATIONSHIPS

ACSA believes:
Diversity, including diversity of ideas, is an asset to our efforts to provide equitable and quality education for all of our children.

Schools that work for all children are grounded in a value system of cooperation and relationships.

A total school environment of pervasive caring and nurturing is critical to our efforts to close the achievement gap.

In an equity-driven system:
- At any school working to close the achievement gap, everyone is part of the solution.
- Trust and collaboration are evident in all communication and interaction within, between and among stakeholder groups.
- Collegial and collaborative faculty and staff work as a team to ensure student achievement of standards for all children not just those assigned to them.
- Parents are welcome partners in the education of their children and feel included in school decisions.
- Leaders truly value, appreciate and seek out the involvement and collaboration of others to ensure educational equity and success for all children.
- Leaders build adequate bridges between school and family and between diverse groups of stakeholders by applying the following five essential elements of cultural proficiency: assess personal and/or organizational culture and its effect on others; value diversity; manage the dynamics of difference as opportunities to learn and grow; adapt to diversity and integrate new knowledge about culture into current knowledge and understanding; and institutionalize cultural knowledge by modeling, teaching, coaching and facilitating culturally proficient behaviors, practices and dispositions. (Lindsey, Randall B. et al) Leaders facilitate open, honest and blame-free discussions about finding solutions to improving learning for under-performing students.
- Leaders give appropriate affirmations, accolades and praise genuinely and frequently to all with whom they work.

DETERMINING THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE

Michael Fullan provides the best admonition as we go about determining the effects of the changes proposed in this position paper. In *Change Forces: The Sequel* he provides the following counsel:

> *With all the interest in accountability and academic achievement, good intentions can easily backfire. I would hypothesize that the greater the emphasis on academic achievement through high stakes accountability, the greater the gap becomes between advantaged and disadvantaged students. The main reason for this is that poor performing students do not need more pressure, they need greater attachment to the school and motivation to want to learn. Pressure by itself in this situation actually demotivates poor performing students.*

We find ourselves in the midst of extreme pressure to show significant gains in the achievement of our lowest performing students. Added to this pressure is the complexity, if not chaos, of the spate of current educational reforms. Again, we must remember Fullan's *"Complex Change Lessons"* to get us through the complexity. We must "understand the meaning of operating on the edge of chaos" and not be intimidated by it. We must "attack the incoherence" of too many, sometimes disparate, reform strategies. Educational leaders must remember that "connectedness and knowledge creation are critical" to our success. We must be clear and stay focused on our goal to ensure equitable learning opportunities leading to high achievement for our students who are most in need. Our goal must engender in us a sense of urgency, but not emergency, lest we find ourselves justifying the means of test preparation and not quality teaching and learning. The determination of our success is simply stated by the Bay Area Equity Task Force:

> *Equity will be a reality when children from minority racial, cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds, experience statistically similar rates of meeting high standards as do children from the majority culture.*

CONCLUSION

It has not been the intent of this position paper to place blame on any specific part of the system but to engage ACSA members at all levels of the educational system to accept responsibility for ensuring that all students, especially those most in need, receive an equal education. ACSA understands the importance of improving conditions that will ensure that all students reach their full learning potential in safe and nurturing environments. The buildings and the facilities are important, but even more so is the quality of the instructional program and the resources that support instruction, from the earliest grades. Educational leaders must ensure that students that need the most or the best educational resources get them.

In California, as in other states, the standards movement is an important first step toward educational equity and the achievement of our students, all of our students. Furthermore, the California Public School Accountability ACT (PSAA) and the revision of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires significant improvement for student groups who have traditionally been labeled as underachievers. ACSA believes that we must embrace standards and standards-aligned tests as the centerpiece of equity-driven school reform. At the same time we must recognize that we work in an environment where educational accountability is increasingly being used as a policy tool with increasing high-stakes consequences for districts and schools and for students and staff.

Educational leaders must keep in mind that the logic of educational accountability is for content and performance standards to drive school policy and classroom practices leading to improved student outcomes. Educational leaders must guard against testing programs being used to drive policy, instruction and student outcomes.

While implementing standards and accountability for ensuring the achievement of our lowest performing students may be among the most daunting challenges we have faced in our state's history, we must not cower from the challenge. Moral leadership requires us to find the courage, the will and the skill to see "other people's children" (Delpit) as all of our children and afford them the best resources our system has to offer to ensure their success.