



January 12, 2018

Dr. Michael W. Kirst, President
State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite #5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: January 2018 State Board of Education Agenda Items #1 and #5

Dear President Kirst and Members of the California State Board of Education,

GO Public Schools and our networks of families, educators, and community allies in Fresno, Oakland, and West Contra Costa, write to comment on two items on the January 18th and 19th State Board of Education agenda.

Regarding Item #1: Update on the California School Dashboard

The idea behind the California School Dashboard – that schools and districts should be held accountable for both the status and growth of all student groups on a broad set of metrics – is a good one, and, as advocates, we appreciate the depth of content available at this time. However, as an organization that works closely with parents and community members, we believe that much can be done to improve the public usability of the California School Dashboard.

The Dashboard's website claims that "the Dashboard was created to give parents and the public a better idea of what is happening in our schools and districts and to identify districts and schools that need extra help." We believe that the Dashboard currently falls short of this goal. Stakeholders need to navigate through too many individual pages to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the state of a school: some pages provide only colors, others provide information on status and growth, and further pages break that information down by subgroup. A version of the tool that provided more information on a single, more usable interface would go a long way in ensuring that all families have access to the information they need to evaluate the performance of their schools and make choices for their children.

The Governor's 2017-18 budget proposes an investment in improving the Dashboard interface and conducting stakeholder meetings to gather feedback. We applaud this idea and encourage the state to ensure that, should this funding be allocated, families of historically underserved

students are specifically and adequately engaged in the feedback process. We believe that families of students in underperforming schools are among the most important consumers of this data – the state must do more to ensure that they find this tool valuable and actionable.

Regarding Item #5: Development of the California State Plan for ESSA

We are deeply concerned with the proposed revisions to California’s ESSA state plan. These revisions may bring the plan closer to technical compliance with federal statutes, but they fail to capitalize on a crucial opportunity to better serve California’s most historically underserved students and close persistent achievement gaps. For months, advocacy groups across the state have requested substantive changes to the state’s plan; today, we add our voice to their call with the following requests:

Direct Districts To Set Interim Goals Putting All Student Groups On A Path To Success

The proposed plan gives school districts the flexibility to set their own interim goals to work towards meeting state targets within seven years. While local flexibility falls squarely in line with GO’s values, we are concerned that the districts in which we work require more direction from the state to set ambitious annual targets, especially for the student groups that are furthest behind. For instance, Oakland USD has an annual LCAP goal of a 2 percent increase in the graduation rate.¹ If this goal were met each year, it would take English Learners 14 years to meet state goals. More dramatically, Fresno USD set an annual target of reducing their suspension rate by only 0.3 percent; at that rate of improvement, their African-American students – who have a suspension rate of 15.4 percent – would not meet the state’s goal until 2061.² We ask that the state direct districts to set interim goals that would have all student groups meet state goals within seven years; not doing so will all but ensure that our students most in need will continue to be left behind.

Clarify What Disproportionate Access To “Ineffective, Out-of-field, And Inexperienced Teachers” Means And The Steps That The State Will Take To Resolve That Disproportionality

In Oakland USD’s 2017 LCAP Update, they cite the troubling statistic that only 52.8% of teachers remain at their schools for three years or more.³ In West Contra Costa, only 48% of new teachers stay into their fourth year of teaching.⁴ These numbers suggest teacher turnover crises, which almost certainly lead to higher rates of “ineffective, out-of-field, and inexperienced teachers” in the districts where we work. This plan not only fails to specifically define what it means for low-income and minority students – like those in our districts – to have disproportionate access to such teachers, but also fails to meaningfully articulate how the state will intervene to remedy such disproportionality. We ask that the state provide a more detailed explanation of how they plan to define and monitor “disproportionate access to ineffective,

¹ Oakland Unified School District 2017 LCAP Update, page 20.

² Fresno Unified School District 2017-18 LCAP, page 190.

³ Oakland Unified School District 2017 LCAP Update, page 11.

⁴ West Contra Costa Unified School District 2017-18 LCAP, page 24.

out-of-field, and inexperienced teachers”, and to detail the types of support they will provide to districts that do not have equitable access.

Include An Academic Performance Measure At The High School Level, Separate From The College/Career Indicator

We appreciate the need for a high school indicator that contains multiple measures of students’ abilities to succeed in college and career. But across the three districts where we work (Oakland USD, West Contra Costa USD, Fresno USD), only 16 percent of 11th graders are meeting or exceeding standards in mathematics. In addition to being a specific requirement of ESSA, this sort of stark underperformance deserves attention on its own. We request that 11th-grade English language arts and math SBAC results are made a stand-alone measure for high school academic achievement.

Our networks of families, educators, and allies across the state of California thank you for the opportunity to comment on these critical issues. We look forward to the Board’s conversations on these topics, as well as its discussion of the state’s system of supports, and hope to see the California State Board of Education take substantive action to ensure more equitable outcomes for our most historically underserved students.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Klein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Jonathan Klein
Chief Executive Officer
GO Public Schools

cc: Karen Stapf Walters, Executive Director, California State Board of Education
Judy Cias, Chief Counsel, California State Board of Education