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Consortium of Nine California Districts Resubmits Plan to Replace NCLB Rules with Locally-Driven School Quality Improvement System

SACRAMENTO – The [California Office to Reform Education](#) (CORE) today resubmitted the [School Quality Improvement System](#) to the [U.S. Department of Education \(US ED\)](#) as a waiver from No Child Left Behind accountability rules. The School Quality Improvement Index is a holistic and locally-driven approach to school improvement aimed at preparing all students for college and careers, underpinned by a moral imperative to help all students improve while closing achievement gaps at the same time.

“The School Quality Improvement System radically reorients our work so that student success in multiple dimensions is at the center of every decision we make and every action we take,” said Michael Hanson, Superintendent of Fresno Unified School District and president of the CORE Board of Directors. “Districts committed to participating in our system are driven by a commitment to collaborate and hold themselves and each other accountable for preparing all students for successful futures.”

The School Quality Improvement System is grounded in the concept of moral imperative highlighted in research conducted by [Michal Fullan’s](#) described in “[Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform](#).” The School Quality Improvement System also incorporates recommendations regarding systemic support for teacher effectiveness from the [Greatness by Design](#) report produced by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson.

The School Quality Improvement System is built upon four foundational goals that align to, and extend beyond the three principles of the federal waiver guidelines:

- College and career ready expectations for all students.
- A focus on collective responsibility, accountability, and action that emphasizes capacity-building over accountability.
- The development of intrinsic motivation for change through differentiated recognition, accountability, and support for schools.
- Focused capacity-building for effective instruction and leadership.

Districts participating in the School Quality Improvement System commit to fully implement the Common Core State Standards by the 2013-14 school year and transition to Common Core-aligned assessments by the 2014-15 school year.

“The Common Core State Standards will revolutionize how teachers teach and how students learn in ways that much better prepare young people for meaningful careers and participatory citizenship in the 21st Century,” said Richard A. Carranza, Superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District. “Putting the Common Core into practice will demand creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration by both teachers and students. The collaboration and mutual accountability fostered through the School Quality Improvement System will ensure that all students benefit from the Common Core. As significantly, research has found that a limited focus on academic success does not indicate how prepared students are for college and career. Our schools and communities must be accountable for improvement on many important factors of student success.”

In addition to holding schools accountable for improving student scores on Common Core-aligned assessments, the School Quality Improvement System will measure multiple aspects of student success across academic, social-emotional, and school culture and climate domains that research has found to be significant indicators of college and career readiness, such as the elimination of disproportionality in school discipline, chronic absenteeism, and non-cognitive factors such as grit or resilience. School culture and climate will also be measured. Districts participating in the School Quality Improvement Plan will collect and share data on these indicators far beyond that necessary for federal accountability purposes so that they can learn from each other about what is working, and how to correct course when students or schools are falling behind.

The additional data elements will be shared among all participating districts so that they can hold themselves and each other accountable for closing achievement gaps at the same time that overall student performance improves.

The accountability calculation at the heart of the School Quality Improvement System is the School Quality Improvement Index. In today’s resubmission, CORE dropped the minimum number of students necessary to be a recognized subgroup in the School Quality Improvement Index to 20, as compared to 100 under California’s current state and federal accountability calculation.

“This change was not requested or required by the U.S. Department of Education, but we are absolutely committed to shining a bright light on achievement and support for our traditionally underserved students at every school,” said Dr. John Deasy, Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified School District. “We cannot provide a successful future for our students if we are not

open and honest about how we are doing at eliminating achievement gaps and disproportionality in all its forms at the same time we are improving overall student achievement.”

With the change in subgroup inclusion size to 20, across the current nine participating districts, schools will be accountable for reporting progress on nearly 200,000 additional students, of whom a large percentage are African American, Latino, English Learning, or are students with disabilities.

With an ethos of shared focus on improvement rather than sanctions, the School Quality Improvement System requires that schools that are falling short in any of the domains for college and career readiness will be paired with schools that are having success with similar students so that effective practices can be shared through a culture of support and collaboration.

The districts will also use the shared data system to strengthen teaching and learning in their individual community contexts’ and will agree on elements that will be common among educator effectiveness and evaluation systems that each district will develop individually during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 years and implement by the 2015-16 school year.

Nine school districts that are part of the CORE consortium have applied to participate in the School Quality Improvement System through a bundled waiver request. The participating districts are Clovis, Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Sanger, and Santa Ana Unified School Districts. Together, these CORE districts serve more than a million students.

US ED accepted an earlier version of the School Quality Improvement System, previously known as the CORE Waiver, for Peer Review in March of this year. The Peer Review and response process is iterative. The revised plan – the School Quality Improvement System – addresses comments and questions from US ED and peer reviewers, and provide additional details about how districts can participate in the School Quality Improvement System.

The participating districts are working iteratively with the US Ed with a goal of getting federal approval to use the School Quality Improvement System for federal accountability purposes starting with the 2013-14 school year. Once final federal approval is granted, other school districts and charter schools in California will be eligible to participate in the School Quality Improvement System.

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