

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JOINT REQUEST FOR WAIVERS UNDER ESEA SECTION 9401 FROM EIGHT DISTRICTS PARTICIPATING IN THE CALIFORNIA OFFICE TO REFORM EDUCATION (CORE)

Eight districts in California that are participating in the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) submitted, in collaboration with each other, a joint request for flexibility with respect to certain requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), in exchange for committing to improve academic achievement and the quality of instruction for all elementary and secondary school students. The joint request for waivers includes: Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento City, San Francisco, Santa Ana, and Sanger Unified School Districts. These districts serve more than one million students and represent 17 percent of California's students. Although the CORE districts applied jointly, the waivers are granted to each individual district.

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

California adopted rigorous English language arts and mathematics standards now in place in 45 States and the District of Columbia. Since California adopted the standards in 2010, these districts have shared plans for implementation and systems to improve instruction and promote continuous learning and are developing performance task modules to support implementation of the college- and career-ready standards in mathematics and English language arts. The districts developed rigorous transition plans, supplemented by supports from CORE, and are fully implementing the college- and career-ready standards in the 2013–2014 school year for all students. The districts will ensure classroom instruction and professional development is aligned to college- and career-ready standards, participate in CORE-wide aligned professional development for teachers of English Learners, students with disabilities, and low-achieving students, and conduct an annual district-level peer review of the implementation of the standards. The districts will also work to ensure that the new California English language proficiency standards are integrated with the college- and career-ready standards, and have committed to transition away from the use of alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards for students with disabilities.

Each of the districts has an individual plan tied to implementation of the college- and career-ready standards. For example, Fresno Unified School District will use demonstration classrooms so that teachers can share and learn from one another as they align instruction to the college- and career-ready standards. Additionally, they will have site-based learning communities that meet weekly to focus on specific learning objectives and formative assessments tied to the new standards. Long Beach Unified School District will coordinate professional development so that teachers and administrators receive parallel training on the same topics, and site administrators receive district-developed tools, such as observation and conversation protocols, to assist their work as instructional leaders in the transition to California's college- and career-ready (CCR) standards. Los Angeles Unified School District created four modules on the new college- and career-ready standards that are available online and can be used by site leaders.

California is a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium under the Race to the Top Assessment program, and all districts are committed to piloting these assessments during the 2013–2014 school year.

INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL STUDENTS

New Differentiated Accountability Model: The districts have developed a consortium-wide accountability framework, the School Quality Improvement System, which emphasizes academic achievement, growth, and graduation rate, while also including social-emotional factors and school culture and climate. While CORE and the districts will use the 2013–2014 school year to refine the elements and weightings of these factors within the index, they will include achievement, growth, and graduation rate for all students and all disaggregated subgroups; chronic absenteeism; suspension/expulsion rates; non-cognitive skills; student, staff, and parent survey data; special education identification rates; and English Learner re-designation rates.

The districts will also continue to identify schools that do not meet California’s current performance targets for achievement and graduation rate for disaggregated subgroups, and will ensure that schools use this information to target interventions and supports to low-achieving students.

Consortium-wide School Partnership Model: To share best practices throughout the consortium, high-performing and high-progress Title I schools (Reward schools) will partner with the lowest-achieving Title I schools (Priority schools) and Title I schools with the largest achievement gaps (Focus schools) to coach and share successful intervention practices. CORE will organize and facilitate a “Reward School Symposium” to train coaching teams to effectively serve as peer reviewers, coaches, and reform partners with Priority and Focus schools. CORE will also host a “Partnership Building Convening” to facilitate the first opportunity for paired schools to learn together, develop common expectations, and begin the peer review and collaboration work as partners. Although the initial intention is for partnerships between Reward and Priority schools, the districts will use this model to provide escalated supports to Focus schools and other Title I schools should they be needed in future years. This partnership model is built on the successful collaboration between Fresno Unified School District and Long Beach Unified School District, as well as international work in Ontario, Canada; Shanghai, China; and the United Kingdom.

Renewed Focus on Closing Achievement Gaps: CORE will identify the schools in the CORE consortium with the largest achievement gaps as Focus schools. The districts and the identified Focus schools will design interventions in those schools to improve student performance and close achievement gaps.

Focus school interventions will be based on a Response to Intervention model, applied by individual school needs. When designated, Focus schools will receive a data report highlighting the reason for Focus identification, subgroup-specific indicators, and data on school and subgroup performance against State performance targets. Focus schools will use this data to create a two-year plan that must be approved by the district superintendent. Starting in fall 2013, and each fall after, each Focus school joins a community of practice that convenes at least quarterly to strategize about improving performance in the area(s) that led to the identification as a Focus school. With the support of its community of practice, each Focus school engages in a continuous process of applying intervention strategies and studying their effectiveness through an ongoing feedback loop.

The districts will escalate intervention strategies in Focus schools if they do not show improvement. If a school does not exit Focus school status within two years, it is required to partner with a Reward school that has demonstrated success in raising the achievement of the subgroup that led to the school's identification. If a school does not exit Focus status after four years, the school will be subject to district-managed turnaround.

To capture more students in the accountability system, the districts have lowered the minimum number of students necessary for individual subgroup performance to be considered from 100 students to 20 students. Because of this change, these districts will be accountable for the performance of approximately 23,000 additional African-American students, 15,000 additional Hispanic students, 20,000 additional English Learners, 10,000 additional low-income students, and 46,000 additional students with disabilities.

Aggressive Plan for Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools: The districts will identify the lowest-performing schools in the consortium as Priority schools and ensure that specific strategies aligned to the turnaround principles are implemented in each of these schools. In the first year that a school is identified as a Priority school, the school will be assessed using a peer evaluation and support process, which will review the performance of the school leadership and provide an analysis of the school's strengths and areas for improvement to guide the Priority school in implementing interventions aligned with all of the turnaround principles. If a school does not exit Priority school status within four years, the district will take more aggressive actions.

Building Capacity for School Improvement: CORE will provide low-achieving Title I schools with access to professional development and technical assistance from the CORE collaborative, which is specifically tailored to engage teachers of students with disabilities, English Learners, and low-achieving students. Should these schools fail to improve, they will receive escalating supports including joining communities of practice focused on their areas of need and partnering with Reward schools for additional support. The districts will use Title I funds previously reserved for supplemental educational services and choice-related transportation to support interventions in Priority and Focus schools and other low-performing Title I schools, including support for partnering teams, communities of practice, and expanded learning time.

Increased Accountability and Support for Districts: The districts will participate in an annual district-level peer review, which will include progress in implementing California's CCR standards and the School Quality Improvement System, as well as work to develop and implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems. All districts will establish local implementation plans and protocols for use in consultation with school-level advisory councils. The districts will conduct peer reviews of these plans based on commonly developed rubrics, and districts that do not meet expectations will be required to revise and resubmit their plans. Additionally, an Oversight Panel comprised of external stakeholder representatives will meet at least twice a year to review district performance and to determine if additional implementation supports or interventions are needed.

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

The districts will develop consortium-wide guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems in August 2013 and all districts will adopt these guidelines by December 1, 2013.

Between August 2013 and the time of final adoption, the districts will consult with key stakeholders on the guidelines, including teachers and their representatives. These guidelines will ensure that the systems are used for continual improvement of instruction; differentiate performance using at least four performance levels; are based on multiple measures, including student growth as a significant factor and measures of professional practice; evaluate teachers and principals on a regular basis; provide clear, timely, and useful feedback to guide professional development; and are used to inform personnel decisions. The districts will pilot teacher and principal evaluation and systems in the 2014–2015 school year and implement these systems in the 2015–2016 school year, including publicly reporting data on the distribution of teachers and principals by performance level. CORE will also develop a rubric that the districts will use to peer review the development and implementation of teacher and principal evaluation and support systems.