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Contact: Hilary McLean
916-441-2917 / 916-203-7274
Hilary@capimactllc.com

Eight California Districts Win Federal Approval to Replace NCLB Rules with Locally-Driven School Quality Improvement System

SACRAMENTO – Eight* districts in the [California Office to Reform Education](#) (CORE) have been granted a waiver from the [U.S. Department of Education \(US ED\)](#) to implement the [School Quality Improvement System](#) in place of No Child Left Behind accountability rules.

“We deeply appreciate Secretary Duncan and the Obama administration for reviewing and ultimately approving our districts’ plan to improve teaching and learning through collaboration and capacity building,” said Michael Hanson, Superintendent of Fresno Unified School District and president of the CORE Board of Directors. “The School Quality Improvement System will reorient our work around student success in multiple dimensions so we can prepare all students for college, career, and life. We thank the U.S. Department of Education for its rigorous review process, which strengthened and improved this plan.”

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 is not an escape from accountability; it is empowerment to build capacity at each of our districts,” said Richard Carranza, Superintendent of San Francisco School District. “The School Quality Improvement System is closely aligned with the groundbreaking Local Control Funding Formula. This federal flexibility, combined with the new state funding system, empowers our districts to better support underserved student subgroups, close achievement gaps, and prepare all students for college and career.”

The School Quality Improvement System is grounded in the concept of moral imperative highlighted in research conducted by [Michal Fullan](#) described in “[Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform](#).” The School Quality Improvement System also incorporates recommendations from [Greatness by Design](#), a comprehensive report on supporting outstanding teaching produced by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson’s Task Force on Educator Excellence.

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 in the 2013-14 school year and transition to Common Core-aligned assessments by the 2014-15 school year.

“The School Quality Improvement System will accelerate our districts’ transition to the Common Core State Standards, providing powerful new learning experiences for our students.” said Jonathan Raymond, Superintendent of the Sacramento Unified School District. “We will continue to collaborate and share learning on effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards, while holding each other accountable for student success on the standards. We will also work together to foster students’ social and emotional growth and make sure that schools have a climate and culture that supports high achievement for all kids.”

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. Indicators will include student progress on Common Core-aligned assessments and factors 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.

“Our collective commitment to equity has never been stronger,” said John Deasy Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District. “The School Quality Improvement System will shine a bright light on achievement gaps and disproportionality. We will work together and hold ourselves accountable for increasing achievement for all students while

eliminating disparity. We must do this to ensure a bright future for California and our communities.”

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

With the change in subgroup inclusion size to 20, across the current eight participating districts, schools will be accountable for reporting progress on nearly 153,000 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 and capacity building, 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. Each district will also be responsible for developing a teacher and principal evaluation system that is appropriate for their local community, but will be based on common indicators that exemplify effectiveness, and include student growth as a significant factor. Districts will determine the elements that will be common among educator effectiveness and evaluation systems during the 2013-14 school year, and each district will implement their locally developed system in the 2014-15 school year.

“Sanger believes that every student deserves an effective teacher, caring environment and culture that fosters positive relationships for students and teachers, which is why providing appropriate support and engaging in collaborative conversations with our teachers about how we get better as an organization is the overriding purpose for us to engage in conversations around the School Quality Improvement System,” said Matthew Navo, Superintendent of the Sanger Unified School District.

The School Quality Improvement System includes multiple levels of accountability, starting with transparency in student and school achievement data. Participating districts will also conduct self-evaluations, and will evaluate each other on how well they are meeting the commitments in the School Quality Improvement System. Finally, there will be an ultimate level of oversight provided by a cross-section of stakeholders from the California education community, which will provide an unbiased external compliance review of each district’s progress. Panel members will represent the civil rights, English learner, and students with disabilities communities, ACSA,

CSBA, CCSEA, CTA, PTA, the Education Trust, the California Department of Education, and the California State Board of Education, as well as a member appointed by the governor.

The Oversight Panel will meet biannually to receive participating districts' self-evaluation reports with peer reviewer comments and recommendations regarding implementation progress and status.

* While all ten CORE districts contributed to the development of the School Quality Improvement System, eight school districts that are part of the CORE consortium applied to participate in the School Quality Improvement System through a bundled waiver request. The eight participating districts are 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.

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