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CALIFORNIA OFFICE TO REFORM EDUCATION

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CORE Districts Submit Federal Waiver Extension Request; Premiere Video on School Quality Improvement System

SACRAMENTO – Seven districts that participate in the [California Office to Reform Education \(CORE\)](#) announced today the submission of a joint request to the U.S. Department of Education to extend a waiver of federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) rules and approval of the [School Quality Improvement System for federal school accountability purposes](#) beyond the 2014-15 school year. CORE is a collaborative partnership of ten school districts working together to improve student learning and close achievement gaps. The U.S. Department of Education granted the original one-year waiver to eight* CORE districts last August. The seven districts requesting extension of the waiver are: Fresno Unified, Long Beach Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, San Francisco Unified, Sanger Unified, and Santa Ana Unified.

The School Quality Improvement System is a comprehensive and locally-driven approach to school improvement. CORE today premiered a [new video](#) to build understanding about the School Quality Improvement System's holistic approach that prepares students for college and career through a focus on academic achievement for all students, building students' social-emotional skills, and ensuring a positive culture and climate at all schools. School improvement strategies outlined in the School Quality Improvement System include collaborative learning between schools, peer-to-peer coaching, effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and supporting effective instruction.

"Implementing the School Quality Improvement System is helping us build capacity within our schools so that all students get a great education," said Michael Hanson, Superintendent of the Fresno Unified School District and President of the CORE Board of Directors. "We have learned a tremendous amount this year, which we've used to further develop and refine the School Quality Improvement System to make it even more meaningful and useful for our educators and students."

Since the School Quality Improvement System was approved, the CORE districts have worked together on developing Common Core-aligned instructional resources and providing professional development for teachers and school administrators. The districts participated in a symposium to support English language learners, and shared instructional plans and curricular materials.

Under the School Quality Improvement System, the consequence for falling short on goals is not punitive sanctioning for schools. Instead, support and technical assistance is provided by partner teachers and school leaders that are seeing success with similar students measured by the School Quality Improvement System's accountability metrics. This is a tremendous shift away from a compliance-based accountability system to one driven by shared responsibility and support building from educator to educator, from school to school, and from district to district.



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Schools from participating districts that have struggled with student achievement have been paired with partner schools that have had success in improving outcomes for similar students, and launched their work together at the first school pairing institute held earlier this year.

“Teachers and school leaders appreciated the opportunity to pair up with a similar school to share best practices and learn from each other,” said Matthew Navo, Superintendent of Sanger Unified School District. “It is exciting to see the impact on student achievement that is derived from this collaborative approach to school improvement.”

The CORE districts also worked collaboratively to develop an [Educator Evaluation Systems handbook](#) articulating guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation systems, and to provide guidance to teachers, administrators and school leaders. Each participating district will individually design and implement an evaluation system based on principles and indicators described in the handbook, consistent with their local context and bargaining agreements.

“Our teachers and principals are committed to continuous learning and professional growth,” said Chris Steinhauser, Superintendent of Long Beach Unified School District. “The School Quality Improvement System’s professional evaluations will be based on multiple measures chosen at the local level to determine how an educator is doing, and most importantly, what we can do to help them improve.”

Teachers and staff from the CORE districts also worked together throughout the past nine months to provide specificity and refinements to the accountability model, resulting in several amendments to the School Quality Improvement System. One change proposed in the resubmission is a shift in the timeline for full implementation of the Educator Effectiveness Evaluation System from the 2015-16 school year to 2016-17. The educator evaluation system will now be piloted in the 2015-16 school year.

Other technical changes included in the resubmission of the School Quality Improvement System are detailed below.

* 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 in 2013. The eight districts that applied for and received an NCLB waiver in August 2013 are Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco, Sanger, and Santa Ana Unified School Districts. Sacramento City Unified School District did not join the joint waiver extension request, but the district remains a participant in the CORE consortium.

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Summary of Amendments to the School Quality Improvement System

Principle 1: College- and career-ready expectations for all students

There were no necessary amendments to Principle 1 of the School Quality Improvement System, as all CORE districts made tremendous progress and completed what they had committed to do. During this first year of implementation, all CORE districts aligned professional development, instructional plans, and curricular materials to the Common Core State Standards. They also incorporated assessment protocols into instruction. Additionally, all CORE districts participated in Common Core-aligned exams in all tested subjects and grades.

Principle 2: Differentiated recognition, accountability, and supports

There were several amendments to Principle 2, as many of the specific details of the School Quality Improvement Index were expected to be further developed during this first year of the School Quality Improvement System. In addition, because of Assembly Bill 484, there was no new academic performance information for the 2013-14 school year. The 2014-15 school year will be a learning year with the first release of Common Core-aligned exam results. Thus, 2015-16 will be the first year with comprehensive School Quality Improvement Index data. Specific amendments to Principle 2 included:

- Amendments to guiding principles:
 - Limited stakes the first time a metric is introduced: Depending on the metric, some or all districts will be introducing a new measure to educators and other stakeholders. To maximize the ability of school stakeholders to understand and respond to these data, the first time an indicator is introduced, it should have limited stakes in terms of impacts on accountability.
 - Where feasible, historic data provided for up to three years by November for the year in which a metric “counts” for the first time: To the extent historic data is available, educators and other stakeholders will be provided with three years of baseline data by November of the year in which a metric will count for the first time on the School Quality Improvement Index.
 - Clear, transparent decision-making processes for metric thresholds/targets: A School Quality Improvement Index Committee consisting of one official designee from each CORE district participating in the waiver will be formally empaneled in June 2014. The Committee will be responsible for making recommendations to the CORE Board regarding adjustments to any of the metrics, performance thresholds for translating performance on any particular metric into School Quality Improvement Index points, refinements to metric weights, refinements to designation criteria, and refinements to exit criteria. Committee members will be responsible for engaging stakeholders in their districts on these items, and bringing that input to the committee. Recommendations from the School Quality Improvement Index Committee will be posted on the CORE website with opportunities for public comment at least two weeks in advance of the CORE Board meeting at which they will be discussed.
- Timing of the rollout of certain School Quality Improvement Index elements was pushed back one year due to the availability of academic performance information. Specific date changes included:



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- School Quality Improvement Index will be counted in AMOs, designations, and exit criteria starting in summer 2015.
- Reward, Priority, and Focus designations will be based on the School Quality Improvement Index beginning in summer 2015, utilizing methods from 2013 to update designations in 2014 (adjusting the three years of data used to 2011-2013).
- Priority and Focus school lists will be updated in summer 2016.
- Definition of interim AMO changes to the bottom 30 percent of the School Quality Improvement Index starting in summer 2015, utilizing the bottom 30 percent in API for summer 2014.
- The baseline for measuring School Quality Improvement Index growth in terms of 2 points in 2 years and 4 points in 4 years will begin in summer 2016, such that we will look at 2 point growth for the first time in summer 2018.
- The social-emotional and culture-climate domains are merged, although the weighting of the domains and the metrics that are included remain the same. This was done to facilitate communications and avoid confusion over why certain metrics were in certain domains.
- A few measures will be rolled out one year later than originally anticipated. This will allow for a full pilot, further refinement of the measures, and additional community engagement around the measures. These measures are:
 - Persistence: Rolled out in fall 2015
 - Student, staff, and parent school culture and climate surveys: Rolled out in fall 2016
 - Social-emotional skills (the name was changed from ‘noncognitive skills’): Rolled out in fall 2016
- Waiver amendments for Reward, Priority, Focus, and other support schools reflect what we learned during our first year of designations and school pairings. Amendments included:
 - If there are an insufficient number of appropriate Reward schools, schools are allowed to pair with an “other high performing” or “other high progress” school as long as such schools are a good match and are meeting their current AMO.
 - Rather than Reward schools being required to pair if asked, Reward schools “may be required to participate in the school pairing program. This gives districts greater discretion in determining which schools are appropriate for the program.
 - High progress SIG schools are allowed to be collaborative partners with Priority schools.
 - If a school's SIG plan already includes partnering with an education management organization or similar organization, then that school has the option of partnering within their EMO, provided that their EMO includes peer learning with other schools into the intervention approach.
 - The amount of contact between pairs includes monthly contact that may be in person or virtual by both the school teams and the principals.
 - If Focus schools participate in the school pairing program, it will be in lieu of their participation in Communities of Practice.
 - Eliminating the requirement to hold a coaching convening for Reward schools in addition to the pairing convening.
 - As one of their first activities, Priority and Focus school teams will conduct a needs assessment or utilize a recently completed needs assessment. The process may be similar to a School Quality Review or may utilize the needs assessment tools that a



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District is already implementing. Priority schools will share their needs assessment with their partner school. Focus schools will share relevant portions of their needs assessment within their Community of Practice or with their partner schools.

- Reward school partners may be asked to participate in peer reviews, but the role of evaluating schools (e.g., in terms of monitoring the implementation of school improvement plans) will be the responsibility of the school district.
- The language relating to implementation of the seven Turnaround Principles and mandatory interventions was clarified to ensure that such interventions will be implemented in alignment with collective bargaining agreements, to allow that the implementation of a particular intervention may be in one or more years of the three-year plan, and to allow that priority schools may hire an instructional school or utilize an external coach.
- Schools' problem(s) of practice for their Communities of Practice will derive from their needs assessment, which will include a deeper analysis of several data points (quantitative and qualitative).
- The Communities of Practice may be organized based upon a variety of factors, including but not limited to the reason a school was identified as Focus, similarity in problems of practice, similarity in the interventions being used to address problem(s) of practice, geography, and/or similarities in school population.
- Every year there will be at least one inter-district Community of Practice focusing on one topic (e.g., helping special education students access the core curriculum in secondary schools), where select schools and districts will participate. This inter-district Community of Practice will take place virtually and/or in person.
- Starting with the identification of schools for Communities of Practice that are neither Priority nor Focus for implementation in 2014-15, schools will need to have missed their AMO for two consecutive years to be required to join a Community of Practice. These schools will be referred to as "other support schools."
- Schools that test less than 90% of eligible students in the all students group or any individual subgroup will automatically be considered as a school that did not meet its AMOs (as opposed to being automatically a focus school).
- Recognition of Reward schools may or may not include media coverage.
- "Newcomer" programs are added to the list of schools excluded from Priority and Focus analyses and lists.
- CORE is committed to supporting Reward schools, with no specific commitment to having a Community of Practice for Reward schools.

Principle 3: Effective instruction and leadership

There were a small number of amendments to Principle 3 related to teacher and leader evaluation systems. These included:

- An adjusted approach to educator effectiveness categories: Ratings that meaningfully differentiate among levels of teaching effectiveness preferably employ four, but must include no fewer than three, categories.



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- Educator evaluation system timeline revision: This timeline reflects the on-going cycle of design, feedback and refinement of the system, which started in 2012-13 and continues through 2016-2017.
 - 2013-17: Participating school districts design, pilot and implement new evaluation systems for teachers and leaders while annually undergoing a rigorous peer review process to ensure quality.
 - 2014-2015: Participating school districts pilot the Professional Practice elements of evaluation designs while developing the Impact on Student Learning elements.
 - 2015-2016: Participating school districts scale up to full implementation of the Professional Practice elements of their designs while piloting the Impact on Student Learning elements.
 - 2016-2017: Participating school districts scale up to full implementation of both the Professional Practice and Impact on Student Learning elements of evaluation systems.