



July 28, 2016

To: Karen Stapf Walters and David Sapp, California State Board of Education

Fr: Rick Miller, CORE Districts

Re: CORE Districts Pilot to Support Continuous Improvement and School Accountability

We appreciate the opportunity to meet last week and discuss the benefits of the CORE districts' proposed research pilot to support California's evolving accountability system. As we discussed, the CORE districts have local accountability systems in place that are more robust than those included in the initial state system now under development. To support one coherent state and federal school accountability system, we are proposing that CORE districts serve as a research pilot in California's new accountability system.

CORE districts locally developed indicators can support and augment several aspects of California's evolving accountability system and California's Every Student Succeeding Act (ESSA) state plan. The pilot would ensure use of the state indicators as a baseline and then CORE districts' shared local indicators for further delineation. Information from CORE districts about growth in student performance over time, high school readiness of 8th graders, measures of students' social and emotional skills, as well as a school's overall culture-climate will be useful in assessing these locally developed indicators and informing short and long-term local, state and federal policy decisions.

Currently, research pilots are used successfully by many school districts including Long Beach Unified, one of the nine CORE districts. Long Beach grants flexibility to local schools as research pilots for new instructional practices and resource allocations that can help improve student outcomes. As a research pilot for the state, the CORE districts will work closely with local schools and local educators to ensure the alignment and integration of school site improvement plans with district local accountability plans and the state's new accountability system.

The CORE districts are supported by a shared data system that is aligned with new state and federal accountability laws and the educational priorities set by the governor and Legislature. The locally generated data in the CORE districts' system is not collected by or available through the state's current data system.

Data evaluation for CORE districts is conducted by the independent, non-partisan research center Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). Usable information is

provided back to schools and classrooms to help improve teaching and learning and to work within and across local districts to innovate, implement and scale strategies that improve student outcomes. Local districts share data generated the CORE system with parents and other stakeholders to inform the strategic allocation of resources locally and to develop and implement local accountability plans.

Local indicators matter for both instruction and accountability. PACE research shows that local indicators greatly influence which schools are identified in the bottom five percent. Within the construct of California's new accountability system and adopted state indicators, CORE districts' research pilot will allow policymakers in California and nationally to test local indicators for accountability purposes. As a research pilot, we would ensure our data system aligns with the approved state indicators. Then for coherence, we would like to explore with the California State Board of Education and California Department of Education how CORE districts' can help support required state reporting and identifying the bottom five percent. As a research pilot, CORE districts also could support the state's efforts to align the ESSA state plan and State Systemic Improvement Plan to better support students with disabilities as well as assist in the state efforts to fairly integrate alternative schools within the state's new accountability system.

We look forward to our continued conversations about how the CORE districts can serve as a research pilot for state and federal purposes in California's new school accountability system. We are available to share data and resources with the staff of the board and the California Department of Education as needed to determine next steps in this proposed research pilot.

Cc: Michael Kirst, California State Board of Education president

Mike Hanson, CORE Districts president and Fresno USD superintendent



Quick Overview of the CORE Districts' Proposed Research Pilot

To support one coherent state and federal school accountability system, the CORE Districts (Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco and Santa Ana Unified) are [proposing to serve as research pilot](#). Within the construct of California's new accountability system and adopted state indicators, CORE Districts' research pilot will allow policymakers in California and nationally to test local indicators for accountability purposes.

The CORE Districts have local accountability systems in place that are more robust than those included in the initial state system now under development. CORE Districts' locally developed indicators can support and augment several aspects of California's evolving accountability system and California's Every Student Succeeding Act (ESSA) state plan. Information from CORE Districts about growth in student performance over time, high school readiness of 8th graders, measures of students' social and emotional skills, as well as a school's overall culture-climate will be useful in assessing these locally developed indicators and informing short and long-term local, state and federal policy decisions.

Currently, research pilots are used successfully by many school districts including Long Beach Unified, one of the CORE districts. Long Beach grants flexibility to local schools as research pilots for new instructional practices and resource allocations that can help improve student outcomes. Under the new Every Student Succeeds Act, [states have waiver authority](#) to use innovative practices underway in local districts to help design new state accountability systems. The waiver provision (ESSA sec. 8013) allows districts to request of the state and then the state to request of the Department of Education the waiver.

The CORE Districts are supported by a shared data system that is aligned with new state and federal accountability laws and the educational priorities set by the governor and Legislature. The locally generated data in the CORE Districts' system is not collected by or available through the state's current data system. Data evaluation for CORE Districts is conducted by the independent, non-partisan research center Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE). Usable information is provided back to schools and classrooms to help improve teaching and learning and to work within and across local districts to innovate, implement and scale strategies that improve student outcomes. Local districts share data generated in the CORE system with parents and other stakeholders to inform the strategic allocation of resources locally and to develop and implement local accountability plans.

Local indicators matter for both instruction and accountability. [CORE-PACE research](#) shows that local indicators greatly influence which schools are identified in the bottom five percent. As a research pilot, the CORE Districts would ensure its data system aligns with the approved state indicators. Then for coherence, the CORE Districts would explore with the California State Board of Education and California Department of Education how to help support required state reporting and identifying the bottom five percent of schools for support and intervention. The CORE Districts will continue to share data and resources to help determine next steps in this proposed research pilot.



Commonly Asked Questions and Answers about the CORE Districts Proposed Research Pilot

Q: Why are the CORE Districts proposing to serve as a research pilot?

A: The CORE Districts (Fresno, Garden Grove, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Francisco and Santa Ana Unified) are uniquely positioned to support evolving accountability efforts and share lessons learned. California, like other states, has limited locally-driven data available across multiple measures. The CORE Districts have been working collaboratively for six years on a shared data system that helps them work within and across local districts to innovate, implement and scale strategies that improve student outcomes. Within the construct of California's new accountability system and adopted state indicators, CORE districts' research pilot will allow policymakers in California and nationally to test local indicators for accountability purposes.

Q: Does the law allow for a research pilot? Is it state law or federal law?

A: Under the new Every Student Succeeds Act, states have waiver authority to use innovative practices underway in local districts to help design new state accountability systems. The waiver provision (ESSA sec. 8013) allows districts to request of the state and then the state to request of the Department of Education the waiver. ESSA states that the waiver should be granted as long as the state "provides sufficient information to demonstrate how the waiving of such requirements will advance student academic achievement and provides plans for adequate evaluation to ensure review and continuous improvement."

Q: How would a research pilot operate in California?

A: Currently, research pilots are used successfully by many school districts including Long Beach Unified, one of the nine CORE districts. Long Beach grants flexibility to local schools as research pilots for new instructional practices and resource allocations that can help improve student outcomes. As a research pilot for the state, the CORE districts will work closely with local schools and local educators to ensure the alignment and integration of school site improvement plans with district local accountability plans and the state's new accountability system.

Q: Are the indicators that will be used to measure school progress in California's new accountability the same indicators used in the CORE Districts' current data system?

A: As a research pilot, CORE Districts would ensure its data system aligns with the approved state indicators. Then for coherence, the CORE Districts plan to explore with the California State Board of Education and California Department of Education how to support required state reporting and identifying the bottom five percent of schools for support and intervention purposes.

Q: Where can I learn more about the CORE Districts research pilot proposal?

A: If you would like more information about the CORE Districts' research pilot proposal, please contact Julie White, the CORE District's Director of External Relations at julie@coredistricts.org.