

California Governor Puts the Testing Juggernaut On Ice

By [Anthony Cody](#) on May 18, 2011 9:29 AM

California Governor Jerry Brown has taken a big step towards reducing the testing mania in the nation's most populous state. Up until his administration we have been on an accelerated path towards the comprehensive data-driven system that test publishers and corporate reformers have convinced leaders is needed to improve schools. But in the [May budget outline](#) from Brown's office, he makes it clear he is putting on the brakes.

From the [Thoughts on Public Education blog](#) comes this:

Gov. Jerry Brown is proposing to suspend funding for CALPADS, the state student longitudinal data system, and to stop further planning for CALTIDES, the teacher data base that was to be joined at the hip with CALPADS.

What is even more encouraging is the explanation Brown offers, which shows a great deal of understanding of these issues. The document states:

A number of problems have been identified with California's state testing, data collection and accountability regime. Testing takes huge amounts of time from classroom instruction. Data collection requirements are cumbersome and do not provide timely - and therefore usable - information back to schools. Teachers are forced to curb their own creativity and engagement with students as they focus on teaching to the test. State and federal administrators continue to centralize teaching authority far from the classroom.

The (Brown) Administration proposes to deal with these issues by carefully reforming testing and accountability requirements to achieve genuine accountability and maximum local autonomy. It will engage teachers, scholars, school administrators and parents to develop proposals to

- (1) reduce the amount of time devoted to state testing in schools;
- (2) eliminate data collections that do not provide useful information to school administrators, teachers and parents; and
- (3) restore power to school administrators, teachers and parents.

The goal is to improve the learning environment in every classroom, thereby encouraging the demanding pursuit of excellence. The May Revision proposes to suspend funding for CALPADS in 2011-12 pending this continued review of data collection requirements.

Praise be!

Jerry Brown is unusual among our nation's governors. He got a bit more involved than most in on-the-ground school reform while he was serving as mayor of Oakland. He learned the hard way how schools are a reflection of deeper social issues. In a [statement he wrote](#) to respond to Arne Duncan's Race to the Top a year and a half ago, while he was California's Attorney General, he said:

You assume we know how to "turn around all the struggling low performing schools," when the real answers may lie outside of school. As Oakland mayor, I directly confronted conditions that hindered education, and that were deeply rooted in the social and economic conditions of the community or were embedded in the particular attitudes and situations of the parents. There is insufficient recognition in the draft regulations that inside and outside of school strategies must be interactive and merged.

Even more revealing was what he wrote about federally-driven education "reform":

The basic assumption of your draft regulations appears to be that top down, Washington driven standardization is best. This is a "one size fit all" approach that ignores the vast diversity of our federal system and the creativity inherent in local communities. What we have at stake are the impressionable minds of the children of America. You are not collecting data or devising standards for operating machines or establishing a credit score. You are funding teaching interventions or changes to the learning environment that promise to make public education better, i.e. greater mastery of what it takes to become an effective citizen and a productive member of society. In the draft you have circulated, I sense a pervasive technocratic bias and an uncritical faith in the power of social science.

We all know that Secretary Duncan did not heed Jerry Brown's thoughtful advice, and still has not. But Brown's proposed budget takes on the testing machine from the top, and that is a very hopeful sign.