



**California
High School
Exit Exam**

**Lessons Learned
from
Ten High Schools**

Findings and Recommendations from the California Academic Partnership Program



OCTOBER 2006

The CAHSEE: Lessons from Ten High Schools

“I couldn’t believe that all you had to do was get 55 percent of the math questions right to pass,” said an incredulous sophomore at a large, urban high school in California with high numbers of low-income Hispanic and African American students. This sophomore attends one of ten high schools with grants from the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) aimed both at increasing the number of students who pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and raising overall academic achievement and college readiness.

The reality of the CAHSEE is that it presents a modest set of English-language arts and mathematic standards that all students should be able to meet. But a substantial number of students were denied a diploma at the end of the 2005-06 school year as a consequence of failing one or both parts of the exam. About 9 percent of seniors, approximately 40,000 students, failed one or both parts of the exam, in many cases after taking it several times beginning in tenth grade. For these students, 55 percent correct, or 60 percent with a written essay in the case of the English section, was a significant bar to clear.

This report, *Lessons from Ten High Schools*, highlights what CAPP has learned in supporting and studying the ten schools it provides grants to. The schools all had Academic Performance Index (API) scores in the bottom 50 percent of the state, as calculated by the California Department of Education, when they were selected for funding in the 2000-01 school year. CAPP has provided financial support to these schools during the past five years.

While these schools are making progress on improving their students’ CAHSEE pass rates, the schools are not making progress on raising the number of students eligible for four-year colleges and universities. In large part, the schools are part of a statewide trend to find quick fixes to raise test scores. The schools are not expending nearly enough energy and resources on the larger challenge of how to strengthen the rigor of their curriculum and support struggling students throughout their high school years. Nevertheless, despite these troubling consequences, the CAHSEE is likely having more positive impact on low-performing high schools than any other state initiative in recent years.

The California Academic Partnership Program

CAPP was created by a 1983 statute to help high schools, particularly low-performing schools, prepare more students for college. The California State University system manages CAPP in cooperation with the University of California, the California Community Colleges, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Besides working directly with specific schools, CAPP identifies the characteristics or elements that promote improved achievement and college-going rates in low-performing schools. CAPP’s primary purpose is research-driven: to support practices in schools that improve student learning and to share the knowledge gleaned from schools with other institutions, educators, and decision makers.

The California legislature enacted legislation establishing the CAHSEE in 1999 with the intent of fully implementing the exam in time to apply to the graduating class of 2004. The full implementation date was delayed in 2004 and now applies to students who graduated in 2006 and thereafter. The California Department of Education reports that just under 50 percent of the 40,000 students who failed the CAHSEE would have been denied a diploma in any case since they lacked sufficient credits or other requirements for the diploma. Special education students in 2006 and 2007 are exempt from passing the exam.

What We Know About Good High Schools

From its 22-year history of supporting high schools to improve student academic performance, CAPP has learned to recognize the characteristics of good high schools. This brief list is consistent with various other observations by national research and advocacy groups, including two recent reports from the Education Trust—*Gaining Traction*, *Gaining Ground* and *The Power to Change*.

- **Course content is rigorous, and students are expected to succeed.** School staff believes that all students have the potential to graduate and continue their education beyond high school. All students are urged to take challenging courses. Courses once considered part of a “general” track (e.g., “practical” mathematics instead of algebra) are absent. Struggling students have support to help them succeed.
- **Students are engaged in their learning.** Teaching is not only rigorous, but also relevant to students’ perspectives. Students relate their learning to “real life” through projects, community service, internships, and other activities that require partnerships with the community. While restructuring schools into smaller learning communities can help engage students, ultimately improved instruction makes the real difference.
- **Teachers truly are part of a professional learning community.** They know their subject matter. Professional development opportunities are many and are not just for the motivated few. Teacher turnover each year is minimal, and experienced teachers support new ones. The “burden” and challenge of teaching struggling students is shared. Teachers work collaboratively to develop common curriculum and assessments, refine instructional practices, examine student work, develop interdisciplinary projects, and analyze student data both during the school year and each summer.
- **Order, not chaos, prevails.** Rules for students are reasonable and consistently enforced. Master scheduling of students takes place far enough in advance to make needed changes before a semester begins. Schools have informative, well-organized websites or handbooks that convey necessary information to students, families, and the community. An adequate number of experienced and skilled administrators and support staff handle the many details of running a complex institution and are especially responsive to student and parent requests for help. The schools have a well-equipped, staffed library/media center with computer access and comfortable places for students to work.

Sadly, few California high schools measure up to this picture, and in low-performing high schools, the shortcomings are more pronounced. Of course, part of the problem stems from the circumstances in which these schools exist. For example, they have inadequate financial resources, difficulty in recruiting and hiring qualified teachers and other staff, substantial annual turnover in teachers, large numbers of students transferring in and out of school during the year, and too few academic counselors.

CAPP's objectives for this report are to 1) help policymakers better understand the issues underperforming schools face in preparing students for this high-stakes exam; 2) explain the impact, both intended and unintended, that the CAHSEE is having on these schools; and 3) highlight programs and practices that have greater long-term impact on student learning than the limited goal of passing the CAHSEE.

The report focuses primarily on the content and delivery of instruction and support for students who struggle with the CAHSEE, and not on other specific CAHSEE policy issues, such as accommodations for special education students or alternative routes to diplomas for seniors who do not pass the exam prior to their scheduled graduation. These issues are addressed in several reports prepared for the California Department of Education by the Human Resources Research Organization (HUMRRO). Hopefully, *Lessons from Ten High Schools*, while aimed at policymakers, will also be useful to the thousands of California secondary school educators who work hard to help students pass the exam and improve their academic skills.

CAPP's CAHSEE Grant Program

In 2001, CAPP issued a request for proposal for schools seeking assistance in their efforts to improve pass rates on the CAHSEE. Only schools in the lower 50 percent of California's achievement rankings were eligible for funding under CAPP's CAHSEE grant program. *In high schools with rankings below 50 percent, the CAHSEE has become an important focus for instruction in ninth and tenth grade and a focus for remediation in eleventh and twelfth grade.* In these schools, getting 55 percent or 60 percent of the questions right is a real challenge for many students. For example, in early 2006 some 250 students, nearly 30 percent of the senior class at one CAPP-supported school in the Los Angeles area, had not yet passed the math portion of the CAHSEE, despite several administrations of the test. By contrast, in suburban, high-income districts, it is common that only a handful of students will not pass the CAHSEE.

Table I on the next page provides demographic data about the ten schools that received CAPP grants beginning in 2001. Most have high percentages of students who receive free or reduced-price lunches and high percentages of English learners, Hispanic students, and/or African American students. Three of the schools—Hoopa, Farmersville, and Lower Lake—are in rural areas. The others are in or near urban areas.

While CAPP's CAHSEE grant program provided resources to these schools to gain knowledge to help all schools in the state improve student performance on the CAHSEE, an equally important goal inherent in all CAPP grants is to better prepare more students for success in four-year colleges. The original intent of the CAHSEE grant program was to provide funds for three years, through the 2003-04 school year when seniors would need to pass the CAHSEE to get a diploma. When the State Board of Education decided to delay the test for two years, CAPP continued to support the schools through the 2005-06 school year. Schools recently applied for extended funding through the 2006-07 school year. During the first three years, each school was granted about \$100,000 per year; in the next two years, schools received an additional \$50,000 per year. For 2006-07, schools have received a final grant of up to \$40,000.

Table I
2005-06 CAPP CAHSEE School Data¹

School and District	Enrollment	% English Learners	% Hispanic	% African American	% Free & Reduced-Price Meals ²	Senior CAHSEE pass rate ³
Hoopa Valley High School Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District	216	0.0	3.8	0.8	90.7	98
Farmersville High School Farmersville Unified School District	584	29.3	88.1	0.2	82.2	95
Lower Lake High School Konocti Unified School District	790	7.6	17.3	6.0	83.9	98
Shafter High School Kern Union High School District	1,469	21.7	80.5	0.6	73.2	96
San Lorenzo High School San Lorenzo Unified School District	1,636	12.9	42.0	26.1	34.5	95
Sacramento Charter High School Sacramento City Unified School District	1,318	13.1	27.1	33.3	82.8	96
Calexico High School Calexico Unified School District	2,133	66.2	97.6	0.0	70.0	91
Mar Vista Senior High School Sweetwater Union High School District	2,198	22.9	64.6	4.2	51.0	93
Chula Vista Senior High School Sweetwater Union High School District	2,904	26.8	81.1	5.8	54.8	93
Jordan High School Long Beach Unified School District	4,279	20.3	54.0	28.5	64.7	85
CAPP School Average	1,753	22.1	55.6	10.6	68.8	94
California ⁴	6,312,074	24.9	46.8	8.0	49.7	90.8 ⁵

¹ Numbers in bold italics are higher than statewide.

² Percent eligible

³ Individual school rates as reported by the schools

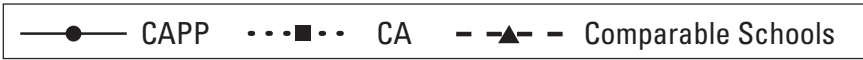
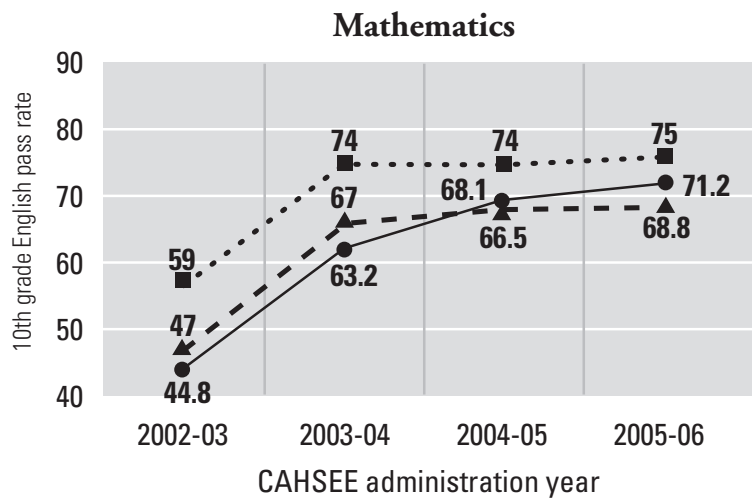
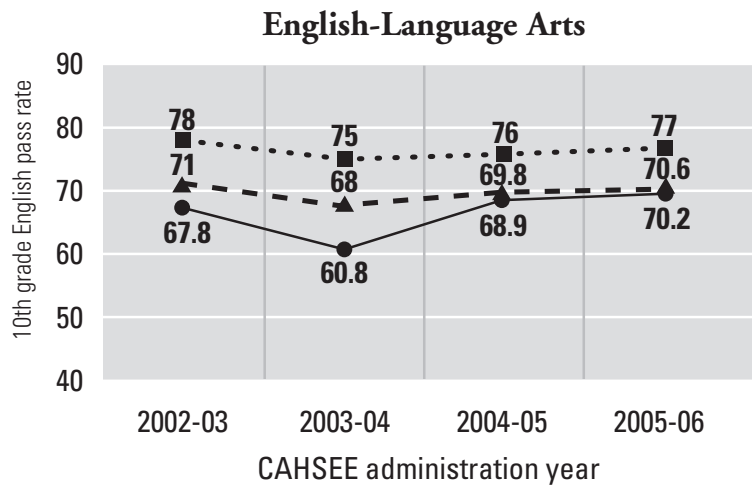
⁴ All grades

⁵ From the California Department of Education News Release, July 21, 2006; proportion of all California seniors who passed the exam by June 30, 2006

Evidence of Success at CAPP-CAHSEE Schools

Some evidence indicates that CAPP-provided resources are having a positive impact on student performance on the CAHSEE. The last column in Table I shows the 2006 senior pass rate for CAHSEE for each of the ten CAPP CAHSEE schools. The pass rate for all but one CAPP CAHSEE school exceeded the statewide average of 90.8 percent. Chart I below graphs the average tenth grade pass rate on the CAHSEE for the ten CAPP-supported high schools and for all high schools statewide from 2002-03 through 2005-06. Five comparable schools are also matched up against each of the ten CAPP schools, and the average of the comparable schools is shown. Improvements in tenth grade pass rates for the CAPP schools exceeded improvements statewide.

Chart I
Tenth Grade CAHSEE Pass Rates:
CAPP CAHSEE Schools, Comparable Schools, and California Statewide



From 2002-03 to 2005-06, CAPP schools improved their math pass rates by 26.4 points while comparable schools improved their rates by 21.8 points, and the statewide average improved 16 points. CAPP schools also improved their English pass rates slightly while similar schools' and the statewide average English pass rates declined slightly.

From looking at the CAPP data, it appears that targeting extra resources to improve CAHSEE pass rates can have a real benefit and that focusing resources on a problem can lead to better results. *But much more than improved CAHSEE scores is needed at the schools CAPP supports.*

Table II on the next page shows additional high school performance measures. It shows higher graduation rates for the CAPP schools than state averages, with the difference in graduation rates between CAPP schools and state averages increasing each year through 2004-05. While the relatively high graduation rates for CAPP schools is encouraging, it is unclear what accounts for this positive gap, and there is debate about the accuracy of graduation rates statewide.

Although not shown in Table II, improvement in the CAPP schools' overall Academic Performance Index between 2001 and 2005 has been positive. One way that the API looks at schools is by dividing them into decile groups. Six of the ten CAPP schools improved their API ranking by moving into the next higher decile group, two stayed in the same decile group, and two moved to the next lower decile group.

However, while CAPP's CAHSEE schools have made progress on the CAHSEE and the API, Table II shows that they have not improved their college-preparatory, A-G course completion rates; the proportion of students taking the SATs; or their performance on the SAT tests—all good measures of whether students will be qualified for admission to four-year colleges. *Perhaps the lesson here is that schools can respond to a narrow reform effort, especially one as easily measured as CAHSEE pass rates. But success in one or two areas does not necessarily lead to reaching other related reform goals, such as better preparing students for success in higher education.*

Table II
Additional High School Performance Measures

Item	A – G Completion with “C” or Better ²	Graduation Rate (NCES Calculation) ³	Proportion of 12th Graders Taking SAT ⁴	Proportion with SAT Combined Score \geq 1,000 ⁵
2001-02				
CAPP	21.0	90.7	28.3	26.9
CA	34.6	87.0	37.3	51.5
2002-03				
CAPP	21.6	91.7	26.4	30.0
CA	33.6	86.7	36.7	52.6
Comparable Schools ¹	32.8	87.3	32.1	28.6
2003-04				
CAPP	21.9	93.6	27.4	27.8
CA	33.7	85.1	36.3	52.8
Comparable Schools	30.1	88.2	31.7	29.4
2004-05				
CAPP	21.5	93.0	25.4	26.9
CA	33.6	84.9	35.9	54.0
Comparable Schools	29.2	87.6	31.0	30.0

¹ These are “comparable schools” for the CAPP schools from the 2001-02 base year. Five similar schools with the closest API to the CAPP school were identified for each CAPP school from the 2000-01 California Department of Education (CDE) Academic Performance Index list of similar schools.

² Courses required for admission to the University of California and the California State University

³ National Center for Education Statistics

⁴ Test required for admission at many colleges and universities

⁵ Calculated as a proportion of twelfth graders who took the test, not the entire twelfth grade population (which is how the CDE typically calculates this statistic)

Positive Effects of the CAHSEE

It may sound as if we do not think that the CAHSEE is a useful policy tool to improve California public education. To the contrary, we believe that it has already had a major impact, especially on low-performing schools, with some encouraging consequences:

- Schools can no longer write off significant groups of students as unable to read and write well or learn algebra. The old practice of social promotion, i.e., passing a student for good behavior or just showing up (“seat time”) rather than demonstrated learning, is disappearing.
- The CAHSEE has forced reluctant teachers to become familiar with state standards and recognize that standards-based instruction can help them improve their craft.
- Experience at CAPP schools confirms that the CAHSEE has had positive effects on curriculum articulation between middle and high schools.
- The disparities in performance on the CAHSEE among different groups of students have further highlighted the importance of closing the achievement gap.
- The CAHSEE has undoubtedly added rigor to the curriculum for many lower performing students, and according to HumRRO and the experience of our ten schools, this has occurred without increasing dropout rates.
- The original goal of the CAHSEE—to ensure that high school graduates have learned the requisite skills to function well as adults—remains a good one.

At the CAPP schools we have seen a trend of greater support for the CAHSEE and its purposes from teachers, along with changes in instructional practices. During 2001-02 through 2004-05, CAPP’s evaluator, WestEd, conducted surveys of teachers at CAPP schools regarding their perceptions of the CAHSEE.

About 200 teachers responded each year. The percentage who agreed that CAHSEE reflects “the standards all students should learn” grew over the four years from 64 percent to 78 percent. The percentage who said they have modified their student assessments grew from 54 percent to 71 percent. Similarly, the percentage who reported changing classroom practices as a result of the CAHSEE went from 73 percent to 85 percent. In 2001-02, 78 percent agreed that the textbooks they used were aligned with California state standards. By 2004-05, that percentage rose to 94 percent. While only 64 percent of the teachers surveyed in 2001-02 agreed that the content of the CAHSEE reflected the standards all students should learn, by 2004-05 that percentage was 79 percent.

Nevertheless, CAPP teachers (and we suspect this is true of secondary teachers across the state) remain skeptical about standardized testing in general. Only about half of the teachers surveyed during the past four years agree that standardized tests “are an important part of a comprehensive assessment program.” The proportion that believes getting a high school diploma “should be dependent upon passing the CAHSEE” is also about half. These proportions have not changed appreciably over the past four years.

CAHSEE's Short-Term Impact

Because of the constant pressure from state and federal officials to improve scores or face sanctions and takeover, schools leap to short-term remedies. Mandates and funding from the state's Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) and the federal No Child Left Behind Act move schools to rely on short-term measures to quickly raise test scores. These programmatic responses to the need to raise test scores often are born from desperation rather than cogent planning and long-term thinking. Instead of asking the narrowly focused question, "How do we raise CAHSEE and California Standards Tests scores?" we need to answer the larger, more challenging question, "How do we support the learning of marginalized, struggling students?" Focusing on the second question will inevitably lead to finding solutions to the first.

Almost all of our CAHSEE project schools fall into the same trap; they seek the short-term fix to raise standardized test scores. They are not expending nearly enough energy and resources on the larger challenge of how to strengthen the rigor of their regular English and math courses as well as support struggling students throughout their high school years. When first conceived, the state's API was supposed to include "multiple measures" of student progress, not just test scores. But since the API currently includes test scores alone, schools are, not surprisingly, focusing primarily on measures that get a quick boost on test results.

Strategies to Improve CAHSEE Results

High schools serving large numbers of struggling students would like clear guidance about what they should do to achieve success. They would like to know: What remedial curricula are best? What are the best ways to help students be smarter test takers? What can schools do to help students do better on the next administration of the test? What is the value of adding extra English and math courses for students struggling with these basic skills? What is the best way to use the resources that are available for teacher professional development?

What schools are doing to help struggling students is very similar. They are buying new textbooks, workbooks, and software; training teachers; and providing additional classes and support before, during, and after the school day. However, achieving success hinges on how well programs and practices are implemented. *It is not so much what schools do, but how thoughtful and thorough the implementation is.* The descriptions that follow focus on implementation of programs and practices.

"Double Dosing"

The most common practice used to promote higher CAHSEE pass rates in CAPP schools, and we suspect across the state, is so-called "double dosing"—having struggling students take extra English and math courses. Its use is extremely widespread, and it likely will continue to grow given the assumption that more is better. The extent to which double dosing has become a popular practice is an unintended, often negative consequence of implementation of the CAHSEE.

Concern about passing the CAHSEE has understandably moved many schools to early identification of students at risk of failing the entrance exam. This, in turn, leads to establishing a second English or math class for students as early as seventh or eighth grade. For some students, double dosing can mean extra classes in both subjects for one to three years. The motives for double dosing are good. We have seen some examples of positive ways of offering these extra support classes, such as the creative use of in-class college tutors, or instituting small classes, thereby allowing greater individualized attention and small group learning. Occasionally, the support class is coordinated with the core class, so teachers collaborate in planning and teaching the curriculum.

But more often these preemptive classes are slapped together too quickly without a great deal of thought, relying too heavily on remedial texts and skill-and-drill computer programs. They are not coordinated with or structured to support the core math and English classes that all students take. These extra classes usually do not attract the best and most experienced English and math teachers. There is a shortage of math teachers across the state, and since these remedial classes have lower-level content, teachers with lower-level math knowledge tend to teach them. Also, these support classes can limit students' opportunities to take electives, such as art, music, or career technical training—classes that often help students remain engaged in school.

Even worse, by filling ninth and tenth grade students' schedules with math and English, double dosing makes it more difficult for them to complete the demanding a-g course sequence required for admission to a California State University or University of California campus. In effect, by placing young high school students in remedial classes that have passage of the CAHSEE as their goal, schools label students as not having college potential. Such early labeling can negatively affect students' aspirations for higher education.

We are not arguing against identifying low-scoring students in the early grades or offering extra support to help them pass the CAHSEE. We are simply raising questions that have been asked by some of the teachers at CAPP-supported schools regarding the unintended consequences of double dosing. Schools need to consider a total, multi-faceted plan that may include after-school tutoring, Saturday sessions involving parents, advisory or zero period classes, and other creative interventions, such as short, targeted mini-courses in English and math.

A recent Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) study of reform work in the San Diego Unified School District supports our contention that double dosing can cause more harm than good. San Diego adopted a policy of lengthening instruction at all grade levels, including double dosing of English and math at the high school level. The study showed significant gains in academic achievement at the elementary level, and lesser but noteworthy gains for middle school students. But at the high school level, PPIC reports that reform efforts centered on lengthening the amount of English or math instruction aggravated existing achievement gaps. Scores on standardized tests actually declined. The PPIC speculates on two possible causes: "the sensitivity of teenagers to being placed in activities that differentiate them from their peers, as well as the more distant teacher-student personal relationships typical of high school."

The best, long-term alternative to double dosing is to better integrate CAHSEE standards into the regular, core academic classes. Clearly, this ought to be done in middle school as well as in ninth and tenth grade core classes. Two CAPP schools provide examples.

CAPP project director Carlos Cabana from San Lorenzo High School explains his school's approach:

We have so far avoided placing students into remedial or intervention courses.... Our school's approach instead has been to assume that the best preparation for the CAHSEE is to support student learning in their core math and English classes.

For example, the English department has worked to make explicit the connection between the writing students are asked to do in their classes and what is expected on the CAHSEE. The teachers have even made and distributed wallet-sized cards reminding students of what an exemplary essay should include. This approach has paid off in improved scores.

In math, we have tried to make strategic decisions about what CAHSEE content to include in our classes and in what way. Based on our examination of past CAHSEE results and released test items, we have added an entire proportional reasoning unit to our Algebra I course and have begun to focus on other, small pieces of CAHSEE content in both Algebra I and geometry.

It is also worth noting that at San Lorenzo High School, Algebra I is the lowest level math offered. It is a yearlong course offered 90 minutes per day, with the first semester staffed at a 20 to 1 student-teacher ratio. Except for some ninth graders who have already successfully completed Algebra I, ninth graders take the full yearlong algebra course.

Extra math and English classes for struggling ninth and tenth graders, and for juniors and seniors who have failed the CAHSEE, are added after considering all other options first. Teachers discuss how to align the additional or support class with the core class. Even more importantly, experienced teachers who are committed to working with struggling students teach these classes.

At Mar Vista Senior High School, in the Sweetwater Union High School District, the district provides extra funding to work with the lowest performing ninth graders by adding extra English and math classes. The principal uses the funds to free two of her most experienced and talented teachers for a period each day to ensure a coordinated program for these students, rather than simply tacking on an extra class. The same teachers teach the core and the support classes. Both English and math teachers have common planning time and share strategies and practices. Efforts are made to assure that students do not feel stigmatized, and other support services are also provided.

With juniors and seniors who have not passed the CAHSEE, the rationale for double dosing through support classes is compelling because the CAHSEE looms as a more immediate barrier to getting a diploma. But here too, the quality of the special CAHSEE prep class curriculum and the teachers who teach the classes are what counts. *As long as the best and most experienced teachers believe that it is all right to serve only the best and most successful students, the achievement gap that the CAHSEE helps illuminate will be hard to close.*

For the 2006-07 school year, CAPP is offering its CAHSEE schools another year of funding, but with a focus on activities believed to have a better long-term impact on student achievement than double dosing. The short list of activities schools are encouraged to implement begins with work to better integrate CAHSEE standards into the regular core math and English curriculum.

Instructional Materials

Textbooks in California tout their alignment with the CAHSEE test and the standards, and many schools have invested in such texts. The CDE has produced a useful workbook for students and teachers to help students prepare for the CAHSEE. In addition, an abundance of software is designed to help students master math and English standards, and most schools have learning labs where students can supplement their classroom work with computer-based, often individualized, skill-building activities that they can do on their own or with minimal supervision. Some software programs are geared specifically to the CAHSEE, but their effectiveness is still unclear. However, even teachers who remain skeptical about the value of such computer lab activity admit that given large class sizes and the challenges of working one-on-one with students, skill and drill software has some value.

There are also materials that offer strategies to help students do better on multiple-choice questions, the foundation of most standardized tests, including the CAHSEE. Many schools use these “test prep” materials. In addition, some software is available that will help schools organize, analyze, and calibrate their CAHSEE and other standardized test results.

With this focus of energy and resources on the CAHSEE, pass rates have improved using combinations of extended instruction, special CAHSEE prep workshops, tutoring, specific CAHSEE-oriented texts, and computer lab drill. But while buying new texts and software and adding extra English and math classes can improve CAHSEE pass rates, they do not do nearly enough to solve the much greater long-term problem of low achievement. More important is effective implementation of curricular materials and approaches to pedagogy.

The schools that appear to be making the most progress toward long-term solutions have decided that helping struggling students is a priority, and they focus on carefully planned, thoughtful implementation. For example, these schools do not take the selection of new instructional materials lightly, and subject matter teachers spend the time needed to review what is available. English or math departments make reasoned decisions about what materials to purchase. The teachers meet regularly to discuss texts and instruction, which is not a common practice at many schools. Teachers agree to make time available to learn together about implementing new curriculum. This approach contrasts with the common practice of district and site-level administrators or committees who make decisions about instructional materials without sufficient teacher involvement.

Teacher Professional Development

A substantial portion of CAPP funds goes toward hourly pay or substitutes for teachers who participate in workshops aimed at improving instruction. The funds cover a daily release period for veteran teachers to manage the CAPP project. Some schools use CAPP funds for outside consultants. Larger districts have central office trainers or coaches who work with teachers, sometimes as requested by a school, or as required by the district. CAPP funds have also been used to send teachers to workshops or conferences during the school day, after school, on Saturdays, or during the summer.

Although there are exceptions, CAPP has learned that the most valuable professional development focuses on standards, curriculum, and assessment and causes teachers to reexamine their teaching, their expectations for students, and their relationships with their professional colleagues. It occurs when a large proportion of teachers in a department participate, and the work goes on regularly over a period of many months or even years and becomes part of the school's normal way of doing business. While the best conferences and workshops, attended by a teacher or two, may help a teacher improve his or her teaching, efforts to transfer the knowledge gained to other teachers are often limited and futile. An especially effective practice is to adjust the schedule and build in time for teachers to collaborate regularly during the school day (e.g., one or two late student arrival or early dismissal days per month).

The following professional development practices of CAPP schools contribute to the long-term improvement of teaching and learning, while also addressing CAHSEE test preparation:

- San Lorenzo High School holds annual, weeklong summer institutes for entire departments to prepare for the coming year and then follows up with department meetings at least once a month that focus on improving instruction. The school uses its own resources to pay teachers, but CAPP funds allow it to include teachers from its largest feeder middle school. The focus of the workshops varies from summer to summer. For example, one summer the math department focused exclusively on collective ways to improve algebra instruction.
- Jordan High School in Long Beach has created common assessments in algebra and geometry. Math teachers meet regularly to systematically examine assessments and agree on what constitutes responses that do or do not meet standards. The district has directed such activity for some years, and more recently, CAPP has supported the work with more frequent workshops facilitated by a consultant from WestEd. Jordan is a challenging place to teach compared to other CAPP schools. Classes are too large, and most students are at least two or three years behind in math. Yet one new math teacher commented recently that it is the opportunity to collaborate with and get support from her fellow math teachers that has kept her enthused for her work during her demanding first two years as a teacher.
- Lower Lake and Jordan high schools worked with WestEd's Instructional Leadership Institute (ILI) over two or more years to help teachers truly understand the meaning of standards-based instruction and how it can improve teaching and learning. While many teachers may see standards implementation as a burden — an add-on that is not essential to instruction — ILI teachers agree on what will be assessed and develop rich, standards-based instructional units. Most teachers in a department participate in long-term training that improves their individual instructional skills and develops a professional community. (More about ILI can be found in *Inside High School Reform* cited in the References.)
- In the past two years, CAPP instituted a new form of professional development called a "Design Studio" to complement its regular workshops and conferences for grantees. This term and type of training are not original; other schools, such as Sir Francis Drake High School in Marin County, have conducted Design Studios for some years. Rather than have teachers go off site to experience workshops from "experts," CAPP school teams spend two intensive days visiting a host CAPP school. In spring 2005, San Lorenzo High School opened its doors to five school teams composed mostly of teachers, with a sprinkling of administrators and counselors. A team of teachers planned two days of classroom observations, panels, and opportunities for conversations focusing on the issues of equity and the development and nurturing of a professional learning community. In spring 2006, Mar Vista High School held a Design Studio for six CAPP school teams, with a narrow focus on strategies to help struggling ninth and tenth grade

students in English and math. These studios have been well received by participants as an intense and insightful form of professional development. Each two-day session ends with school team meetings to determine practices the members have observed that can be implemented at their schools.

- Providing release periods for strong teachers to manage reform efforts and support their peers is another effective strategy at several CAPP high schools, including Calexico, Chula Vista, Mar Vista, San Lorenzo, and Jordan. These expert teachers serve as coaches for other teachers, organize and examine student test results, lead group analysis of student work, help develop and formalize common course assessments, and coordinate student support, such as tutoring. From our experience, teachers trying to improve their instruction respond best to guidance from their peers, especially when the guidance is seen as supportive rather than evaluative. The release periods, which cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per year, work best when the teacher involved is held accountable through a detailed job description, written yearly objectives for his or her work, minutes from department meetings showing progress and agreements, and other documentation.

Support Services

CAPP funds also help support services outside the classroom. These services may be in-school and after-school tutoring, workshops for families, special CAHSEE preparation sessions held after school or on Saturdays, after-school homework centers, college visits, and funding PSAT and SAT sign-ups. Successful support services instituted by CAPP schools include the following programs:

- Three CAPP schools initiated after-school homework centers based on a model originally developed in the Sweetwater Union High School District. The demanding model requires a good deal of planning, commitment by teachers and administrators, and a spirit of support too often absent in many after-school tutoring programs. However, a well-run homework/tutoring center, with a core of dedicated teachers and trained college tutors, can be an invaluable source of support for students preparing for the CAHSEE, working on a senior project, or simply looking for a nurturing place to do homework.
- Through the efforts of a highly motivated, bilingual math teacher and some financial support from CAPP, Calexico High School operates a student-parent CAHSEE math class on five or six Saturday mornings before the administration of the exam. These workshops are for juniors and seniors who have failed the math portion previously. This approach seems to work much better than working with the students alone. Nearly all students at the school are Hispanic, and many of the parents speak little English, so the class is presented in Spanish and English. Parents become increasingly aware of the CAHSEE and can help prepare and motivate students to pass the exam. In the long term, the teachers at Calexico believe that when parents feel more direct responsibility for helping their students learn, and when they are offered some skills to assist learning, students are better prepared to be effective learners.
- Sacramento Charter High School is using mentors to support the seniors at school who have not yet passed one or both parts of the CAHSEE. Each of these students is assigned one adult mentor from the staff who meets with the student regularly and provides both pedagogical and personal support to pass the exam.

Managing Improvement

Any serious effort to improve teaching and learning requires a management structure that begins with the principal's support. All CAPP projects are required to have a project director. Some project directors are district or school-level administrators; one is from a partnering university. All other project directors are teachers who have a release period from their regular schedule or are on special assignment and have no teaching responsibilities.

While each situation differs, there are real advantages to having a teacher manage reform efforts, if the right person is available. Teachers have greater credibility with their peers since they have faced the same challenges each day. One advantage of teachers managing improvement efforts is that they tend to stay in their jobs longer than administrators. An exception is Hoopa Valley High School, where the project director from Humboldt State University has stayed with the project for the full five years and has provided stability during considerable changes in school and district administration.

Lessons from CAPP's CAHSEE Experience

While CAPP's funded schools are making progress on raising the CAHSEE pass rates, they are making little progress on raising the number of students eligible for four-year colleges. With some exceptions, our ten schools are part of the statewide trend to seek a quick fix on test scores, often at the expense of the deeper work needed to improve struggling students' long-term futures. High school reform is not just about improved scores on standardized tests, and teachers are among the strongest critics of the ubiquitous focus on test scores.

Despite these troubling consequences, CAHSEE is likely having more positive impact on low-performing high schools than any other state initiative in recent years. Each year a greater proportion of California students will likely pass the CAHSEE, with the result that current concerns about the test will decrease. However, the concerns regarding the poor academic performance of so many California students is legitimate. The CAHSEE serves as a catalyst to focus our attention and effort on closing the achievement gap. We also need to make sure that it helps us to focus on all the other components of what makes a good school.

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Acknowledgments

This publication communicates the observations and conclusions of the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) about the impact of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) on ten California public high schools. It was written by CAPP consultant Alan Weisberg, with the assistance of Marge Chisholm, Alice Kawazoe, Nina Moore, Lorie Roth, and Diane Siri. The CAPP Board, which annually reviews the progress of the CAPP CAHSEE projects, also provided significant input. Jordan Horowitz and his staff at WestEd served as evaluators of the projects. Eleanor Knott, Virginia Soto, and Ty Melvin of CAPP provided support for the project. Janice Lowen Agee did the final editing.

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October 2006

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