



CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION

**TOM TORLAKSON**

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

August 18, 2015

Dear County and District Superintendents; Charter School Administrators; and Elementary, Middle School, and High School Principals:

### **BACK TO SCHOOL MESSAGE**

Welcome back!

I always enjoy the beginning of the school year. With high hopes and new goals, all of us—principals, teachers, classified employees, parents, and business and community leaders—get a chance to renew our efforts to help our students succeed.

This year is even better. I have never been more optimistic about education because of the dramatic and positive changes underway. Working with our Governor and Legislature, we are providing more resources to all schools and even more to those schools and students with the greatest needs, giving local communities more flexibility in how the money is spent and, through our rigorous California Standards, upgrading our aspirations for what we want students to learn. In July, I released a roadmap for improving schools for the next three years. It is called “A Blueprint for Great Schools, Version 2.0” and it contains a variety of recommendations put together by leading education experts in the state.

Last year, we began a new era in student assessment when more than 3.2 million students took a new online test in English Language Arts and math, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). We expect to release results next month. Please help communicate to your staff and school communities that these results are just a starting point and they are only one measure of student progress. The results will provide better information for parents, teachers, and administrators to support our students’ advancement in learning new standards that will help prepare them for 21<sup>st</sup> century careers and college.

Working with our statewide partners, we have developed a set of talking points and a toolkit to assist in communications about our state’s new assessment and accountability directions and California Standards. These are available on the Californians Dedicated to Education Web page at <http://cdefoundation.org/what-we-do/common-core/>.

There are a few other items I want to bring to your attention:

#### **California High School Exit Exam**

As you know, we did not administer the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in July, as we have in past years. That is because we are pursuing legislation that would exempt the exit exam requirement for the Class of 2015 and the next three years. SB 172 is making its way

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through the legislative process, and legislators are committed to passing it before they adjourn for the year on September 11.

I understand this has created a problem for students in the Class of 2015 who have met all other requirements for high school graduation (with the exception of passing the exit exam) and now face potential delays in enrolling in college, joining the military, or getting a job because they have not received their diploma. I am working with military authorities and institutions of higher education to assist the students affected. Both the California State University system and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities have instructed their member institutions to be flexible with these students and consider enrolling them for the time being until they can take the exit exam another time or legislation settles the matter.

If SB 172 is passed and signed by the Governor, I will send you further guidance at that time. In the event the legislation is not enacted, the California Department of Education (CDE) will immediately make arrangements to continue administering the exit exam. If you have any questions with regard to this matter, please contact my office.

### **State Priorities Snapshot**

I want to alert you to a new online toolkit that provides valuable information about schools under California's new funding formula in a format that is easy to access and understand. This Snapshot makes available three years of data on schools in three state priority areas: student achievement, student engagement, and school climate. You may access this report at <http://ias.cde.ca.gov/lcffreports/>.

### **High School Voter Education Week: September 14–25, 2015**

Among the most important roles played by California public schools is preparing students to be educated and active citizens who participate in government at all levels. It is the goal of the bi-annual High School Voter Education Week to ensure that California students understand the democratic process and their roles in it. The Secretary of State's office provides an excellent resource detailing High School Voter Education Weeks on its Web page at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/voting-california/help-strengthen-our-democracy/high-school-voter-education-weeks/>.

### **Creating a Safe Place to Learn**

All of us are committed to improving student attendance and safety and reducing discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying. See the CDE Bullying and Hate-Motivated Behavior Prevention Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/bullyingprev.asp> and the CDE Bullying Publications and Resources Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/bullyres.asp> for resources to support those efforts.

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### **Planning for College**

The beginning of the year is also a good time to encourage students and guardians to think about college. The CDE has resources that help students plan for college while connecting them to the University of California, California State University, and California Community College systems. Please see the CDE College Planning Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/cc/collegeplan.asp> for more details. Information on financial aid is available at the Federal Student Aid Web page at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/>.

### **Vaccine Update (Senate Bill 277)**

SB 277 was signed into law by the Governor but does **not** take effect until July 1, 2016. The CDE will be working with the California Department of Public Health to develop implementation plans and will issue guidance to schools and parents in the coming months.

Finally, I want to thank all of our hard-working teachers, administrators, classified school employees, and parents for your efforts on behalf of California's students. Our collaborative efforts ensure the success of our students and provide them with a positive, supportive, and safe learning environment.

On behalf of the entire CDE, please accept my best wishes for a successful school year!

Sincerely,



Tom Torlakson

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