

March 29, 2006

In March 2006, California Assembly member Jackie Goldberg, the current chair of the Assembly Education Committee, published what she calls “an essay” on California Education. Here we present a fact check and rebuttal to that essay, which is riddled with misstatements and errors. Our comments are interspersed in bold within the original text. The complete original text is also attached at the end of this document.

Part I  
California Education in 2006  
State Policy  
by Jackie Goldberg

In the mid-1990's a noble idea was "kidnapped" and K-12 education in California began to move down a path that has led to a disastrous result for the majority of California students. The original concept was excellent and included the idea of statewide standards for each grade, in each core subject: Math, English, Science, History/Social Sciences. Statewide panels of teachers and academicians were appointed for each of the four curricular subject matter areas. They worked together, battling over and discussing each standard, and remarkably achieved consensus.

But their work was thrown out by the State Board of Education (SBE). Instead, one member of the SBE, at the time, rewrote the work of each of these statewide panels. This was done at the urging of, and with the personal active participation of, "fellows" at the conservative Hoover Institute located on the Stanford University campus.

**In fact, only the mathematics standards were revised, and this was done by the mathematics departments at Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley. A single member of 21-member Standards Commission was a fellow of the Hoover Institution, which may account for Chairman Goldberg's confusion.**

These ideologically based "scholars" created new standards which immediately set off the "math wars," "reading wars," and the "science wars" which rage on to this day.

**Chairman Goldberg would have us believe that those wars were set by the Standards. Yet anyone who has been following California education would know that disagreements on math, science, and reading instruction predate the Standards, which were adopted only beginning in late 1997. For example, a 1990 Education Week article said<sup>1</sup>:**

***“In 1967, one of the most prominent researchers in reading instruction, Jeanne S. Chall, analyzed the controversy that was then raging in the field in an influential book called *The Great Debate*.***

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<sup>1</sup> Rothman, R. From a 'Great Debate' to a Full-Scale War: Dispute Over Teaching Reading Heats Up, Education Week p. 1, March 21, 1990 (<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1990/03/21/09310040.h09.html>)

*Today, nearly a quarter of a century later, the Harvard University scholar says the "debate" not only persists, but has, in fact, escalated to a full-scale war.*

*The battle lines are drawn between advocates of phonics, who stress the importance of teaching the relationships between letters and sounds, and those of whole-language methodology, who believe children should be taught reading by reading whole texts."*

**In early 1995, more than two years prior to the Standards, State Superintendent Eastin convened both Reading and Mathematics Task Forces to address these issues, and the California press closely followed the story at the time. Apparently, Chairman Goldberg is unaware that education debate existed long prior to her coming to Sacramento.**

These new standards from the Hoover Institute began the forced march towards the current rigid, one-size-fits-all, top down regimentation of K-8 education in California. And, when they added "standards' aligned testing" and "standards' aligned textbooks," rigor mortis set in.

**The fact is that California Standards that were adopted in the late 90's are highly regarded by many organizations, including the American Federation of Teachers<sup>2</sup> and the Fordham Foundation.<sup>3</sup> The standards adoption process, as described by Chairman Goldberg, is quite different from what actually occurred. The Standards were voted for unanimously by the State Board, and since then have been embraced by three governors—two Republican and one Democrat. AB 265 called for alignment of the testing system with academically rigorous content standards. Such alignment, as well as the similar alignment of instructional materials, is consistent with equity.**

Statewide standards as originally presented had broad-based support by academicians and teachers. The revised "adopted" standards do not. And by law, the current standards are NEVER to be revised by anyone, though the SBE believes it can do so, and that it alone is thus empowered. All the current standards are not terrible, but there are many problems with them. First, there are too many of them, and they stress finite, individual skills and rote memorization of facts. Second, there are few distinctions between "minor" standards and the key or "critical" standards. Third, many of the standards are age and developmentally inappropriate, i.e., memorizing the periodic table of elements in third grade.

**This paragraph has several inaccuracies. While “there are too many of them” may be in the eye of the beholder, the standards definitely do not stress rote memorization – indeed, they do quite the opposite, as anyone who bothered to read them can immediately see. Furthermore, while the English Language Arts, Science, and History/Social Science standards do not stress the distinction between critical and less**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aft.org/topics/sbr/ca.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/topic/topic.cfm?topic=Testing%20%26%20Accountability>

critical standards, it is worth noting that California was the first state in the country to identify some of the mathematics standards as more basic than others, and all the *frameworks* go to a great length on this subject and indicate which are the more critical standards in each grade. Finally, the old myth about “memorizing the periodic table in third grade” refuses to die. Here it is blindly repeated by the chair of the Assembly Education Committee. What the third grade Science standard in question actually says is that students should know of the existence of the periodic table and its nature, not that they should memorize it. Specifically, the relevant standard says:

- *Students know people once thought that earth, wind, fire, and water were the basic elements that made up all matter. Science experiments show that there are more than 100 different types of atoms, which are presented on the periodic table of the elements.*

But the real problems began when California implemented high stakes so-called standards aligned testing.

**Chairman Goldberg is illogical in calling it “so-called” standards aligned testing. Her complaint, just few paragraphs above, was that they are indeed aligned.**

The current Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) testing program is made up largely of multiple choice tests that do not distinguish between "minor" and "critical" standards. Teachers are prohibited from knowing what skills and knowledge the tests will test, and they are explicitly prohibited from helping students prepare for the tests. For the most part, high scores rely on some knowledge, but even more on "strategic guessing, based on limited information. Yet teachers and local school site administrators, as well as districts are threatened with dire consequences if students fail to make sufficient "progress" on these standards aligned tests.

**The testing blueprints, adopted by the SBE, determine the content emphasis on the CST exams. Through the blueprint mechanism, STAR does distinguish between minor and key standards, in that minor standards may be sampled by a single item, while key standards may be represented by 4 or even 6 items, with weight toward the key standards. Teachers are not “prohibited from knowing what skills and knowledge the test will test” – on the contrary! The STAR Blueprints are readily available on the CDE web site, and every year CDE publishes 25% of the questions from that year’s test. Teachers are not prohibited from helping the students to prepare for the test—the only thing teachers are prohibited from doing is actually reading the live test and helping students cheat. As to the validity of the claim that scores rely on “strategic guessing”, Chairman Goldberg, a past California high school teacher, is encouraged to take, for example, the STAR high school Geometry test, and publicly report the effectiveness of such “strategic guessing.”**

Once the high stakes testing began, everything started to change in the K-8 classrooms in all areas of the state, except in districts and schools serving California's more affluent students. Today, more than one-half of elementary schools in the state spend a minimum of 2 1/2 hours daily on one of two "adopted" Reading/Language Arts programs. Usually where there are English Learners (EL's) an additional 45 minutes to an hour is spent on English acquisition. From 1½ to 2 hours daily is spent on mathematics. Add to this 30 minutes for lunch, and one short recess, and what remains is one-half hour daily which is shared by the sciences, social studies, health, art, music, and physical education.

**Practically speaking, more than ½ of California elementary school students are being taught a curriculum devoid of all subjects except math and reading!** Because more affluent students are taught the full curriculum, we are seeing the development of a classic statewide "dual school system."

**This is gross exaggeration of the situation. In grades 1 through 3, two and a half hours of literacy are recommended, which include vocabulary and grammar development, in addition to reading and writing. Further, teachers are encouraged to integrate topics in science and social studies during that period. Additionally one period of about 50 minutes is recommended for math. In grades 4 through 8 two hours of literacy are recommended, and one period of about 50 minutes for math. This is the situation for the majority of California students, and it leaves plenty of time for other subjects. Intensive language acquisition is critical to help English Learners learn other subjects, and additional 30-45 minutes of specialized language instruction is recommended for them. After all, it makes little sense to teach children a rich curriculum in a language they do not understand**

The narrowing of what subjects we teach began with the high stakes "standards aligned" testing, but it was when we passed legislation requiring that textbooks be "standards aligned" for K-8 students that the battle was finally lost. I am pretty sure I voted for "standards aligned" texts in the state adoption process. I mean, if you have standards, and the tests are on those standards, simple logic would require that the books should be aligned to the standards as well. In the hands of ideologues-who believe there is only one true shining path to academic achievement-this last piece was the nail in the coffin. Here is how it works: The Governor (both Gray Davis and Arnold Schwarzenegger) are convinced that the one true approach is working. Each Governor, in turn, appointed members of the SBE who subscribe to the one-path ideology. This ideologically-stacked SBE appoints the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission (Curriculum Commission) members, each of whom must agree with the current ideology of the SBE to get appointed. The Commission appoints the teachers and academicians who are loyal to the ideology if they are to be allowed to review textbooks, and Voila! -- you have a completely closed and rigid system. And if someone on the review panels or on the Commission were to persuade a majority to stray from the one shining path, well, all final decisions are made by the SBE anyway, so the "harm" of multiple strategies, pedagogy or approaches can and will be prevented.

**Ignoring the ad-hominem attacks by Chairman Goldberg, it is clear that she prefers that the Standards, textbooks and the test should**

**not be aligned with each other. It is difficult to understand such logic. Stakeholders would logically complain if the testing system were not related to the state's published standards and to the instructional materials children use. It would be unfair to test students on material that they have not had the opportunity to learn. Such a policy would undoubtedly lead to well-justified lawsuits having the potential of destroying the state accountability system. Luckily, the State Board of Education has somewhat better understanding of education and it made sure that the Standards, the textbooks and the test are well aligned, as directed by the legislature.**

This all would be less tragic if the one true shining path actually worked. Sadly it does not. So what are the underpinnings of this ideology? Their ideas can be expressed in a series of ideological statements as follows:

1. "Equality of opportunity" means treating every student alike.  
**This is factually incorrect. The Frameworks have extensive sections addressing access for LD and EL students, as well as those who are academically advanced. Furthermore, the EL students get the additional 30-45 minutes of intensive language acquisition as mentioned above. This is hardly "treating every student alike."**
2. The term "research-based" must be defined in law, and must be so narrow that the definition excludes about 2/3 of all education research completed over the past 40 years.  
**This is one of the few true statements in this essay. The fraction may be even bigger, given the quality of what often goes by the name of educational research, which mostly seems to ignore widely accepted experimentation protocols. For example, the National Reading Panel reports that out of 1962 research articles on Phonemic Awareness Instruction only 52 (3%) were found qualified to be used in their study. Similarly, on the topic of Phonics Instruction only 59 out of 1373 (4%) research papers qualified<sup>4</sup>. Another recent example is the University of Chicago, which closed its school of education due to its disgraceful academic level.**
3. Teachers are the problem. So, all materials should tell teachers "what to teach, how to teach, and when to teach it." (Preferably teachers should be trained to read a script that accompanies the adopted materials).  
**Education has many problems, and teacher expertise is only one of the more serious ones. This has been reported often, and there are of course always new and inexperienced teachers. This is the main reason so much money is allocated for professional development. As to scripting, California has not adopted any strictly scripted program, independent of what Chairman Goldberg may think.**

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/report.htm>

4. All university-based teacher training programs are suspect, and probably incompetent, so we must spend massive amounts of money annually to be sure that teachers acquire the state ideology. Also, this happens because only state SBE approved, standards aligned vendors can receive state funding for professional development (most UC and CSU professional development is considered ineligible for state funding).  
**It seems surprising that Chairman Goldberg supports allocation of state funds to unapproved trainers offering unapproved or unaligned programs. The State Board of Education is to be commended for following the law and only approving training that is aligned with the Standards and textbooks.**
5. Bilingual education is evil and should be illegal. Teaching materials for Reading/Language Arts should be the same for English Learners as for native English speakers (see #1 above).  
**This is factually incorrect. The current criteria provide for special teaching materials for English Learners, and the state board adopted standards-aligned teaching materials in Spanish. What the current criteria do not provide is lowered expectations for these students, as Chairman Goldberg seems to prefer. Bilingual education, its merits aside, was settled in law in Proposition 227. Separate standards for English Learners would result in de-facto segregation and inferior education of those students.**
6. Forty-five minutes to an hour a day is enough time for English Learners to become academically competent in English, preferably by the end of third grade.  
**This statement has absolutely no connection with reality. EL students get additional time for language acquisition, over and above the differentiated instruction they receive during the daily regular 2 plus hours of ELA.**
7. Teacher directed instruction is the best way to teach any student, any subject or skill. In fact, there is only one true way to teach anything, and the state SBE knows what it is because it is "research-based" (see #2 above).  
**Direct instruction is shown by major studies (e.g., Project Follow Through) to be the most effective for the majority of students, but not for all, not for all topics and objectives, and not all the time.**
8. Any learning that comes from student experimentation or discovery is evil because it is unpredictable, and very likely will be wrong.  
**This is a mischaracterization. Experimentation and discovery is helpful—and encouraged—as appropriate and as part of California balanced program. What is discouraged is mindless and guideless “experimentation” when the teacher never intervenes, explains, corrects or sums up the lesson for those who may not have made the desired discovery.**
9. Only skills and facts which can be tested by high stakes, objective tests are worth knowing, because the system must be data driven.

**Clearly the system must be data driven if it has to be accountable, but this has nothing to do with the type of test used. Objective tests, whether high stakes or not, can—and do—test much more than just skills and facts, but so can other type of tests. The advantage of objective tests, in addition to them being relatively inexpensive, is that they are, well... objective.**

**That said, clearly some things which are worth knowing cannot be tested. That is why those things are not part of the state accountability system and are left to the classroom teachers' discretion. The state cannot be held accountable for what cannot be measured. But a great deal of useful knowledge *is* assessable, and that is what the state tries to assess.**

10. The term "universal access" means that all students can use the same single textbook system for each core subject because there are supplemental questions, work sheets, and projects that make one book good for gifted and talented, special education, and every student in between.

**This is a mischaracterization. The regular instructional materials already have components that allow different access levels to the core material, in support of common high performing standards for all students. Additionally, supplemental and specialized instructional materials are provided for EL, LD, and other special-need students**

What are the results of this ideologically based, top down curriculum and testing and standards? In a phrase, NOT GOOD. You will hear from the SBE and from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction that things are going so well in K-8 schools that we must "stay the course" (not too different from Bush's analysis of the war in Iraq). They use as proof that student scores on STAR tests continue to go up, and we are really thrilled about that. But let's see what is not happening that they fail to mention:

1. California NAEP scores are near the bottom of all states. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade Reading, CA is 4<sup>th</sup> to the last, tied with Nevada and New Mexico. Only Mississippi, West Virginia, and Washington, DC scored lower. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade Reading, CA is third to the last. Only Hawaii and Washington, DC scored lower. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade Math, CA tied with Arizona, Hawaii, Louisiana and Nevada for fifth to last place. Only Alabama, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Washington, DC scored lower. And in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math, is third to the last. Only Hawaii, and Washington, DC scored lower. The NAEP is often referred to as the "nation's report card."

**California has been scoring low on NAEP since the 1980s and 1990s. Since then we have been slowly—very slowly—climbing out of that pit. For example, on 4<sup>th</sup> grade NAEP math California had the second biggest jump in the nation—14 points—between 2000 and 2003, at a grade where the impact of the new Standards would be most pronounced at that point**

in time<sup>5</sup>. What hurts California NAEP results is both the large influx of migrant population, and the fact that California—to its credit!—does not exclude excessive number of LD students from NAEP testing, as many other states do. This is a flaw in the NAEP methodology<sup>6</sup>, which unfortunately makes the NAEP unsuitable for comparisons between states. Despite all that, California closed the gap between English Learners and Fluent English speakers by 5 points from 2002 to 2003. This gain for English Learners is even more impressive, since California tests 88% of its ELs while states like Texas tested only 62% of their ELs and New York tested but 70%.

2. Fifty percent of new teachers are leaving the field of teaching before their 5<sup>th</sup> year of teaching.

**California's attrition is similar to that of other states<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, new teachers require more support than many now receive.**

3. Large numbers of experienced teachers are retiring early, even though it means a substantial reduction in their STRS pension.

**Again, this is no different from national trends.**

4. The achievement gap between low income students and their better off peers has remained almost unchanged.

**This is incorrect. For example, NAEP shows that California reduced low SES 8<sup>th</sup> grade achievement gap in reading from 32 to 23 points between 1998 and 2005. One truly needs to be mathematically challenged to call almost 30% improvement "almost unchanged"**

5. The achievement gap between English Learners, and native English speakers has actually widened in the last three years.

**Since the adoption of the Standards the achievement of all groups has been—finally—slowly improving. Closing the gap takes time. For example, between 2001 and 2005 the fraction of EL students assessed at Early Advanced and Advanced levels almost doubled from 25% to 47%<sup>8</sup>.**

6. In 2004, only 6.2% of African Americans and 6.5% of Latino/a high school graduates were eligible for UC. In contrast over 31 % of Asian and 16.2% of white high school graduates were UC eligible that year.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/mathematics/results2003/stateavgscale-g4.asp>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nagb.org/pubs/conferences/haertle.doc>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/TeacherAttrition.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr06/yr06rel19.asp>



Here is what the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) report that presented this data actually wrote in its summary <sup>9</sup>

*"The university eligibility of African American and Latino high school graduates in California has increased significantly in recent years. The Commission's most recent eligibility study showed that the percentage of African American high school graduates who met the minimum admission requirements of the University of California more than doubled between 1996 and 2003. The eligibility rate for Latinos also increased sharply."*

In fact, we find it very encouraging that the UC eligibility rate for African-Americans has more than doubled over what it had been prior to proposition 209, and that the Latino eligibility has also almost doubled since then. While in 1996 African Americans were almost 5 times less likely to be eligible than their white peers, this has dropped to barely twice less likely in 2003; similarly Latino odds rose from worse than 3:1 in 1996 to less than 2:1 in 2003. Further, between 1998 and 2003 African Americans and Latinos doubled their AP participation, while Asian and whites increased them only by about 50% <sup>10</sup>.

So the gap is clearly closing, despite what the Chairman chooses to believe. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that more could be done. However, excusing some students from the state rigorous ELA standards, or relegating them to a separate education system with inferior instructional materials, is unlikely to achieve this.

7. Only 50% of English Learners have passed the high school exit exam

Chairman Goldberg's numbers are incorrect. Almost 70% of English Learners passed the high school exit exam, and there is yet another administration in May 2006 which they can take <sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, the numbers are troubling and call for increased attention to instruction. Yet increased attention to ELL instruction is exactly what Chairman Goldberg seems to object to. In contrast, the 2005 Human Resources Research Organization (the independent evaluator of the CAHSEE), report to the state was quite explicit in its complimentary observation that

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cpec.ca.gov/FactSheets/FactSheet2005/FS05-03.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cpec.ca.gov/FactSheets/FactSheet2005/FS05-03.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr06/yr06rel29.asp>

***"the passing rates on the CAHSEE provide the clearest evidence of the effectiveness of instruction in the standards covered by the CAHSEE<sup>12</sup>".***

8. Depending on how the calculation is made, between 1/3 and 1/4 of all California high school students fail to graduate from high school.

**This indeed is a problem, but it is in line with the national trends, not specific or relevant to the Standards or CAHSEE.**

9. The California high school exit exam does not test: biology, chemistry, physics, American literature, English literature, U.S. History, World History, U.S. Government, citizenship skills, geography, art, music, health, or critical thinking skills.

**This is mostly correct. By law, CAHSEE focuses only on the essential skills – language and mathematics. The STAR system supports a broader range of topics, including science and history. And the excellent Standards and Frameworks developed under SBE leadership now include Visual and Performing Arts. Does Chairman Goldberg suggest adding more testing to the CAHSEE and make high school graduation even harder?**

10. Career and technical education courses have almost disappeared.

**This is indeed a pity. This process started years ago, and has absolutely nothing to do with the Standards or testing.**

11. California students have less access to educational technology than most American students.

**It is unclear what measures Chairman Goldberg uses to support this claim. In any case, in the last decade California spent untold millions on adding technology into the classrooms, yet it is unclear that this improved academic achievement one iota.**

12. California students are required to pass Algebra I in order to graduate from high school, in spite of the fact that only 19% of the jobs and professions in California require any knowledge of Algebra at all, and passing a class in Algebra I does not qualify anyone for higher education.

**Algebra 1 is an 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade subject; requiring it for high school graduation is not unreasonable. High school education should be aimed at a number of things, only one of which is the first job. One might also ask how many jobs in California require training in history or geography, yet just few lines ago the Chairman suggested augmenting CAHSEE with them.**

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/evaluations.asp>

**In reality, over 80% of high school graduates attempt college after high school<sup>13</sup>. Also, the data are clear that the single greatest factor determining success in college is the highest math class taken in high school, with the biggest jump occurring for students who have taken at least Algebra II. Algebra is indeed a prerequisite to college admittance, and 2/3 of the new jobs in this country now require at least some college background, with 1/3 actually requiring a college degree<sup>14</sup>.**

13. Since the year 2000-01 through the 2005-06, California has spent \$2.029 billion state funded dollars on Instructional Materials. Excluding federal funds, the state has spent \$592 million on its testing program.

**California spends about \$50-60 million a year for STAR, which comes to about \$330 million in six years, and not close to \$600 million. In any case, during the same time California spent about \$300 billion on education overall, so either \$350 or even \$600 million would come to less than 0.2% for testing and accountability. We expect car manufacturers to spend more than that inspecting the quality of our cars. Should we expect less from education?**

14. The federally funded Reading First program designed to meet "California's rigorous standards," has been a dismal failure for the three years it has been running. In spite of the spin, here are the results:

- Year One: 237 schools showed some improvement; 485 schools actually lost ground on mandated tests; 26 schools showed no change.
- Year Two: 265 schools showed some improvement, 485 schools lost ground on the mandated tests, 20 schools showed no change.

**It is unclear where Chairman Goldberg is taking her numbers from, since in Year One only 283 schools participated in Reading First, and not 748 as she writes (237+485+26). Similarly, in Year Two 673 schools participated and not the 770 she cites (265+485+20).**

**In any case, quoting from Reading First (RF) Year 1 Evaluation Report for California, RF schools "*generally outgained all elementary schools in California, ... marginally outgained comparison group... [but] gain***

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Dept. of Education, (2006) C. Adelman, The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College.

<sup>14</sup> A.P. Carnevale, D.M Desrochers, Standards for what? The economic roots of K-12 reform, ETS, (2003), and C.Adelman, The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College. U.S. Dept. of Education, 2006

***differentials were not sufficiently large to be called meaningful, but the pattern of gains appeared to be consistent and promising***". Similar results were reported in Year 2 Evaluation Report, and the Year 3 Evaluation Report for California<sup>15</sup> already reported that students in RF schools, and in the "high implementation" schools in particular, clearly benefited as compared to similar schools.

**In each year, more students in more schools lost ground than gained or stayed the same.** Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on this mostly unsuccessful program.

**The RF evaluation reports cited above clearly contradict this groundless statement.**

There is much more to say. And the academic problems of English Learners and low income students, including African American students will be addressed in later essays. But for now, we cannot claim that this rigid, top down program is working for large groups of California students. It is not wildly successful as you will hear claimed. And it most definitely is not closing achievement gaps, raising our scores on national tests, or reducing our massive drop out rate. We cannot afford to "stay the course."

**It is unfortunate that the chair of the Assembly Education Committee penned an essay that displays ignorance of basic educational facts for California and for the nation. It is indeed an "essay"—a work of fiction with little anchor in reality, where the essayist liberally uses her prerogative of modifying facts as necessary to suit her political narrative<sup>16</sup>.**

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.eddata.com/resources/publications/RF\\_Evaluation\\_2004-2005.pdf](http://www.eddata.com/resources/publications/RF_Evaluation_2004-2005.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> However, even as a fictional essay it could benefit from grammar improvement, reduction in overuse of quotes, correct capitalization, and proper use of Latin abbreviations—after all, Chairman Goldberg was supposedly an English teacher in her youth.

COMMITTEES:  
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TOXIC MATERIALS

BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE #2  
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# Assembly California Legislature

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## Part I

### California Education in 2006 State Policy

by Jackie Goldberg

In the mid-1990's a noble idea was "kidnapped" and K-12 education in California began to move down a path that has led to a disastrous result for the majority of California students. The original concept was excellent and included the idea of statewide standards for each grade, in each core subject: Math, English, Science, History/Social Sciences. Statewide panels of teachers and academicians were appointed for each of the four curricular subject matter areas. They worked together, battling over and discussing each standard, and remarkably achieved consensus.

But their work was thrown out by the State Board of Education (SBE). Instead, one member of the SBE, at the time, rewrote the work of each of these statewide panels. This was done at the urging of, and with the personal active participation of, "fellows" at the conservative Hoover Institute located on the Stanford University campus. These ideologically based "scholars" created new standards which immediately set off the "math wars," "reading wars," and the "science wars" which rage on to this day. These new standards from the Hoover Institute began the forced march towards the current rigid, one-size-fits-all, top down regimentation of K-8 education in California. And, when they added "standards' aligned testing" and "standards' aligned textbooks," rigor mortis set in.

Statewide standards as originally presented had broad-based support by academicians and teachers. The revised "adopted" standards do not. And by law, the current standards are NEVER to be revised by anyone, though the SBE believes it can do so, and that it alone is thus empowered. All the current standards are not terrible, but there are many problems with them. First, there are too many of them, and they stress finite, individual skills and rote memorization of facts. Second, there are few distinctions between "minor" standards and the key or "critical" standards. Third, many of the standards are age and developmentally inappropriate, i.e., memorizing the periodic table of elements in third grade.

But the real problems began when California implemented high stakes so-called standards aligned testing. The current Standardized Testing and Reporting



(STAR) testing program is made up largely of multiple choice tests that do not distinguish between "minor" and "critical" standards. Teachers are prohibited from knowing what skills and knowledge the tests will test, and they are explicitly prohibited from helping students prepare for the tests. For the most part, high scores rely on some knowledge, but even more on "strategic guessing, based on limited information. Yet teachers and local school site administrators, as well as districts are threatened with dire consequences if students fail to make sufficient "progress" on these standards aligned tests.

Once the high stakes testing began, everything started to change in the K-8 classrooms in all areas of the state, except in districts and schools serving California's more affluent students. Today, more than one-half of elementary schools in the state spend a minimum of 2 ½ hours daily on one of two "adopted" Reading/Language Arts programs. Usually where there are English Learners (EL's) an additional 45 minutes to an hour is spent on English acquisition. From 1½ to 2 hours daily is spent on mathematics. Add to this 30 minutes for lunch, and one short recess, and what remains is one-half hour daily which is shared by the sciences, social studies, health, art, music, and physical education. **Practically speaking, more than ½ of California elementary school students are being taught a curriculum devoid of all subjects except math and reading!** Because more affluent students are taught the full curriculum, we are seeing the development of a classic statewide "dual school system."

The narrowing of what subjects we teach began with the high stakes "standards aligned" testing, but it was when we passed legislation requiring that textbooks be "standards aligned" for K-8 students that the battle was finally lost. I am pretty sure I voted for "standards aligned" texts in the state adoption process. I mean, if you have standards, and the tests are on those standards, simple logic would require that the books should be aligned to the standards as well. In the hands of ideologues—who believe there is only one true shining path to academic achievement—this last piece was the nail in the coffin. Here is how it works: The Governor (both Gray Davis and Arnold Schwarzenegger) are convinced that the one true approach is working. Each Governor, in turn, appointed members of the SBE who subscribe to the one-path ideology. This ideologically-stacked SBE appoints the Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission (Curriculum Commission) members, each of whom must agree with the current ideology of the SBE to get appointed. The Commission appoints the teachers and academicians who are loyal to the ideology if they are to be allowed to review textbooks, and Voila! -- you have a completely closed and rigid system. And if someone on the review panels or on the Commission were to persuade a majority to stray from the one shining path, well, all final decisions are made by the SBE anyway, so the "harm" of multiple strategies, pedagogy or approaches can and will be prevented.

This all would be less tragic if the one true shining path actually worked. Sadly it does not.

So what are the underpinnings of this ideology? Their ideas can be expressed in a series of ideological statements as follows:

1. "Equality of opportunity" means treating every student alike.
2. The term "research-based" must be defined in law, and must be so narrow that the definition excludes about 2/3 of all education research completed over the past 40 years.
3. Teachers are the problem. So, all materials should tell teachers "what to teach, how to teach, and when to teach it." (Preferably teachers should be trained to read a script that accompanies the adopted materials).
4. All university-based teacher training programs are suspect, and probably incompetent, so we must spend massive amounts of money annually to be sure that teachers acquire the state ideology. Also, this happens because only state SBE approved, standards aligned vendors can receive state funding for professional development (most UC and CSU professional development is considered ineligible for state funding).
5. Bilingual education is evil and should be illegal. Teaching materials for Reading/Language Arts should be the same for English Learners as for native English speakers (see #1 above).
6. Forty-five minutes to an hour a day is enough time for English Learners to be come academically competent in English, preferably by the end of third grade.
7. Teacher directed instruction is the best way to teach any student, any subject or skill. In fact, there is only one true way to teach anything, and the state SBE knows what it is because it is "research-based" (see #2 above).
8. Any learning that comes from student experimentation or discovery is evil because it is unpredictable, and very likely will be wrong.
9. Only skills and facts which can be tested by high stakes, objective tests are worth knowing, because the system must be data driven.
10. The term "universal access" means that all students can use the same single textbook system for each core subject because there are supplemental questions, work sheets, and projects that make one book good for gifted and talented, special education, and every student in between.

What are the results of this ideologically based, top down curriculum and testing and standards? In a phrase, NOT GOOD. You will hear from the SBE and from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction that things are going so well in K-8 schools that we must "stay the course" (not too different from Bush's analysis of the war in Iraq). They use as proof that student scores on STAR tests continue to go up, and we are really thrilled about that. But let's see what is not happening that they fail to mention:

1. California NAEP scores are near the bottom of all states. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade Reading, CA is 4<sup>th</sup> to the last, tied with Nevada and New Mexico. Only Mississippi, West Virginia, and Washington, DC scored lower. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade Reading CA is third to the last. Only Hawaii and Washington, DC scored lower. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade Math, CA tied with Arizona, Hawaii, Louisiana and Nevada for fifth to last place. Only Alabama, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Washington, DC scored lower. And in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math, CA is third to the last. Only Hawaii, and Washington, DC scored lower. The NAEP is often referred to as the "nation's report card."
2. Fifty percent of new teachers are leaving the field of teaching before their 5<sup>th</sup> year of teaching.
3. Large numbers of experienced teachers are retiring early, even though it means a substantial reduction in their STRS pension.
4. The achievement gap between low income students and their better off peers has remained almost unchanged.
5. The achievement gap between English Learners, and native English speakers has actually widened in the last three years.
6. In 2004, only 6.2% of African Americans and 6.5% of Latino/a high school graduates were eligible for UC. In contrast over 31% of Asian and 16.2% of white high school graduates were UC eligible that year.
7. Only 50% of English Learners have passed the high school exit exam
8. Depending on how the calculation is made, between 1/3 and 1/4 of all California high school students fail to graduate from high school.
9. The California high school exit exam does not test: biology, chemistry, physics, American literature, English literature, U.S. History, World History, U.S. Government, citizenship skills, geography, art, music, health, or critical thinking skills.
10. Career and technical education courses have almost disappeared.
11. California students have less access to educational technology than most American students.
12. California students are required to pass Algebra I in order to graduate from high school, in spite of the fact that only 19% of the jobs and professions in California require any knowledge of Algebra at all, and passing a class in Algebra I does not qualify anyone for higher education.
13. Since the year 2000-01 through the 2005-06, California has spent \$2.029 billion state funded dollars on Instructional Materials. Excluding federal funds, the state has spent \$592 million on its testing program.
14. The federally funded Reading First program designed to meet "California's rigorous standards," has been a dismal failure for the three years it has been running. In spite of the spin, here are the results:



- Year One: 237 schools showed some improvement; 485 schools actually lost ground on mandated tests; 26 schools showed no change.
- Year Two: 265 schools showed some improvement, 485 schools lost ground on the mandated tests, 20 schools showed no change.

**In each year, more students in more schools lost ground than gained or stayed the same.** Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on this mostly unsuccessful program.

There is much more to say. And the academic problems of English Learners and low income students, including African American students will be addressed in later essays. But for now, we cannot claim that this rigid, top down program is working for large groups of California students. It is not wildly successful as you will hear claimed. And it most definitely is not closing achievement gaps, raising our scores on national tests, or reducing our massive drop out rate. We cannot afford to "stay the course."