

# **Governor Newsom's Proposal to Strengthen California's Education Governance System**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

*"California can no longer postpone reforms that have been recommended regularly for a century. So we are going to modernize the governance system by unifying the policy-making State Board with the Department of Education that implements those policies. And we're empowering the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to help align our education policies from early childhood through college. These critical reforms will bring greater accountability, clarity, and coherence to how we serve our students and schools."*

- **Governor Gavin Newsom**

### **1) How will the proposed governance changes improve outcomes for students?**

For decades, every major non-partisan and bi-partisan review has identified the same "fatal flaw": California's K-12 education system is governed by different entities with overlapping roles that at times in our state's history have operated in conflict with one another to the detriment of educational services offered to students.<sup>1</sup> For example, disputes between SBE and SPI led to years of litigation (1990-1993), confirming predictions of the previous 70 years.<sup>2</sup>

When the Legislature, Governor and SPI called for the first series of "Getting Down to Facts" studies in the early 2000s, the resulting governance report described California's system as a "remarkably crazy quilt of interacting authorities that are not aligned for purpose of accountability or action."

By eliminating the "double-headed" system, the budget trailer bill will enable coherent and consistent state-level focus on implementation and support to local educational agencies that will lead to improved student outcomes.

As we see so often at the local level, "without good governance, good schools are the exception, not the rule."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> California's Master Plan for Education (2002), produced by the Legislature's Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education ([http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/master\\_plan2002.pdf](http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/master_plan2002.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> *State Board of Education v. Honig* (1993), 13 Cal. App. 4th 721.

<sup>3</sup> National Commission for Governing America's Schools (1999)

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Current "Double-Headed" TK-12 System</b>	<b>Proposed "Aligned" System</b>
Who manages the CDE?	The Elected SPI	Professional Education Commissioner
Who sets CDE Policy?	The Governor's SBE	The Governor's SBE (now includes SPI)
The SPI's Primary Role	Managing 2,000+ staff and Policy Champion	Policy Champion with Voting Authority and TK-Higher Ed Leader
Accountability	Split and Unclear	Clear

**2) Why is it important to do this now?**

With 2026 being a transition year for both the Governorship and the SPI, this is a unique window to enact historic changes. Governor Newsom is compelled to leave California's schools with a strong state-level foundation of support to ensure the sustained success of the initiatives that have transformed the promise of public education in our state, from Transitional Kindergarten and community schools, to universal early screening for reading difficulties and literacy coaches, and unprecedented expansions in before, after and summer school programs and universal meals for all students, every day.

While there have been shared efforts at close coordination and successful championing of common priorities, California can be stronger and more supportive of local educational agencies, as demonstrated by many other states and highlighted by all who have studied California's system over the years.

After nearly a century of calls for change, California can no longer remain one of the handful of states that still adhere to this state education governance model.<sup>4</sup> The number continues to dwindle, with Indiana moving away from it in

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<sup>4</sup> Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

2021, and Oklahoma taking steps to do the same in the wake of the resignation of their state superintendent, Ryan Walters.

In the context of recent federal actions, it is more clear than ever that California's education governance systems need to be strong, coherent, and aligned with a clear focus on the needs of our children.

It is time for California to act after years and years of studies that all reach the same conclusion. The moment is right.

### **3) How have the studies and reports recommended improving California's education governance system?**

As noted by a [recent EdSource article](#), in 2018 when the Legislative Analyst's Office summarized governance reports published over 25 years, it found: "All studies recommended making the governor the clear head of executive functions."

The following is a representative sample of studies and reports published since 1990 alone:

- **Little Hoover Commission (1990)** – critiqued current governance structure, preceding the *State Board of Education v. Honig* lawsuit
- **Constitution Revision Commission (1996-97)** – proposed changing K-12 governance structure to, among other things, have Governor appoint SPI
- **Legislative Analyst's Office Proposal for a Master Plan for Education (1999)** – recommended consolidation of K-12 governance authority, largely under the Governor
- **California's Master Plan for Education (2002)** – recommended consolidation of K-12 governance authority, largely under the Governor
- **California Performance Review (2004)** – recommended consolidation of K-12 governance authority, largely under the Governor
- **Governor's Committee on Education Excellence (2007) Technical Report** – recommended consolidation of K-12 governance authority, largely under the Governor
- **Legislative Analyst's Office (2008)** – proposed governance reforms consistent with its 1999 Master Plan recommendations, the California Master Plan for Education (2002) and the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence (2007)
- And now, in **December 2025, PACE's TK-12 Education Governance in California report** calls for governance reforms consistent with those proposed in 1999, 2002, 2007 and 2008.

**4) How would you describe how the SBE currently works with the SPI, and how that would change with this proposal?**

The Department of Education and the State Board of Education are working well together currently, which makes this the ideal time for a seamless transition for the next Governor and SPI. This proposal aligns the TK-12 management functions of CDE with the budget and policy responsibilities associated with the Governor, thereby improving transparency and allowing the state to be held accountable for carrying out its roles in support of education delivery.

**5) Would the governance changes take policy-making authority away from the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction such that supporters of public schools should be concerned their traditional champion may be disempowered?**

***How would the authority of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) change under this proposal?***

The Governor's proposal assigns responsibility for the daily management of the Department of Education to an appointed Education Commissioner, envisioned as an experienced education administrator, similar to high-performing states with appointed chief officials such as Massachusetts, New Jersey, Connecticut, and New Hampshire.

In terms of policy-making authority, however, this shift alone will not change much.

Current law charges the SPI with "execut[ing], under direction of the State Board of Education, the policies which have been decided upon by the board."<sup>5</sup> The State Board, whose members are all appointed by the Governor, is "the governing and policy determining body of the department" and is designated as the state educational agency to carry out the purposes of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the primary federal law funding K-12 education).

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<sup>5</sup> California Education Code Section 33111.

Moreover, the State Constitution and Education Code currently require that all of the SPI's Deputy and Associate Superintendents must be appointed by the Governor or the Governor's State Board of Education.

Accordingly, the Governor's proposal actually **increases** the policy-making authority of the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. They will become a voting Member of the State Board of Education for the first time, thus becoming the only Member not appointed by the Governor. They will also gain a seat on the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, in addition to their roles as a UC Regent and CSU Trustee.

As a result, the SPI will be empowered, both by statute and by having more time and capacity after being freed up from day-to-day management responsibilities, to foster needed alignment and coordination of education policies from early childhood through postsecondary education for the betterment of California's students.

Perhaps most importantly, the SPI will continue to serve as California's independently elected education champion. Recent SPIs have sponsored legislation and worked with Governors and Legislatures to bring public attention to pressing issues facing students and schools. While the proposal shifts administrative responsibilities, the SPI will have unfettered independence to focus on this critical role as the voters' education champion with the Legislature and Governor **and** serve as a force for building collaboration across all the state education governing bodies.

#### **6) How will current Department of Education staff be affected?**

Career staff at the Department of Education will have a unified governance and management structure for the first time, with both their current policy making body (the State Board of Education) and their administrative leader (the new Education Commissioner) being appointed by the Governor.

As part of the transition from the current administrations of Governor Newsom and Superintendent Thurmond, the appointees provided to the newly elected State Superintendent by the state constitution will join to the new Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, along with a handful of expert and clerical assistant positions from the Department of Education. The new Governor will appoint a cabinet-level Education Commissioner, envisioned as an

experienced education administrator, to serve under the State Board of Education's direction, and they will be joined by appointed deputies.

The transition in governance over the Department of Education is expected to be minimally disruptive for most existing staff. The Administration is not proposing significant changes to the structure of the department outside of changes at the executive level.

Notably, for the first time, the Department of Education will be directly represented in budget and legislative negotiations by the Executive Branch.

**7) Does the Governor's governance proposal seek to implement the recommendations from the 2025 PACE report?**

The Governor's proposal unifies the policy-making State Board of Education with the Department of Education that implements those policies, consistent with the PACE report's key recommendation. The Governor's proposal also provides the SPI with additional authority and empowers them to help align California's education policies from early childhood through college. The PACE report includes other recommendations that are not reflected in the Governor's proposal.