

# High Schools for Equity



## *Policy Brief*

### Policy Supports for Student Learning in Communities of Color

A Study by the School Redesign Network at Stanford University and Justice Matters • November 2007

*H*igh Schools for Equity documents the practices and outcomes of five urban high schools in California that do an extraordinary job of preparing their students for success in higher education, productive careers, and a fulfilling life. The schools, which are non-selective in their admissions and serve populations that are predominantly low-income students of color, include both district-run and charter-operated schools in California's largest cities. They are Animo Inglewood Charter High School in Los Angeles; June Jordan School for Equity and Leadership High School, both in San Francisco; **New Tech High School** in Sacramento; and Construction Tech Academy in San Diego.

These schools are, in many respects, anomalies in the current landscape of secondary education: They send from 80 to 100% of their students to higher education, exhibiting college-going rates more than twice the state averages for the students they serve. Equally important, these schools offer an educational experience that engages students in intellectually stimulating, socially and practically relevant, and personalized learning that empowers them to contribute to their communities and to learn throughout their lives. These students take ownership of their education and develop a stake in their own learning that enables them to negotiate obstacles and take charge of their lives.

This brief, based on intensive case studies of the five schools, seeks to describe in detail the practices that support student success, the design features of the schools that enable these practices, and the policies that both support and, sometimes, obstruct their ability to accomplish their goals. It develops recommendations for the kinds of policy

reinforcements and changes needed to develop and maintain schools like these on a much broader scale, so that they become the norm rather than the exception for students of color.

## The Problem

*W*hile California has become a “majority minority” state, inequality in educational opportunities and outcomes has increased. The large achievement gap reflected in disparate test scores, graduation rates, and college-going rates for African American and Latino students in comparison to their white and Asian peers has not decreased significantly in more than a decade. Recent statistics suggest that, among those who enter the 9th grade, only 56% of African American students and 55% of Latino students now graduate with a high school diploma four years later, and only 12 to 14% graduate having met the requirements to attend a state university. These proportions are even lower in most urban districts. And an increasing share of young African American and Latino men are populating the state's growing prison system, rather than its higher education system.

With declines in real spending on public universities and sharp increases in prison costs, by 2006 the state was spending as much on corrections as on higher education. And while 50,000 new African American inmates were added to the California state prison system during the 1990s, African American enrollment in higher education declined: For every 57 who were added to state correctional facilities, one was lost from higher education. In addition, three Latino males were added to the prison population for every one added

to the four-year public university system. Incarceration is tightly linked to lack of education, as most inmates are functionally illiterate and lack a high school degree.

These outcomes are predicted by the post-Proposition 13 decline in educational spending in California for the two decades after 1979, which also exacerbated resource inequality. By 2000, California ranked first in the nation in the number of pupils it served, but 38th in expenditures per student, 48th in K-12 expenditures as a share of personal income, and 50th in the ratio of students per teacher. California also employed a greater number of under-qualified teachers than any other state in the country, and these teachers were primarily assigned to teach low-income students of color in segregated schools. By 2006, the spending ratio between the highest-spending and lowest-spending school districts was more than 3:1 (from just over \$6,000 per pupil to as much as \$20,000 per pupil), with schools serving the highest concentrations of students of color spending noticeably less than those serving predominantly white students.

Indeed, low-income students of color in California increasingly attend schools that are racially and socio-economically segregated, and which have systematically lower levels of key resources, such as qualified teachers and college preparatory curriculum. By 2004, the state was one of the five most segregated for African American students and one of the three most segregated for Latino students, with 87% of African American students and 90% of Latino students attending

predominantly “minority” schools. In addition, 47% of Latino students and 37% of African American students in California attend schools that are 90-100% students of color.

California also dropped to the bottom decile in student achievement nationally, and currently ranks 49th among the states in 8th grade reading, with large differentials by race and class. As demonstrated by the Public Policy Institute of California, current trends suggest that, as the white population shrinks to a third of the state total by 2025, and Latinos grow to about half, California is likely to have a less well-educated citizenry in the future than exists today, even while labor force demands for highly educated workers increase. Clearly, if this situation is to be changed, California needs to make stronger and more effective investments in all of

its youth than it is making currently.



**“I can’t imagine working in a big school district and feeling like I’m pushing a rock up a hill. It’s nice to know everybody on staff is pushing that same rock because we have the same kids.”**

**— A teacher at Animo Inglewood**

## The Study

The data above indicate that there are very few California urban high schools that are able to support low-income African American and Latino students in completing high school and moving smoothly to college and productive careers. Furthermore, as a recent EdSource publication, *Narrowing the Achievement Gap* (2003), notes, research on how to close this gap is “inconclusive, if not contradictory, [providing] few definitive answers on how best to improve learning for all students, in particular the lowest-performing

students.” The *High Schools for Equity* study seeks to shed some light on this problem by examining five schools that are achieving noticeably greater success with traditionally underserved students and evaluating the policy implications of their approaches and experiences in trying to construct healthy environments for learning.

The study aims to identify the practices and policies that are strategic for improving the day-to-day learning experience for low-income students of color, as well as the aggregate outcomes of those experiences. The cases focus on high schools that not only graduate students and send them on to college and careers, but also are healthy places for students of color to develop their identities, envision and realize a broad range of future opportunities, and become vital members of their communities.

After reviewing an extensive body of data on more than 360 California high schools in a multi-stage selection process, we narrowed the sample to five urban, public high schools that have no

selective admissions requirements, serve primarily students of color and low-income students, graduate students of color at higher rates than the state average, and send most of their students to college. We also looked for evidence that the schools offer students of color an academically rigorous, relevant, and responsive learning experience that enables them to develop strong intellectual and personal skills so that they can chart their own futures and contribute to their communities. These are not the only schools that could have been chosen. They were selected because, as a group, they provide geographic diversity and illustrate very distinctive school models in terms of educational approach and governance.

As Table 1 illustrates, two of the schools are operated by districts, and three are charter schools. One of the charters, **New Tech High**, operates as part of the Sacramento Unified School District, while the other two are independent. Although we did not limit our search by school size, all the schools in the study are small, ranging

**Table 1 - School Characteristics**

	Animo Inglewood (Green Dot Public Schools)	Construction Tech Academy (San Diego Unified S.D.)	June Jordan School for Equity (San Francisco Unified S.D.)	Leadership High School (Independent charter)	New Tech High School (New Tech Foundation)
<b>Student Enrollment</b>	518	430	371	320	355
<b>Free and Reduced Lunch</b>	74%	68%	48% (75%)*	52%	62%
<b>Students of Color</b>	100%	81%	95%	96%	70%
<b>African American</b>	37%	17%	37%	18%	27%
<b>Latino</b>	63%	51%	32%	39%	26%
<b>English Language Learners</b>	7%	24%	13%	12%	25%
<b>Graduates Going to College</b>	94%	81%	95%	100%	100%
<b>Graduates Going to Four-Year College</b>	69%	36%	73%	68%	42%

Source for demographic data is the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS) 2006-2007, except free- and reduced-lunch which is 2005-06.

\*Although more than three-quarters of the students in the school are from families with incomes below the eligibility threshold for free- and reduced-price lunch, only 48% of students have enrolled in the lunch program.

from about 300 to 500 students, and all have been started within the last 10 years. Two of the schools — Construction Tech Academy and New Tech High — focus especially on preparing students for college and careers. Each of the schools is making a notable contribution in supporting the success of African American, Latino and low-income students in graduating and going on to postsecondary education at rates exceeding state averages.

## Design Features

Although the schools in this study are located in varied urban communities serving different student populations and operating within different policy contexts, they have a number of design features in common. These features differentiate these schools from the 20th century factory model high school which remains the pervasive model in this country, especially in cities. Factory model schools were designed to process a great number of students efficiently, selecting and supporting only a few for “thinking work,” and tracking others into a basic skills curriculum aimed at preparation for the routinized manufacturing jobs of the time. These schools were designed to favor size and specialization over strong relationships, assigning thousands of students to a single building, sending them to a different teacher for each 50-minute class period, assigning teachers to 150 or more students (this ratio is over 200 in some California cities), and organizing teaching as an isolated activity, with little time for teachers to plan and work together on supporting students or designing a coherent curriculum.

In contrast, the design features embraced by the schools in our study aim to create personalized schools, which offer rigorous and relevant instruction — featuring authentic approaches to learning, much of it project-based, evaluated through intellectually challenging performance assessments — supported by professional collaboration and learning. These mutually reinforcing design features are built upon multiple changes in traditional high

school approaches to school structure, organization, and pedagogy.

### PERSONALIZATION

A key feature of all five schools — perhaps the most striking in contrast to the traditional urban high school — is their degree of personalization. The schools’ efforts to ensure that students are well-known include the construction of small learning environments; continuous, long-term relationships between adults and students; and advisory systems that organize counseling, academic supports, and family connections in systematic ways. In each school, teachers have an advisory group of 15 to 25 students who meet with them several times a week and, in most cases, stay with the same group for 2 to 4 years. The advisor works closely with the family, with other teachers, and with the student to ensure that the academic and personal supports needed for success are available. Students do not have to fall through the cracks to get needed assistance. Support is proactive and built into the central organization of the school.

In order to provide personalization, these schools have redesigned traditional staffing to hire more classroom-based staff, thus enabling smaller class sizes and reduced pupil loads for teachers. They have also reorganized time so that teachers teach fewer students for longer blocks of time. By knowing students well, teachers are more able to tailor instruction to students’ strengths, needs, experiences, and developing interests.

### RIGOROUS AND RELEVANT INSTRUCTION

Each of the five schools has designed a rigorous, coherent instructional program that enables all students to overcome barriers to access that are often associated with race, poverty, language, or initially low academic skill. The challenge of filling large gaps in academic skills for students who have been previously underserved by the school system, as well as other systems that shape their lives, requires substantial innovation in instruction to meet students where they are and enable them to make large strides. Each school has

addressed this by establishing high expectations — operationalized through performance assessments linked to clear standards that students must meet — while ensuring explicit teaching of intellectual and research skills in the context of rigorous coursework. This coursework includes both career-oriented and college preparatory learning, with a strong focus on applying knowledge to real-world issues.

The schools provide students with connections to their communities and their futures through community service, internships, and partnerships with community groups and local colleges. Teachers create authentic learning experiences that connect to the world outside of school — including ambitious research projects that require students to investigate problems, find and organize resources, develop designs and products, and present their results orally and in writing to a range of audiences. Teachers provide opportunities for ongoing revision of work in response to feedback from peers and outside experts as well as

themselves, using a mastery approach to learning along with adaptive, culturally relevant pedagogies to connect to students' needs and experiences. Additional classes and tutoring supports for closing skill gaps are made available for students who need them. As a group, the schools provide students — including those who enter high school below grade level, are special education students or English Language learners — with in-class and beyond-class supports in a holistic and integrated

way to ensure their success in academically rigorous courses and beyond.

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND COLLABORATION

All the schools work to continually improve the quality of instruction by making it the consistent focus of their professional learning time. Part of this commitment includes allocating considerable time for teachers to collaborate, design curriculum

and instruction, and learn from each other. The schools organize extensive summer learning opportunities and retreats to look at student learning evidence and to plan and organize instruction, advisory practices, and student supports. Overall, the schools allocate 7 to 15 days to shared professional learning time throughout the year. In addition, they organize substantial time during the week — usually several hours — for teachers to plan and problem solve together around students and subject matter. With teachers operating in grade-level teams that meet regularly,

the schools create structures for examining student progress, as well as for creating a more coherent curriculum and allowing teachers to learn from each other. Planning within departments also occurs regularly, and teachers develop both curriculum and assessments with a view toward ensuring that students will be prepared to meet the common school-wide outcomes that have been established.

These structural supports for teacher learning are augmented by mentoring and coaching



**“It makes it easier to come to school.... We learn from textbooks, and we go on to apply them to real life projects that we’re working on in class, and then you see how the textbook work is relevant.”**

**— 12th grade student at Construction Tech Academy**

systems for new and veteran teachers, focused inquiry about problems of practice that occurs in staff meetings, and the learning about student thinking, standards, and curriculum that occurs when teachers collectively evaluate student portfolios, projects, and exhibitions. In small schools with school-led professional learning, the line between professional learning and school leadership and decision-making is often blurred. All the schools engage teachers in a range of leadership roles and in democratic decisionmaking. Shared governance also often involves students, parents, community members, and industry leaders, supporting widespread commitment to the vision and mission of the school.

## Policy Implications

**D**esigning schools that serve low-income students of color well is not impossible. This is not the first study to document the practices of unusually effective schools, nor is it the first to find similar features of high schools that succeed with students who are historically underserved. However, to create such schools on a much wider scale, a policy environment must be constructed that routinely encourages successful practices. In this research, we identified five policy areas that have major influences on the ability of high schools to construct the practices that enable students of color to succeed: organization and governance, human capital, curriculum and assessment, funding, and postsecondary education policies. In some cases,

the schools benefited from specific policy supports. In others, they succeeded despite policy impediments — or lack of supports — that constrain other schools. In addition, we highlight policies needed to disseminate productive practices we found across these schools.



**“It’s all about co-planning, co-teaching and analyzing, and having time out of the regular teaching day to do these analyses.”**

**— A Sacramento District Official  
on New Tech High**

### ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE POLICIES

The schools benefited from policies that encourage the creation of new small high schools designed to offer the personalization and instructional supports needed to

create more successful learning. New models of schools that are organized differently need extra funding to support start-up costs associated with planning the new design, recruiting and developing staff, securing facilities and equipment, and growing to a level that supports scale economies. These school design efforts were supported by small schools grants from the state and federal governments as well as, for some, the charter schools initiative in California and private funding support. Creating new approaches to school organization requires the kind of venture capital that allows start-up companies to re-invent both technologies and ways of doing business.

At the same time, the policy environment has not provided steady support for the continuation of this work. Grants end, and local budgets are often inadequate to support essential features of the schools’ work — especially their professional learning needs — without continuous outside fundraising. This is especially true in

California, which continues to operate with funding levels well below those of most other states. Significant ongoing financial support for creating and sustaining new-model schools will be needed if these designs that support student success are to continue to develop and spread. Thus we recommend that California:

- ❖ **Expand grants to support new schools and small learning communities** that offer designs which promise to attend more effectively to students' needs and increase their success. The state should also create a means for documenting and sharing effective school organizational and instructional practices through clearinghouses and networks that allow schools to learn from each other.

The goal is not only to support a vanguard group of uniquely-situated schools, but to enable all schools eventually to adopt practices that will be more successful for all of their students. A challenge in scaling up more effective school designs is that the century-old model of school organization that has shaped most high schools is now reinforced by a geological dig of regulations that do not always produce the most effective forms of education. California's overall regulatory framework for high schools — as enacted at the state and district levels through curriculum and testing rules; assumptions made by categorical funding streams about how staffing, programs, and materials are managed; and approaches to professional development — has not yet shifted to accommodate or encourage the design choices made by these new schools.

One critical aspect of the governance problem is the extent to which the education system relies on bureaucratic or professional forms of accountability — that is, the extent to which the state attempts to create regulations that prescribe and manage what schools do, or, alternatively, strives to develop knowledgeable educators who can be trusted to make responsible decisions

about practice. The ongoing tug of war between bureaucratic control and autonomy cannot ultimately be resolved without investments in school capacity and professional knowledge and skill. The autonomies regarding hiring, professional development, curriculum, and assessment these schools rely upon to construct more powerful learning environments are not likely to be granted to most schools unless there is a high degree of confidence on the part of the public that defensible decisions will be made. In all professions, this confidence rests on the knowledge, skills, and commitments professionals bring to their work that allow them to behave accountably.

The success of these schools and the transformation of others will rely on both investments in schools' capacities and changes in the current regulatory and funding structure for education. These include:

- Teacher preparation and development to enable the kinds of pedagogical strategies and advisement responsibilities teachers have taken on in these new models;
- School leader recruitment and development to help principals learn how to design and manage organizations in which their instructional leadership, organizational design, and change management skills are critically important;
- Support for a system of curriculum, assessment, and instruction that encourages the development of 21st century skills and enables a curriculum that is intellectually rigorous as well as socially and practically relevant;
- Funding streams that are sufficiently flexible to enable strategic investments in innovative approaches at the school level; and
- Financial support that enables college access to become a reality for low-income and undocumented students.



**“When kids are slipping, there’s this expectation that teachers grab hold of them and will not let go.”**  
— Community organizer at June Jordan

## HUMAN CAPITAL POLICIES

The schools we studied succeed in part because of their ability to recruit and develop very strong teachers. However, there is a substantial shortage of teachers who are armed with the kinds of skills needed for the sophisticated pedagogies used in these schools and who are available to teach in urban districts. Once teachers are working in schools, they need ongoing high-quality opportunities for continual learning focused on addressing concrete problems of practice in the content areas they teach with the specific students they serve. While California has, at various times, initiated programs to address these concerns, they have come and gone with budget shifts, creating a yo-yo diet of initiatives rather than a steady set of policy supports for developing high-quality teaching in all schools. To address these needs the state should:

- ❖ **Provide financial subsidies for high quality pre-service preparation for candidates who will teach in high-need schools.** This would include reinstating and expanding service scholarships and forgivable loans for individuals who prepare to teach in low-income schools, with special incentives for high-need teachers

with language skills and content backgrounds in short supply.

- ❖ **Provide support for improving the capacity of teacher education programs** to provide a foundation in the skills that teachers most need to provide rigorous, relevant, and responsive education to low-income students of color.
- ❖ **Restore funding for at least 10 days of professional development time each year.** As was once the case in California and is now the case in other states and high-achieving nations, the state should fund learning time for teachers. Schools should have the flexibility to determine how to use this time throughout the year.
- ❖ **Provide adequate, stable support for high-quality professional development** in areas teachers need to be effective. This would include increasing support for the California Subject Matter Projects as well as funding much more extensive high quality professional development for teaching English language learners.
- ❖ **Support training for professional development providers and mentors** to make sure they have the opportunity to learn about successful methods of teaching students of color and English language learners, and to help other teachers acquire these skills.
- ❖ **Support the adoption of school models that provide time for teacher planning and collaboration.** The state should sponsor both incentive grants for school redesign and a “best practices” clearinghouse that shares models of school organization and instructional practice with other schools.

In addition to having adequately prepared teachers, schools also need well-prepared princi-

pals who can be strong instructional leaders who understand how to support good instructional practice. Principals also need to know how to plan professional development, redesign school organizations, and manage a change process. In addition, they need to know how to organize staffing and teacher time to reduce class size, create teams, incorporate advisory systems, and provide time for collaboration and professional learning opportunities. To create capacity for such leadership, we recommend that the state:

- ❖ **Proactively recruit dynamic future leaders into the principal pipeline** by subsidizing training, including paid internships, for candidates who have strong instructional and leadership capacities and who reflect California’s students.
- ❖ **Provide support for systematically improving principal preparation programs**, specifically organizing clinical experiences and content that prepare principals to lead in schools that are organized very differently from traditional schools.
- ❖ **Restore the California School Leadership Academy** which was eliminated in 2003, despite its substantial success. The Academy’s offerings should include mentoring and coaching specific to beginning principals, and training on the specific learning needs of students of color and English language learners.

## **CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES**

The schools in this study developed rigorous, engaging, and relevant curriculum that prepares their students for the hands-on, minds-on learning they will need to succeed in college and in 21st century careers. While they give their students access to a college preparatory curriculum, they work to adapt the standard “A to G” requirements to offer more innovative learning opportunities. Although the A-G requirements have value in expressing the

intention for students to access a college preparatory curriculum, California is the only state that prescribes high school coursework in this way, and the approved courses are based on a century-old notion of curriculum that does not include interdisciplinary learning or rigorous career and technology-focused offerings.

The schools’ forward-looking curricula rely both on redefining these requirements and on using challenging performance-based assessments that demand applications of knowledge, provide students and staff with timely feedback about students’ progress and success, and support revision to meet standards of quality. When they are collectively scored — as is the case with portfolios or performance tasks presented at exhibitions juried by teachers and external judges — the assessments also construct shared ideas about what constitutes good work and conversations about how to improve curriculum and teaching.

The performance assessments the schools use resemble those used in high-achieving nations like Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada, and Australia, which use local assessments that require students to conduct research and scientific investigations, solve complex real-world problems, and defend their ideas orally and in writing. By asking students to show what they know through direct applications of knowledge, and by embedding these assessments in the process of teaching and learning, these nations’ assessment systems — like those of the schools in this study — promote serious intellectual work. While the schools in this study attend to the demand of the state’s accountability system, they do not find that the multiple-choice tests it offers promote the kind of learning that would enable students to find and use resources, analyze and synthesize information, produce and explain ideas, or apply knowledge to novel situations.

If more schools are to create strong curriculum that is oriented to their students’ and society’s future, as well as assessments that

prepare students for the genuine expectations of college and workplaces of the 21st century, state and local policies will need to evolve to support these efforts. The state should:

- ❖ **Rethink the A-G curriculum requirements to more fully acknowledge modern conceptions of learning and curriculum, including interdisciplinary and applied learning that incorporates new technologies.**
- ❖ **Redesign the assessment system to better assess and encourage applications of knowledge and skill in performance assessments at the state and local level, including appropriate assessments for English language learners.**

## FUNDING POLICIES

As we have noted, California public schools are severely under-funded when compared to school systems in other states, especially those with a comparable cost of living. Whereas average instructional spending in California has edged up to about \$8,000 per pupil, comparable expenditures in states like New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut exceed \$12,000 per pupil, with even greater funding going to urban districts, since the recent resolution of school finance cases calling for more equitable spending.

The ability of the schools we studied to provide a rigorous, relevant, and responsive education to low-income students of color requires them to raise additional funds. These schools spend these funds on resources that are necessary to providing a high quality education — hiring additional core staff, funding professional development costs, and purchasing the kinds of books and materials they need. Not only does the state provide insufficient funding for the resources that most directly translate to educational quality, but these resources are rarely identified as high priorities for funding.

In addition, facilities issues plague most of the schools in this study. Four of the five have



**“Leadership High School has a particularly well-developed model for professional learning. Everything is very intentional here. At other places I’ve worked, it is like, ‘Let’s try this. Let’s try that.’ Here, we look at the research, we look at the data, and figure it out. There are reasons for everything.”**

**— A counselor at Leadership High**

no library and three lack a gymnasium. Several share buildings with other schools and have little common space or outdoor space for students. The urban districts that sponsor them have struggled, like others in California, with the lack of investment that occurred as spending on facilities fell for two decades. Although funds have increased since 1998, local districts must still pass bonds to underwrite construction, only about half of which pass, and there is a long backlog of projects to be financed, especially in cities with older buildings. This situation creates special challenges for charter schools, which rely on districts for facilities the districts often do not have.

Not only do schools not have enough funds to provide what they know their students need, they also lack flexibility in using the funds that they do have to direct the resources so as to best serve their students. All the schools in this study achieve an integrated system of support by reallocating resources to reduce pupil load and class sizes, instituting an advisory program and

monitoring academic achievement. In spite of these efforts to consolidate and focus resources, however, the schools are still hindered in their work by the state's fragmented funding streams. Aside from their state per pupil funding, much of the funding schools receive comes in small categorical dollops for additional programs, often not enough to provide the additional services. This fragmented, overly prescribed allocation of funds gets in the way of schools carrying out their vision and undermines the provision of meaningful supports for students. It can also create a set of unglued programs that detract from a core instructional focus.

As the recent set of studies on California's school funding system (*Getting Down to Facts*, 2007) has established, California's public education system needs more resources to meet the goals it has established for students, and these need to be organized to provide a more stable and rational funding stream that is more connected to the needs of students, offers responsible flexibility in the use of funds, and is linked to reforms in the ways that resources are spent. Our research suggests that to ensure that the needs of currently under-served students are met, California should:

- ❖ **Increase funding for schools by establishing a weighted student funding formula** in which funds follow the child, and additional funding is allocated for students with the greatest needs, thus ensuring that funds are distributed more equitably.
- ❖ **Create less fragmented funding streams.** Aside from major categorical programs intended to address specific population needs (e.g., special education, English language learner funding), reduce the number of small categorical programs and roll funds into core funding through the weighted student formula, so that schools have more flexibility to align funding to their instructional mission.

- ❖ **Create a more consistent and stable approach to funding facilities.** To address the unstable facilities funding that undermines rational planning, drives up facilities costs, and is unfair to low-wealth districts, the state needs to create funding streams that draw more predictably on the general fund and are less dependent on local bonds, with regular allocations to districts that include the needs of charter schools.

## POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION POLICIES

The schools we studied succeed to a remarkable extent in preparing students for college who would, in other contexts, frequently fail even to graduate from high school. But too often, higher education is not ready for them. Tuitions have been rising while state support for college has been declining in real dollar terms. This problem is not only cyclical with changes in the state economy; it is also structural. Ironically, the fate of higher education is increasingly connected with the rising costs of incarceration in the state, which, in turn, is the result of both the state's strict sentencing laws for non-violent offenders and its under-investments in elementary and secondary education, since most inmates are functionally illiterate and high school dropouts.

The implications of these budget priorities have been wide-ranging: The state university system has not grown to meet demand; the share of costs borne by students has increased; and the size of subsidies for attendance through programs like the Cal Grants has declined, creating growing barriers to college for low-income students. Despite the need for greater access to higher education, including an increase from 33 to 39% of jobs requiring college, there is a predicted shortfall of higher education space for more than 686,000 students by 2013, equal to about a third of current full-time enrollment.

The state must change its priorities for its young people. Investments in early grades education, high school education, and college access for

African American, Latino, and other traditionally underserved students are needed to change the trajectory of declining economic capacity projected for California's future. To create the kind of access to higher education that California's students need and the state needs them to have, California should:

- ❖ **Reinvest in higher education** to keep the public university systems affordable, accessible, and high-quality. The state should set goals and targets for increasing access to higher education in line with the growing number of jobs requiring a college degree, and should invest in higher education funding that both enhances quality and guarantees the number of student slots needed to keep pace.
- ❖ **Increase student financial aid and put the Dream Act into law.** An increase in Cal Grants to previous levels should be accompanied by signing of the twice-passed Dream Act, which would allow all California students to be eligible for financial aid and in-state tuition at state colleges they have earned the right to attend.

## Conclusion

This study offers vivid examples of high schools that are interrupting the status quo by providing opportunities for low-income students of color to become critical thinkers and leaders for the future. Unless the policy system changes, however, these schools will remain anomalies, rather than harbingers of the future. Creating a system that supports the learning of all students is not impossible. It will take clarity of vision and purposeful, consistent action to create a web of supportive, mutually reinforcing elements. In particular, dismantling the institutionalized inequities that feed the racial, socio-economic and linguistic achievement gap in this state will require substantive policy changes in recruiting, inducting, and supporting teachers and principals; expanding our conceptions of curriculum and assessment; rethinking funding strategies; and opening access to higher education. These kinds of changes could create a context in which the kinds of schools described here may become the norm rather than the exception and all students, regardless of race, income or zip code, achieve the right to learn.

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The full report and related materials are available online at: <http://srnleads.org>

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