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## Commission Calls on State to Create New Education Accountability System

The Little Hoover Commission on Thursday urged the governor and the Legislature to clear the way for a next-generation accountability system that recognizes that the majority of California schools will be identified as failing under the federal No Child Left Behind Act within two years.

In its report, *Educational Governance & Accountability: Taking the Next Step*, the Commission recommends combining details of the state Public Schools Accountability Act and the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to create a uniform and mandatory accountability system that sets a clear expectation for all students at all schools to reach proficiency or better on California's academic content standards. The Commission recommends creating a simpler, more transparent accountability system that goes beyond identifying schools for punishment and instead focuses on their continuous appraisal and improvement to produce college-ready students and highly educated workers for the state's world-class economy.

The Commission found that the state's current intervention approach to low-performing schools has cost \$1.4 billion without meaningful results. The Commission found that the state could more efficiently and effectively use that money, together with redirected funding from categorical programs, by incentivizing districts to create their own turnaround strategies and rewarding them for improving student achievement.

The Commission also found that an increase in flexibility must be linked to an increase in accountability. The Commission recommends formalizing a support and oversight network from the state to the local level that includes county offices of education and, for schools unwilling or unable to improve, an academic strike team modeled after the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT).

In the study, the Commission found that the tension of implementing the No Child Left Behind Act on top of our own state system and the specter of sanctions has distracted the education community.

"California deserves credit for pioneering an educational accountability program in the 1990s, but the Public Schools Accountability Act falls short of providing true accountability to all schools," Commission Chairman Dan Hancock said. "Many are hoping NCLB goes away when President George W. Bush leaves office, but accountability is here to stay. The turf war over accountability needs to end."

In *Educational Governance & Accountability: Taking the Next Step*, the Commission makes the following recommendations:

***Establish a comprehensive accountability system that combines state and federal principles.*** The State Board of Education must align the metrics of the state and federal accountability systems to the highest common denominators, including proficiency goals, timelines and participation. The state must establish clear-cut and specific expectations that all students can reach a minimum of grade-level proficiency on California's academic content standards.

***Implement a new, transparent rating system for schools that aligns interventions and rewards.*** The state must abandon the High Priority Schools Grant Program and the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program. To better communicate a school's level of performance to educators and parents, the State Board of Education must adopt a simple overall rating for schools that correspond to a new "Right Track" education index based on individual student performance, schoolwide growth and other academic and environmental measures. Using the new education index, the California Department of Education and State Board must differentiate schools and districts with appropriate levels of interventions and rewards.

***Give districts and schools flexibility to ensure deep implementation of standards and instructional improvement.*** The Legislature must coordinate and combine state categorical programs that target factors that drive student achievement, such as academic preparation, language acquisition, parental involvement and school safety. The state should redistribute this money through block grants tied to high-needs student populations. Districts should be rewarded with additional money from the pooled categorical funds when they increase their performance on the new "Right Track" index.

***Formalize and enforce the chain of accountability.*** The governor must use his power to appoint members of the State Board of Education to focus that body as the policy lever and independent enforcer of the accountability system, serving as a true check on the California Department of Education. The state superintendent of public instruction, as the leader of the education department and spokesperson for student achievement, must use the existing arsenal of intervention tools and the power of the office to catalyze a dramatic turnaround for underperforming schools. As part of the existing budget approval process, county offices must be given the authority to make their approval of local district budgets contingent upon adopting an appropriate blueprint for districtwide improvement strategies.

***Champion the use of data to drive instructional improvement and policy and financial decisions.*** The Legislature needs to closely monitor the progress of student and teacher data systems and work with the administration to ensure the systems, once built, are as robust and accessible as envisioned and needed. The state must return fine-grained data to teachers, schools, districts and parents on timelines and in formats that support efforts to improve educational outcomes.

The Little Hoover Commission is a bipartisan and independent state agency charged with recommending ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs. The Commission's recommendations are sent to the governor and the Legislature. To obtain a copy of the report, *Educational Governance & Accountability: Taking the Next Step*, contact the Commission or visit its Web site: [www.lhc.ca.gov](http://www.lhc.ca.gov).