



# How California Compares

## Demographics, Resources, and Student Achievement

For good or ill, there is clearly no state that compares with California. And no state will play as large a role in educating America's future citizens.

Seeing the dynamics that affect California's public schools through a national lens can sharpen our understanding of the challenges our schools face and the progress they are making.

The indicators included in this report provide some answers regarding how California compares with the rest of the country and the four next-largest states—Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois—which are the most likely to face similar challenges. Of equal importance are the issues the data and analyses raise about the young people this state is educating, its commitment to its public schools, and its progress in helping its students succeed.

EdSource thanks the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the James Irvine Foundation for their investment in our core work.

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### Demographics (pages 2-8)

- California has far more K-12 students than any other state.
- Its birth and immigration rate have slowed compared with fast-growing Texas and Florida.
- Its largest ethnic group is Hispanic/Latino, unlike most states.
- It has the highest percentage of children who live in a family in which the head of household has not completed high school.
- It ranks first by a wide margin in the proportion of children who speak a language other than English at home.

#### Resources (pages 9-14)

- California spent \$614 less per pupil than the national average in 2005-06.
- That year it ranked in the middle in per-pupil expenditures among the five largest states.
- Its teacher salaries are among the highest even when adjusted for the cost of living.

- It ranks last in total school staff per student.
- After years of low investment, California spent more on school facilities from 2003 to 2006 than any other state.

#### Student Achievement (pages 15-22)

- California is one of three states that earns an "A" for its academic content standards from the Fordham Foundation.
- It has a higher-than-average proportion of schools not making adequate yearly progress as the state defines it under NCLB.
- Overall, it ranks among the lowest on NAEP (the "nation's report card"), but its scores are much closer to the U.S. average if English learners' results are excluded.
- Its high school students are more likely to take advanced placement classes and perform well.
- But its high school graduates are less likely to enroll directly in a four-year university.

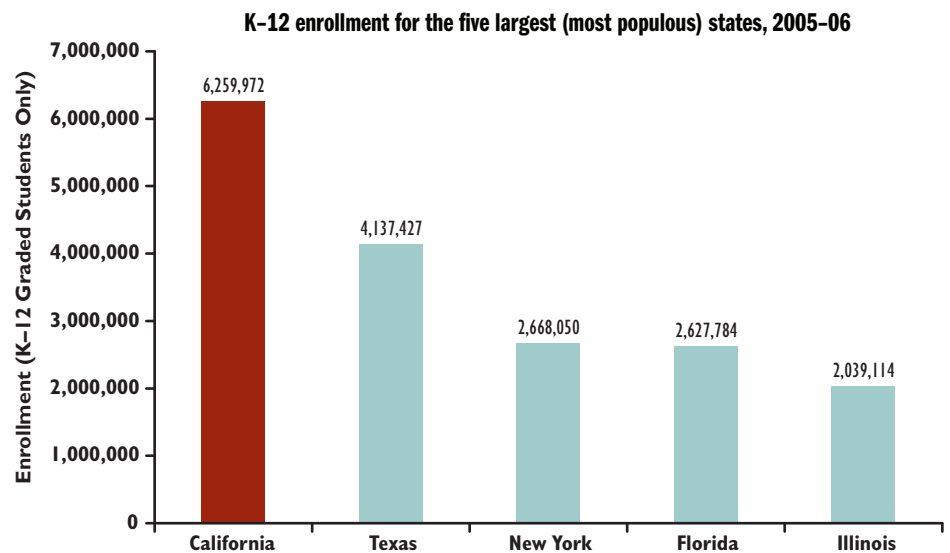


## DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1985, California had 4.3 million public school students, 29% of whom were Hispanic. Over the next two decades, California stood out for its rapid growth and the emergence of Latinos as the largest segment of its student population. That period of rapid change in the state's ethnic makeup appears to have ended. That said, California still stands out dramatically from the nation in regard to the high proportion of its students whose parents have not graduated from high school and whose families speak a language other than English.

### California has far more K-12 students than any other state

California has far more residents—and students—than any other state. Of the 47,751,099 U.S. students in 2005–06, 6,259,972 went to school in California, or about one in eight. Comparing California with the country's other four most populous states underscores its size. California has nearly 2 million more students than Texas, the next largest state, and 1.4 million more students than New York and Florida combined.



DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS (NCES), COMMON CORE OF DATA, 2005–06 EdSource 9/08

### Comparisons are complex, even with data from credible sources

This report synthesizes information from a number of organizations. No information source is perfect, and sources sometimes conflict. EdSource made every attempt to use the most current data available from highly credible organizations and to present a range of perspectives to provide a full picture of these important issues.

Still, any attempt to compare California with other states faces pitfalls. For example, the data are not always consistent among states in terms of what is collected or in how and when that is done. States also often differ in their policies, which can make seemingly identical measures such as academic proficiency quite different in fact. Data definitions can also change over time.

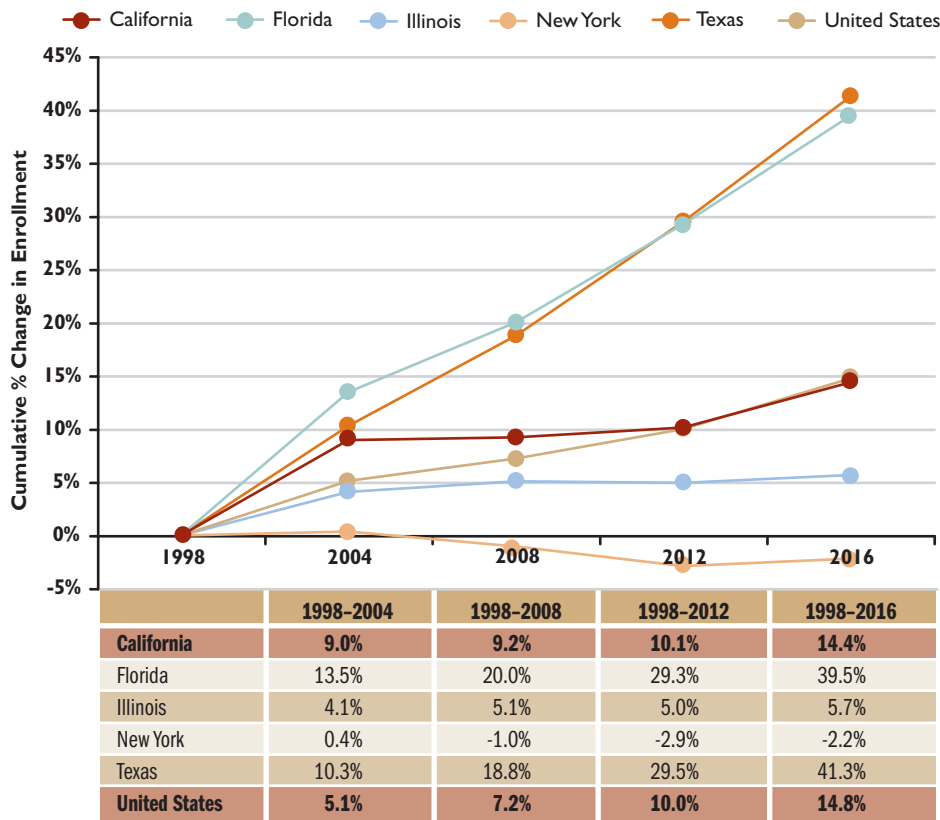
In addition, care should be taken to understand that averages and totals, though often illuminating, can mask variations that are both informative and important.

## In contrast to Florida and Texas, California's years of above average enrollment growth appear to be over

National projections are for both Texas and Florida to experience continuous and rapid enrollment growth through 2016. By contrast, California's birth and immigration rates have slowed. As a result, the student population is not currently growing and is not expected to begin increasing again until 2010.

This represents a significant change. Between 1998 and 2004, California's percentage enrollment increases were roughly similar to those of Florida and Texas and higher than the United States as a whole. However, for the entire period from 1998 to 2016, national estimates are for California's enrollment to increase at about the same rate as the national average and less than half the rate of the increases expected in Texas and Florida. More recent projections from the California Department of Finance are for even slower growth.

**Cumulative percentage change in K-12 enrollment from 1998 in the five largest states and the United States (actual numbers through 2004 and projections from 2005 to 2016)**



The NCES data here have been adjusted to include only grade K-12 enrollment.

Although NCES data allow for state and national comparisons, they are based on 2004 data. The California Department of Finance, using more recent information, projects that the cumulative percentage increase in K-12 enrollment from 1998 to 2016 will be lower—closer to 10.5%.

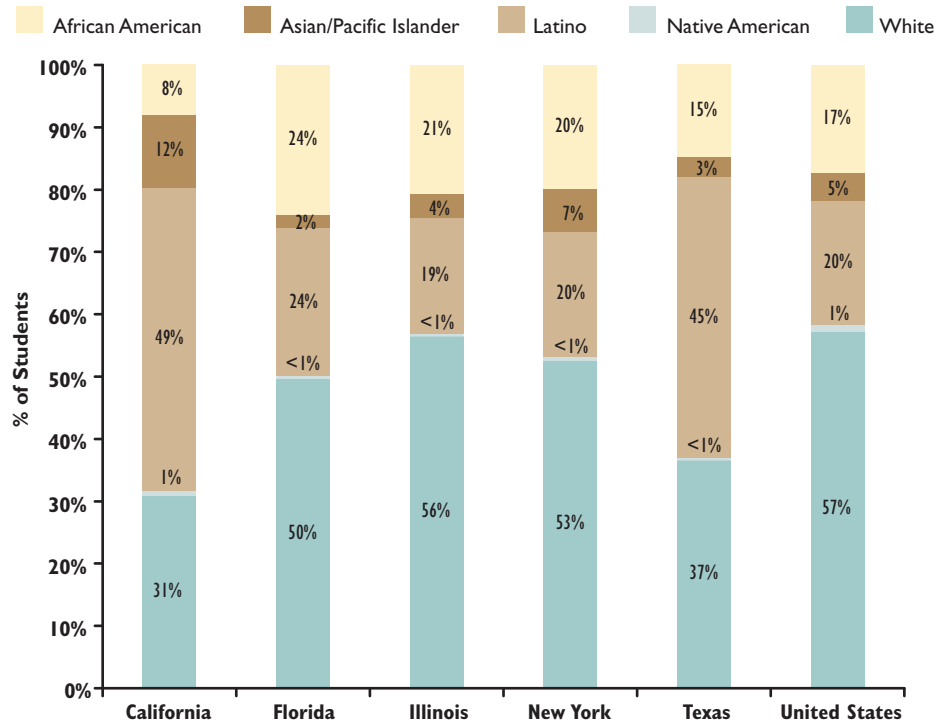
DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES), *Projections of Education Statistics to 2016* EdSource 9/08

### Latinos are California's largest K-12 ethnic group

No ethnic group constitutes a majority in California, but Hispanics/Latinos are the largest segment of the student population and almost half of all students. This contrasts dramatically with the United States as a whole and with three of the other largest states. White students are the majority in New York, Florida, and Illinois.

Texas, where 45% of students are Latino, is much more similar to California, though it has a larger portion of African American students and a very small proportion of Asian students compared with California's 12%.

Student ethnicity in the five largest states and the United States, 2005-06



Note: The percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES), COMMON CORE OF DATA, 2005-06 EdSource 9/08

For comparison purposes, this chart uses NCES data, which include only five ethnic group categories (white, non-Hispanic; Hispanic; black, non-Hispanic; Asian/Pacific Islander; and American Indian/Alaska Native). Percentages are based on the total number of students identified as being in these five categories, and the data do not include California students in the "multiple or no response" category.

Because California breaks down ethnicities into eight categories and includes the "multiple or no response" category, percentages from the California Department of Education (CDE) are not the same as those from NCES. The CDE in 2005-06 listed the state's ethnic breakdown as follows:

- 7.8% African American;
- 8.2% Asian;
- 2.6% Filipino;
- 47.6% Hispanic/Latino;
- 0.8% Native American/Alaska Native;
- 0.6% Pacific Islander;
- 30.3% white; and
- 2.0% multiple or no response.

### Sources of information used in this report

**American Community Survey (ACS)** is an ongoing project by the U.S. Census Bureau to learn more about the American population and how they live, based on a survey sent to a small sample of the national population. [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)

**American Federation of Teachers (AFT)** is a union of classroom teachers. Among its many activities, the AFT periodically issues a review of states' academic content standards. [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)

**Center on Education Policy (CEP)** is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. CEP generally works with other research organizations to produce impartial reports on important policy issues. [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org)

**College Board** is a not-for-profit organization best known for its SAT and Advanced Placement testing programs. [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

**KIDS COUNT** is a national and state-by-state project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the status of children in the United States. [www.kidscount.org](http://www.kidscount.org)

**Lincoln Institute of Land Policy**, a private operating foundation, researches issues concerning the use, regulation, and taxation of land and strives to improve public dialogue and decisions about land policy. [www.lincolinst.edu](http://www.lincolinst.edu)

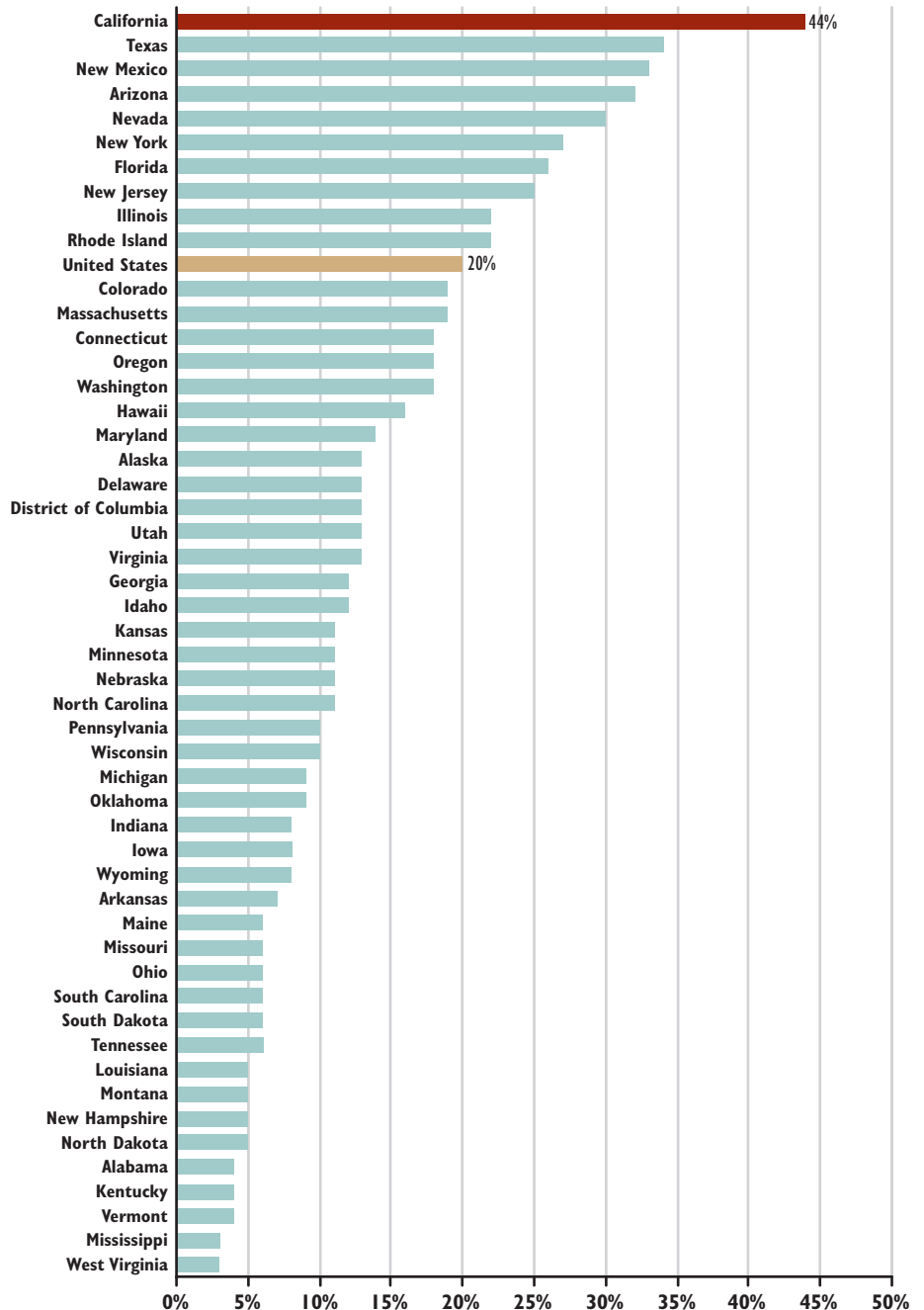


### California ranks first by a wide margin in the proportion of children who speak a language other than English at home

Nearly half of California’s children ages 5 to 17 speak a language other than English at home, according to data from KIDS COUNT, which is based on the 2006 American Community Survey. This is the highest concentration of any state—about 10 percentage points above the next highest state, Texas. And it compares to about 20% for the United States as a whole.

In terms of total numbers, California’s overall population of children who are not native English speakers dwarfs those in other states. California is home to about 28% of all the country’s children who speak a language other than English at home.

Percentage of children who speak a language other than English at home in 2006



### California is unusual in having two state education officials

California shares its basic model of state education governance with 10 other states. These states have a governor who appoints the members of the State Board of Education and a chief state school officer who is elected.

California also has both a secretary of education, appointed by the governor as an adviser, and an elected superintendent of public instruction, who leads the California Department of Education. Only the District of Columbia and four states—California, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Virginia—have two state education officials.

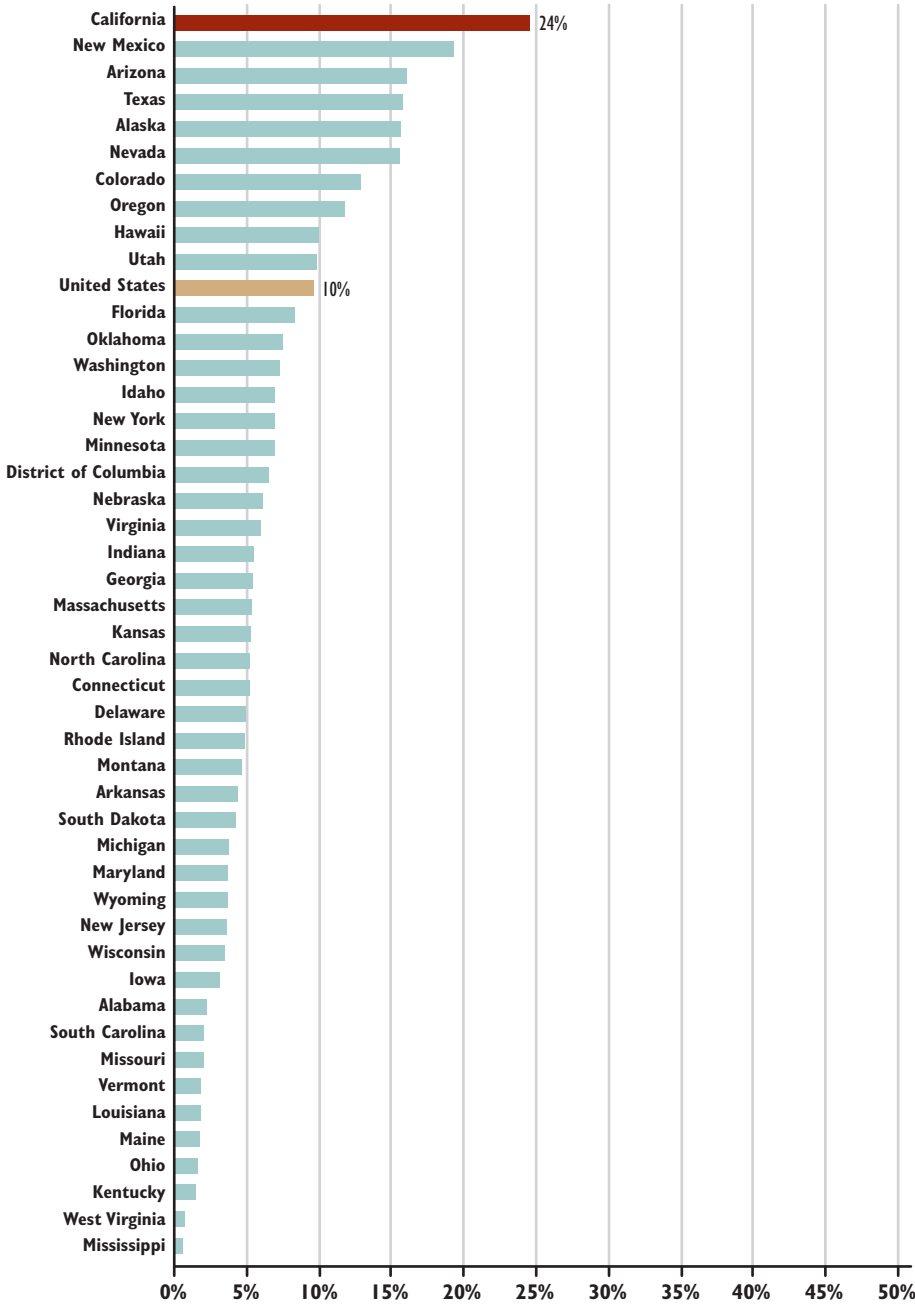
DATA: THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION, KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER  
BASED ON DATA FROM THE 2006 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY.

*California educates more than a third of the nation's English learners*

About 24% of California's public school students are classified as English learners (ELs), compared with 19% in the next-highest state (New Mexico) and 10% across the United States as a whole, according to NCES data. California's English learners comprise 37% of the total English learner population in the nation. At 1.6 million, California's English learner population is about 400,000 more than the number of English learners in Texas, Florida, and New York combined.

In comparison with the nation as a whole, California's ELs are also somewhat more likely to be Spanish-speaking (85% in California compared with 80% in the United States).

**Percentage of student populations classified as English learners in 2005-06**



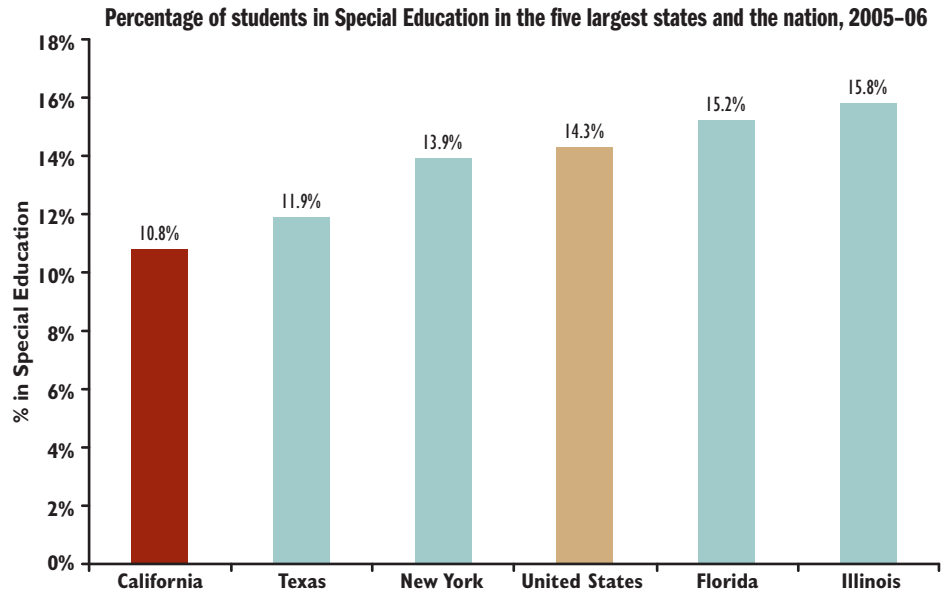
Note: Data on English learners are missing for Illinois, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, New Hampshire, and North Dakota; thus their enrollments are not included in the total for the United States. Also note that bars may not appear accurate due to rounding.

In California, somewhat more than half of the state's children ages 5 to 17 who speak a language other than English are classified as English learners (ELs) in public schools. States differ significantly in this regard. It is likely that these variations can in part be explained by differences in the socioeconomic and linguistic characteristics of students in the respective states. Almost certainly, differences in the policies and assessments states use to designate students as English learners or reclassify them as "fluent in English" also contribute to these variations.

## California identifies a lower-than-average percentage of Special Education students

Students receiving Special Education services consistently make up 10.8% of the school population in California. This is just three-fourths of the nationwide figure of 14.3%. It is also lowest among the five most populous states. These data more likely reflect differences in the rate of identification of students with disabilities, rather than substantial differences in student characteristics.

California's particularly low level of Special Education identification has drawn research attention. The state uses a census-based approach to funding Special Education in contrast to an approach that bases funding on the number of students identified. Researchers disagree regarding the extent to which this approach explains California's low identification rate. California's identification rate has historically been below the national average. And even before the advent of census-based funding, allocations of Special Education funds in the state had largely been disassociated with the number of students identified for service due to a prior "freeze" on state funding that paid for new Special Education staff (expressed as "Special Education funding units").



Note: Percentages are based on the number of Special Education students states reported to NCES (those with an Individualized Education Program or IEP) divided by the total K-12 graded enrollment reported. Students with IEPs may range in age from 3 to 22. Data from Missouri were not provided and thus not included in the U. S. calculation.

DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES), COMMON CORE OF DATA, 2005–06

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## California's high number of school districts is typical among the largest states, but the prevalence of nonunified districts is rare

California has 987 separate school districts—a number that is high in absolute terms but proportionally similar to other states. Florida's approach of organizing its school districts based on county lines is unique among the five largest states, but it is not unique among states as a whole.

In most states, the school districts are almost entirely unified districts serving students from kindergarten through grade 12. By contrast, only about 40% of California's school districts are unified, and they serve approximately 71.7% of the state's students (compared with 92.2% nationwide).

California is unusual, but not alone, in having a sizable portion of nonunified districts. It is one of only 10 states in which unified districts make up less than 70% of all districts, according to NCES. Vermont and Montana have the lowest percentage of unified districts (12%).

	California	Florida	Illinois	New York	Texas
<b>Number of Districts</b>	987	67	875	730	1,035
<b>Percentage of Students in Unified Districts</b>	71.7%	100%	62.2%	98.3%	99.8%

DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES), COMMON CORE OF DATA NUMBER OF DISTRICTS FROM "LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY UNIVERSE SURVEY," 2005–06, VERSION 1A. PERCENT OF POPULATION IN UNIFIED DISTRICTS FROM "SCHOOL DISTRICT FINANCE SURVEY (F-33)," FISCAL YEAR 2006, VERSION 1A.

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## RESOURCES

National comparisons provide a perspective on the process by which California funds its schools, how much the state invests, and how those funds are spent. In general, these measures show that the state is below average in its expenditures per pupil, among the most generous when it comes to salaries, and among the lowest in staffing levels. A bright spot is spending on facilities, which has increased dramatically in the past decade thanks to voter support for state and local bond measures.

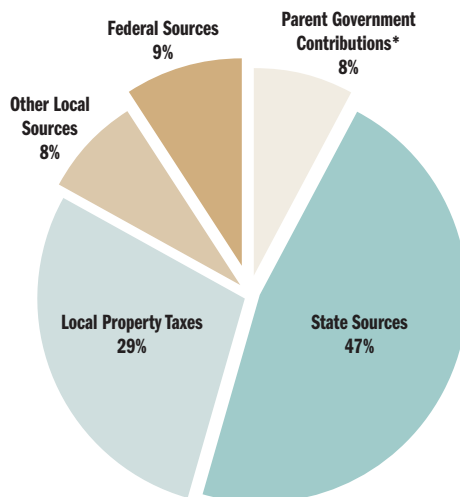
### California is unusual in the extent to which the state controls the amount school districts receive

As a result of court decisions and ballot propositions, the amount California spends on its schools is largely determined by state policymakers rather than local voters and school districts. This level of state control over school funding is unusual as is the portion of school revenues that the state provides. Therefore, fluctuations in the health of the state's General Fund substantially influence decisions about education spending.

The extent to which state governments contribute to total education spending varies, but California's percentage is relatively high. Data for 2004–05, as reported by the California Department of Education, estimated that 58% of the total revenues budgeted for K–12 education came from the state. The state also largely determines the portion of local property taxes that are distributed to school districts, effectively controlling about 80% of total revenues.

This compared with 47% of revenues from state sources for the nation's schools as a whole in 2004–05, as reported by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Because the 47% includes California, the difference between California and the rest of the country is understated.

**Distribution of public K–12 school revenues in the United States, 2004–05**



\*These are contributions from local governments to school districts.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

DATA: *The Property Tax-School Funding Dilemma* (2007), DAPHNE A. KENYON, LINCOLN INSTITUTE OF LAND POLICY. BASED ON DATA FROM THE U.S. CENSUS (2007B) AND THE TAX FOUNDATION (2006).

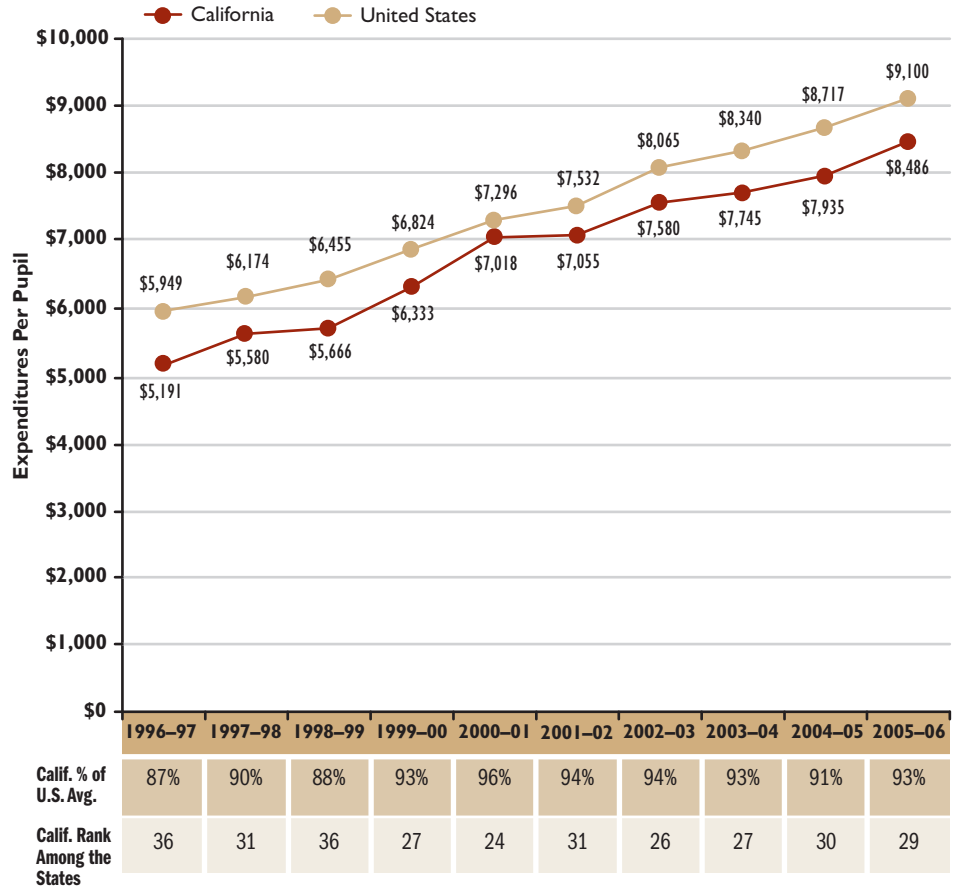
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**Per-pupil funding in California has consistently been below the national average**

For 30 years, California has lagged behind the rest of the nation in its expenditures per pupil. In 1996–97, funding per pupil was 87% of the national average or \$758 less per student.

Since then the state has gained some ground, but its progress has fluctuated along with the overall health of the state’s economy. During the dot-com boom in 2000–01, for example, California’s spending came within 4% of the national average. During subsequent slow downs in 2001–02 and again in 2004–05, the state’s relative spending slipped once again. In 2005–06, California was at 93% of the national average in per-pupil spending, which translated to \$614 less per pupil.

**Expenditures\* per pupil in California compared with the U.S. average**



Calculations of per-pupil expenditures can vary depending on how expenditures are defined and how students are counted.

For its expenditure data, NEA uses the “current expense of education” information each state provides. This is a measure of the cost of direct educational services to students and, as such, excludes food services, facilities acquisition and construction, and certain other expenditures.

\*Based on fall enrollment.

Note: NEA revises its data the year following their initial release. The data in the chart are all revised data except for 2005–06. Revised data were not available for that year.

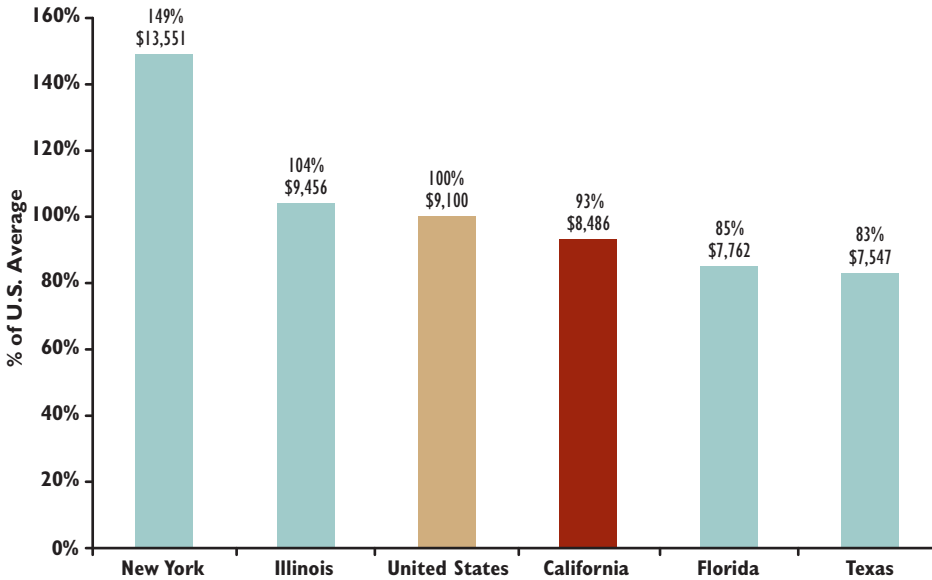
DATA: NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (NEA), *Rankings and Estimates 2006–07*

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## Among the five largest states, California ranked in the middle on K-12 per-pupil spending in 2005-06

Although California falls consistently below the national average in K-12 per-pupil spending, it is in the middle among the five most populous states. Both Texas and Florida have declined somewhat in their proportion of the national average since 1997-98—Texas most dramatically. In 1997-98, Texas' per-pupil expenditures were 93% of the national average and Florida's were 88%. It is notable that the student populations in both states had been growing rapidly during the same time frame (see page 3).

K-12 per-pupil expenditures as a percent of the U.S. average, 2005-06



Note: Per-pupil expenditures are based on fall enrollment.

DATA: NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (NEA), *Rankings and Estimates 2006-07*

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## The California State Preschool program is modest by national standards

California is one of 38 states that provide funding for a state prekindergarten program, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) *State of Preschool Yearbook 2007*. Of these states, the California State Preschool program ranked 25th out of the 38 states in the amount of state resources spent per child enrolled (\$3,486 in 2006-07). New Jersey was the top-ranked state, spending \$10,494 per child.

California's relatively low per-student expenditure is likely related to the quality standards of the state's preschool program. For example, although 22 states (including New Jersey) require preschool teachers to have a bachelor's degree, California's program does not. That lowers costs significantly. Similarly, California is one of only five states that do not limit class size to 20 children or fewer, which reduces the number of teachers that must be hired.

California's total state spending for this program was more than \$295 million in 2006-07. The state supports many other early education and child development programs that were not included in NIEER's analysis.

**California's teacher salaries are high compared with other states**

California's average teacher salary—\$59,825 in 2005–06—is higher than that of any other state. However, the relatively high cost of living in California is a contributing factor. In comparisons of average teacher salaries among states, the seniority of the workforce also plays a role because teacher salaries generally increase with experience.

Throughout the United States, teachers do not earn as much as other college graduates. Although California's teachers earn only about 84% as much as other college graduates in the state, that is a higher percentage than for teachers nationally (77%) and in most other individual states.

When teacher salaries are adjusted for regional cost-of-living differences, California remains among the states with the highest average teacher pay. EdSource adjusted the NEA teacher salary data using the NCES 2005 Comparable Wage Index (CWI) to reflect regional cost-of-living differences. When this was done, California's ranking dropped from first to seventh in the nation for 2005.

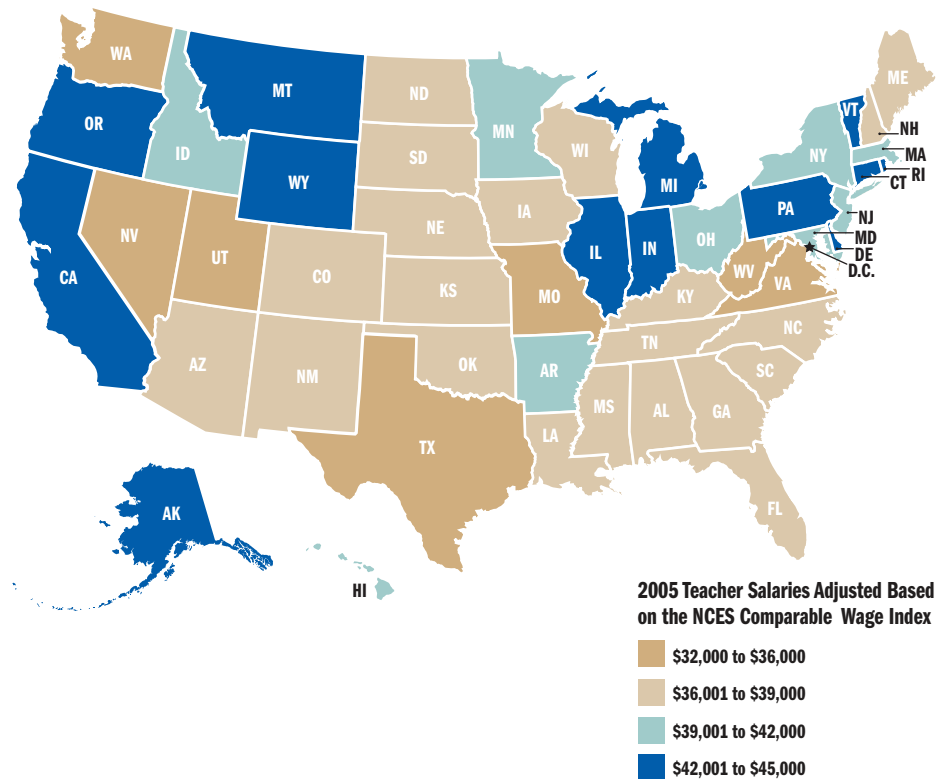
**State-level comparisons do not consider the range in the cost of living within California**

Adjusting teacher salary data and rankings based on the NCES 2005 Comparable Wage Index is useful for state-to-state comparisons. But these comparisons do not reflect the substantial variations within California and the impact of the high cost of living in its urban areas.

A 2005 analysis by the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) compared the pay of elementary school teachers in 50 major metropolitan areas. NCPA found that although elementary school teachers in San Francisco rank second among the 50 areas with an *unadjusted* average salary of \$59,284, the salary falls to \$32,663 when *adjusted* for the cost of living and San Francisco falls to 49th. Similarly, Los Angeles elementary school teachers' average salary ranked fourth before a cost-of-living adjustment and 48th after. Findings for secondary school teachers were similar.

Note: NCPA determined metropolitan areas cost of living by using the American Chamber of Commerce Researchers Association Cost of Living Index. The center relied on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Metropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates report to calculate average teacher salaries.

**Teacher salaries in 2005 adjusted for regional cost differences in all 50 states**



Adjustments for cost of living can be done in various ways. The NCES CWI uses the salaries of college-educated workers who are not in public education and thus measures the wage an employer in a given area must offer to attract people with education levels that are comparable to school teachers.

Teachers are the focus of the salary comparisons here because they are the only educators for whom comparative salary data are readily available. It can reasonably be assumed that California's average salaries for other educators are comparably high compared to their counterparts nationally.

**Unadjusted and adjusted teacher salaries for the five largest states and the U.S. average, 2005–06**

	Unadjusted salary and rank among the states, 2005–06		Salary and rank among the states adjusted for wage levels*	
	Avg. Salary	Rank	Avg. Salary	Rank
Illinois	\$58,686	4	\$44,949	1
<b>California</b>	<b>\$59,825</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$43,139</b>	<b>7</b>
New York	\$57,354	6	\$40,533	19
Florida	\$43,302	29	\$36,975	37
Texas	\$41,744	35	\$33,358	50
<b>U.S. Average</b>	<b>\$49,026</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$39,188</b>	<b>-</b>

\* Adjusted using the 2005 Comparable Wage Index provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Note: The District of Columbia is included with the 50 states.

## California ranked near the bottom in pupil-teacher and pupil-staff ratios in 2005–06

California's below average per-pupil expenditure—combined with higher-than-average teacher salaries—translates into much higher-than-average pupil-teacher ratios. In 2005–06, California ranked 49th in the nation, with a ratio of 20.8 students per teacher. Only Arizona and Utah had higher numbers of students per teacher.

Another way to think about pupil-teacher ratios, and ratios of other staff to students, is by counting the number of staff per 1,000 students. These data make clear that California not only has fewer teachers, but also fewer adults in its schools across all categories. California has about 72% as many staff in its districts and schools as is typical for the nation as a whole, and it has about 66% (or two-thirds) as many as is typical in Texas.

The effects are easier to understand when one thinks about how they play out in a typical school or district. For example, on average a California school of 1,000 students would have 2.2 school site administrators (principal or assistant principal). Nationally, the average is 3.4 people. The same school in California would have 48 teachers compared with a national average of almost 64—three teachers in California for every four in the United States.

The differences are even more dramatic for district officials. On average, a California school district with 10,000 students would have four district officials/administrators compared with 13 in the typical district in the United States, or more than three times as many.

### Staff per 1,000 pupils in 2005–06 for the five largest states and the U.S. average

	Texas	New York	Illinois	Florida	California	U.S. Average	% of U.S. Average	California's Rank
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>137.1</b>	<b>132.7</b>	<b>125.4</b>	<b>117.5</b>	<b>90.0</b>	<b>124.7</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Total District Staff (including classified staff)</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>35</b>
Officials & Administrators only	1.8	1.1	1.8	0.7	0.4	1.3	33%	47
<b>Total School Staff (including classified staff)</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>103.8</b>	<b>96.0</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>70.0</b>	<b>95.2</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Certified School Staff only</b>	<b>77.2</b>	<b>84.5</b>	<b>69.0</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>70.5</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>49</b>
Principals/Asst. Principals	7.0	3.1	3.1	2.7	2.2	3.4	63%	49
Teachers	66.8	77.8	63.4	59.4	48.0	63.9	75%	49
Guidance Counselors	2.3	2.4	1.5	2.1	1.1	2.1	52%	51
Librarians	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.0	0.2	1.1	17%	51

Note: The District of Columbia is included with the 50 states. NCES includes pre-K public school students and their teachers in these data. NCES estimated that there were 125,099 pre-K students and 8,850 pre-K teachers in California in 2005–06. The "Total Staff" row includes all district and school staff plus those who fall under the NCES category "All Other Support Staff."

DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES), COMMON CORE OF DATA, 2005–06

EdSource 9/08

### Changes in state policy led to dramatic changes in California's funding of school facilities after 1998

During the past two decades, California, Florida, and Texas have all seen their K–12 enrollments increase significantly. However, between 1988 and 1997, California fell well below the other two fast-growing large states—and all other states combined—in its funding of school facilities construction.

Beginning in 1998, that picture began to change. Between 1998 and 2006, voters passed a series of statewide bond measures totaling \$35.4 billion; and in 2000, they supported Proposition 39, which reduced the minimum voter-approval threshold for local bond measures from two-thirds to 55%.

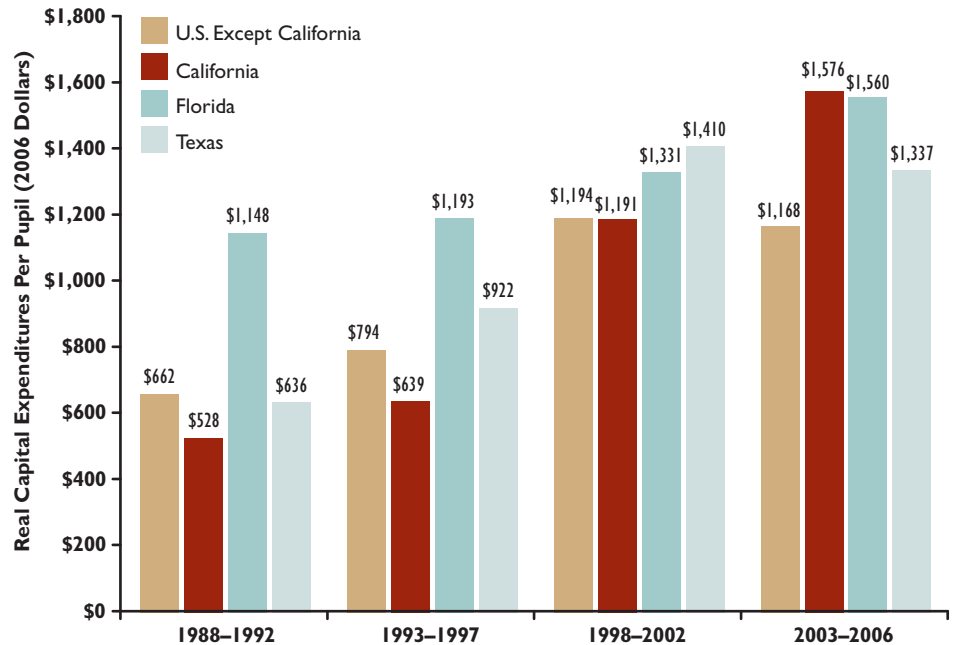
Proposition 39 has had a significant impact on bond passage rates. Altogether 77% of all bond elections from 2001 through 2007 passed (and 83% of those requiring 55% approval). Those elections provided \$32.9 billion for local school facilities, compared with \$19.1 billion in the prior 14 years. California's capital expenditures per pupil from 2003 to 2006 were the highest of any state.

#### General obligation bond passage rates before and after Proposition 39

	Number of G.O. Bonds	Percent Passing	Dollar Amount of Passing Bonds (not adjusted for inflation)
1986–2000	859	55.4%	\$19.1 billion
2001–2007	476	77.3%	\$32.9 billion

DATA: BASED ON THE BEST AVAILABLE INFORMATION FROM EdSOURCE, SCHOOL SERVICES OF CALIFORNIA, INC., LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY ELECTION OFFICES, AND LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES EdSource 9/08

#### Capital expenditures per pupil in 2006 dollars for California, Florida, Texas, and for the United States excluding California



DATA: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, "PUBLIC EDUCATION FINANCES," VARIOUS YEARS. THESE DATA WERE ADJUSTED TO 2006 DOLLARS BY ERIC BRUNNER, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY. EdSource 9/08

From 1988 to 2006, public school enrollments in California grew by 44% compared with a 23% growth rate for the rest of the United States (excluding California). Texas grew nearly as rapidly, with a growth rate of 40%, while Florida's increase was substantially more (63%).



## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Comparing the achievement of California's students to those in other states is as much a comparison of student backgrounds and state policy as of performance. Each state determines its own academic standards and its own assessments of those standards; and it decides on the cut scores that will represent "proficient" on those assessments. California's demanding expectations for academic achievement and ambitious definition of proficiency affect how well the state's schools perform against the standards and their ability to meet federal benchmarks. Although other measures—such as high school graduation rates, scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and college admissions tests—are more comparable, state-specific factors, including students' family backgrounds, still affect the results. For all these reasons, achievement comparisons can illuminate how each state is progressing toward its own and federal goals, but they do not necessarily indicate that one state's education system is better or worse than another's.

### Two organizations rate California's academic content standards among the highest in the nation

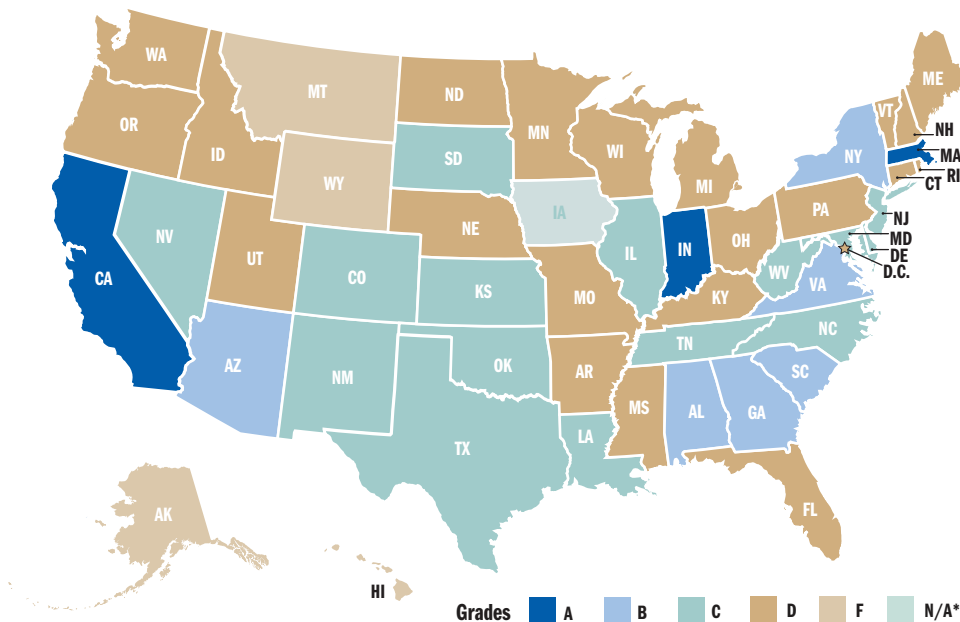
California's academic content standards were developed through an extensive consultative process within the state in the late 1990s. Content standards specify what students should know and be able to do by subject and grade level. Every state now has academic content standards of their own and assessments that test how well students have mastered those standards, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. However, California's standards are consistently ranked as being of the highest quality.

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation gives California's content standards a ranking of "A," and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) rates the standards "A-." The difference between the two organizations is their emphasis.

In Fordham's *State of State Standards* in 2006, California is among just three states to earn "straight A's" in all four core subjects: English language arts, math, science, and world history. This contrasts with Fordham's average rating of "C-" for state standards across the nation on all subjects. The Fordham Foundation's criteria address clarity, structure, and the scope and rigor of content. Fordham rates standards in each of the four core subjects for all K-12 grades collectively.

By comparison, AFT rates standards for specific grade spans. In *Sizing Up State Standards 2008*, AFT considers standards in four content areas (English, math, science, social studies) in three grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school). For each of its 12 categories of standards, the AFT provides a yes-or-no rating on whether the standards meet the organization's composite criteria for clarity, specificity, and content that support teaching and learning. Along with Arkansas and Louisiana, California received 10 positive ratings out of 12. (California's high school English and elementary social studies standards did not meet AFT's criteria.) Four jurisdictions did better than California: Georgia, Indiana, and the District of Columbia received 11 positive ratings, and Virginia received 12.

States' academic content standards graded from "A" to "F" by the Fordham Foundation in 2006



\* Iowa did not have state academic content standards at the time the Fordham Foundation wrote its report, but its Legislature passed a bill in 2006 to create them, according to Fordham. Rhode Island had no standards for history at the time of the report.

DATA: THOMAS B. FORDHAM FOUNDATION, *The State of State Standards*, 2006

EDSOURCE 9/08

## California's progress against its own standards, though largely comparable to other states, shows variation by grade level

Acknowledging the wide variation in academic standards and assessments among the states, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted an analysis of how well states were doing against their own benchmarks as reported to the federal government for NCLB purposes. For those states with sufficient data, CEP reported on progress between 2002 and 2007, focusing on whether achievement had increased and if achievement gaps had narrowed.

### California joined the majority of states in showing gains at the elementary level

California's progress against its own demanding performance standards shows gains in elementary school in both math and English language arts, as is true in most other states for which data were available.

### States' progress on the percentage of elementary school students scoring proficient or above on state tests of reading and math, 2002 through 2007

	Reading	Math
States Making Gains	<b>California and 23 other states—</b> AK, AL, AR, FL, IA, ID, KY, LA, MD, MS, MT, ND, NE, NM, NV, OH, OK, OR, SC, TN, TX, WA, WV	<b>California and 27 other states—</b> AK, AL, AR, AZ, FL, GA, IA, ID, KY, LA, MA, MD, MS, MT, NE, NJ, NM, NV, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, TX, WA, WV
States Making Slight Gains	<b>10 states—</b> AZ, CO, HI, IN, MA, NC, NJ, PA, SD, UT	<b>5 states—</b> CO, HI, IN, ND, UT
Sufficient Trend Data Unavailable	<b>16 states</b>	<b>17 states</b>

DATA: *Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002? State Test Score Trends Through 2006–07*, CENTER ON EDUCATION POLICY, 2008. CEP USES 4TH GRADE CALIFORNIA STANDARDS TEST (CST) RESULTS FOR THE STATE'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING AND MATH ANALYSIS. EdSource 9/08

### CEP's report of California's slight decline in middle school math misses real progress in Algebra I results for 8th graders

In middle school, California, like 19 other states, shows a gain in reading, according to the CEP report. However, CEP used Algebra I as its measure of student performance on middle school math in California, a test that about half of the state's 8th graders took in 2007. The researchers reported a slight decline in math performance based on scores of these algebra test takers only. (The percent scoring proficient went from 39% to 38% between 2002 and 2007.)

Underlying this slight decline is the fact that the percentage of 8th graders taking Algebra I in California increased greatly, particularly among lower-scoring subgroups. (The overall participation rate rose from 32% to 49% between 2002 and 2007.) Even though the performance of each ethnic subgroup improved during that time, the rapid expansion in participation by lower-scoring subgroups had a dampening effect on overall scores. Thus, a statewide decrease in the percent of test takers scoring proficient masks the good news of increased participation and test scores for all subgroups. New state efforts to further increase the number of 8th grade students taking the Algebra I test make it likely that these performance data will continue to be complex for years to come.

The key metric for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reporting is the percent of students scoring at least proficient on state tests.

As part of California's development of its state accountability system, California set five performance levels for evaluating student performance on state assessments: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic. For most grade levels and subjects, the proficient benchmark represented an ambitious performance level that less than a third of students were achieving at the time.



### States' progress on the percentage of middle school students scoring proficient or above on state tests of reading and math, 2002 through 2007

	Reading	Math
States Making Gains	<b>California and 19 other states—</b> AK, AL, AR, IA, ID, IN, KY, LA, MA, MD, MT, ND, NE, NM, NV, PA, TN, TX, WA	<b>28 states—</b> AK, AL, AR, CO, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IN, KY, LA, MA, MD, MS, NE, NJ, NM, NV, OH, OK, OR, PA, TN, TX, UT, WA, WV
States Making Slight Gains	<b>9 states—</b> CO, FL, MS, NC, NJ, OH, OK, OR, UT	<b>2 states—</b> ND, SC
No Change	<b>1 state—</b> WV	<b>1 state—</b> AZ
States Making Slight Declines	<b>3 states—</b> AZ, HI, SC	<b>California</b> (based on Algebra I test takers only)
States Making Declines	<b>1 state—</b> SD	<b>1 state—</b> MT
Sufficient Trend Data Unavailable	<b>16 states</b>	<b>17 states</b>

DATA: *Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002? State Test Score Trends Through 2006–07*, CENTER ON EDUCATION POLICY, 2008. FOR CALIFORNIA'S MIDDLE SCHOOL ANALYSIS, CEP USES 8TH GRADE CALIFORNIA STANDARDS TEST (CST) RESULTS FOR READING AND THE ALGEBRA I CST FOR MATH. EdSource 9/08

### California's high school progress is mixed, with gains in math and a slight decline in reading

CEP's analysis places California with 18 other states whose high school students show gains in math and with five states whose students show a slight decline in reading. These findings are difficult to interpret because states vary greatly in which tests are used at the high school level. For example, the only standards-based test in English and math that California high school students take for federal reporting purposes is the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). It measures English standards through 10th grade and middle school math standards (including Algebra I). This is not the approach taken by all states, some of which do not even have exit exams.

### States' progress on the percentage of high school students scoring proficient or above on state tests of reading and math, 2002 through 2007

	Reading	Math
States Making Gains	<b>14 states—</b> AR, KY, MA, MD, MT, ND, NE, NH, OH, OK, PA, TN, TX, WA	<b>California and 18 other states—</b> AL, AR, FL, KY, LA, MA, ME, MS, ND, NE, NH, NJ, OH, OK, TX, UT, WA, WV
States Making Slight Gains	<b>10 states—</b> CO, CT, HI, ID, LA, NJ, OR, RI, SC, UT	<b>7 states—</b> CT, GA, ID, IN, NM, PA, SC
No Change	<b>1 state—</b> IN	<b>4 states—</b> CO, IA, OR, TN
States Making Slight Declines	<b>California and 5 other states—</b> AL, AZ, FL, IA, WV	<b>3 states—</b> AZ, HI, RI
States Making Declines	<b>5 states—</b> ME, MS, NM, NV, SD	<b>2 states—</b> MT, NV
Sufficient Trend Data Unavailable	<b>14 states</b>	<b>15 states</b>

DATA: *Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002? State Test Score Trends Through 2006–07*, CENTER ON EDUCATION POLICY, 2008. CEP USES THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND THE MATH SECTIONS OF THE CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM TAKEN IN 10TH GRADE FOR CALIFORNIA'S HIGH SCHOOL ANALYSIS. EdSource 9/08

The Center on Education Policy stresses that its analysis is not intended to compare states with each other. Rather, the center's central question was the extent to which each state could claim progress against its own standards based on its own assessments. As California's Algebra I results demonstrate, answers to even those seemingly straightforward questions can be misleading.

A major contribution of CEP's work is its online analyses and profiles of the test results for all 50 states. These can be accessed at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org) as part of the report, *Has Student Achievement Increased Since 2002? State Test Score Trends Through 2006–07*.

## California's implementation of No Child Left Behind has meant a large proportion of the state's schools are not making adequate yearly progress

NCLB requires schools, districts, and states as a whole that receive Title I funding to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English language arts and math. Based on federal guidelines, the state sets annual targets for the percentage of students who must test proficient or above in those subjects in order to make AYP.

Several state policy decisions contribute to whether a school, district, or state makes AYP, including:

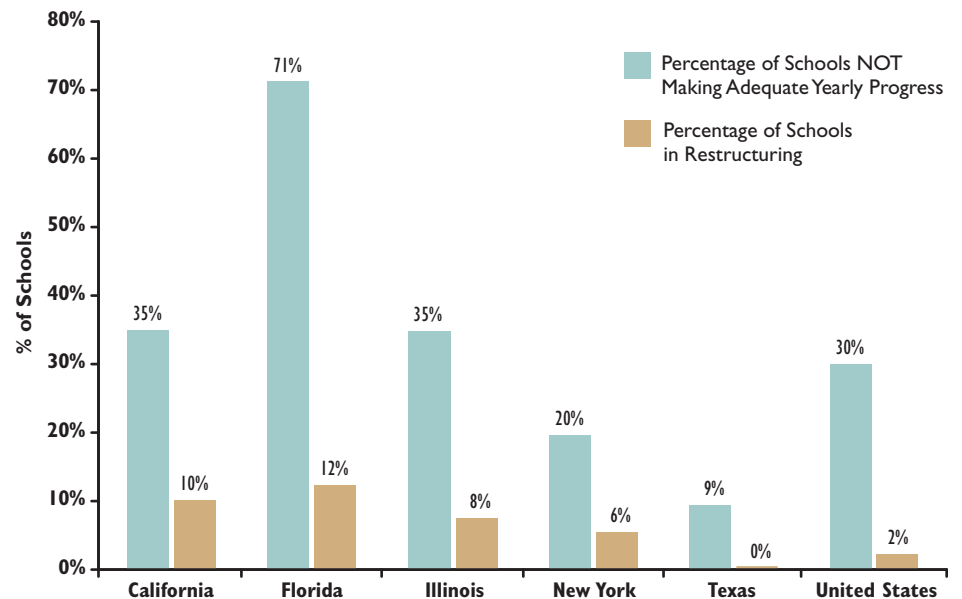
- the rigor of state standards,
- the state's cut score for proficient on the state test, and
- the annual measurable objectives (AMOs) that must be met in order to make AYP.

Each state sets its own policies (with federal approval), and they vary considerably from state to state.

Prior to the enactment of NCLB in January 2002, California's State Board of Education (SBE) had already established rigorous academic content standards and built assessment and accountability systems based on them. The state had also set cut scores that defined proficiency for English language arts and was in the process of doing the same for other subjects. In response to NCLB, the SBE set up California's AMOs based on the demanding definitions of proficiency already in place. With a relatively high bar for proficiency and an ever-increasing percentage of students expected to clear that bar, California is seeing a growing share of its schools unable to make AYP each year.

Within this context, a larger proportion of California schools have been identified for NCLB sanctions than is true nationally. Comparing California to the other four large states, however, shows that Florida has even more schools facing sanctions. By contrast, Texas in particular appears to be faring much better. It is unclear whether Texas students and schools are doing better academically, whether the state's standards are less rigorous, or whether its accountability measures are set up under NCLB differently.

Percentage of total public schools not making AYP and schools in restructuring, 2006-07



A school is considered "in need of improvement" if it or any of its student subgroups has not made adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years on one indicator (English or math). In California, these schools enter "Program Improvement," and they must develop a two-year improvement plan. After four consecutive years of missing AYP goals, a school faces "corrective action" by the state, which includes more serious steps for turning around the school's performance. If after a year of corrective action the school is still not making AYP, it must begin planning some type of "restructuring" to be executed if the school again fails to make AYP. Restructuring requires a change in the governance of the school, with options such as replacing staff or converting to a charter school.

For more information on AYP, please see the Accountability Overview at: [www.edsource.org](http://www.edsource.org)

Note: A Title I school that does not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for five consecutive years is identified for restructuring.

DATA: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, *Consolidated State Performance Report, 2006-07*

EdSource 9/08

### Although California ranks among the lowest states on NAEP, its scores are closer to the national average if English learners' results are excluded

To varying degrees, standardized state tests differ from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in purpose and design and in how well students perform. NAEP is the only national assessment of what U.S. students know and can do in core academic subjects. NAEP is an ongoing assessment, and results are calculated to permit comparisons of student performance among states.

It is important to note, however, the state policies that affect California's NAEP results, as well as the results of the other states:

- NAEP is not aligned with state standards, so it does not necessarily test what students are learning in the classroom.
- California includes many more of its English learners in the testing than do other states with large English learner populations. These students' performance thus has a larger effect on the state's overall performance than is true elsewhere. For greater accuracy, it is important to compare subgroup results with those of similar students in other states and the nation.

California's overall student performance on the 2007 NAEP was significantly lower than the national average. The state's students ranked among the five lowest states on each of the assessments. However, when the English learner population is taken out of the equation and the results of non-English learners only are compared, California's performance is more akin to that of the other large states and the nation as a whole.

#### Percentage of non-English learners scoring proficient or above on 2007 NAEP

	California	Florida	Illinois	New York	Texas	United States
4th Grade Reading	31%	35%	34%	38%	32%	34%
4th Grade Math	40%	42%	39%	46%	44%	42%
8th Grade Reading	26%	29%	30%	33%	29%	31%
8th Grade Math	29%	28%	31%	31%	37%	33%

Note: Observed differences may not be statistically significant.

DATA: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES), NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP), 2007

EdSource 9/08

## Based on estimates, California high school graduation rates were comparable to the national average in 2005

Earning a high school diploma is an important student outcome and a strong predictor of future social and economic success. NCLB requires schools to report graduation rates as an academic accountability indicator at the high school level. However, states currently vary in how they calculate these graduation rates. Efforts to standardize this important measure and make it more accurate are currently under way (see box).

In the meantime, the U.S. Department of Education compares states' graduation rates using an estimate known as the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR). The AFGR is based on the average size of an incoming freshman class and the average number of diplomas awarded four years later. Based on the AFGR estimate, 74.6% of California's 12th graders graduated on time in 2005, roughly the same as the national average of 74.7%, giving California a ranking of 33rd.

### New methods and data are expected to make graduation rates more accurate and more comparable in the future

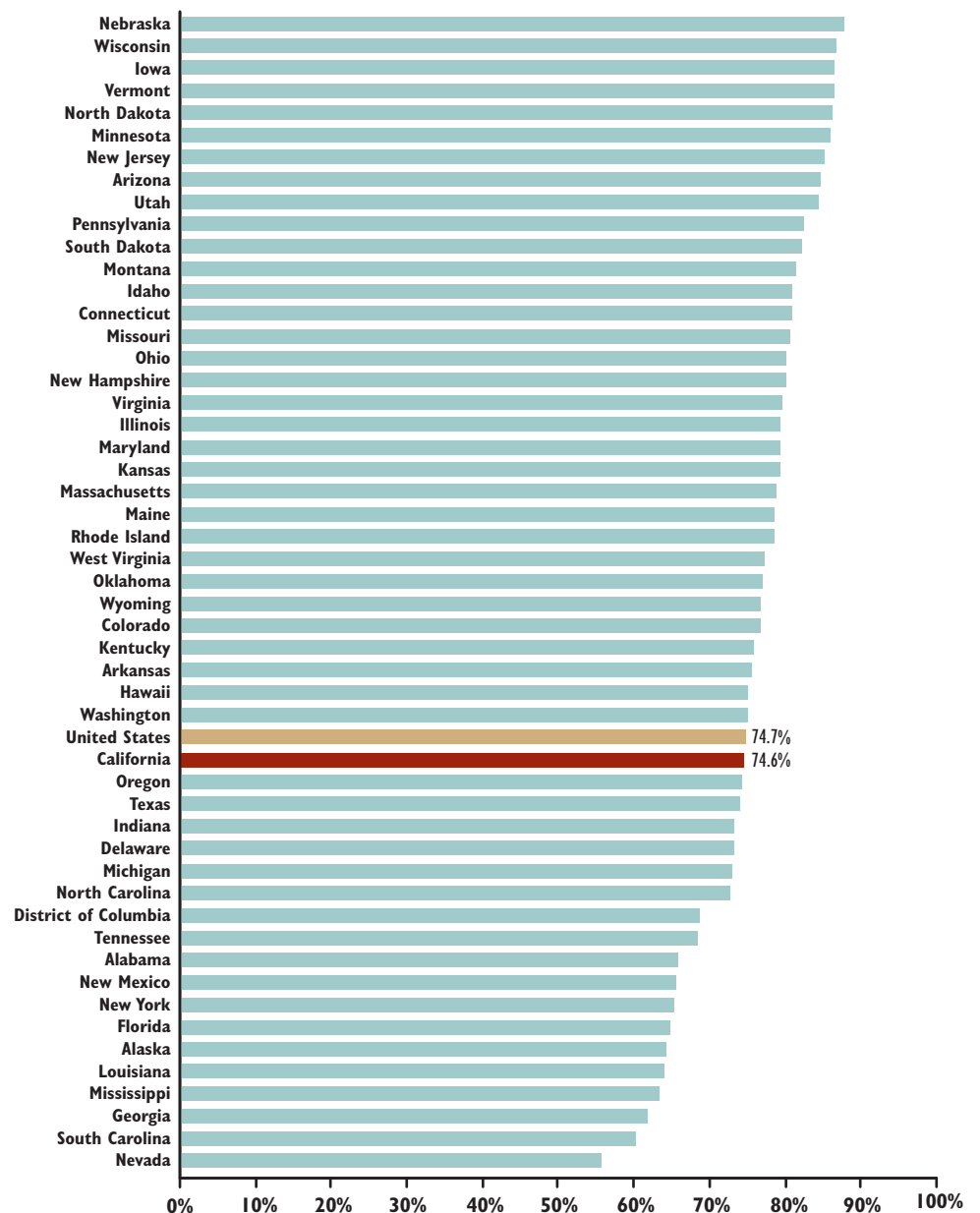
According to *Education Week*, California and most other states use a graduation rate calculation that divides the number of students earning a diploma by that same number, plus students who have dropped out or have otherwise completed their education.

New Department of Education regulations will require states by 2012–13 to use a uniform four-year adjusted cohort rate, agreed to by the National Governors Association (NGA). The cohort method requires a longitudinal data system to assign students a unique identifying number and track the individual from ninth grade through graduation or until that student drops out.

Many states, including California, are in the process of bringing their longitudinal data on line. California's experience with the student-based data in the summer of 2008 makes it clear that this new approach to graduation rate calculations can markedly change the results. Using student-level data for the first time, the state reported that for 2006–07 the "ninth grade to graduate rate" was 67.6%. For that same year, the California Department of Education reported to the federal government a graduation rate of 79.5% using the method specified under its existing NCLB reporting plan.

Between 2000 and 2005, California's estimated graduation rate increased nearly 3 percentage points, at the same rate as the national average. Over that same period, four states saw their graduation rates decline, and 25 states improved but at a slower rate than the national average. The other 21 states improved their graduation rates by more than 3 percentage points.

Graduation rates by state in 2005, using the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) method

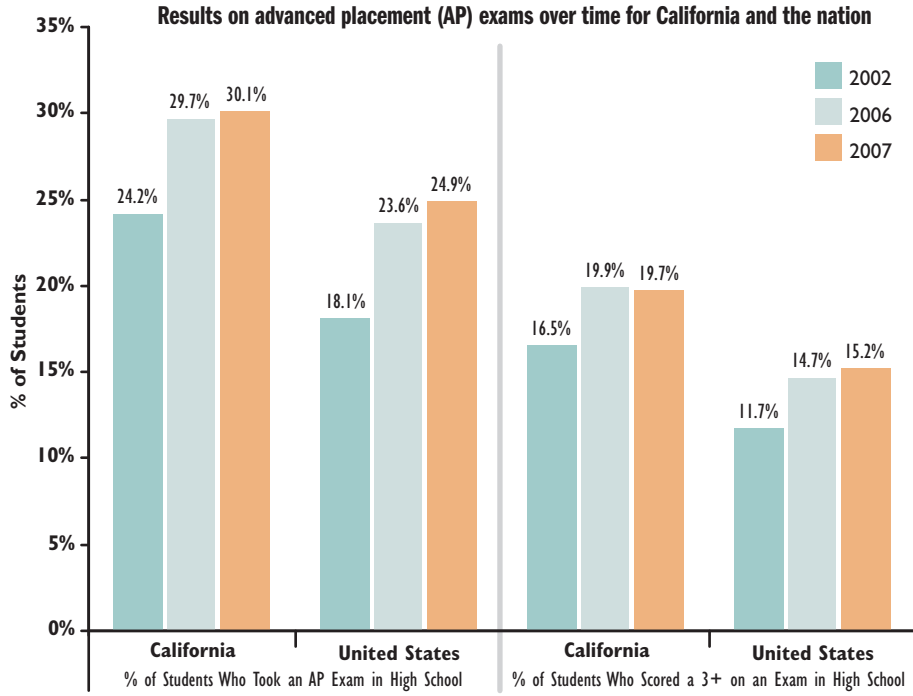


DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES), DIGEST OF EDUCATION STATISTICS, 2007. AVERAGED FRESHMAN GRADUATION RATES FOR PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS, BY STATE: SELECTED YEARS, 1990–91 THROUGH 2004–05

EdSource 9/08

### California high school students exceed their peers in advanced placement course-taking and test performance

During the past few years, the percentage of California students who took an advanced placement (AP) exam in high school has increased and exceeded the national percentage. California students were also more likely to score 3 or better on these tests. Students who score a 3 or higher (out of 5) may receive college credit. According to several studies on the topic, earning a 3 or higher on an AP exam is a main predictor of college performance.



DATA: THE COLLEGE BOARD, AP REPORT TO THE NATION 2008, APPENDIX C

EDSOURCE 9/08

### Performance of California’s college-bound students on the SAT is comparable to that of students in other states

The rates of student participation and achievement on a college-readiness test such as the SAT Reasoning Test (critical reading, mathematics, and writing) provides an important indicator of students’ preparation for college-level work and their postsecondary ambitions. California’s participation rates and scores on the SAT test sections are similar to the national averages.

#### Average scores for California and the nation on the SAT for the class of 2007

Test Section	California	U.S. Average
Critical Reading	499	502
Mathematics	516	515
Writing	498	494
<b>Percent of Graduates Taking the SAT</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>48%</b>

DATA: THE COLLEGE BOARD. SAT SCORE AVERAGES OF COLLEGE-BOUND SENIORS AND PERCENTAGE OF GRADUATES TAKING SAT, BY STATE OR JURISDICTION, 2006–07

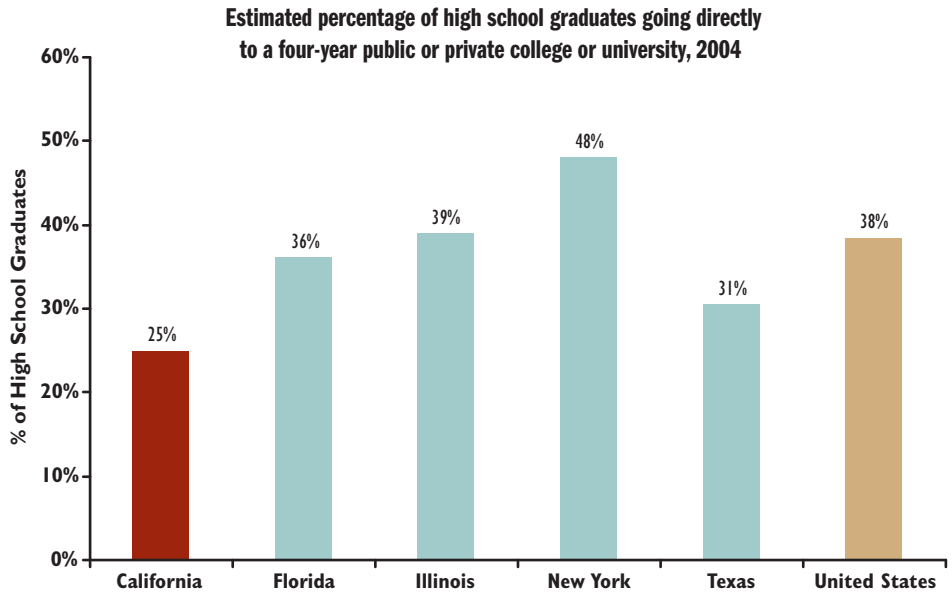
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Because universities in some states require the SAT college admissions test while others require the ACT, comparisons of SAT participation can be somewhat misleading. In California, the College Board reports that 48% of students projected to graduate in 2007 took the SAT. By comparison, 65% of high school graduates in Florida, 89% of graduates in New York, and 52% of graduates in Texas took the SAT. In Illinois, where students are more likely to take the ACT, only 8% of graduating students took the SAT.

In 2007, 15% of California’s graduating seniors took the ACT (U.S. average rate: 42%), according to ACT. The mean composite score for California was 22.1 compared with the U.S. mean of 21.2. Data are not available to determine how many ACT test takers took both tests and thus are included in the SAT total.

## The percentage of California high school graduates who enroll directly in a four-year college is relatively low

California's public and private high school graduates were less likely to enroll directly in a four-year college or university than their peers in the other large states in 2004, according to the most recent estimates available.



This estimate is calculated by dividing the number of students who graduated from any high school in a particular state in the past 12 months and directly enrolled in a four-year college or university anywhere in the United States by the number of public and private high school graduates from that state. All data are not available for each year, so this estimate uses college enrollment data from fall 2004 and public and private high school graduate numbers from spring 2005.

DATA: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES) *Digest of Education Statistics 2007*, TABLE 101; *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, TABLE 204; *Private School Universe Survey, 2005-06*, TABLE 15.

EdSource 9/08

## To Learn More

### Demographics

- More data about the characteristics of California students are available from DataQuest, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>, and Ed-Data, [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us).
- For more information about the state's English learner students, see EdSource's March 2008 report, *English Learners in California: What the Numbers Say*. [www.edsource.org/pub\\_ELvitalstats3-08.html](http://www.edsource.org/pub_ELvitalstats3-08.html)

### Resources

- EdSource's website provides an explanation of California's school finance system. [www.edsource.org/school-finance.html](http://www.edsource.org/school-finance.html)
- Data on per-pupil expenditures and staffing ratios for individual school districts in California over time can be found on the Ed-Data website. [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us)

- NCES offers the *Build a Table* tool that allows users to access multiyear Common Core of Data information. <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat>

### Student Achievement

- Copies of California's academic content standards can be found on the California Department of Education website. [www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp)
- The NAEP section of the NCES website offers a number of website tools and applications. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/naeptools.asp>
- The California Postsecondary Education Commission provides more data on California students' college-going rates. [www.cpec.ca.gov](http://www.cpec.ca.gov)

- For detailed information on statewide test scores, go to the Testing & Accountability section of the California Department of Education website. [www.cde.ca.gov/ta](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta)
- For an in-depth look at the achievement of the state's African American students, see EdSource's May 2008 report, *Raising African American Student Achievement: California Goals, Local Outcomes*. [www.edsource.org/pub\\_AAachievement5-08\\_report.html](http://www.edsource.org/pub_AAachievement5-08_report.html)
- For data on student achievement as well as student demographics and state resources, see EdSource's *2008 Resource Cards on California Schools*. [www.edsource.org/pub\\_resourcecards4-08.html](http://www.edsource.org/pub_resourcecards4-08.html)



## CONCLUSION

National comparisons make it clear that California's public schools face a daunting task. They are being expected to meet demanding new achievement goals that apply to all their students. Yet they collectively educate a higher percentage of academically challenged students and are trying to do so with substantially fewer staff than other states.

### Demographic comparisons show the formidable tasks that California schools face

With its 6.2 million school children, California is the largest state by far and one of the most ethnically diverse. Compared with other states, a higher proportion of K–12 students in California face academic challenges because they live in homes where their parents do not speak English and/or have not graduated from high school.

The sheer size and diversity of California make simply operating a state school system a much more complex and formidable task than what any other state faces. Texas, which is similar in its diversity, educates 2 million fewer children of whom only 16% are identified as English learners, compared with 24% in California.

During the past decade, these realities have made the state's task of implementing a new standards-based education system much more daunting than in states where the numbers are fewer and students' similarities outweigh their differences. But California's reforms are now largely institutionalized, if not fully implemented. In addition, the state's era of explosive population growth and dramatic ethnic change appears to be over. California can perhaps look forward to at least a few years of relative stability in terms of its student population.

### California is behind most other states in the resources its schools have available

California's investment in its schools has also increased somewhat in the past 10 years relative to the national average. That said, in 2005–06 the state remains 7% or \$614 below the U.S. average expenditure per pupil.

The data indicate that the increase that occurred between 2001–02 and 2005–06—from \$7,055 to \$8,486 per pupil (not adjusted for inflation)—did not put more teachers or other staff into the state's schools. Instead, it largely paid for a boost in average salaries, as indicated by teacher salaries. In the process, the state maintained a teacher wage level that is more comparable to other professionals than is the case in most other states.


The net result is that basic resources in California schools changed very little over this time. This state's schools are working with a higher proportion of academically challenged students, and doing so with three adults for every four available in schools nationally. That reality has not deterred state and federal leaders from pressing forward with accountability measures that have raised expectations and increased the pressures that the educators in the system face.

### California students are making some progress, but not enough to meet NCLB benchmarks or the state's ambitious goals

California has set high expectations for the academic achievement of its students. Data indicate that here, as in many other states, the standards-based reform agenda—with its high-stakes assessment and accountability systems—has resulted in higher scores on state achievement tests.

Comparisons with national benchmarks also show that student achievement in California varies depending on the student groups in question. When English learners are not included in NAEP results, the state's student achievement scores come close to the national average.

The California students who take demanding SAT and AP tests do as well or slightly better than their peers nationally. Yet a smaller proportion of California high school graduates go directly to a four-year university.

Overall, California schools appear to be making important progress, but clearly they have much to do. Less apparent is how much more progress is possible and how rapidly it can occur without a real change in the resources available to California schools. This is particularly true for schools with a large number of students who face the most academic challenges, particularly those who need to learn English. In a year when the state is struggling to find funds to maintain the status quo, the possibility of such an increased investment seems very far away. 

For a version of this report that works well with black-and-white printers, [click here](#).

## Acknowledgments

This report was written  
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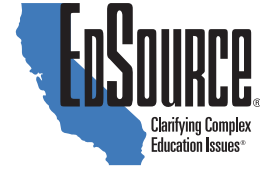
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