



Characteristics of California school districts in program improvement





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July 2008

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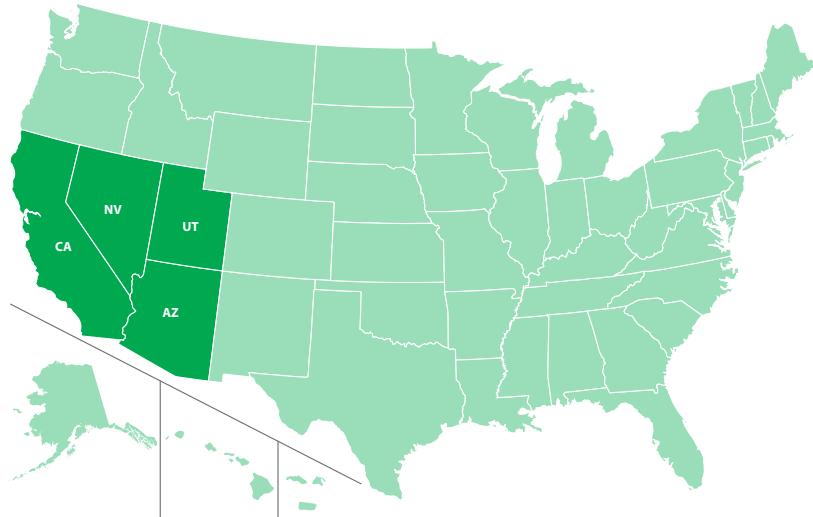
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July 2008

This report was prepared for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under Contract ED-06-CO-0014 by Regional Educational Laboratory West administered by WestEd. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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Crane, E. W., Huang, C.-W., Derby, K., Makkonen, R., and Goel, A. M. (2008). *Characteristics of California school districts in program improvement* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2008-No. 055). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Characteristics of California school districts in program improvement

This descriptive analysis provides a statistical profile of California's Title I school districts in program improvement. As an independent analysis of these districts in the aggregate, it is intended to inform the context for district improvement as California rolls out and refines its district intervention strategies.

Education policymakers and practitioners in California, as elsewhere, are actively addressing the program improvement requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. They have several years of experience with schools in program improvement and school improvement approaches. But because the district-level element of the education accountability system was phased in later, less is known about districts that have been identified as in need of program improvement, about how district performance under state accountability rules compares with that of their own schools, and about what districts in program improvement might have in common and how they compare with other districts.

This report provides a statistical profile of California's Title I districts in program improvement. As an independent analysis of these districts in the aggregate, it is intended to be a useful source of information to California

decisionmakers about the characteristics of districts in program improvement.

Under the NCLB Act each state must operate a two-level education accountability system, with one level focused on school performance and the other on district performance. Separate accountability calculations are made for schools and for districts, which makes it possible for individual schools to have a different accountability status from their district. To make adequate yearly progress, California districts need to meet as many as 46 individual requirements. California's school districts first became subject to program improvement in 2005/06 if they had failed to make adequate yearly progress in the two previous years in the same content area or accountability category.

A key finding of this study is that the district level of California's accountability system is identifying problems that are missed at the school level. An examination of how California's 961 Title I districts and their 10,290 schools did on individual adequate yearly progress requirements under the NCLB Act reveals that in 2005/06—the year on which the 2006/07 program improvement designations were based—207 districts (78 of them in program improvement) failed to make adequate yearly progress on at least one requirement,

even though all their schools did so on the same requirement. In addition, 24 districts failed to make adequate yearly progress in the aggregate, even though not one school in those districts failed to do so. Regarding improvement status, in 2006/07 four districts in program improvement had no schools identified for improvement.

In these cases the districts were held accountable for certain student subgroups whose performance was not tracked by the school-level accountability rules because there were too few students in the subgroup at each school to meet the minimum subgroup size (100 or more) in California for reporting under the NCLB Act. This occurred most often for the students with disabilities subgroup. While such inconsistencies may appear counterintuitive at first, they reflect the effectiveness of a two-level accountability system—with the district-level system picking up, monitoring, and being accountable for students missed by the school-level system.

In 2006/07, 159 (17 percent) of the state's 961 Title I school districts were in program improvement. These districts served more than 2.6 million students, or 42 percent of all public school enrollment. Close to half the students in districts in program improvement were also enrolled in schools in program improvement (1.2 million). Compared with the state's 802 districts not identified for program improvement, the districts in program improvement were larger on average, with more schools and students, and were more frequently located in urban

settings. But although districts in improvement had a greater proportion of large districts than did districts not identified for improvement, some very large districts were not identified for improvement. In fact, half of the largest districts in the state (5 of 10) were not identified for program improvement in 2006/07. California's districts in program improvement also tended to have higher proportions of Hispanic, Black, English language learner, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Moving forward, California's districts in program improvement face substantial challenges. Only 22 of the 159 districts in program improvement made adequate yearly progress in 2005/06, and statewide proficiency targets were set to increase again in spring 2008. Compared with other districts, districts in program improvement tend to have more English language learner students and students with disabilities and are more likely to be held accountable for the test performance of these subgroups. Moreover, among all districts that are accountable for these two subgroups, districts in program improvement have disproportionately failed to meet the proficiency targets for the subgroups. California's new intervention process for districts in program improvement, the District Assistance and Intervention Team, which will have increased prominence in the state's district improvement efforts over the coming years, emphasizes improved services to English language learner students and students with disabilities.

July 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why this study?	1
Findings of the study	4
The district accountability system monitored the progress of many students that the school accountability system did not have to monitor	5
Districts in program improvement tended to be larger and more urban than other districts	7
Districts in program improvement had different student demographics than did other districts	8
The share of highly qualified teachers and per student staffing and expenditure levels varied little between districts in program improvement and other districts	8
Districts in program improvement have struggled to meet proficiency targets; other districts also face increasing challenges	9
Districts in program improvement were accountable for more student subgroups than other districts	12
Implications for research and practice	14
Appendix A Research questions, data sources, and methodology	16
Appendix B The 159 California districts in program improvement in 2006/07, with their 2005/06 student enrollments	19
Appendix C Summary of California's district accountability system	21
Notes	24
References	26
Boxes	
1 Accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act: definitions of key concepts	2
2 Summary of methods and data sources	3
Figures	
1 Distribution of California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement by locale, 2004/05	8
2 Median percentages of students scoring proficient or above in California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement, spring 2006	11
3 Percentage of students meeting annual measurable objectives in California's Title I districts accountable for subgroups of English language learner students and students with disabilities, spring 2006	13
4 Annual measurable objective attainment trends among California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement accountable for subgroups of English language learner students and students with disabilities, 2004–06	14
Tables	
1 Program or improvement status of California's 961 Title I districts, entering 2006/07 school year	4
2 California Title I districts that failed an adequate yearly progress requirement but had no schools that failed the same requirement, 2005/06	6

3	Detail for the 207 California Title I districts that failed an adequate yearly progress requirement but had no schools that failed the same requirement, 2005/06 (number of districts)	7
4	Distribution of California students by 2006/07 school and district program improvement status	8
5	Student demographics in California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement, 2005/06 (median percentages)	9
6	Median percentages of core academic subjects taught by highly qualified teachers, staffing rates, and education expenditures in California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement	10
7	Adequate yearly progress requirements on which California's Title I districts in program improvement fell short most frequently in 2005/06	12
8	Number of student subgroups for which California Title I school districts were held accountable in 2005/06	12
C1	California's proficiency baselines and intermediate goals, grades 2–8 and high school (percent)	22

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WHY THIS STUDY?

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 calls for a two-part accountability system in each state—one part tracking school-level performance and the other district-level performance.¹

One goal of performing separate adequate yearly progress calculations at the school and district levels is to give educators—from practitioners to policymakers—a clear picture of where improvement efforts are needed so that every student may succeed. District-level accountability is the newer of the two education accountability elements, phased in nationwide beginning with the 2002/03 school year (see box 1 for a discussion of key concepts under the NCLB Act). Because Title I school accountability policies pre-date the NCLB Act, the first California schools were identified for program improvement more than a decade ago, in 1996/97, but the first California districts were not identified until 2004/05.

Not surprising, therefore, more is known about schools in need of improvement, and intervention efforts at the school level are largely defined and in place. Less understood are districts in program improvement. For example, do districts in program improvement—or districts not identified for improvement, for that matter—typically have the same adequate yearly progress status as the majority of their schools? If not, why might such inconsistencies occur? Do districts in program improvement share some characteristics? How do they resemble or differ from other districts? In what areas do districts most commonly fail to make adequate yearly progress? Education decisionmakers in California and other states in the West Regional Educational Laboratory Region have requested more information about the characteristics of their districts in program improvement. This report seeks to provide some of that information.

California, which operates the largest public school system in the country, is piloting the District Assistance and Intervention Team (DAIT) process, offering guidance, technical assistance, monitoring, and support for districts in program improvement (California Department of Education 2007b). The process incorporates a school-level academic survey to measure the presence of program components associated with instructional success and district-level self-assessments to help districts analyze and address the needs of their students,

BOX 1**Accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act: definitions of key concepts**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The NCLB Act is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the central federal law in K-12 education. At its heart are new provisions to drive broad achievement gains, eliminate disparities between groups of students, and hold states, districts, and schools more accountable for performance and progress.

Title I. Title I is the section of the NCLB Act governing resources for districts and schools serving disadvantaged student populations, including low-performing and high-poverty students. It includes accountability provisions for the academic performance of all students and subgroups of students (ethnic groups, low-income students, students with disabilities).

Adequate yearly progress. States must assess students annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school in mathematics and reading/language arts tests aligned with state academic standards. To make adequate yearly progress, schools and districts receiving Title I funds must meet participation and performance requirements on these tests and perform adequately on a state-determined “additional indicator.” In California this indicator is the high school graduation rate and in K-8, growth in the Academic Performance Index, the state’s own measure of academic performance. Performance requirements rise to 100 percent proficiency in 2013/14. Performance goals are the same for all students.

Annual measurable objectives. Performance requirements in mathematics and reading/language arts are expressed as the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on tests aligned with state content standards. Though the schedule varies by state, annual measurable objectives rise to 100 percent in 2013/14 in all states.

Safe harbor provision. The NCLB Act’s “safe harbor” provision is an alternative measure of adequate yearly progress. A school or district achieves adequate yearly progress by this measure if it reduces by at least 10 percent over the previous year the percentage of students in each subgroup that fails to score proficient or above.

Confidence intervals. Confidence intervals (calculations of the upper and lower limits between which there is “confidence” that a school or district’s true percentage falls) account for statistical uncertainty in the percentage of students scoring proficient. For example, if 69 percent of students in a school score proficient in mathematics, then depending on the number of students tested, the lower proficiency limit might be 63 percent and the upper 75 percent—a result that might be high enough to move the school above the annual measurable objective target in mathematics. Including confidence intervals in accountability systems is intended to acknowledge random measurement errors in assessments and hold the entities affected harmless. Virtually all states use some form of confidence intervals (Chudowsky and Chudowsky 2005).

Another trend is use of confidence intervals with safe harbor provisions, which relaxes the 10 percent reduction rule since confidence intervals

afford more leniency for smaller subgroups. Eight states (including California) added a 75 percent confidence interval for safe harbor in 2005; nine states did so in 2004 (Chudowsky and Chudowsky 2007).

School and local education agency improvement and corrective action. Schools and districts that repeatedly fail to make adequate yearly progress face increasingly serious consequences from the state. In general, a school or district not making adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years in the same content area or accountability category is identified as a school in need of improvement or a district in program improvement. Though 2004/05 was the first year that districts were subject to improvement nationwide, in California implementation was delayed a year. A district in program improvement that fails to make adequate yearly progress for two more consecutive years (advancing to Year 3 status) becomes subject to “corrective action,” which includes deferment or reduction of state funds, student transfers to a higher performing school in another district, implementation of a new curriculum, replacement of district staff, removal of schools from the district’s jurisdiction, appointment of a trustee to run the district, and abolition or restructuring of the district. To exit program improvement, a district must meet all adequate yearly progress criteria for two years in a row.

To implement these provisions, each state had to submit an accountability plan for review to the federal government. Appendix C offers an overview of school and district accountability in California.

including English language learner students and students with disabilities. All DAIT-guided steps are designed to be carried out by a collaborative team of DAIT and district officials (California Department of Education and California County Superintendents Educational Services Association 2007a,b).

In considering how best to prepare and deploy DAIT teams and other interventions targeted to school districts, California's decisionmakers may benefit from a better overall understanding of local districts in program improvement. This study provides a statistical profile of California's Title I districts in program improvement (see box 1). The report addresses two sets of questions. One set concerns how the performance of districts in program improvement (as defined under California's district accountability rules) compares with the performance of their own schools (as defined under the state's school accountability rules). The other set of questions concerns common characteristics of districts in program improvement, including how they compare with districts that

are not identified for improvement. (For details on the data sources and methodology used to answer these questions, see box 2 and appendix A.)

California requirements for districts in program improvement mirror federal requirements. California's school districts first became subject to program improvement in 2005/06 if they had failed to make adequate yearly progress during 2003/04 and 2004/05 in the same content area or accountability category. These school districts were in a Year 1 status during 2005/06. Districts in Year 1 status that did not make adequate yearly progress during 2005/06 advanced to Year 2 status in 2006/07, while those that did make adequate yearly progress remained in Year 1 status. In 2005/06, 159 (17 percent) of the 961 California districts receiving Title I funding had been designated for program improvement; 802 (83 percent) had not.¹ Another 73 districts did not receive Title I funds and were not subject to program improvement requirements. Districts receiving Title I funds account for more than 98 percent of California's public school enrollment. (See appendix B for

BOX 2**Summary of methods and data sources**

To generate a statistical profile of California's districts in program improvement, the research team acquired online demographic, assessment, and accountability data from the California Department of Education. Most data were collected in May 2007.

The research team met with and called California Department of Education staff to clarify ambiguous data elements or findings. Financial and staffing data and information about the rural-urban characteristics of districts were downloaded from the federal Common Core of

Data maintained by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2007). The research team merged datasets to link key variables, and district and school characteristics were investigated using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, measures of central tendency (generally, the median), and measures of variability (for example, interquartile range).

The aim of the study was to document basic descriptive information about California districts in program improvement and to compare them with districts not identified for improvement. The study relied on publicly available demographic, assessment, accountability, financial,

and staffing data. Although the report documents performance differences for certain student subgroups that are associated with program improvement status, the reasons for performance differences cannot be determined with the data available to this study. Students may differ in important ways in districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement, including initial achievement before entering the district and access to resources outside of school that support learning and achievement. Thus, the reasons for the observed differences in performance cannot be identified in this study. Appendix A offers further detail about the research questions, data sources, and methodology used in this study.

TABLE 1

Program or improvement status of California's 961 Title I districts, entering 2006/07 school year

Status	Number	Percent of total
In program improvement	159	16.5
Year 1 status (not making adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years: 2003/04 and 2004/05 or 2004/05 and 2005/06)	59	6.1
Year 2 status (not making adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years: 2003/04, 2004/05, and 2005/06)	100	10.4
Not identified for improvement	802	83.5
Made adequate yearly progress in 2005/06	595	61.9
Did not make adequate yearly progress in 2005/06	207	21.5
Total	961	100.0

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a,g).

a list of California's districts in program improvement in 2006/07, along with student enrollment information.)

Of the 159 districts in program improvement, 59 were in Year 1 of program improvement and 100 were in Year 2 (table 1). The Year 1 cohort had not made adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years (in the same content area or accountability category), whereas the Year 2 cohort had not made adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years. An additional 207 districts had not made adequate yearly progress during 2005/06 and so were at risk of entering program improvement in 2007/08 if they did not make adequate yearly progress in 2006/07. No California districts were subject to "corrective action," which occurs when a district moves into a third year of program improvement, because district-level accountability had not yet been in effect for three years in California.²

In 2006/07, 159 (17 percent) of California's 961 Title I school districts were in program improvement. They served more than 2.6 million students, or 42 percent of public school enrollment

In general, California's districts in program improvement oversee more schools in improvement than do districts not identified for improvement (both per district and overall), and their schools tend to be facing more severe sanctions than schools in improvement in other districts. Of the 1,178 California schools in corrective action

(because they have been in program improvement for three or more years) in 2006/07, 845 (72 percent) were in districts in program improvement.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In 2006/07, 159 (17 percent) of California's 961 Title I school districts were in program improvement. These districts served more than 2.6 million students, or 42 percent of all public school enrollment. Close to half the students in districts in program improvement were also enrolled in the 1,439 schools in program improvement (1.2 million). Compared with the state's 802 districts not identified for improvement, the districts in program improvement were larger on average, with more schools and students, and were more frequently located in urban settings. But although districts in program improvement had a larger proportion of large districts than did districts not identified for improvement, some very large districts were not in improvement. In fact, half of the largest districts in the state (5 of 10) were not identified for program improvement in 2006/07. California's districts in program improvement also tended to have more student subgroups and have higher proportions of Hispanic, Black, English language learner, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

A key finding of this study is that the district level of California's accountability system is identifying

problems that are missed at the school level. An examination of how California's 961 Title I districts and their schools did on individual adequate yearly progress requirements reveals that in 2005/06—the year on which the 2006/07 program improvement designations were based—207 districts (78 of them districts in program improvement) failed to make adequate yearly progress on at least one requirement, even though all their schools made adequate yearly progress on the same requirement. In addition, 24 districts failed to make adequate yearly progress in the aggregate even though not one school in those districts failed to do so. Regarding improvement status, which is based on adequate yearly progress calculations in the preceding years, in 2006/07 four districts in program improvement had no schools identified for improvement.

In these cases the districts were held accountable for certain student subgroups whose performance was not tracked by the school-level accountability rules because there were not enough students in the subgroup to meet the minimum subgroup size (100 or more) in California for reporting under the NCLB Act. This occurred most often for the students with disabilities subgroup. While such inconsistencies may appear counterintuitive at first, they reflect the effectiveness of a two-level accountability system—with the district-level system picking up, monitoring, and being accountable for students missed by the school-level system.

Moving forward, California's districts in program improvement face substantial challenges. Only 22 of the 159 districts in program improvement made adequate yearly progress in 2005/06, and statewide proficiency targets were set to increase again in spring 2008. Compared with other districts, districts in program improvement tend to have more English language learner students and students with disabilities and are more likely to be held accountable for the test performance of these subgroups. Moreover, among all districts that are accountable for these two subgroups, districts in program improvement have disproportionately failed to meet the proficiency targets for them.

California's new intervention process for districts in program improvement, DAIT, which will have increased prominence in the state's district improvement efforts over the coming years, emphasizes improved services to English language learner students and students with disabilities.

In 2006/07 four districts in program improvement had no schools identified for improvement

The district accountability system monitored the progress of many students that the school accountability system did not have to monitor

Can a district miss making adequate yearly progress even if all its schools make adequate yearly progress? Though this may seem counterintuitive, separate calculations at the school and district levels mean that the answer is yes. The study found accountability inconsistencies at multiple levels of analysis, from individual adequate yearly progress requirements to adequate yearly progress overall and district program improvement. To make adequate yearly progress, California districts need to meet as many as 46 individual requirements.³ In 2005/06, the year on which the 2006/07 designations of districts in program improvement were based, 207 (22 percent) of the state's 961 districts failed to make adequate yearly progress on at least one adequate yearly progress requirement, even though all their schools made adequate yearly progress on (or were not accountable for) that requirement (table 2). In 24 of these 207 districts all the schools met all the requirements or were not held accountable for them (not shown in table). Collectively, these 207 districts—78 of them in program improvement at the time—enrolled more than 1.2 million students (20 percent of the statewide enrollment), and 153 of the districts were in city or urban fringe areas. Thus a district may be in program improvement even if none or only a few of its schools are in program improvement. In 2006/07 four districts in program improvement had no schools in program improvement.

There are two reasons why districts might not meet an adequate yearly progress requirement when all

TABLE 2

California Title I districts that failed an adequate yearly progress requirement but had no schools that failed the same requirement, 2005/06

Category	Number of districts or students	Percent of Title I districts ^a
Districts with district-school inconsistencies	207	22
Districts in program improvement	78	8
District not identified for improvement	129	13
Student enrollment in these districts	1,211,007	20

a. N = 961 districts with 6,211,441 students.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a).

their schools do: districts are held accountable for students who are not enrolled in a school for a full academic year, and individual schools may have too few students in a given subgroup to be held accountable for its progress. In California schools with fewer than 100 students in a subgroup are not generally held accountable for the test participation or performance of students in that subgroup. But when the students in that subgroup at each school are aggregated at the district level, the districtwide subgroup size may be large enough for an adequate yearly progress determination.

The tendency for the district-level accountability system to identify and count students not meeting a particular standard who were not identified and counted by the school-level accountability system was most pronounced for students with disabilities (table 3). Of California's 961 districts, 107 (11 percent) did not meet the English language arts annual measurable objective proficiency target for their students with disabilities subgroup in 2005/06, even though none of their schools failed to meet this target. Such inconsistencies

resulted almost entirely from the aggregation at a district level of subgroups that were too small to be counted at individual schools.

Of the 1,174 schools overseen by these 107 districts, in 2005/06 only 10 had enough students with disabilities to be counted for accountability purposes, and all 10 met the English language arts annual measurable objective proficiency target. In other accountability categories for this subgroup 46 districts had similar inconsistencies for the mathematics proficiency target, 63 districts on the English language arts participation rate, and 34 districts on the mathematics participation rate. Some districts failed more than one requirement. Taken together, 161 California districts (17 percent) failed to make one of the adequate yearly progress requirements for their students with disabilities subgroup, even though none of their schools failed to make the same adequate yearly progress requirement. (The 161 districts represent an unduplicated count that cannot be derived directly from table 3.) These types of inconsistencies also were evident, though less common, across other adequate yearly progress requirements (see table 3).

Inconsistencies between adequate yearly progress outcomes for a district and those for its schools are not new. In 2004 the California Department of Education sought to address these inconsistencies, proposing to double to 200 students the minimum subgroup size for districts—and to raise to 100 students the size for subgroups that represented at least 15 percent of the total district enrollment (California Department of Education 2004). However, this proposal was not adopted. Thus, California's adequate yearly progress accountability rules at the district and school levels continue to yield inconsistent results for some districts and their schools. In these cases districts are held accountable for students who slip through school accountability processes. Together, the dual approaches appear comprehensive—counting and being accountable for all students. By identifying underperformance missed by school accountability, California's

The tendency for the district-level accountability system to identify students not meeting a particular standard who were not identified by the school-level accountability system was most pronounced for students with disabilities

TABLE 3

Detail for the 207 California Title I districts that failed an adequate yearly progress requirement but had no schools that failed the same requirement, 2005/06 (number of districts)

Adequate yearly progress requirement	English language arts	Mathematics	Additional indicator
Annual measurable objective proficiency target			
Students with disabilities	107	46	na
English language learner students	19	5	na
Hispanic students	9	5	na
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	7	7	na
Black students	5	6	na
School- or districtwide ^a	3	6	na
White students	2	4	na
Participation rate			
Students with disabilities	63	34	na
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	8	10	na
Black students	6	5	na
Hispanic students	3	5	na
White students	2	5	na
School- or districtwide ^a	1	2	na
English language learner students	0	1	na
Additional indicator			
Academic Performance Index criteria	na	na	1
Graduation rate ^b	na	na	5

na is not applicable.

Note: Totals (not shown) exceed 207 because some districts have district-school inconsistencies in multiple categories.

a. This discrepancy generally reflects students who are not enrolled in a school for a full academic year and so who are not counted at the school level but are accounted for at the district level.

b. This discrepancy reflects high schools too small to be accountable for the graduation rate requirement and students who are not enrolled in a school for a full academic year and so who are not counted at the school level but are accounted for at the district level.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a).

district accountability procedures capture the performance and progress of students who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

Districts in program improvement tended to be larger and more urban than other districts

California's districts in program improvement tended to have more schools and higher student enrollments than districts not identified for improvement. In 2005/06 the median number of schools and enrollment in districts in program improvement was 12 schools and 7,472 students,

compared with only 5 schools and 1,213 students for other districts.⁴

Collectively, California's 159 districts in program improvement enrolled more than 2.6 million students in 2006/07, with just under half of those students (1.2 million) also enrolled in schools in program improvement (table 4). Another 485,617 students were in schools in program improvement in districts not identified for improvement.

The state's districts in program improvement tended to be located in more urban settings. In

TABLE 4

Distribution of California students by 2006/07 school and district program improvement status

	In districts in program improvement	In districts not identified for improvement	Total
In schools in program improvement	1,239,587	485,617	1,725,204
In schools not identified for improvement	1,364,819	3,121,418	4,486,237
Total	2,604,406	3,607,035	6,211,441

Note: The table does not include the 100,995 students enrolled in the 73 districts that do not receive Title I funds.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007g) for improvement program status and California Department of Education (2007d) for student enrollment.

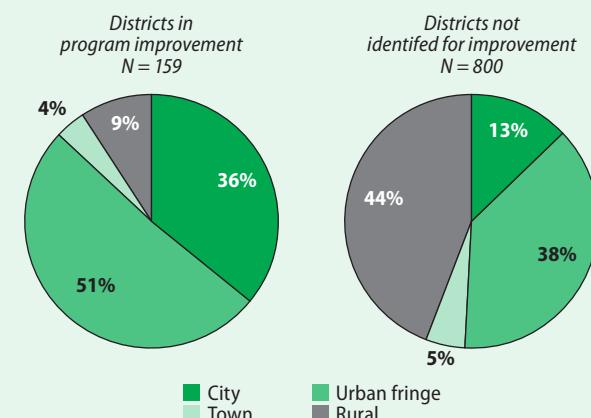
2004/05, the most recent year for which data were available at the time of writing, 87 percent of districts in program improvement were in city or urban fringe areas, compared with only 51 percent of other districts (figure 1).⁵ However, not all large, urban districts were in program improvement. In 2006/07, 5 of the state's 10 largest districts (San Diego Unified, Long Beach Unified, Elk Grove Unified, Capistrano Unified, and Sacramento City Unified) were not in program improvement.

None of California's three types of school districts (elementary, high school, and unified) was more strongly represented among program improvement districts than any other in 2006/07. The distribution of school district types was similar in districts in program improvement and in districts not identified for improvement: about 54 percent were elementary school districts, about 9 percent were high school districts, and about 38 percent were unified school districts.

Districts in program improvement had different student demographics than did other districts

Districts in program improvement tended to have a different ethnic composition from districts

FIGURE 1

Distribution of California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement by locale, 2004/05

Note: Because of missing data, districts not identified for program improvement total fewer than 802.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2007).

not identified for improvement. For example, in 2004/05 among districts in program improvement the median percentage of Hispanic students (59 percent) and Black students (3 percent) were both about double the medians in districts not identified for improvement (24 percent and 2 percent); and the median percentage of White students (19 percent) in districts in program improvement was about a third that in other districts (58 percent).

The proportions of special populations of students tended to differ as well. In 2005/06 the median percentages of English language learner students and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch were both higher in districts in program improvement (table 5). The exception was students with disabilities, with median proportions similar in both types of districts.

The share of highly qualified teachers and per student staffing and expenditure levels varied little between districts in program improvement and other districts

Across California there was little difference in the percentage of core academic subjects⁶ taught by highly qualified teachers (as defined under

TABLE 5
Student demographics in California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement, 2005/06 (median percentages)

Subgroup	Districts in program improvement	Districts not identified for improvement
Race/ethnicity		
White, not Hispanic	19.0 (8.1–34.7)	58.2 (33.7–75.8)
Hispanic	59.2 (41.9–79.2)	23.6 (9.9–44.8)
Black, not Hispanic	3.4 (1.1–9.9)	1.7 (0.7–4.0)
Asian	1.7 (0.8–5.2)	1.6 (0.6–5.2)
American Indian	0.5 (0.2–0.9)	0.7 (0.2–2.0)
Filipino	0.7 (0.3–2.0)	0.5 (0–1.4)
Pacific Islander	0.3 (0.1–0.6)	0.3 (0–0.6)
Special populations		
English language learner students	30.9 (20.3–44.0)	12.1 (4.6–25.2)
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	69.7 (52.4–81.3)	44.8 (25.5–64.8)
Students with disabilities	10.1 (8.5–11.4)	10.1 (7.8–12.2)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the spread of values from the 25th to the 75th percentiles, which give a sense of how districts vary within each group. Because of missing data, districts in program improvement sometimes total fewer than 159 and districts not identified for improvement total fewer than 802: ethnicity: 159 districts in program improvement, 800 other districts; English language learner students: 159 districts in program improvement, 721 other districts; students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch: 158 districts in program improvement, 795 other districts; students with disabilities: 159 districts in program improvement, 801 other districts.

Source: Authors' analysis based on California Department of Education (2007c) for race/ethnicity; California Department of Education (2007f) for English language learner students; California Department of Education (2007e) for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; and California Department of Education (2007a) for students with disabilities.

the NCLB Act) between districts in program improvement and other districts.⁷ The median per student staffing and per student expenditure levels were similar as well. However, in two cases the median values for districts not identified for improvement fell in the lower or upper quartile of the distribution for districts in program improvement. California's districts not identified for improvement tended to employ more school administrators and fewer instructional coordinators and supervisors per 1,000 students (table 6).

Districts in program improvement have struggled to meet proficiency targets; other districts also face increasing challenges

Not unexpected, student test performance tended to be higher in districts not identified for improvement than in districts in program improvement, but many of the districts not identified for improvement are quite close to being subject to program improvement, especially with annual measurable objectives set to rise in 2008. The median proficiency level (students scoring proficient or above) on the spring 2006 English language arts test was 33 percent among districts in program improvement and 49 percent among other districts. In mathematics the median proficiency level was 39 percent among districts in program improvement and 51 percent among other districts (figure 2).

Student test performance tended to be higher in districts not identified for improvement than in districts in program improvement

More than 100 districts either did not meet the annual measurable objectives or exceeded them by no more than 5 percentage points in 2006, a slim margin in light of the schedule of annual measurable objectives (table C1 in appendix C). Specifically, 26 percent of districts in program improvement and 10 percent of other districts either did not meet the districtwide annual measurable objective in at least one subject or exceeded it by 5 or fewer percentage points. If

TABLE 6

Median percentages of core academic subjects taught by highly qualified teachers, staffing rates, and education expenditures in California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement

Category	Districts in program improvement	Districts not identified for improvement
Core academic subjects taught by highly qualified teachers, 2005/06 (percent)		
Highly qualified based on education or training	60.5 (43.8–86.2)	66.7 (47.7–93.0)
Highly qualified based on California's High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE)	11.5 (0.9–35.9)	17.3 (0.0–40.1)
Number of districts		
Staffing per 1,000 students, 2004/05	159	788
Teachers		
	47.5 (45.0–50.0)	49.7 (46.3–55.8)
School administrators	2.1 (1.9–2.5)	2.5 (2.0–3.4)
District administrators	0.4 (0.2–0.6)	0.4 (0.0–0.9)
Instructional coordinators and supervisors	0.6 (0.4–1.1)	0.3 (0.0–0.8)
Guidance counselors	0.7 (0.2–1.3)	0.4 (0.0–1.1)
Number of districts		
Expenditures per student, 2003/04 (dollars)	159	800
Instructional^a		
	4,527 (4,083–4,866)	4,529 (4,122–5,240)
Noninstructional ^b	319 (252–397)	274 (194–393)
Support services ^c	2,273 (2,062–2,602)	2,444 (2,079–3,181)
Number of districts		

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the spread of values from the 25th to the 75th percentiles, which give a sense of how districts vary within each group. Because of missing data, districts identified for program improvement total fewer than 159 and districts not identified for program improvement total fewer than 802.

a. Current expenditures for activities directly associated with the interaction between teachers and students, including teacher salaries and benefits, supplies (such as textbooks), and purchased instructional services.

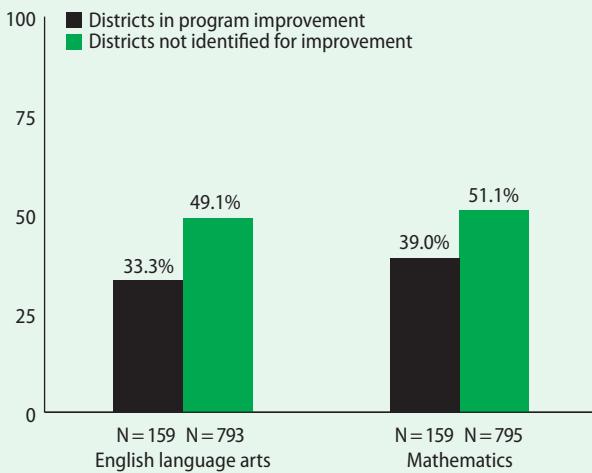
b. Composed predominantly of food services and enterprise operations, such as bookstores and interscholastic athletics.

c. Incorporates student support services, instructional staff support, general administration support services, school administration support services, operations and maintenance, student transportation support services, and other support services.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007c), for core subjects; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2007), for staffing and expenditures per 1,000 students.

FIGURE 2

Median percentages of students scoring proficient or above in California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement, spring 2006



Note: Because of missing data, districts not identified for improvement total fewer than 802.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a).

district-level proficiency rates remain the same, 85 districts in program improvement (54 percent) and 139 other districts (18 percent) will fall short of the 2008 annual measurable objective. The number of districts that do not make adequate yearly progress is likely to grow in 2008/09 and beyond, as the annual measurable objective targets rise; historical examples of even large districtwide gains in student achievement are not sufficient to meet the increasingly stringent annual measurable objective targets (Linn, Baker, and Betebenner 2002).

These projections of districts not making adequate yearly progress districtwide are likely to underestimate the percentage of districts not making adequate yearly progress. Overall district-level performance is only one requirement of adequate yearly progress, and it can be much higher than the performance of the lowest scoring subgroup. Although all the median district-level figures displayed in figure 2 were above the statewide annual measurable objective set for 2004/05, they represented only two

of the state's many adequate yearly progress criteria, and a district could have failed to make adequate yearly progress based on other criteria. Furthermore, if these same district-level passing rates were achieved in spring 2008, the median English language arts proficiency level among districts in program improvement (33 percent) would fall just below the 2008 statewide annual measurable objective (see appendix C).

While only 22 of 159 (14 percent) of California's districts in program improvement met all their adequate yearly progress requirements in 2005/06, 595 of 802 (75 percent) of other districts did so. If these 22 districts in program improvement make adequate yearly progress again in 2006/07, they will exit program improvement. (Adequate yearly progress determinations for 2006/07 were released by the California Department of Education in September 2007.)

Most districts that did not make adequate yearly progress in 2005/06 fell short in multiple areas. Of the 207 districts not identified for improvement that did not make adequate yearly progress in 2005/06, 150 (72 percent) fell short in more than one area. Of the 137 districts in program improvement that did not make adequate yearly progress in 2005/06, 130 (95 percent) had multiple problem areas. The most challenging requirements by far for those districts were the English language arts annual measurable objective proficiency targets for English language learner students and students with disabilities: more than 75 percent of districts in program improvement accountable for these subgroups failed to meet the requirement for both of these subgroups. The next most challenging requirement is the mathematics annual measurable objective target for the students with disabilities subgroup; 32 percent of program improvement districts accountable for this subgroup failed to meet this target (table 7).

While only 22 of 159 of California's districts in program improvement met all their adequate yearly progress requirements in 2005/06, 595 of 802 of other districts did so

TABLE 7

Adequate yearly progress requirements on which California's Title I districts in program improvement fell short most frequently in 2005/06

Adequate yearly progress requirement	Number of districts in program improvement held accountable for requirement ^a	Percentage of districts accountable that did not meet requirement
English language arts annual measurable objective target for students with disabilities subgroup	132	78
English language arts annual measurable objective target for English language learner students subgroup	149	75
Mathematics annual measurable objective target for students with disabilities subgroup	133	32
Mathematics annual measurable objective target for Black students subgroup	86	26
English language arts test participation for students with disabilities subgroup	135	25
English language arts annual measurable objective target for Hispanic students subgroup	152	25
English language arts annual measurable objective target for socioeconomically disadvantaged students subgroup	155	23
Districtwide graduation rate	83	21
English language arts annual measurable objective target for Black students subgroup	86	17
Mathematics test participation for students with disabilities subgroup	135	14

a. These are the districts in program improvement that had a sufficiently large subgroup size to be held accountable for the specific adequate yearly progress requirement in 2005/06.

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a).

Districts in program improvement were accountable for more student subgroups than other districts

Like some schools, some districts did not enroll enough students in a particular subgroup to be held accountable for the performance of those students, thereby reducing the number of criteria that must be met to make adequate yearly progress. (Unless the subgroup represents at least 15 percent of the overall enrollment, California's minimum subgroup size for adequate yearly progress purposes is 100 students. Additional details are in appendix C.) On average, districts in program improvement were accountable for 6.25 subgroups, and districts not identified for improvement were accountable for 3.94 subgroups; the median numbers of subgroups were 6 and 4 (table 8).

Among the state's districts not identified for improvement fewer than half (approximately

TABLE 8

Number of student subgroups for which California Title I school districts were held accountable in 2005/06

Subgroup value	Districts in program improvement	Districts not identified for improvement
Mean	6.25	3.94
Median	6.00	4.00

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a).

46 percent) enrolled enough English language learner students to be held accountable for their performance and test participation in 2005/06, and only about 42 percent enrolled enough students with disabilities to be held accountable for that subgroup. In contrast, among districts in program improvement almost 94 percent had enough English language learner students for which they

were held accountable in 2005/06, and almost 83 percent had an eligible subgroup of students with disabilities.

These discrepancies underscore the difficult adequate yearly progress path of the districts in program improvement, with their larger student populations and hence greater number of subgroups for which to be accountable. Districts with more criteria to meet are less likely to meet their proficiency targets (Novak and Fuller 2003). While all districts must meet the needs of the diverse students they enroll, districts in program improvement, generally, are held accountable for meeting the needs of more groups of students.

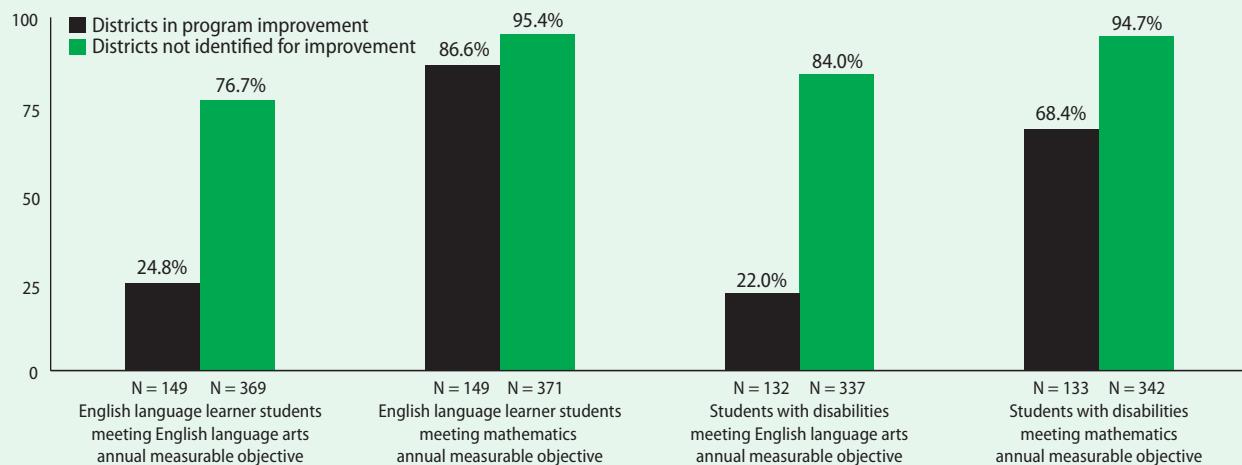
Among districts that are accountable for the performance of English language learner students and students with disabilities, districts not identified for improvement have been more successful in meeting their annual measurable objective targets for those subgroups. For example, of the districts held accountable for a students with disabilities subgroup in 2005/06, 283 of the 337 (84 percent) districts not identified for improvement met the English language arts annual measurable objective

for this subgroup, compared with 29 of 132 (22 percent) districts in program improvement.⁸ A similar performance discrepancy was evident for districts accountable for the performance of English language learner students: 283 of the 369 (77 percent) districts not identified for improvement met the English language arts annual measurable objective for this subgroup, while only 37 of the 149 (25 percent) districts in program improvement did so (figure 3).

When the annual measurable objective targets last increased, in 2005, more district-level subgroups of English language learner students fell short of the new proficiency bar. Districts in program improvement were particularly affected by the change (figure 4, top two panels). The English language arts and mathematics trends among subgroups of English language learner students were typical of the general statewide pattern: the annual measurable objective target rose, and the percentage of districts that met it fell. The students with disabilities subgroup was an exception to this trend: both districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement met the mathematics annual measurable objective proficiency target for this

FIGURE 3

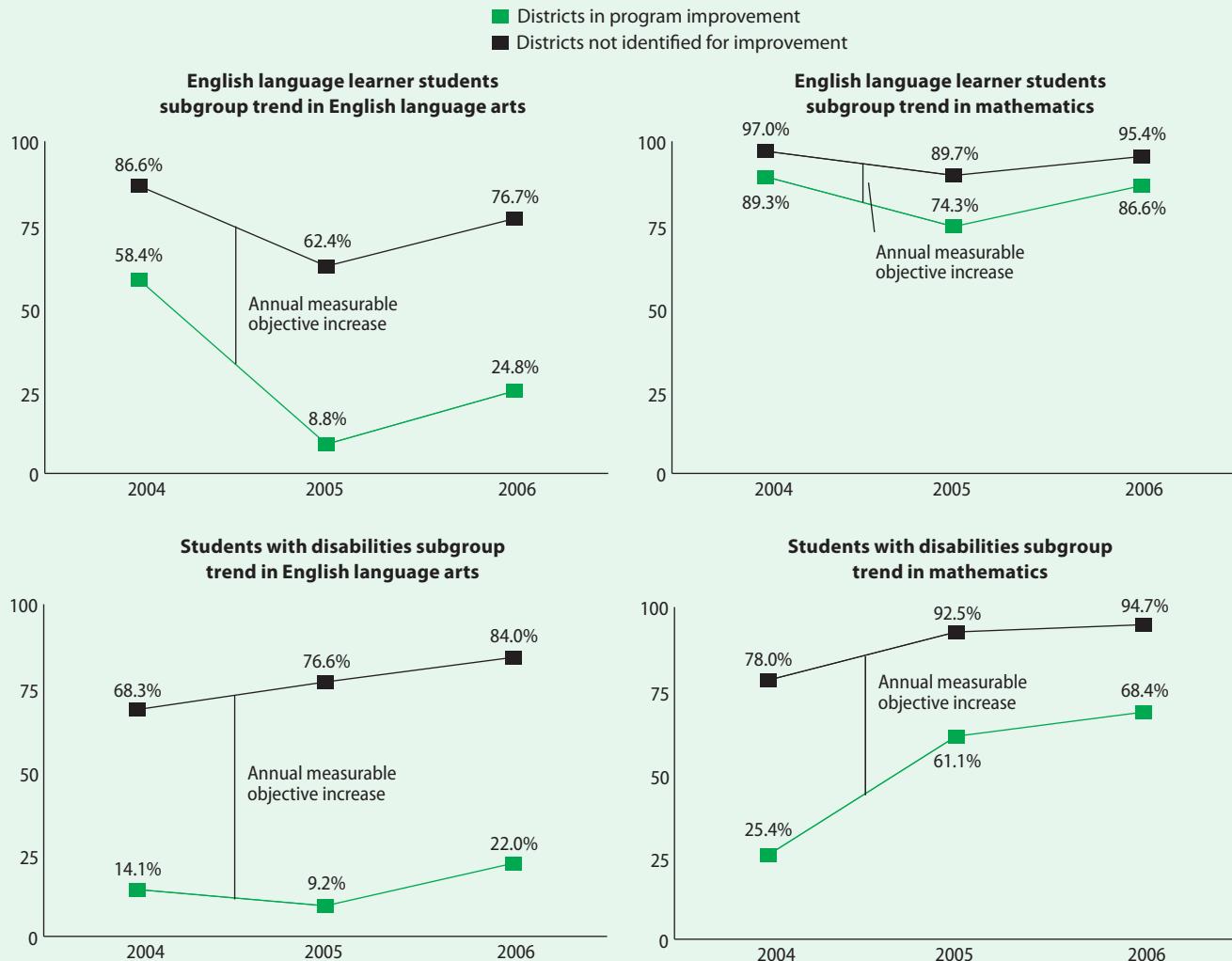
Percentage of students meeting annual measurable objectives in California's Title I districts accountable for subgroups of English language learner students and students with disabilities, spring 2006



Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a).

FIGURE 4

Annual measurable objective attainment trends among California's Title I districts in program improvement and districts not identified for improvement accountable for subgroups of English language learner students and students with disabilities, 2004–06



Source: Authors' analysis based on data from California Department of Education (2007a).

subgroup at similar or slightly increasing rates compared with the previous year in both 2005 and 2006 (figure 4, bottom right panel). This may have been the result of certain adequate yearly progress flexibility options granted by the U.S. Department of Education, however.⁹ And with statewide annual measurable objective proficiency targets that were set to increase again in spring 2008, many schools and districts in California are likely to have a more difficult time making adequate yearly progress.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

To inform the state's nascent district-level intervention efforts, this descriptive study sought to identify distinguishing characteristics of California's districts in program improvement, including how their accountability-related performance compares with that of their own schools. More than a third of California's Title I school districts (344 of 961) did not make adequate yearly progress in 2005/06, including all but 22 of the state's districts in program

improvement. Statewide annual measurable objective proficiency targets were set to increase again in spring 2008, making it more difficult for districts to meet adequate yearly progress. Compared with other districts across the state, California's districts in program improvement face particularly tough challenges. They are accountable for more subgroups (including English language learner students and students with disabilities), and they tend to have lower rates of proficiency for these subgroups. More careful study of the differences between student populations in districts in program improvement and other districts, especially within the same subgroup designation, could shed more light on the differences in academic performance across school districts.

The use of new primary data (perhaps collected through surveys or targeted interviews) could offer more nuanced insights on certain key issues, including whether and how the education needs of students in districts in program improvement and other districts differ from each other. A future study could also explore differences in support for these subgroups, including whether districts not identified for improvement are employing useful

education strategies or offering more specialized supports that might be transferable to districts in program improvement. Differences in the education needs of students in different types of districts could also be studied to see whether these subgroups face additional challenges in districts in program improvement.

Because of the many adequate yearly progress discrepancies between districts and their schools related to students with disabilities, the state might consider focusing its district-level interventions on coordinating special education services across schools. The impact of California's new DAIT process will be of great interest to both researchers and state policymakers in the coming years. Furthermore, as accountability rules and intervention approaches will be shaped by reauthorization of the NCLB Act, an update of this study once these areas are defined in reauthorization would be useful.

Compared with other districts across the state California's districts in program improvement are accountable for more subgroups, and they tend to have lower rates of proficiency for these subgroups

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA SOURCES, AND METHODOLOGY

The West Regional Educational Laboratory research team began the study with two guiding sets of questions. The first set concerns the characteristics of districts in program improvement. Key questions included:

- What is the distribution of districts in program improvement by district size and density, improvement status, and overall achievement levels?
- What are the demographic features of the student populations in districts in program improvement?
- What type and amount of staff support are available in districts in program improvement? How are financial resources spent in these districts?

The second set of questions looked within districts and was concerned with the relationship between the district and school accountability systems. Key questions included:

- What percentage of students in districts in program improvement are enrolled in schools in program improvement? What percentage of students in districts in program improvement are enrolled in schools now in corrective action?
- How common is it for a district to be in program improvement when none of its schools are in program improvement? How common is it for a district to fail to make adequate yearly progress when none of its schools fails to make adequate yearly progress?
- What accountability provisions are related to inconsistencies between the reasons for 2005/06 adequate yearly progress classifications of districts and schools in those districts?

To begin to address these questions, the research team acquired state data from the comprehensive online demographic, assessment, and accountability databases maintained by the California Department of Education. The team made a handful of phone calls to California Department of Education staff to clarify ambiguous data elements or findings. In addition, financial and staffing data were downloaded from the Common Core of Data maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2007).

From the outset it was evident that answering the research questions would not require advanced statistics. Judicious application of basic statistics, including a number of descriptive analyses, would be sufficient. The specific statistical approach used to address each research question is described below.

Characteristics of identified districts

For each adequate yearly progress requirement the research team tallied the number of districts that met, failed to meet, or were not bound by the requirement in 2006/07. Districts that did not meet adequate yearly progress for a single reason and for multiple reasons were also counted. The team summarized the distribution of districts in program improvement by status and size.

Characteristics of student populations

Using simple descriptive statistics, the research team examined differences between the distributions of districts in program improvement and other districts on student demographic characteristics, such as 2005/06 ethnic composition and the percentages of English language learner students, students with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The investigations included measures of central tendency (generally the median) and measures of variability (such as interquartile range).

Staff support and expenditures

Using 2004/05 staffing data from the Common Core of Data (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2007) and the California Department of Education (2007a), the research team created a merged dataset that linked program improvement status to variables such as student-teacher ratio, student-guidance counselor ratio (for high schools), and teacher experience. Additionally, by examining financial information from the Common Core of Data, the team also explored the percentage of annual budget spent on supplemental instruction.

Prevalence of school improvement and corrective action

By merging state agency lists of schools and districts in program improvement with school-level data, the team was able to analyze and describe the prevalence of school improvement and school-level corrective action within districts in program improvement in 2006/07 (California Department of Education 2007g).

Accountability inconsistencies

The analysis of district-school adequate yearly progress inconsistencies involved looking for divergent performance at the district and school levels in 2005/06 (California Department of Education 2007a). An “inconsistency” was defined as the case of a district not making adequate yearly progress for any given adequate yearly progress requirement but each school within the district either meeting the requirement or not being held accountable for it.

First, the research team created a categorical variable for each adequate yearly progress requirement at the district level. District values were defined as:

- *None*, where at least one school in the district did not meet the requirement, and the remaining schools either did not meet the requirement or were not accountable for it.

- *Some*, where at least one school in the district did not meet the requirement, and at least one school met the requirement.
- *All*, where all schools in the district met the requirement, were not accountable for it, or both.

Then, for each adequate yearly progress requirement, these categorical values were cross-tabulated with the district’s adequate yearly progress determination (Met, Did not meet, or Not applicable) and the research team examined situations where all schools in the district met the requirement (or were not held accountable for it) but the district did not meet the requirement, the *All-Did Not Meet* cell of the table.

Reasons for apparent inconsistencies

Once the inconsistencies associated with each 2005/06 adequate yearly progress requirement were identified, the research team investigated the context associated with the anomalies, exploring district program improvement status, locale, and student enrollment information (California Department of Education 2007a, 2007g).

Additional measures

The following additional measures were also used.

- *Program improvement status*. Lists of districts and schools in program improvement were obtained from the California Department of Education (California Department of Education 2007g). The data represent program improvement status entering the 2006/07 school year.
- *Academic performance*. Academic performance for 2003/04, 2004/05, and 2005/06 was measured by the statewide assessments used in accountability reporting and in the determinations of adequate yearly progress. Measures were accessed through state datasets (California Department of Education 2007a).

- *Budget information.* The research team obtained district spending on supplemental instruction and other major budget categories by analyzing budget information in the Common Core of Data (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2007). These data reflect spending during the 2003/04 school year, one of the recent years in which the districts in program improvement failed to meet adequate yearly progress.
- *Sociodemographic variables.* The following sociodemographic compositional variables were examined at the school and district level for districts in program improvement: enrollment, percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, percentage of English language learner students, percentage of students with disabilities, and racial/ethnic composition. These data were obtained from state datasets (California Department of Education 2007c, 2007d, 2007e, 2007f).

APPENDIX B**THE 159 CALIFORNIA DISTRICTS IN PROGRAM
IMPROVEMENT IN 2006/07, WITH THEIR
2005/06 STUDENT ENROLLMENTS**

The 78 districts in bold type missed an adequate yearly progress requirement in 2005/06, even though none of their schools failed to meet the same requirement. The data are from the California Department of Education (2007g) LEA and school program improvement status data files.

Adelanto Elementary (7,782 students)
Alisal Union Elementary (7,472 students)
Alum Rock Union Elementary (13,515 students)
Alvord Unified (19,869 students)
Anaheim Elementary (20,690 students)
Antelope Valley Union High (25,312 students)
Arvin Union Elementary (3,127 students)
Atwater Elementary (4,692 students)
Bakersfield City Elementary (27,890 students)
Banning Unified (4,906 students)
Barstow Unified (7,313 students)
Bellevue Union Elementary (1,738 students)
Berkeley Unified (9,076 students)
Bishop Union Elementary (1,326 students)
Burton Elementary (3,379 students)
Castaic Union Elementary (3,568 students)
Centinela Valley Union High (8,000 students)
Chaffey Joint Union High (24,982 students)
Chatom Union Elementary (702 students)
Chico Unified (13,533 students)
Chowchilla Union High (955 students)
Coachella Valley Unified (16,418 students)
Colton Joint Unified (24,715 students)
Compton Unified (30,233 students)
Corning Union Elementary (1,976 students)
Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified (4,058 students)
Del Norte Co. Office of Education (989 students)
Del Paso Heights Elementary (1,865 students)
Delano Union Elementary (7,510 students)
Desert Sands Unified (27,565 students)
Dinuba Unified (5,746 students)
Earlimart Elementary (1,940 students)
East Side Union High (25,817 students)
East Whittier City Elementary (8,979 students)
Eastside Union Elementary (2,914 students)

Edison Elementary (1,053 students)
El Centro Elementary (5,857 students)
El Monte City Elementary (10,881 students)
Escondido Union Elementary (19,654 students)
Fairfax Elementary (1,789 students)
Fallbrook Union High (3,106 students)
Fort Bragg Unified (1,951 students)
Franklin-McKinley Elementary (9,659 students)
Fresno Co. Office of Education (2,052 students)
Fresno Unified (79,046 students)
Fullerton Joint Union High (16,299 students)
Garvey Elementary (6,297 students)
Greenfield Union Elementary (8,170 students)
Greenfield Union Elementary (2,449 students)
Grossmont Union High (24,444 students)
Hanford Elementary (5,451 students)
Hayward Unified (22,236 students)
Healdsburg Unified (2,485 students)
Hemet Unified (22,368 students)
Hesperia Unified (20,267 students)
Hollister School District (6,050 students)
Hueneme Elementary (8,208 students)
Jurupa Unified (21,043 students)
Keppel Union Elementary (3,090 students)
Kern Union High (35,394 students)
King City Union Elementary (2,505 students)
La Habra City Elementary (6,165 students)
Lagunitas Elementary (307 students)
Lake Elsinore Unified (20,652 students)
Lamont Elementary (2,873 students)
Lancaster Elementary (16,058 students)
Lawndale Elementary (6,485 students)
Lemon Grove Elementary (4,147 students)
Lennox Elementary (7,597 students)
Little Lake City Elementary (5,022 students)
Lodi Unified (30,911 students)
Los Angeles Unified (727,319 students)
Los Banos Unified (8,768 students)
Los Nietos Elementary (2,173 students)
Lost Hills Union Elementary (564 students)
Lynwood Unified (18,211 students)
Madera Unified (17,991 students)
Marysville Joint Unified (9,644 students)
Mattole Unified (935 students)
McFarland Unified (3,155 students)
Merced City Elementary (11,289 students)
Merced Co. Office of Education (1,747 students)

- Modesto City Elementary (17,345 students)
Modesto City High (15,967 students)
Montebello Unified (35,286 students)
Monterey Peninsula Unified (11,546 students)
Moreno Valley Unified (37,019 students)
Mountain View Elementary (9,741 students)
Napa Valley Unified (17,408 students)
Nevada Joint Union High (4,198 students)
North Sacramento Elementary (4,862 students)
Oakland Unified (48,135 students)
Oceanside Unified (21,367 students)
Ontario-Montclair Elementary (25,376 students)
Orange Co. Office of Education (8,284 students)
Oroville City Elementary (3,049 students)
Oxnard Elementary (16,004 students)
Pajaro Valley Unified School (19,329 students)
Palm Springs Unified (23,689 students)
Palmdale Elementary (22,826 students)
Parlier Unified (3,867 students)
Perris Elementary (5,441 students)
Perris Union High (8,557 students)
Planada Elementary (788 students)
Pomona Unified (33,294 students)
Porterville Unified (13,373 students)
Ravenswood City Elementary (4,756 students)
Red Bluff Union Elementary (2,349 students)
Reef-Sunset Unified (2,584 students)
Rialto Unified (30,715 students)
Richland Union Elementary (3,080 students)
Rio Elementary (4,049 students)
Romoland Elementary (2,130 students)
Roseland Elementary (1,718 students)
Roseville Joint Union High (8,627 students)
Salinas City Elementary (7,954 students)
Salinas Union High (13,578 students)
San Bernardino City Unified (58,661 students)
San Francisco Co. Off. of Educ. (1,040 students)
San Francisco Unified (56,236 students)
San Jacinto Unified (8,322 students)
San Joaquin Co. Off. of Educ. (2,432 students)
San Lorenzo Unified (11,613 students)
San Luis Coastal Unified (7,470 students)
San Ysidro Elementary (5,087 students)
Santa Ana Unified (59,310 students)
Santa Barbara Elementary (5,808 students)
Santa Maria-Bonita Elementary (12,815)
Santa Paula Elementary (3,801 students)
Santa Paula Union High (1,760 students)
Santa Rita Union Elementary (3,071 students)
Sonoma Valley Unified (4,914 students)
South Bay Union Elementary (8,582 students)
South Whittier Elementary (4,199 students)
Stockton City Unified (38,936 students)
Strathmore Union Elementary (752 students)
Taft City Elementary (2,100 students)
Tahoe-Truckee Joint Unified (4,304 students)
Terra Bella Union Elementary (872 students)
Thermalito Union Elementary (1,455 students)
Tracy Joint Unified (17,186 students)
Tulare City Elementary (8,544 students)
Tulare Joint Union High (4,714 students)
Vacaville Unified (13,704 students)
Vallejo City Unified (18,312 students)
Ventura Unified (17,545 students)
Victor Valley Union High (12,379 students)
Vineland Elementary (847 students)
Visalia Unified (26,105 students)
Vista Unified (26,207 students)
Wasco Union Elementary (3,107 students)
Washington Union High (1,184 students)
Weaver Union Elementary (2,086 students)
West Contra Costa Unified (32,184 students)
West Fresno Elementary (1,504 students)
Whittier City Elementary (7,029 students)
Wilsona Elementary (2,017 students)
Winters Joint Unified (1,940 students)
Woodlake Union Elementary (1,612 students)

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF CALIFORNIA'S DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

This summary describes key components of California's accountability system. It draws on the *State of California Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook* last amended on June 16, 2006 (U.S. Department of Education 2006).

The Standardized Testing and Reporting program and adequate yearly progress

California legislated a comprehensive accountability system in 1999, which it later adjusted to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Today, the state's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program includes the assessments used for state accountability as well as the elementary and middle school assessments used to calculate adequate yearly progress under the NCLB Act. The California Standards Test is used for assessing adequate yearly progress in grades 2–8, while the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) is used in grade 10.

To make adequate yearly progress in California, all districts, schools, and (numerically significant) subgroups must meet or exceed the state's English language arts and mathematics testing annual measurable objectives,¹⁰ meet or exceed the graduation rate requirement (if a high school or a district with at least one high school), demonstrate growth on California's Academic Performance Index (API), and demonstrate a participation rate of 95 percent or higher on the statewide exams. However, a district that fails to meet its annual measurable objectives can still make adequate yearly progress if it meets all of the following conditions:

- Reduces its percentage of nonproficient students by 10 percent over the previous year (safe harbor). A confidence interval of 75 percent is used to make this determination.

- Attains the annual API status target or demonstrates growth of at least one API point over the previous year.
- Increases its high school graduation rate (if applicable).
- Has at least a 95 percent participation rate on the applicable statewide assessments.

California's Title I school districts are identified for program improvement when they fail to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, either in the same content area (performance or participation rate) or on the same additional indicator (API or graduation rate), districtwide or for the same numerically significant subgroup.

California applies an additional criterion for districts that miss the annual measurable objectives in the same content area for two consecutive years. If any grade span within the district (elementary, middle, or high school) met the grade span annual measurable objective in either of the two years in question, the district is not identified for improvement.

The progression of a district's program improvement status can be complicated. To clarify with an example, districts entered program improvement for the 2006/07 school year based on performance and participation data from 2004/05 and 2005/06. Districts moved into Year 2 status of program improvement in 2006/07 if they were in Year 1 status in 2005/06 and did not meet adequate yearly progress that year. However, a district in program improvement Year 1 status in 2005/06 that made adequate yearly progress that year remained in program improvement Year 1 status ("on hold") in 2006/07. Such a district would exit program improvement if it made adequate yearly progress again in 2006/07.

Annual measurable objective proficiency baselines and intermediate goals

California used its 2002 STAR data to establish proficiency baselines for elementary and middle

schools and used 2001 and 2002 CAHSEE data to establish its high school baselines (table C1). According to the state's accountability workbook, "All of these starting points [were] based on the percentage of students at 'proficient' or above in a public school at the twentieth percentile of California's total enrollment among all schools ranked by the percentage of students at the proficient or advanced levels" (U.S. Department of Education 2007, p. 27). From these starting points, the state set intermediate goals that increased in equal increments, reaching 100 percent proficiency by spring 2014 (table C1).

Adequate yearly progress participation rate

As in many other states, in California districts with enrollments of 50 or more students must demonstrate a participation rate of at least 95 percent on each applicable statewide assessment to make adequate yearly progress. Participation rates are calculated separately for English language arts and mathematics, and they are determined by dividing the number of students tested by the number of students enrolled on the first day of testing. California considers all students who sit for the assessment to be participants, even

TABLE C1

California's proficiency baselines and intermediate goals, grades 2–8 and high school (percent)

Proficiency baseline and targets	Grades 2–8		High school	
	English language arts	Mathematics	English language arts	Mathematics
Spring 2002 baselines/starting points				
Overall	13.6	16.0	11.2	9.6
Black, not Hispanic	19.6	18.1	15.4	10.3
American Indian	28.1	27.8	25.2	21.9
Asian	51.0	60.5	43.4	52.1
Filipino	45.3	46.6	37.3	32.8
Hispanic	16.2	20.2	12.7	10.2
Pacific Islander	27.6	29.7	22.0	20.2
White, not Hispanic	50.7	48.9	45.4	39.4
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	16.3	20.7	11.3	10.7
English language learners	8.5	16.5	9.6	11.5
Students with disabilities	9.7	12.1	2.8	3.5
Proficiency targets, 2002–14				
2002 Baseline	13.6	16.0	11.2	9.6
Spring 2005	24.4	26.5	22.3	20.9
Spring 2008	35.2	37.0	33.4	32.2
Spring 2009	46.0	47.5	44.5	43.5
Spring 2010	56.8	58.0	55.6	54.8
Spring 2011	67.6	68.5	66.7	66.1
Spring 2012	78.4	79.0	77.8	77.4
Spring 2013	89.2	89.5	88.9	88.7
Spring 2014	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: California districts that enroll both primary and secondary school students use an average to determine their intermediate goals. Unified school districts and high school districts with grades 7 or 8 have slightly different goals (see California Department of Education 2007i, workbook attachments M and N).

Source: California Department of Education (2007i, workbook attachments G, H, K, L).

if they do not respond to enough items to generate a result.

Adequate yearly progress subgroups

Special education students participate in STAR by taking either the grade-level assessment (with or without accommodations or modifications) or the California Alternate Performance Assessment, first administered in spring 2003. Individualized Education Plan teams determine how students with disabilities will participate in the STAR program. California's English language learner students may also take their STAR assessments with accommodations. Those who have been in the country for one year or less do not have their test results counted toward the annual measurable objective calculation, but are counted in the participation rate measure. Redesignated fluent English proficient students are included in the English language learner students subgroup until they reach proficiency on the English language arts California Standards Test for three years.

For determining adequate yearly progress, the minimum subgroup size in California is either 100 students with valid test scores or, when the

subgroup constitutes at least 15 percent of the students with valid test scores, 50 students. Test scores are considered valid if students have been continuously enrolled in the district since the preceding October.

Additional indicator

California's additional adequate yearly progress indicators are API progress for elementary districts and the graduation rate for districts that enroll high school students.¹¹ California has created growth targets, similar to the annual measurable objective schedule, for both additional indicators. API growth is defined as meeting the annual API status target or a demonstrated gain of one or more API points. Graduation rate growth is defined as improvement of at least 0.1 percent over the previous year, improvement of at least 0.2 percent in the average graduation rate over the previous two years, or achievement of an annual graduation rate target, which began at 82.8 percent and increases at a trajectory similar to the state's annual measurable objectives. A district with high school students is identified for program improvement if it fails to meet one of these graduation rate growth criteria for two consecutive years.

NOTES

1. Throughout the report, because of missing data districts in improvement may sometimes total fewer than 159 and districts not identified for improvement may sometimes total fewer than 802.
2. California and the U.S. Department of Education had agreed to a timetable that is one year behind that in most other states.
3. There are four requirements (English language arts performance and participation, mathematics performance and participation) that apply to as many as 11 different student groups (all students, seven ethnic groups, socioeconomically disadvantaged, English language learner students, and students with disabilities), plus an additional indicator (graduation rate for high schools, Academic Performance Index for other schools): $4 \times 11 + 1 + 1 = 46$.
4. The median values are the 50th percentile for the characteristic. Equal numbers of districts have higher and lower values. The median is used in this report because extreme values—such as those associated with Los Angeles Unified, by far California's largest district—can skew the average.
5. The U.S. Census Bureau uses eight location (locale) codes to delineate the urban and rural characteristics of school districts. For this analysis these codes were merged into four, more general density classifications: city ("large city" and "mid-size city"), urban fringe ("urban fringe of large city" and "urban fringe of mid-size city"), town ("large town" and "small town"), and rural ("rural, outside core-based statistical area" and "rural, inside core-based statistical area").
6. The U.S. Code (20 U.S.C. §7801(11)) defines "core academic subjects" as English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography. It defines "highly qualified" teachers as having full state certification as a teacher, at least a bachelor's degree, and demonstrated subject matter competency in each of the academic subjects that they teach. The complete statutory definition of highly qualified also includes components that differentiate between new and veteran teachers and among elementary, middle, and high school teachers (20 U.S.C. §7801(23)).
7. In accordance with federal guidance California teachers can obtain highly qualified status in several ways. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell has acknowledged that the process may conceal important differences in teacher qualifications. As he explained in August 2007, "While California followed federal guidance in the development of our Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements and California's High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) process, we know that, unfortunately, in California public schools there remains an inequitable distribution of highly qualified teachers. Too often, schools serving students who are African American or Latino have a disproportionate number of under-qualified and inexperienced teachers and administrators" (California Department of Education 2007h). The HOUSSE process is a federally approved method for teachers to demonstrate that they meet highly qualified requirements under the NCLB Act.
8. It should be noted that some of the districts in improvement had that status because of the large numbers of students with disabilities that had scored below proficient.
9. In May 2005 the U.S. Department of Education began granting states some flexibility for the students with disabilities subgroup. Schools or districts that failed to make adequate yearly progress solely because this subgroup did not reach its annual measurable

objective target could add 20 percentage points to the proficiency score for this subgroup. Furthermore, in previous years the results of students tested with modifications were counted in the adequate yearly progress participation rate as “tested” and in the percentages proficient as “not proficient.” Beginning in spring 2006, however, these student records were counted in California’s adequate yearly progress participation rate as “not tested” and were not counted in the percentage proficient calculation (California Department of Education 2006a).

10. Small schools and districts with fewer than 100 valid scores have their annual measurable objectives adjusted through a 99-percent confidence interval.
11. California uses a graduation rate calculation that corresponds to the National Center for Education Statistics’ four-year completion rate: the number of four-year high school completers divided by the sum of the four-year completers plus the total number of dropouts, aggregated over the four-year period.

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