



Chapter I. Background

Education is a significant issue in California. The state's education system includes about twelve percent of the nation's public school students and is the largest single annual budget item: 71 billion dollars in 2002-2003, including \$56 billion for K-12 and \$15 billion for higher education.⁴ The state is very diverse, and demands on resources are increasing. There are four sizeable ethnic subgroups – more than other states with significant minority populations – and Latinos alone outnumber non-Latino whites. From 1990-1991 to 2000-2001, students who are “English learners” increased from 20 to 25% (and more, in primary grades). Over 20% of children under 18 live in families with incomes below poverty level, and in 2000-2001 about 47% of students participated in school meal programs.⁵ Postsecondary students are also increasingly diverse, including English language learners, adult re-entry students and part-time students. The draft Master Plan⁶ concluded “few schools can now provide the conditions in which the State can fairly ask students to learn to the highest standards,” citing National Assessment of Educational Progress scores in 2000: barely one-half or fewer fourth graders demonstrated basic competence in reading, math or science – in which California placed last among the 40 participating states.

While a Master Plan for higher education was developed in 1960, California has had no Master Plan for earlier grades. Major changes⁷ related to curriculum, assessment, accountability and teachers, as well as in class size and funding, have been implemented, but these have often been ad hoc, addressing parts of the education system rather than the whole. EdSource Online describes the goal of this plan as to “create coherent, coordinated policy and bring clarity around who is responsible for each component of the public education system. In addition the plan would more tightly couple K-12 and higher education policies and reforms, forging a sorely needed connection....”⁸ Processes for allocating resources and for governance also need to be updated, and conflicts among governing entities need to be addressed.⁹

⁴ Enrollment data: National Center for Education Statistics (http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/snf_report/table_01_1.asp); budget data: California State Budget Highlights (October 2002, at http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/BUD_DOCS/State_Budget_Highlights.pdf). In “How California Ranks” EdSource Online (September 2002, at http://www.edsource.org/pub_abs_ranks02.cfm) notes that California is moving closer to the national average in spending per student but remains next to highest in number of students per teacher. Teacher salaries are in third place, but are eroded by the high cost of living.

⁵ Student statistics and definitions: “Who Are California’s Students.” EdSource Online “Ed Fact” (June 2002; data from 2000-2001 school year and 2000 U.S. Census, at http://www.edsource.org/pub_edfct_whoarestdts.cfm). Nationally, in 2000 poverty was defined as an annual income of \$17,463 or less for a family of four. In 2001-2002, children in a family of four that earned no more than \$32,653 per year were eligible for free and reduced-price school meal programs.

⁶ The draft of the California Master Plan for Education (May 2001; unofficial HTML version) is available in the dialogue archives (<http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/plan/contents.shtml>). The final Plan is also online (http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/SEN/COMMITTEE/JOINT/MASTER_PLAN/_home/020909THEMASTERPLANLINKS.HTML).

⁷ EdSource Online chart showing changes, http://www.edsource.org/align_mat.html (from “Aligning California’s Education Reforms,” January 2001).

⁸ “Up for Public Review: A Master Plan for California’s K-16 Schools.” EdSource Online “EdFact” (April 2002, at http://www.edsource.org/pdf/EDFctMasterPlan_Final.pdf).

⁹ Joint Committee press packet (<http://www.network-democracy.org/camp/bb/bg/mp-why.shtml>). Also see “Aligning California’s Education Reforms: Progress Made and the Work That Remains.” EdSource Online

In 1999 the California Legislature established a bipartisan ad hoc Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education,¹⁰ made up of 18 state senators and assembly members. Their task was to develop a Plan covering Kindergarten through University (during the process, discussion was extended to include pre-kindergarten). The result was a far-reaching draft Plan that attempted to deal with a broad sweep of critical educational issues (Box 2, p. 21), developed following the timeline in Table 1. However, the resulting document is only a first step: much implementing legislation will be required to put the provisions of the Plan into effect.

Fall 1999	Members of the Joint Legislative Committee held interviews with educators and legislators, town hall meetings and committee hearings.
August 2000	Release of a “Framework” document ¹¹ to guide the preparation of the Plan; Seven Working Groups ¹² covering the aspects of the Framework began to be established.
January 2001	Working Group meetings began.
September-October 2001	Interim report from Working Groups; discussion of progress and findings.
February 2002	Working Group meetings concluded.
February-March 2002	Working Group reports were released and committee hearings held.
March 2002	e-testimony Web site opened on the Joint Committee Web site (http://www.hpcnet.org/cgi-bin/global/a_bus_card.cgi?SiteID=94#alltest).
May 10, 2002	Release of a draft Master Plan.
May-July 2002	Hearings throughout California; online dialogue 3-14 June; feedback from the public encouraged.
July 2002	Preparation and release of second draft of the Master Plan, using testimony and public feedback.
August 2002	Completion and release of final report from the Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Education, with recommendations to the Legislature.
August 2002	Submission of final Master Plan report to both houses of the legislature.
September-December 2002	Master Plan implementation legislation drafted.
December 2002 -March 2003 and beyond	Legislation to begin implementation of the Master Plan will be deliberated, amended, and voted upon by both houses of legislature. (http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/sen/committee/joint/master_plan/_home/021203_IMPLEMENTATION Efforts.HTM)

Table 1. Development of the California Master Plan for Education.

(January 2001, at http://www.edsource.org/pub_abs_align.cfm).

¹⁰ Joint Committee Web site (http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/sen/committee/joint/master_plan/_home/).

¹¹ <http://www.sen.ca.gov/masterplan/Framework.HTM>

¹² See Chapter II.