



### Chapter V. An evaluation of the dialogue

This chapter examines the evaluation and registration data in the light of the five evaluation questions.

#### ***Satisfaction and motivation to participate***

*How satisfied were participants with the process?*

#### ***Satisfaction***

Most participants – 76% – described their experience as either “very positive” or “somewhat positive;” 12% found it negative or very negative (Figure 15). Enthusiasm was even greater regarding future online dialogues on California policy topics, to which 91% said definitely (75%) or probably (16%) yes, and less than 2% said definitely or probably no (Figure 16). Several other evaluation questions, discussed below and in the following sections on *New voices* (p. 46), *The dialogue as a public space* (p. 51) and *What participants got ...* (p. 59) are also important to satisfaction – for example ratings of elements of the dialogue, questions related to the technology, the atmosphere and quality of the discussion, and what was learned. Although a few participants had trouble with the technology, responses in these areas were also quite positive. This is an important finding, since as mentioned in Chapter II (p. 16) satisfaction with the process is an important prerequisite for recommending online dialogue as a new mechanism for civic engagement.

People participating in the evaluation were invited to give open-ended responses to explain their ratings of their experience. Interestingly, most (19 of 23) of those who said their experience was somewhat or very negative gave explanations. These focused primarily on the technology and the timing of the dialogue; several mentioned their difficulties in finding time to participate, while a few mentioned the topics; two felt the discussion was too philosophical or theoretical, with one addressing the need to include a broader audience. Among the comments were:

- It was hard for me to navigate the Dialogue. If the set-up had shown the discussion as it progressed (or maybe it did and I never found it) it would have made more sense to me, and would have been less frustrating.
- My first notification that the dialogue would begin came on that same day. As a busy mother of two, who is involved in a wide variety of school activities I had no time to block out my calendar.... holding this dialogue during the final weeks of school made it impossible for most parents to participate....
- Very frustrated. I found that many ideas and thoughts I had on the matter were already expressed and since it was impossible to continue and add immediately to the idea expressed or the delay was so long, it was best to give up.

A considerably lower proportion (17 of 32) of those who rated their experience as “neither positive nor negative,” said they had no opinion, or left the question blank gave comments.

<b><i>Evaluation</i></b>	Frequency	Percent
Very positive	66	33 %
Somewhat positive	85	43 %
Neither positive nor negative	22	11 %
No opinion	4	2 %
Somewhat negative	18	9 %
Very negative	5	3 %
Total responses	200	100 %

***Overall, how would you rate your experience in this online dialogue?***

**Figure 15.** Satisfaction with the dialogue.

<b><i>Evaluation</i></b>	Frequency	Percent
Definitely yes	150	75 %
Probably yes	31	16 %
Maybe	14	7 %
No opinion	2	1 %
Probably no	2	1 %
Definitely no	1	>1 %
Total responses	200	100 %

***Do you think there should be online dialogues on other California policy topics in the future?***

**Figure 16.** Future online dialogues.

These responses were stated more positively, but voiced similar concerns; three mentioned the informative nature of the daily discussion summaries.

- It was somewhat more difficult to access and follow than I expected. It was also very time consuming to read and follow all of the threads.
- At times I found it tedious and had to make myself focus. However, the information and understanding I gained was invaluable.
- I think it could have been more positive if I had been able to spend more time with it. I like the idea; however, it occurred at a very busy time for me and I could not spend the time with it like I wanted to.

Of the majority, the 151 respondents who said their experience was somewhat or very positive, less than one-half (65) gave comments. Participants said:

- .... I had become disheartened, and now feel more hopeful, both as a mother and an educator.
- This process opens the door for access to legislators and policy makers who are otherwise difficult to reach.
- It felt good to be able to share my views among this diverse group.
- I felt the participants were listened to and given credence.
- The depth of insight from the participants was helpful in clarifying the issues.
- I was very impressed with the responsiveness of the master plan team.

- I commented on a thread I thought was very important, but that had not been discussed very much, and I got more responses. Everyone had something worthwhile to contribute.
- I feel that some of the educators who are in the front line of deliverers of education have had an opportunity to respond to some of the current issues. As a parent, I have felt the need to voice my opinions as well.
- An innovative approach to creating a statewide dialogue. Eliminated travel costs and provided for more opportunity for input.
- This is the first time I participated in such a dialogue regarding educational policy in California and I felt richer by it.
- Although I could not spend hours per day following the dialogue along, the summaries each day and being able to click selectively into the topics and discussions in which I was interested, was great. The system reached a tremendous audience who might not have otherwise participated.

Quite a few of these respondents too, commented on the technology, the timing of the discussion, and the difficulty in finding time to participate as much as they would have liked. Some expressed frustration, but again the tone was more positive than for those who felt their experience had been negative:

- It was difficult to access where I wanted to be.... When I did get there, though, it was great!

Others were entirely positive:

- It was easy to access and the threading technology worked well.
- I would like to use this type of format when we revise the Adult Education State Plan -- it's a great way to get broader input.

Several mentioned their concern regarding the impact of the dialogue (see the section below on *What participants got out of the dialogue*, p. 59). There were a number of comments on the volume of the discussion:

- ...the volume of participants made it challenging. It was difficult to read every participant's response, which you needed to do if you were not to repeat what others were already conveying.

Six used the word "overwhelming" or "overwhelmed" to describe the discussion:

- I found myself overwhelmed by the number of messages that people were posting...
- The amount of participation was somewhat overwhelming and I did a lot of skimming. But I like the idea of people throughout the state talking about this, and that means listening to what a lot of people have to say.

A few would have liked to have a more in-depth discussion, but more commonly there was a feeling that there was a bit too much information to digest:

- I would open the response, skim it and then move on unless it really caught my attention.
- I did not participate in it on a daily basis, but printed out every day's summary and read them that night.

Other elements also elicited dissatisfaction:

- I think dialogue is a misnomer.... It was an opportunity to communicate to political office-holders, educational policy makers and staff. But it tried to cover too much too quickly.

- Sometimes it seemed one voice would dominate a day's postings.
- I felt that participation was 'limited' and that many appropriate groups were not represented. This wasn't due to exclusion; it just reflects how few educators are really 'connected' in a meaningful way.
- Other open-ended questions also elicited comments related to satisfaction.
- I hope it will continue – finally there is a way to at least attempt to give input on my time, not the legislature's.
- I am not actually sure that I participated in the 'dialog.' I read anonymous comments on different topics and sent in testimony but was not actively interacting with the dialog.
- ...it seemed that when I received notice about a topic the discussion was finished. I felt helpless, as if the so-called 'experts' had taken over. I ended up an observer not a participant.
- The procedures for accessing layers of topic information was too often labyrinthine and excessively complex. Needs to be simplified.
- It is a very efficient way for people to dialogue about educational issues. We discuss issues at various meetings but here we had access to people all over the state. It was very revealing and enlightening.

When asked if there should be online dialogues on other California policy topics in the future, three-fourths of respondents said "definitely yes." With those who said "probably yes", the percent in favor comes up to 91%. Less than two percent said there should definitely or probably not be dialogues on other topics. Here again, participants could give open-ended comments to explain their answers.<sup>37</sup> Many emphasized the general level of interest, convenience and democratic aspects of online dialogue:

- It's an easier way for working parents to participate in the process.
- More accessible than hearings, which is good, but many are still not comfortable with the format.
- Again, this can be a very positive and effective way to gather opinion and information. I just hope that the opinions of those in the "trenches" carries some weight in the decision-making process or it will all be a waste.
- This provides an opportunity to participate without having to travel, and at times more convenient to the many different types of work we do.
- It is good to hear what others are thinking.
- A larger participating group gives a better cross section of ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and misconceptions. These types of dialogues bring the "working grunt" closer to the decision/policy makers.
- An excellent tool to disperse a tremendous amount of information on a specific policy area. Certainly, policy topics like energy, water and health care are worthy of this treatment.
- On-line discussion is a great way to engage people whose schedules might preclude their participating in other venues and times.

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<sup>37</sup> For most open-ended questions no counts have been made related to number of responses. Many of the open ended questions drew a mixture of comments – for example, the quality of the dialogue, problems with the technology, or expectations regarding the impact of the process came up in several places. Groups of examples in the following text are sometimes drawn from more than one question.

- You do have to be committed to a course of action and be unafraid of having a position. After all, what one writes is a permanent record. What one says can always be denied or misunderstood.
- For those of us who can't participate in meetings in Sacramento, or even regionally, this is a great way for people to contribute to the policymaking process.

But here too there were cautionary notes:

- The only major problem I see is how to get the opinions from people not online.
- As long as we do not forget about the many that do not have access to online information. This medium could easily become another way of separating ourselves from reality. This form of dialogue still is a virtual forum and nothing more.

### *Elements of the dialogue*

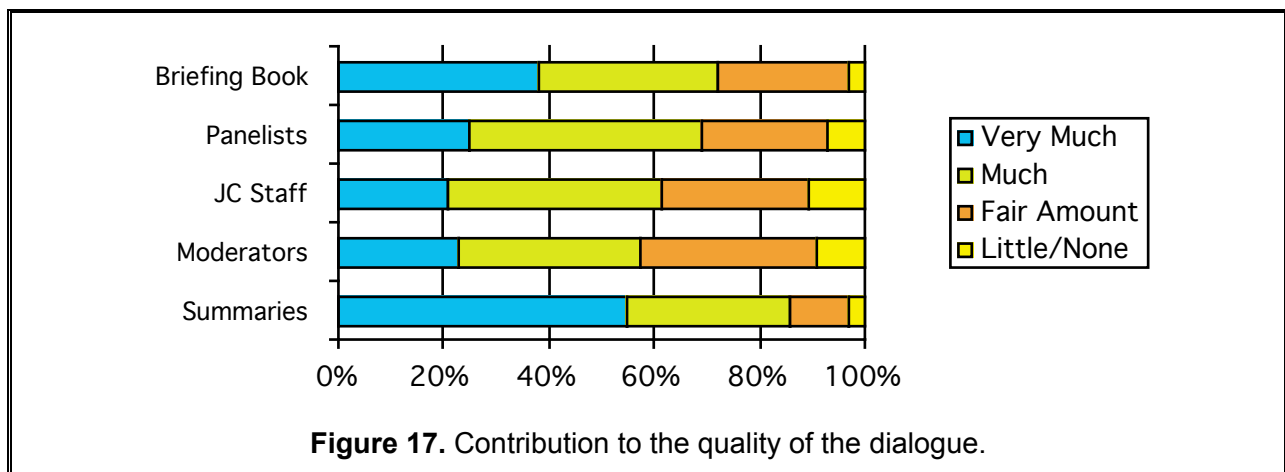
Participants were also asked to assess elements of the dialogue. These responses were often enthusiastic, but variations can be seen (Figure 17). The daily summaries received the highest rating, with 86% of participants saying they contributed “much” or “very much” to the dialogue, and 3% rating them as contributing “a little” or “not at all.” Open-ended comments of the following sort explained this rating:

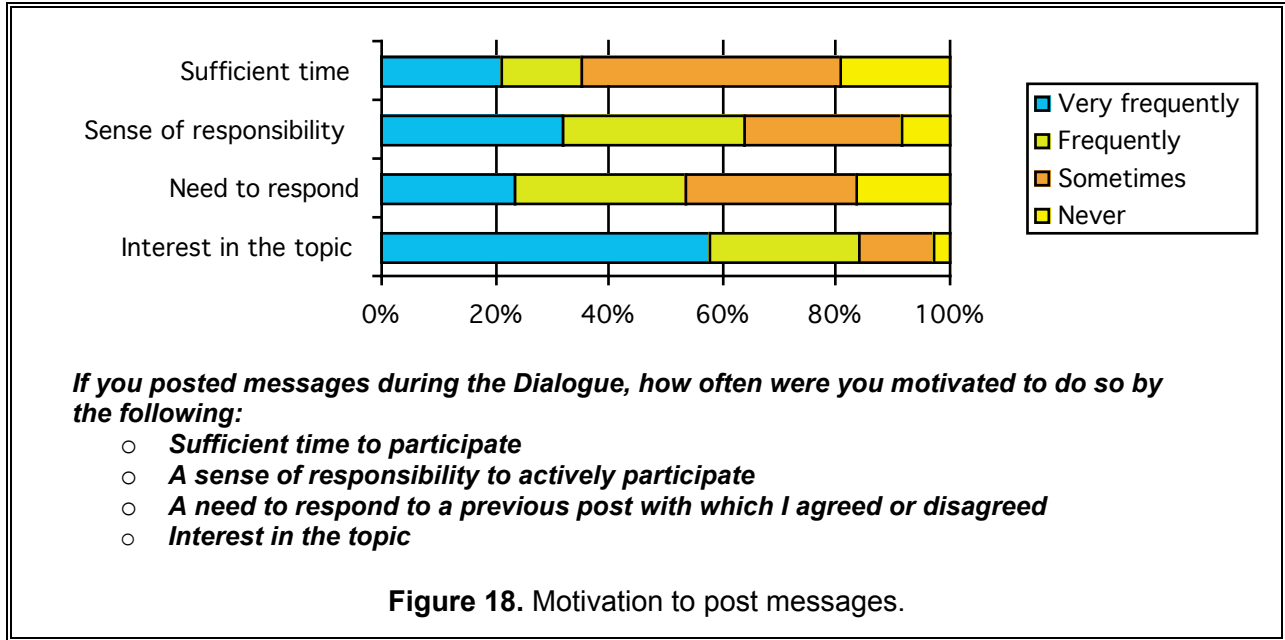
- The summaries were extraordinary. The ability to ooze in and out kept me engaged.

For other elements, combining “much” and “very much,” ratings ranged from 72% for the Briefing Book to 58% for moderators. (The response rate on this group of questions was comparatively low; from 19% to 26% of evaluation participants did not answer.)

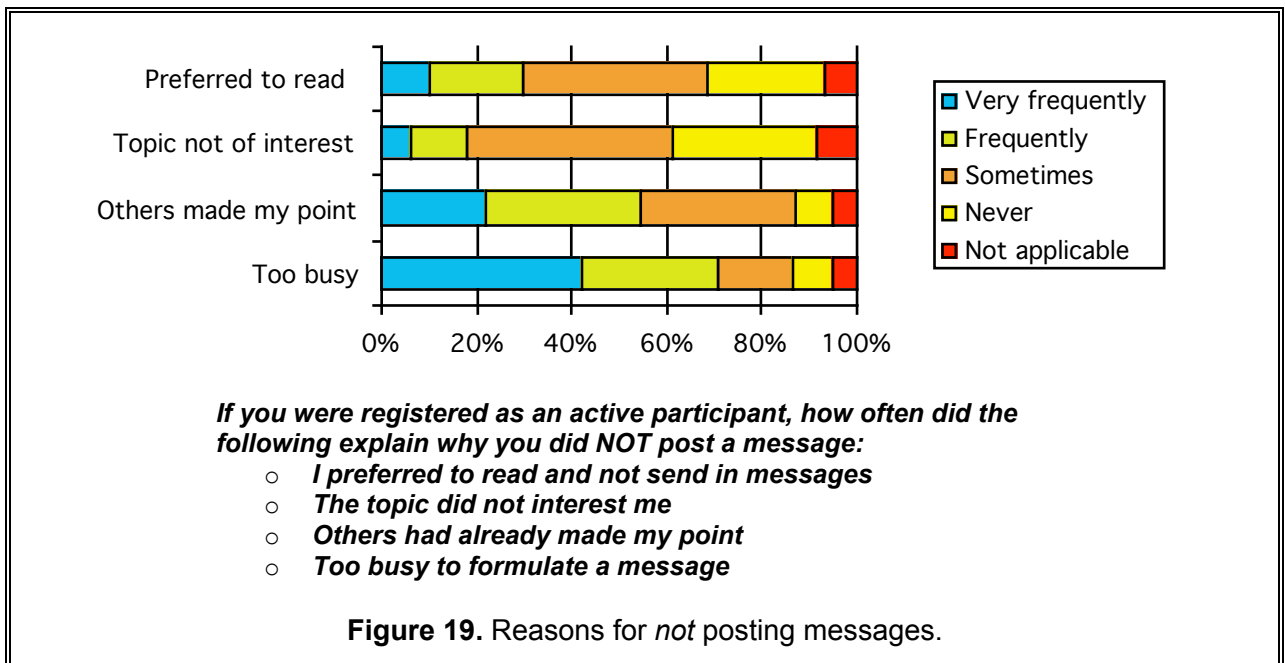
### *Motivation to post messages*

Reasons for writing messages are indicated by responses to the evaluation questions “If you posted messages during the Dialogue, how often were you motivated to do so by the following?” and “If you were registered as an active participant, how often did the following explain why you did NOT post a message?” with choices including very frequently, frequently, sometimes and never (Figures 18 and 19). Again, response rates were not high (with 31%-39% not responding on questions in Figure 18 and 25%-32% not responding on questions in Figure 19), but in this





case can be explained in part by the 57 evaluation respondents who had not posted messages (see *Activity in the dialogue*, p. 39). The reason for posting messages that received the highest percentage of “frequently” or “very frequently” responses (83%) was *interest in the topic*, followed by *a sense of responsibility to actively participate* (64%) and *a need to respond to a previous post with which I agreed or disagreed* (54%). Although the problem of finding time for the dialogue was mentioned in a good many open-ended responses, here “sometimes” was the most frequent response (45%) to “sufficient time” as the reason for not posting.



## New voices

### *Were new voices brought into policy discussions?*

The “new voices” most often sought in political processes are those who are underrepresented as voters – less well educated, younger, and ethnic groups. By this measure, the dialogue did not involve many of the most-hoped-for new participants: a high percentage of those who registered had the opposite characteristics.

As individuals, however, just over one-third (37%) of registrants said they had not known about the Master Plan before learning of the dialogue. Of those who had known about the Plan, only about 45% knew they could submit comments (Figure 10). These percentages seem fairly remarkable, given the percentage (more than two-thirds) who identified themselves as working in some aspect of education – whether as an “education administrator,” “representative of education organization” or simply “educator,” presumably mostly classroom teachers.

Disaggregating the registration data (Figure 20) suggests that while education administrators and representatives of education organizations did know about the Plan more frequently than the rest of the group, “educators” had this knowledge only slightly more frequently than participants who were not part of the profession (55% versus 49%).

A lack of knowledge on the part of classroom teachers seems consistent with the results of a Public Agenda study of education stakeholders regarding attitudes toward public engagement in education.<sup>38</sup> They summarize: “Teachers, of all the groups surveyed, feel the most ignored, with 70 percent saying they are left out of the decision-making process ... parents and the public would like to see more community involvement, but two-thirds say they’re comfortable leaving decisions to the professionals.” (Parents and others who are dissatisfied with schools were more likely to be engaged.) The study covered individual school districts, but the findings are worth considering at state level as well; they may help to explain the large number of educators who registered for the dialogue, as well as the small proportion of parents. Bringing more classroom teachers – many of whom may go on to give information to their colleagues – into the discussion of the Master Plan is in fact an important addition of “new voices” to this particular policy discussion.

<b>Registration</b>	Yes, knew about Plan		
	Frequency	Total	Percent
Educators	178	325	55 %
Education administrators & representatives	236	274	86 %
Other participants	151	306	49 %
Total group	565	905	62 %

**Figure 20.** Prior Master Plan knowledge among education personnel.

<sup>38</sup> Farkas, Steve, Patrick Foley and Ann Duffett, with Tony Foleno and Jean Johnson (2001). “Just Waiting to Be Asked? A Fresh Look at Attitudes on Public Engagement.” (<http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/pubengage/pubengage.htm>).



<i>Evaluation</i>	Change in interest		
	Increased	About the same	Decreased
Prior involvement in politics			
Active	29 %	71 %	0 %
Not active	50 %	49 %	1 %

**Figure 21.** Change in political interest for different involvement levels.

Another measure of the extent to which the dialogue encouraged new voices has been shown in Figure 8. At evaluation, 46% characterized themselves as having been “somewhat” or “not too active” in government and politics (58% gave these responses at registration). When asked the evaluation follow-up question “Has the Dialogue changed your interest in government and politics?” 38% said that the dialogue had increased their interest either in government and politics in general, or specifically in government and politics related to education. That is, not only were new individuals brought into education policy discussions, but also many saw these discussions as increasing their interest. This was true for almost all participants, but particularly for those who said they had been “somewhat” or “not too” active in government and politics in the past, as shown in Figure 21.<sup>39</sup> 50% said their interest had been increased by the dialogue. The interest of those who had been relatively active was also increased, but somewhat less (29%).

### *Barriers*

Technology is often seen as a barrier to the participation of “new voices” in online discussion, due both to the need to use unfamiliar mechanisms and to concerns about the “digital divide.” However, we believe that other factors may be at least equally important. Some participants did have problems using the Web site, though as pointed out by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in “A nation online”<sup>40</sup> Internet skills are increasing steadily over time, so to some extent this may not be a long-term problem. But the “digital divide” is an ongoing concern. Internet use in the total population is reported at 54% of the population by NTIA,<sup>41</sup> others give higher figures, e.g. 64%.<sup>42</sup> (Both figures include use from any location, including home and work.) Those who are less well educated or have less income are also less apt to have access to and be able to use a computer. For those with family incomes under

<sup>39</sup> This figure combines data from two evaluation questions: “How active would you say you have been in government and politics in the past?” (“active” includes categories “very” and “fairly” active; “not active” includes “somewhat” and “not too” active) and “Has the Dialogue changed your interest in government and politics?” (“Increased” includes “increased” and “increased, but only for education”).

<sup>40</sup> National Telecommunications and Information Administration (February 2002). “A nation online: How Americans are expanding their use of the Internet,” Chapter 2 (<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/Chapter2.htm>; links to all chapters: <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/toc.htm>).

<sup>41</sup> NTIA (February 2002), op. cit., Chapter 2, data tables. Computer use at this time, as opposed to Internet use, was found to be 66%.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor reports 64% in September/October 2001 and 66% in February/March 2002: Taylor, H. (April 2002). “Internet penetration at 66% of adults nationwide,” The Harris Poll #18 ([http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=295](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=295)). The Pew Internet and American Life Project Report (April 16, 2003) “The Ever-Shifting Internet Population: A new look at Internet access and the digital divide” (<http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=88>) gives an update: “Pew Internet Project tracking data show a flattening of the overall growth of the Internet population since late 2001. Internet penetration rates have hovered between 57% and 61% since October 2001, rather than pursuing the steady climb that they had showed in prior years.”



\$15,000 and 25,000, usage figures of 25% and 33%, respectively, are cited in “A nation online.” Usage in these income categories was reported to be increasing slightly faster than for other income groups;<sup>43</sup> however, many people are still not online.

Most of the 450 public libraries throughout California provide access to the Internet, but public access computers are not always readily available; they require extra dedication to find, reserve and use. “Internet access at public libraries is more often used by those with lower incomes than those with higher incomes. Just over 20 percent of Internet users with household family incomes of less than \$15,000 a year use public libraries.... As household income rises, not only does the proportion of public library Internet users decline, but also the percentage of Internet users without alternative access points also declines.”<sup>44</sup> Figure 4-7 in *A Nation Online* suggests further that 70% of Internet users in the lowest income category also use the Internet elsewhere; since about one-half of library users are under 25,<sup>45</sup> the second source of many of these users may be computers at school. Figure 12 suggests that very few dialogue participants used library access points. A recent report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, however, states that “60% of non-users know of a place in their community where Internet access is publicly available.... Most of those who know of local access points say those access points are easy to reach. The most frequently identified location of public access is a library.”<sup>46</sup>

Open-ended comments on the technology show a range of abilities and confidence:

- It was easy to access and the threading technology worked well.
- Once I figured out how the system worked, it went smoothly.
- Didn't fully understand the mechanics this time out, but hope to be engaged more actively the next round.
- I am only semi-literate on the computer & found it difficult to open & close comments & responses. I felt as if I wasn't having a conversation. I have never participated in a chat room or this type of dialogue before.
- I found it difficult to navigate and there was too much to read. I wanted to participate, but it was too overwhelming.
- I felt it had too many links which took me to places I didn't want to be. I finally gave up trying to participate and just read the others' comments.
- This is my third attempt to complete this survey involving over three hours, as something always seems to happen before I finish.
- The site was confusing. Finding where to enter in the conversation was not easy.

Participants were concerned about the digital divide:

- On-line dialogue is a great idea. I would love to see it as a common vehicle for citizen interaction with government, when the kind of background materials you provided are available to enrich the discussion. We need to have a set of simpler materials available to include the voices of those the government serves -- students, the elderly, and other vulnerable people whose opportunities to participate has been severely limited until now.
- ... remember there are many that do not have access to on-line dialogue.

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<sup>43</sup> NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 2, Figure 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 4, Figures 4-6 and 4-7 (<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/Chapter4.htm>).

<sup>45</sup> NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 4 (<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/html/Chapter4.htm>).

<sup>46</sup> Pew Internet and American Life Project (2003), op. cit.

There were also some misunderstandings. For example, one participant thought the registration process was not working because

- I never received my password and yet whenever I tried to repeat the registration, it said I was already registered.

Actually, to keep things simple, there were no passwords; there were directions, but apparently they were not always found.

Many potential participants, including those with low incomes and those with young families, may also experience more general barriers to political participation, whether online or off. Lack of basic literacy, for example, may stand in the way of participation, as well as any other Internet use: the Pew report<sup>47</sup> cites an estimate that due to problems in this area up to 23% of the population “struggles enough with literacy that they have difficulty completing everyday tasks.” Time is also a scarce resource for many people. Participation in the online dialogue required time to become familiar with the Web site, and suggested spending time learning about background material, then reading and perhaps writing messages. The daily summaries (see *Summaries*, p. 27) help, but are not the same as reading individual messages. Using message threads can also save time, but only if the participant has taken time to learn to use them. These constraints were reflected in responses to the open-ended questions:

- The first two weeks in June are probably the BUSIEST for teacher on a traditional school calendar year. I could not get to the dialogue as I had hoped because of report cards and dozens of end-of-year activities. I hope you will choose another time of the year for the next dialogue!!
- This was a very worthwhile opportunity but time consuming. Many teachers and working parents could not participate because it occurred during the day, through dinner, homework, getting kids to bed....
- It was difficult to get on-line on a regular basis due to my own volume of work.... This made it challenging to read everyone’s posts before you responded to ensure you were not duplicating other people’s thoughts. By the time I was able to go through all the posts I had no time to compose mine. That may need to be looked at in the future, how to manage the large number of posts.
- I wish I had more time to give to the project....
- Too much, too fast. I did not have the energy and the time after 3 days of keeping up (reading everything).
- I am pleased that I took the time to participate.... I would have been more involved had it occurred at a different time of the year.

Such comments reinforced the feeling of the organizers that the scheduling of the CAMP dialogue (see *Sponsorship and funding*, p. 17), while unavoidable, meant that it took place when many parents and teachers felt time was especially short. As noted, this may help to explain both the age distribution of participants (skewed toward older ranges) and the drop off between registration and evaluation in participants aged 30 to 49. In any case, the comments suggest strongly that taking school schedules into account in planning an education dialogue would help to draw more people, and that those who take part might participate more heavily. To have engaged large numbers of students would probably have required both a longer time and sufficient resources to promote involvement classroom by classroom. A participant said:

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, citing a statistic from a National Adult Literacy Survey by the U.S. Department of Education.

- It would have been extremely interesting to have involved classrooms in the discussion, and to be able to have assessed the results in terms of interest in politics.

Another barrier to participation may be a lack of information and understanding of the educational policy process. Parents may be concerned about their children's schools, but fail to understand the relevance of state policy to what happens locally. Those who might be interested may feel that they do not know enough to take part. An online discussion can provide enormous amounts of explanatory information, and with sufficient resources could provide it in a manner that is easier to absorb and accessible to users with varied levels of reading skill. However, only those who feel that it makes a difference to their lives are likely to take the time to study and understand such material. This need for skillful summarization and presentation of material increases the cost of an event. Related questions are discussed further under *Nature and complexity of issues* (p. 69) and *Cost versus engagement* (p. 82).

A basic pre-condition for participation is of course that people must know that the discussion is taking place. For the CAMP dialogue, there was an organized campaign of publicity directed to organizations (*How people heard...*, p. 36). Staff of both Information Renaissance and the Joint Committee, as well as participants in the dialogue, felt there was a need for broader outreach and media attention. Participants said:

- I do not think the public was aware of this dialogue nor of its importance to them, to their families and future. However, this is a good start....
- How do we get the info on this dialogue out to others? My employer, Intel, encouraged us to join the discussion, which is how I heard of it in the first place. Otherwise I would not have known. ...
- A good beginning, but many people were unaware of it even with the publicity....
- It was not well enough publicized before hand, maybe. I happened to read Peter Schrag's column in the Sacramento Bee in which he mentioned it. Something of this import should be sent to all superintendents to disseminate to school staffs and communities to involve the most broad-based response possible....

The demographic composition of participants suggests, however, that while more outreach would have been desirable, reaching additional types of participants would probably have required different approaches. It would have been interesting (though not possible within the dialogue budget) to place paid advertisements or radio interviews in carefully selected media, and to have guided those without computers to local libraries or other access points. But again, before people can be expected to take advantage of this sort of opportunity, they need to know why participation is relevant to *them*. There is not only a need for outreach but also for skills related to reaching and informing those who do not typically take part in any political discussions – not just online dialogue.

### *Potential advantages of online participation*

Though barriers to involving “new voices” that stem from lack of income and education stand in the way of all types of political participation, online participation can in principle overcome many other constraints. For example, online events can allow people to take part at any time of day. Unlike a public hearing, there is no need to choose a few specific locations. No out of town travel is required, so there are no charges for accommodations, meals, or taking time off from work to attend. Those who live in rural areas – whose increase in Internet use has been

“particularly strong”<sup>48</sup> – have a far more equal chance of taking part, as do disabled people who use a computer for communication or find it difficult to travel, those with young families or other caregivers. And, as a student leader said to a Joint Committee staff member, these features make online discussion “student friendly.” In comparison to public hearings, online participation may also have advantages for people who are simply shy about speaking in public, or who prefer a less heated process with more opportunity for reflection and interaction.

### ***The dialogue as a public space for interaction***

*How did participants see the “public space” created by the dialogue for interaction?*

Much of the potential of an online dialogue for reaching the social goals listed in Chapter II is defined by how well it functions as a “public space” – a place for communication and interaction among the public and between public and policy makers. Does this space increase the flow of useful information? Is there a chance to learn from each other? Can policy makers learn more about local circumstances and policy effects? Does it help to inform the public? Do the public listen to and learn from each other? Is the atmosphere adversarial or respectful? Does it encourage sharing opinions and values, and new understandings of others’ viewpoints (an aid to decreasing conflict)? Does it offer potential for moving from input to collaboration? Does it encourage trustworthy institutions, and help to build trust?

In addition to determining whether online dialogue supports social goals, the answers are also important to individual participant satisfaction and willingness to take part in this form of civic involvement. This evaluation gives only a glimpse of answers, but it is an encouraging glimpse, demonstrating that in the respects evaluated the dialogue did create a space in which such interaction, communication and engagement can take place. This section begins with a number of messages from the dialogue archive, as an indicator of information transmission. We then turn to evaluation questions that requested participants to assess these less tangible aspects of the dialogue. Open-ended questions provide more information and also speak to ease of use of the technology. Here too, an important related issue is how the public space created by an online dialogue compares to more traditional mechanisms for public involvement in policy decisions. This is addressed under *What policy makers got...* (p. 63).

#### ***Information flow***

The CAMP dialogue message archive shows participants offering a great deal of information on conditions in local schools, effects of policy on their home locations or their fields, and what does or does not work. Though many comments can be construed as complaints, there were also many suggestions for positive change; clearly participants care deeply about education. The excerpts below are intended to suggest the range of comments; in many cases these were part of a chain of messages, in which these remarks were discussed and may have been rebutted.

An exchange with a state senator, who requested further information:

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<sup>48</sup> NTIA, op. cit., Chapter 2, Table 2-3: “Over the 1998 to 2001 period, growth in Internet use among people living in rural households has been particularly strong (24 percent at an average annual rate). Use of the Internet by people in rural households now approaches the national average.”

- I wanted to elaborate on [this] point.... Over 50,000 adult learners receive at least 12 hours of instruction every year in volunteer-based programs.... [which] provide “anytime, anywhere” instruction, usually for the “hardest to reach, hardest to teach” learners.
- Thank you for the information about volunteer adult education programs. I am not familiar with them or with how they fit in the structure of other adult ed programs. Would it be possible to provide the committee with additional information? ...

Participants described problems, innovations, and programs useful for particular students:

- I haven’t seen any method of parental input mentioned....
- At our school... we have added 1 hour to each day... so we can “get it all done”! We favor this over all day kindergarten where 5 year olds just get too tired for quality learning, and the teachers have less prep time....
- New teachers could benefit from annual direct contact with the 100-500 “Teachers of the Year” across the nation, in seminars and training programs....
- .... important for policy makers to understand... in many rural counties County Offices of Education.... are ideal centralized sites for organizing and implementing training programs for both public and privately operated ECE [Early Childhood Education]....
- ...While I support the intent of... learning support...at key transition points, .... a traditional view... may not be applicable to many .... [who] do not enroll... as full time freshman.... Years may have passed since high school graduation or they may come in after having dropped out, gone to adult ed. and passing their GED. Many take only one course, stop, continue, stop, continue, all the while working and/or raising children....
- As a person with a speech disability, ... one of my biggest barriers... was my inability to use the telephone. That barrier has now been lifted through a new technology, free to the consumer.... It is very important that every pupil with a speech disability in California be trained to use STS.

Many spelled out unintended consequences of policy, particularly in relation to assessment:

- If you have ever watched a class... with English language learners... [being tested], you have to wonder what is being measured. Students make simple mistakes, mark the wrong bubble, skip a line of bubbles, give up and start crying. At worst, they are forced to take a test in a language they cannot read and are just beginning to understand....
- When the state ... insists that all high school students pass geometry (which is not possible), the local districts meet this demand by inventing two geometry classes... If you take geometry A, you cannot sign up for any higher level math classes. ... you know what this means (geometry A heavily involves yarn and crayons).
- ... schools I work with that are [classified, based on testing, as] underperforming have narrowed their curriculum drastically.... When a district or principal directs teachers to spend 3.5 hours a day on literacy and an hour for math, little time is left for science, social studies, [or the] arts....
- .... the problem isn’t with what we learn from the STAR 9 test, the problem is how we interpret what we learn. Johnny reads at 5th level at the end of the 5th grade so his teacher is good. (Even though Johnny read at the 5th grade level when he entered 5th grade.) Bobby only reads at 3rd grade level at the end of 5th grade so his teacher was poor. (Even though Bobby couldn’t read at all when he entered 5th grade.)

A question on attracting and retaining teachers for schools with underserved students produced a number of responses drawn from the participants’ experience:

- ... excellent comments about the methods for attracting teachers... We also need... to retain teachers in the classroom in underachieving schools.... many teachers who leave these schools really want to stay, but... cannot be effective.... Imagine: you have no supplies other than what you have purchased. You have 40+ students. Some... are disruptive, but no one answers the office telephone.... to call parents you have to walk to the office to use a phone on a counter in a public area. The number the District has is wrong.... one student strikes another and is removed, but... [is sent] back to class within 15 minutes. It is hard to feel good when these kinds of incidents are basically daily occurrences and there is no support for or effort toward change....
- ... administrative support is key, and that includes counseling services, for students and for teachers.... I worked in a “low-performing” elementary school in Los Angeles where, in a school of 1200 kids from a local housing project, there was little turnover and great pride among the staff and parents.... mostly engendered by the principal and the leadership among teachers, who loved the school, and saw their responsibility to help new teachers help the kids....
- One teacher... only had 7 of the 30 children that started the year. 23... were replaced with new students (some several times during the year). With every child that changed, she had to start back at the beginning....

This participant may have spoken for others who were not present in the dialogue:

- I am a single mother of three in the public school system in a rural area. I am a full-time working mom... I work with local families in a Native American family services agencies and confront these issues weekly.... It is not a single school, it seems to be more systemic.... I have been amazed when I approach a school as an “official” service provider... I am treated with some grain of respect, but when calling the same school as a mom, I am addressed in a condescending tone and virtually always brushed off....
- .... [in many schools, to receive this information] the parent must WEEKLY request a progress report. This is not realistic for many working parents.... Suggestions made by teachers for student improvement include options not viable for many families of the children they teach, such as after school programs for which no transportation is available.... The K-12 system needs to move out of the 1950’s in the way families are perceived, and the roles they may play....

Advocates forcefully presented the need for adult education:

- .... over five million adults in our state do not have a high school diploma, and this number is on the rise, yet a diploma is now a prerequisite for getting an entry-level job. Millions of Californians lack the English skills they need to be successful....
- ... The comprehensive plan for CA education must take this reality into account....
- ... Hayward Adult School has helped me from being just disabled, to a studious uprising employment bound member of the community. Honestly this program has changed my life in such a positive way; it’s hard to put to words....
- ... in my Basic Reading... just today. “Jacqueline” told me that she and her two children have begun to go to the library to get books once every week... She now reads to both preschoolers 30 minutes per day.... “Art”, a 19 year-old high school dropout, passed a promotional test at reading level 11.0, having originally tested in at 6.8.... Two students in residential drug and alcohol recovery programs have been drug-free for 2 and 3 months and are working toward their adult high school diplomas and/or GEDs.... None of these people would be comfortable in a community college setting... they need the individual and small group instruction and support we can offer in community adult



schools. After they earn their diplomas or GEDs, they will have the necessary skills and confidence to be successful in college or training programs.

Comments on technology reflected both the frustrations of incorporating new technologies and ideas for ways to make this feasible:

- “social promotion” in these schools is very high... students by the 8th grade are already 4-5 years behind.... trying to add new technology to a situation that is so unstable increases the chaos.... until these problems are addressed effectively, new technology may be wasted time, effort and resources....
- ... [regarding] teaching technology skills in non-tech classes.... one California school has.... an “English/History” course... two teachers team teaching and a block schedule format.... neither course is “tech” per se, [but] there is an increased opportunity to smoothly “teach” a tech-enhanced methodology .... [this] “works” because a tech-qualified teacher is always present.... a tech-teacher at large who floats and provides just-in-time support and/or training is the key.... one step further and we can have a remote-access connected tech expert instantly available via desktop-sharing to provide support by adding “intelligence” to the coursework interface. Now start “pooling” that support throughout the district and you have a cost-effective and workable solution to the problem of under-utilized technology in the classroom.

*Informed participation*

Some equality in access to and understanding of relevant information is an important prerequisite to a worthwhile discussion. Better-informed participants can be more equal discussion partners with policy makers, and among themselves. The CAMP dialogue Briefing Book (*Resources*, p. 24) provided detailed background information on many of the topics

<b>Evaluation</b>	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	59	34 %
Agree	72	42 %
Neither agree nor disagree	27	16 %
Disagree	11	7 %
Strongly disagree	4	2 %
Total	173	100 %

***Regarding your perception of this dialogue, how would you rate the following statement: I felt I had enough information to take part.***

<b>Evaluation</b>	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	38	22 %
Agree	94	54 %
Neither agree nor disagree	37	21 %
Disagree	3	2 %
Strongly disagree	3	2 %
Total	175	100 %

***Regarding the communication you observed among participants in this dialogue, how would you rate the following statement: People knew what they were talking about.***

**Figure 22.** Informed participation.



covered in the discussion. The messages above demonstrate that dialogue participants were also rich sources of information, as were panelists and Joint Committee staff.

Most evaluation participants felt that they “had enough information to take part.” 76% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (Figure 22). When these responses are disaggregated, the percentage for educational personnel is slightly higher (79% vs. 67%) than for others in the group, as might be expected. However, this makes the percentage agreement on another question, “People knew what they were talking about,” all the more interesting: again, 76% of the total group agreed or strongly agreed; education personnel were slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree than the rest of the group (77% vs. 71%), but they were twice as likely to “strongly agree” (25% vs. 12%). Of course it is possible that this is a result of a shared vocabulary among the large number of educators taking part.

***Atmosphere to facilitate participation***

To evaluate the atmosphere of the discussion in areas apt to facilitate participation, a three-part question asked how participants perceived the dialogue (Figure 23). Combined “agree” and “strongly agree” responses indicate that 79% of respondents felt welcome (4% disagreed or strongly disagreed), and 77% felt that people’s attitudes and responses encouraged participation (under 3% disagreed or strongly disagreed). Only 22% agreed or strongly agreed

<b><i>Evaluation</i></b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly agree	93	51 %
Agree	51	28 %
Neither agree nor disagree	32	17 %
Disagree	4	2 %
Strongly disagree	4	2 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>100 %</b>

***I felt welcome in the dialogue.***

<b><i>Evaluation</i></b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly agree	55	31 %
Agree	81	46 %
Neither agree nor disagree	36	20 %
Disagree	4	2 %
Strongly disagree	1	>1 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100 %</b>

***Peoples’ attitudes and responses encouraged participation.***

<b><i>Evaluation</i></b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly agree	14	9 %
Agree	19	13 %
Neither agree nor disagree	91	61 %
Disagree	11	7 %
Strongly disagree	13	9 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>100 %</b>

***When I asked questions, they were answered.***

***Regarding your perception of this dialogue,  
how would you rate these statements:***

**Figure 23.** Atmosphere for participation.

that their questions were answered, but the majority (61%) chose “neither agree nor disagree,” suggesting either that they did not feel strongly about this or that the answers they received did not seem relevant. Other factors discussed below, including the quality of communication in the dialogue, are also quite important to its atmosphere.

<b>Evaluation</b>	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	29	16 %
Agree	85	48 %
Neither agree nor disagree	46	26 %
Disagree	14	8 %
Strongly disagree	3	2 %
Total	177	100 %

***It was balanced among different points of view.***

<b>Evaluation</b>	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	65	36 %
Agree	90	50 %
Neither agree nor disagree	20	11 %
Disagree	5	3 %
Strongly disagree	1	>1 %
Total	181	100 %

***It was constructive and useful for examining questions and ideas.***

<b>Evaluation</b>	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	16	9 %
Agree	77	45 %
Neither agree nor disagree	53	31 %
Disagree	22	13 %
Strongly disagree	5	3 %
Total	173	100 %

***It was not dominated by a few participants.***

***Regarding the communication you observed among participants in this dialogue, how would you rate these statements:***

**Figure 24.** Quality of communication.

<b>Evaluation</b>	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	80	45 %
Agree	86	48 %
Neither agree nor disagree	11	6 %
Disagree	1	<1 %
Strongly disagree	1	<1 %
Total	179	100 %

***Regarding the communication you observed among participants in this Dialogue, how would you rate the following statement:  
It was respectful***

**Figure 25.** Respect.

## *Quality of communication*

*Perception of factors related to discussion quality.* A series of evaluation questions requested information about aspects of the quality of communication in the discussion (Figure 24). Asked about the balance among different points of view, 64% of respondents chose “agree” or “strongly agree”; asked whether the discussion was constructive and useful for examining questions and ideas, 86% agreed or strongly agreed. The question of whether a few participants had dominated the discussion showed less agreement (54%). This may be related to the relatively large number of messages about adult education. On the other hand, 31% selected “neither agree nor disagree,” while 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Participants were also asked to evaluate the respect shown among those taking part (Figure 25). A very high percentage of respondents (93%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the dialogue was respectful. This is a particularly interesting finding, since the civility of online discussion has often been called into question. The section on *Civility* (p. 78) goes into this issue, and lists some aspects of Info Ren dialogues that may help to promote civility and respect.

*Reciprocity.* A possible measure of “reciprocity” – or the extent to which people were talking to each other in the dialogue – is a count of the fraction of messages that are found in a thread with other messages. When participants read messages they were given the option of posting a reply to the message they were reading or posting a message that would start a new thread. Of the 1057 messages posted, 924 were part of a larger thread – 87% of the total. This indicates that participants were almost always reading before posting messages – that is, listening to others before speaking themselves.

*Allowing dissent.* Although most participants saw the discussion as respectful, willingness to challenge the view of others (and a good bit of disagreement) was evident in the messages. Many messages from the adult education group fit in this category, but they were not alone in this. On the other hand, the responses to such messages may have elicited the effect pointed out by Beierle,<sup>49</sup> in which messages from those who are “insufficiently civil” are likely to be ignored, may have been at work. Moderators who are well versed in the subject matter, or significant staff time from the sponsoring organization, can help in identifying and specifically requesting comments on concepts included in messages that are relevant to the discussion, even if infelicitously worded. Diverse and attentive panelists can also help in bringing out opposing viewpoints.

*Control of the agenda.* Those who examine public discussion processes generally ask about control of the agenda: who determines what is discussed? In one sense, a great deal was pre-determined in the California dialogue. The Joint Committee had adopted a Framework (footnote 11), Working Groups had met through months of detailed consideration, and (although revisions were expected) a draft Plan was in place. Themes and questions were announced for each day of the discussion, and there was some social pressure to stick to them. This pre-determination of topics is probably unavoidable when public discussion takes place at such a late stage of policy development.

The role of participants in determining the details of the discussion was much greater than this might suggest. Topics were broad, and moderators and panelists were not very active; the evolution of the dialogue depended largely on who chose to post a message and who chose to respond (and to some extent on how well participants chose the subject lines for their messages). The adult education campaign, and perhaps the percentage of those who felt that

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<sup>49</sup> Beierle (2002), op. cit, p. 39.

the discussion was dominated by a few, illustrate both desirable and less desirable aspects of this situation. Some dialogue participants recognized the role they had, or could have, played:

- I'm interested in Adult Ed. The dialog covered it because so many of us wrote in insisting it be covered....
- There was little dialogue about the youth who are disenfranchised from education – I did, however, have an obligation to add that to the discussion, and my time frame prevented me from that.

Responses to the question “Did the Dialogue cover the education issues that concern you most?” suggest that participants found the issues covered relevant: 87% answered positively (“yes”, “yes to some extent” or “half and half”). Fifty-two people responded to the open-ended part of this question, taking this opportunity to cite issues that were not covered in the dialogue. In general, there was little consensus on topics; these included libraries, gifted students, special education, consistency, funding of various sorts, equity (including funding) and quality, social promotion, and environmental education. Several responses referred to topics that were included in the dialogue, but were felt to deserve more emphasis, including unification of small school districts, career or vocational education, school readiness, and governance/accountability. Adult education came up in 10 responses: two felt there should have been more discussion, one that there was too much, and six were glad it had been discussed.

The “no” answers in Figure 26 are also interesting. The questions on local or district issues and on abstraction were an attempt to learn whether people were frustrated by the focus on strategic state-level concerns, which may seem “far from home” if the relevance of state level policy to local schools is not understood. Some examples came up in the open-ended responses:

- Being a senior, my interest in this forum was primarily about the future of Adult education. I really couldn't get an answer on this issue. I still don't know how this plan will affect current facilities....
- The Master Plan (and the dialog) is too focused on bureaucratic procedures and not enough on the process of learning.

<i><b>Evaluation</b></i>	Frequency	Percent
Yes	45	24 %
Yes, to some extent	96	50 %
Half and half	25	13 %
No, I am more interested in local/district issues	3	2 %
No, it was too abstract	8	4 %
No, others did not share my concerns	5	3 %
Other (described in text box below)	9	5 %
Total	191	100 %

***Did the Dialogue cover the education issues that concern you most?***

**Figure 26. Issues covered.**

### *Ease of participation*

Ease of participation also affects the quality (and quantity) of discussion. One aspect of technology in the CAMP dialogue was the storage of messages on the Web site. One could print the messages, but this would be tedious, and replies had to be composed in or copied to an online form and sent via the Web site. The large number of participants and volume of messages increased this challenge. The project design chose one large discussion over a number of smaller ones. In part the goal was to expose participants to a broad range of views and avoid the possibility suggested by some authors<sup>50</sup> that people will favor interactions with participants who have similar views and interests. This means, however, that each participant must find a way to cope with the overall message volume. Participants could read the subject lines of new messages and decide which ones sounded interesting, or skim most messages without lingering. Using message “threads” is a next step, since this organizes messages with their replies. This tool was emphasized in messages from staff, and participants did an excellent job of organizing their replies in threads. Daily summaries also helped by giving an overview; this was particularly helpful for those who came in after the dialogue had started or who might have missed a day or two.

### *What participants got out of the dialogue*

*What did participants get from the process, including the potential for impact on policy?*

### *Engagement and potential impact*

Opportunities for the public to interact with public officials and staff are typically limited. By contrast, online dialogue provides interactions that may feel fairly direct and personal. This type of activity is also new enough that many people find it interesting simply to take part. Also, constructive discussion on a topic of interest may in itself be perceived as rewarding. The dialogue does appear to have been valued in this way: responses to questions about discussion quality quoted in the preceding section (*The dialogue as a public space*, p. 51) describe the discussion as a constructive and useful way to examine questions and ideas; the comments below about what was learned also suggest that the dialogue stimulated reflection about one’s own opinions. Having this sort of discussion with policy makers is an even greater rarity. Participants commented:

- I’ve been a teacher for 33 years and shake my head in despair about the seeming lack of respect teachers have in affecting policy. It’s done to us. We are held accountable for everything from kids brushing and flossing to passing exit exams, yet our voices are basically unheard when it comes to policymaking and probably most importantly, evaluating how policy is affecting the students we serve....
- It is refreshing to be able to dialog with professionals who agree and disagree on subjects. Allowing for consensus building and bringing clarity on subjects that are a little gray.

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<sup>50</sup> Cass Sunstein is one well-known proponent; see footnote 59.

On the other hand, responses to the evaluation question “How much influence do you think this Dialogue will have on the content of the California Master Plan for Education?” suggest that expected impact on policy outcomes may not have been a major reason for taking part, since only 4% expected a “great deal” of influence (Figure 27). Many more (49%) expected “some” influence, and education personnel were somewhat more likely to expect influence than others (55% chose “a great deal” or “some,” in contrast to 32% of other participants).

<i>Evaluation</i>	Frequency	Percent
A great deal of influence	7	4 %
Some influence	95	49 %
Very little influence	47	24 %
I don't know	44	23 %
Total	193	100 %

***How much influence do you think this dialogue will have on the content of the California Master Plan for Education?***

**Figure 27.** Anticipated influence of the dialogue.

The open-ended comments give details about participants’ feelings. Some were hopeful:

- I had an opportunity to be heard in a forum where those listening had the power to effect change.
- I got a sense that they care and that they want to make a reasonable change. There was evidence that the people involved care a great deal and are sometimes at a loss where to start.
- Opportunity to access the “ear” of people empowered to make decisions about requirements I am responsible for enacting as a teacher.
- I now believe I/we have made an impact on what expectations are and a reasonable approach to a more positive and across the board plan for a better outcome.

Quite a few, though, felt that the outcome was pre-determined, or that the institutions involved are captives of special interest groups:

- It was good to have the panelists responding to the comments. However, many times it sounded as if they had made up their minds and were not interested in using the input or making any changes in the master plan.
- I feel that possibly the K16 Master Plan was a done deal and we were allowed to vent our frustrations. I hope this was not an exercise in futility and a waste of our time.
- 95% pre-determined.
- ... My opinion can, and will swing back to the “negative” side if I feel that the opinions/ ideas/thoughts/ and hopes gathered were used to simply “fulfill the public opinion requirement”... I understand the need to “gather public input”, but I also recognize that it can simply become one of many things to “check off” as you formulate policy.
- I had the sense that most of the dialog consisted of members of interest groups expressing their well-defined positions....
- In reality the diversity of opinion found in such dialogue, though engaging and intellectually stimulating, is rarely apparent in the final policies.

- I sort of lost interest in it mid-way because it seemed like special interest groups ... were over-represented.... I felt their voices were skewing the reality of what goes on in public education....

Others were somewhat hopeful, but wondered if the dialogue would make a difference:

- I do not know whether this dialogue will actually result in a plan that reflects the fact that participants in the dialogue were heard and their opinions played a role in the outcome of the Master Plan. If it does, GREAT. If the dialogue had no influence on decision-making, then it's "politics, as usual."
- At least I feel that the state cares enough to read our opinions and thoughts (whether or not this really happens later on down the road remains to be seen).
- I am waiting to see what action takes place in the policy related to the comments – that will be the single most important measure of real success.
- I hope that the opinions and the responses obtained through the dialogue are really taken into consideration when setting policy.

### *Learning*

Information Renaissance believes that a dialogue opens up possibilities for several types of learning; participants' comments included:

- This is my first time being part of a public debate. What I can tell you is that I've learned a lot.
- I really appreciated being able to add my opinions to those of my colleagues. I also learned what others consider important in the Master Plan.

Further, a series of agree/disagree evaluation questions (Figure 28) asked participants to report on what they saw themselves as having learned in specific areas. These include content, as well as others' views:

1. I learned a great deal about education in California.
2. I learned a great deal about opinions I had not thought about before.
3. I learned a lot about where to find information related to California education

Participants were also asked to reflect on the effect on their own thinking:

4. I thought more about my own opinions on education.

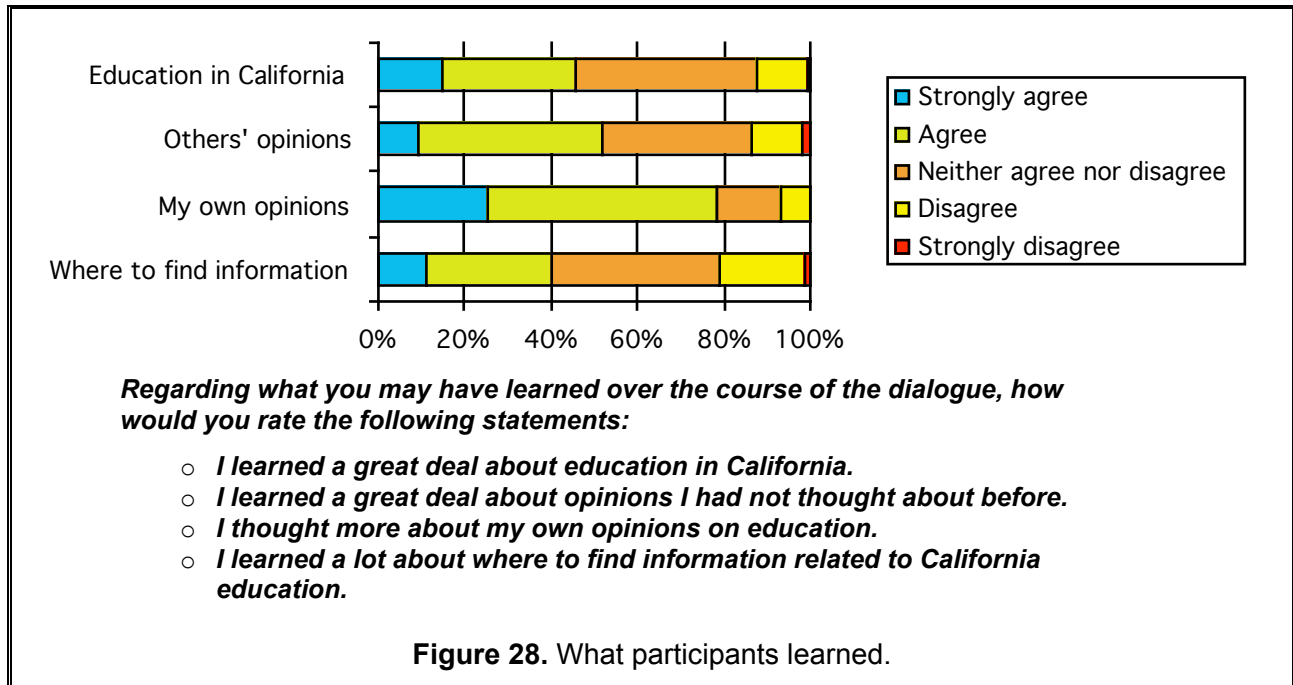
Such learning can be a major asset for individuals, as well as a social benefit. One participant reflected the importance of such change:

- Most contributors began by addressing their personal needs from their own backgrounds and/or schools. As time went on, they began to develop the 'big picture' idea and saw everything as a whole. That was great!

Interestingly, the learning-related question that received the most agreement ("strongly agree" plus "agree" responses totaling 79%) was on thinking through one's own opinions on education. This was followed by reported learning about "opinions I had not thought about before" (52%), suggesting that many participants did take advantage of the opportunity to hear others' opinions.

It might be expected that education personnel would be less likely than other participants to see themselves as having learned about education and education resources in California. However, this is contradicted by the data. Education personnel as a group were more likely to agree with these statements in the evaluation than other participants (48% vs. 38%, for learning about





<b>Evaluation</b>	Frequency	Percent
Yes, many people	7	4 %
Yes, a few people	52	27 %
No	134	69 %
Total	193	100 %

**Over the course of the Dialogue, did you make personal contacts that you have followed up on, or plan to follow up on?**

**Figure 29.** Networking during the dialogue.

education; 42% vs. 35%, for learning where to find education-related education). Although the numbers involved are not large, it is interesting to further disaggregate this group. Responses regarding learning about education in California were somewhat similar; however, with respect to learning where to find information, “educators” were much more likely to agree (47%) than other participants, while education administrators were less likely to agree.

**Other benefits**

Increased interest in government and politics (see Figures 8 and 21, plus the following section) can also be seen as an asset for participants. In addition, for some (31%), personal contacts made during the dialogue – and thus potential for future networking – were also a possible benefit (Figure 29). The sort of community building that may occur within a dialogue is an interesting aspect of this activity. If there are repeated events on related topics, the potential for community building will be even greater.

## **What Joint Committee and staff got out of the dialogue**

*What did policy makers get from the process, including the possibility of changes in public attitudes?*

There are several potential benefits to policy makers from involving the public in dialogue. Goodwill and increased trust may be paramount, but educating the public on issues and gaining information that contributes to better policy decisions are also important, as are opportunities to build support networks and communities.

### **Participants**

The responses to the evaluation shown in Figures 8, 9 and 21 suggest that the dialogue did help to build both goodwill and interest. Many CAMP dialogue participants had previously not been too involved in government and politics. More than one-third of all evaluation respondents (Figure 8) – and 50% of those who had been less active (Figure 21) – reported that the dialogue increased their interest. Asked their opinion on education policy, just over one-third (35%) said their attitude was more positive after the dialogue, although 9% said they had become more negative (Figure 9). Comments, however, indicate that developments after the dialogue – both the final version of the Master Plan and the implementing legislation that must be enacted for the Plan to take force – will be a major factor in the sustainability of these attitudes (see *Impact on policy and engagement*, p. 72).

The dialogue was also an opportunity for the Joint Committee to let the public know more about the draft Plan, and to let the public interact with legislators; half of the 18 Committee members agreed to take part in the dialogue, and several appeared on more than one day. The Web site and, in particular, the Briefing Book served as detailed information resources that are still available for public use. In addition, as demonstrated earlier, (*Information flow*, p. 51) the participants supplied a great deal of material on conditions in local schools, policy effects they have observed, and what approaches do or do not work.

### **Joint Committee and staff**

The Joint Committee, as evidenced by the statement of Senator Alpert (*Origin of the dialogue*, p. 17) had made a commitment to broad public input before the online event was proposed. The legislation that will be necessary to effectively implement the Master Plan may have made the idea of increasing public goodwill, interest and commitment especially interesting. To involve the public the Joint Committee organized hearings, individual members held “Town Hall” meetings in their districts, and there were many informative meetings, including those of the Working Groups, on specific topics, themes, or overviews. There was also the possibility to give online “e-testimony” (see footnote 19).<sup>51</sup> Although e-testimony allowed the public to comment at will,

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<sup>51</sup> In 1999–2001, a number of informational meetings on specific aspects of the Plan were held in Sacramento; also, each of the seven Working Groups presented a final report early in 2002. By the time of the dialogue, 19 public hearings had been completed; three additional hearings were held in July and August. During the summer of 2002, 11 “Town Hall” meetings were organized, each hosted by one or more legislators. (Lists of these events are online at [http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/sen/committee/joint/master\\_plan/\\_home/hearing.htm](http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/sen/committee/joint/master_plan/_home/hearing.htm) and

rather than attending a meeting, this too is a traditional input mechanism. That is, the public could read a limited amount of information on the Master Plan, and present input to decision makers following a prescribed format; they did not interact with decision makers or receive responses to their input.

To evaluate the CAMP dialogue, pre- and post-dialogue interviews were held with staff members, but not with legislators; Info Ren also received a short write-up on the dialogue and its impact. Ideally legislators would have been interviewed as well, but while legislators had been briefed and had served as panelists, staff members were more deeply involved with the development of the dialogue and the related decisions. They had also served as staff to the Working Groups and had been involved in the details of the draft Plan. During interviews, staff were asked what they hoped to gain from the dialogue. Afterwards they were asked what they had gotten, if their hopes had been borne out, whether the public response they had heard in this and other venues had differed, and so forth. The questions were open ended and there were only seven consultants, so no statistics are presented.

The group was generally positive regarding online dialogue. The hope to hear from those who were not political insiders was fulfilled, but not that of hearing from a broader demographic spectrum of the public. Several would have liked a more specific discussion. This is not surprising; the staff had been working closely with the Working Groups and the draft Plan for many months, and wanted to know what people thought about specific recommendations. There was some feeling that the discussion centered on the Working Group topics, rather than the Plan (see *Nature and complexity of issues*, p. 69). Those who saw dialogue more as a barometer, a view of people's perspectives, than a source of specifics were more content with the course of the event.

There were also comments on the mechanics of the dialogue, that message posting might have been faster, and that it would have been preferable for state staff to have done more toward marketing and recruiting the right people to participate. For Info Ren, it was important to learn that a few Joint Committee staff had not been sure that it was appropriate for them post messages to the discussion.

Online dialogue was seen as far more interactive than other venues for public comment. It involves more people and makes room for some who don't often come to public events. For many, staff felt this would have been a first in terms of being able to address a legislator directly. Some felt they also learned more about legislators' views – they also spoke their minds.

Public hearings were described as relatively structured and formal; most who testify do so as part of their job, appearing on behalf of an organization (lobbyists, unions or professional associations) or due to their special expertise. Many speakers are interested in very specific policy recommendations. Public meetings may be "long and boring" (with one formal statement following another) and are a "one-shot" format – once you have spoken, there is no opportunity to rebut another person's comments. Since people have just one chance, they sometimes feel that they must summarize a large number of opinions as quickly as possible. As one participant put it, describing similar hearings:

- After taking time off work, traveling, staying overnight, you may get 2 minutes at a State Board of Education meeting... and then you often cannot comment in the moment when

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[http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/SEN/COMMITTEE/JOINT/MASTER\\_PLAN/\\_home/COMPLETED\\_HEARINGS\\_AND\\_REPORTS.HTM](http://www.sen.ca.gov/ftp/SEN/COMMITTEE/JOINT/MASTER_PLAN/_home/COMPLETED_HEARINGS_AND_REPORTS.HTM)). The e-testimony page ([http://www.hpcnet.org/cgi-bin/global/a\\_bus\\_card.cgi?SiteID=94#alltest](http://www.hpcnet.org/cgi-bin/global/a_bus_card.cgi?SiteID=94#alltest)) opened in March of 2002.

your voice needs to be heard. The feeling is the decisions were already made before they started the meeting and you are being tolerated.

The Town Hall meetings were less formal and more public; most included a panel to inform the public. They also took questions and statements of opinion. The tenor of the public sessions varied based on the skill of the moderators and the temper of those in attendance; responses of the public varied from “thanks for the opportunity” and appreciation for holding events outside Sacramento, to boos, hisses and personal insults. Some meetings were dominated by one interest group.

In contrast, staff saw online dialogue as both involving more people and making room for some who don't often come to meetings. Discussion was less structured and broader, more weighted toward getting the opinions of the lay public, and comments were more direct than in a hearing. And, though people could have said anything they wanted, it was more civil than some Town Hall meetings. However, some heard dialogue messages as being “in a similar vein” to comments heard elsewhere (though in the dialogue there were more who spoke for themselves as individuals and fewer organization representatives), and viewed the loss of face-to-face contact and “immediacy” of Town Hall meetings as a trade-off. Different venues were seen as providing different perspectives on public attitudes.

One remarked that there are many points where online dialogue could be used, if this tool were always available. Another said it would have been interesting to have a dialogue earlier, to talk about the goal, intent and vision, and to have been able to build in the program at libraries and community colleges; then people would have been familiar with the idea and prepared for a second dialogue to talk about the draft Plan.