



**Carlston Family Foundation  
Retreat and Symposium  
November 2-4, 2007**

**Summary Report**

On Saturday, November 3, 2007 the Board of the Carlston Family Foundation hosted a retreat and symposium on the current state of education in California with an advisory group of California high school teachers, previously selected by their former students for their profound impact on the students' personal and academic lives and honored by the Foundation's **Outstanding Teachers of America** Program. A day of lively discourse covered a broad spectrum of issues, including current testing and assessment standards, the quality of professional development programs in education, leadership in education, teacher pre-service training and education, teacher recruitment and retention and "best practices" in education.

Because the accountability movement in California demands improvement in the State's high schools but has not addressed the root causes behind the low academic performance of high school students, the Foundation Honoree Advisory Group focused on identifying key policy changes necessary to address weaknesses in the California education system and intends to play a substantive role in facilitating policy decisions to create systemic solutions. The four general goals are to:

- Improve high school learning and improve test scores
- Improve teacher morale and foster a greater sense of "professionalism" among teachers
- Assist in the recruitment and retention of teachers
- Improve data collection and analysis and use information to create professional development programs that are meaningful, pertinent to the needs of classroom teachers and based on extensive collaboration.

**Key Concerns**

In order to reach the 4 general goals listed above, the Foundation Advisory Group identified six specific concerns profoundly affecting both the quality and equality of teaching and learning in California that continues to impede movement toward the achievement of these goals:

1. The current student assessment process is cumbersome, time consuming and reduces the amount of critical classroom instructional time.
2. The emphasis on testing and assessment has narrowed the breadth of the curriculum to focus primarily on English and Math and has reduced the availability of elective courses.
3. The most inexperienced, under qualified and underprepared teachers are assigned to teach in the lowest performing and poorest socio-economic schools often resulting in continued poor student performance.



4. Data collected from the variety of assessment instruments are not available in a timely fashion, nor are the data presented in a format that is easily analyzed.
5. Current Professional Development Programs, frequently presented by outside sources, do not address the expressed needs of teachers and are frequently determined to be a “waste of valuable time” by teachers.
6. Within the next 10 years, the most experienced one-third of California teachers will retire, leaving an insufficient and inadequate number of properly trained teachers to meet the future needs of the educational system.

The Foundation intends to take measures to support necessary institutional changes needed to address these concerns and supports the recommendations made by the Advisory group as listed below.

### **Recommendations for Change**

1. **Review and refine the current Student and School Assessment Program.**
  - a. Reduce the number of testing days which eliminate critical instructional days.
  - b. Shorten testing periods to reduce student fatigue
  - c. Identify and eliminate redundancy of the many different testing instruments
  - d. Agree to identify and utilize results of other exams such as the SAT/ACT tests or the UC or CSU entrance exams
  - e. Create accountability standards for vendors providing testing materials, data collection services, text books and professional development programs
2. **Alter the data collection practices in the State of California to include the following:**
  - a. Make test results data available in a timely fashion
  - b. Allow teachers released time to analyze, review the data and collaborate with others to make adjustments to the curriculum and create lesson plans designed to address the areas of instruction identified as needing improvement.
  - c. Shift the use of data from a punitive to positive process by using it to demonstrate improvement rather than blaming students and teachers for not reaching the “benchmarks”
3. **Create more positive, rewarding and successful experiences for new teachers, particularly in the lowest performing and most challenging schools and establish incentives for teachers to remain in the profession by:**
  - a. Reducing the workload for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year teachers by assigning only two classes requiring separate preparation,
  - b. Assigning no more than two remedial classes



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- c. Providing two periods per day for preparation and collaboration
  - d. Assigning all 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year teachers experienced “mentor” teachers to collaborate, observe and demonstrate skills and techniques on a regular basis.
  - e. Creating incentive pay plans for teachers who carry the largest workloads. (This is not to be associated with improved test scores)
  - f. Creating incentive/bonus programs for experienced teachers, close to retirement, to mentor, observe, collaborate and assist in instructional improvement and curriculum content improvement. (Use the State of Arizona TAP program as a model)
  - g. Providing bonuses for teachers to teach in the lowest performing schools
  - h. Reinstating the teacher Tax Credit for the teachers who use their personal funds for educational supplies and materials not otherwise provided by schools and districts.
  - i. Increasing teacher involvement in decision making regarding standards for teacher preparation, curriculum development, textbook selection and selection of supplemental materials.
- 4. Improve the current professional development programs by making provision for increased collaboration among individual teachers, departments, district-wide programs and/or for collaboration with other local districts by:**
- a. Increasing the number of Professional Development days from 3 back to 8
  - b. Coordinating State mandated Professional Development days so all California School Districts are off on the same days to allow for improved local and state collaboration.
  - c. Working with the California State University System to offer reduced tuition for current teachers wishing to take additional course work and/or obtain additional degrees
  - d. Allowing current classroom teachers to review tests for redundancy and recommend ways to streamline the process and make the assessment process more meaningful.
  - e. Use the various California Subject Matter Projects as a model to frame collaboration and decision making related to curriculum development, strategic planning and instructional lessons plan development that address the standards in a “tried and true” manner.

### **Plan of Action**

The Carlston Family Foundation remains committed to continuing its program of honoring outstanding California high school teachers through its **Outstanding Teachers of America** annual awards program, which provides recognition and financial support for teachers whose extraordinary skills and devotion have turned around the lives of many young people caught in adverse circumstances. However, the board is also committed to helping improve the quality and state of education in California. To that measure, The Foundation, working closely with the Honoree Advisory Group, intends to develop ways to support the change in policies listed above. Initially, The Foundation will support a campaign of information dissemination that will include:



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- Creating radio and television public service announcements on policy issues such as those described above
- Publicizing stories for national media pickup to increase public understanding of the impact of extraordinary teachers, even in the most adverse environments.
- Developing partnerships with college and university schools of education throughout California to promote teacher recruitment, training and retention, and research in “best practices,” leading to improved learning and consistently higher test scores;
- Supporting public advocacy by the Honoree Advisory Group as speakers, panelists and liaisons to agencies, schools of education and legislative committees in furtherance of our shared objectives.
- Continuing to work with the Honoree Advisory Group to identify and monitor other issues and concerns related to the status and quality of education in California and to serve as advocates for change.

The Foundation Board of Directors applauds the efforts of all teachers dedicated to motivating and instructing students of all ages and backgrounds, in every community throughout the nation. It is the expressed desire of the Carlston Family Foundation Board to continue to review and discuss various ways to improve the quality of instruction and student improvement in the state of California and to find feasible ways to support these efforts, either through direct financial support or through collaboration with other foundations, business and industry and/or California Colleges and Universities.