



*Penny Edgert and
Robert Polkinghorn, Jr.*

Collaborative efforts among state systems of education to improve academic preparation and expand access to college have been fixtures on the California landscape for two decades. The California Education Round Table has been the principal organizing entity for much of the work between precollegiate and postsecondary systems. A cornerstone of this system, the California Subject Matter Projects, a K-18 entity, provides discipline-specific, standards-based professional development to teachers.

California's Collaboration to Improve Education

Collaborative efforts to improve academic preparation and expand access to college have been fixtures on the California landscape for nearly two decades. The California Education Round Table, which began in 1981 as the California Round Table on Educational Opportunity, has been the principal organizing entity and driving force for much of the work between precollegiate and postsecondary education systems. The Round Table is comprised of the system level chief executive officers (e.g., presidents, chancellors) of the University of California, the California State University, the California Community Colleges, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the California Postsecondary Education Commission, and the California Department of Education. The principals meet quarterly to examine common problems, shape collaborative initiatives (both policy and programmatic), and share information, ideas, and expertise.

In 1981, the Round Table was envisioned as “a joint commitment of leaders at the state level in California education to accelerate efforts to deal with issues affecting student achievement and access and, working together with faculty, students, administrators, parents, community organizations, and state government, to better serve the youth of this state.” The specific focus was on “the need to expand collaborative efforts among educators from elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education regarding the content and articulation of instruction at the various levels of schooling...[to provide] stronger academic preparation at the junior and senior high school level for all students.”

Eighteen years later, the environment that gave rise to the Round Table remains, and new developments substantiate the need for its continued commitment to cooperative efforts so that all students achieve academic success:

- Academic achievement in public schools is well below expectations that Californians have for their children and also below the levels required for effectiveness in the increasingly sophisticated world that these students will enter upon graduation from high school—whether they choose to enroll in higher education, enter the work force, or select other options;
- The academic achievement and educational attainment disparities among economically, racially, and ethnically diverse groups of students that were evident in the early 1980s still exist;
- Greater awareness exists that preparation for college must begin in the elementary grades in order for students to learn basic reading and mathematical skills early in their educational careers; and,
- There is an increasing awareness that student achievement—kindergarten through graduate school—is a communal responsibility borne by educators across institutional boundaries and, as such, educational collaboration—at the local, regional, and statewide levels—is a necessary strategy.

The various dimensions of the educational environment in California have given rise to a number of key policy priorities of the Round Table. Since its inception, these priorities have been developed and sustained by a committee of senior administrative staff and faculty representatives from each system. This committee, known as the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee (ICC), works together on a regular basis to operationalize Round Table priorities and guide the development of collaborative activities involving the participating systems.

The ICC supports a range of faculty and staff subcommittees—some standing, others ad hoc—to work directly on key Round Table initiatives. One of its most important and influential standing committees is the Intersegmental Budget Task Force (IBTF). The IBTF focuses on the development of budget proposals (reflecting Round Table priorities) that are jointly presented by ICC leadership to the governor's office through the Department of Finance. In the past five years, for example, over \$25 million in program support funds were endorsed by the governor through this proposal process and evolved into key intersegmental initiatives.

A prime example of intersegmental collaboration is the California Subject Matter Project (CSMP) network (described in more detail later in this article)—a statewide, discipline-specific professional development system for teachers. The CSMPs support a wide range of university-based professional development programs in subject areas required for high school graduation and college admission. The widely regarded Bay Area Writing Project, founded in 1974 by James R. Gray at the University of California at Berkeley, is the foundation model for this expansive network of projects. The CSMPs involve faculty from kindergarten through the university level, working together to deepen content knowledge and improve pedagogical practices in a “teachers teaching teachers” approach.

Current Round Table Initiatives

The Round Table has taken myriad collective actions during its existence. In 1995, it established five initiatives to guide its actions, which are described in *Collaborative Initiatives to Improve Student Learning and Academic Performance: Kindergarten Through College*. Each of these initiatives is examined briefly below:

- *Agree on Standards for High School Graduation and Clarify Expected Competencies for University Admissions.* The Round Table established two task forces—one in English and one in mathematics—consisting of representatives from the public schools and the higher education sectors to jointly develop standards for high school graduation in these subjects. The English standards developed by the Round Table Task Force substantially influenced the content adopted by the State Board of Education. The Round Table standards in mathematics, however, varied considerably from what the state board eventually adopted.
- *Strengthen Programs and Resources for Teacher Preparation and Professional Development.* The Round Table has been active in promoting collaboration and cooperation among the various entities in the state responsible for ensuring that there is a teacher in every classroom who has the content and pedagogical expertise to help students meet the standards. Understanding the linkages between teacher recruitment, preparation, induction, and professional development, and designing smoother means by which prospective teachers move from one phase to another has resulted in significant changes in legislation. Moreover, the Round Table supported the continuation of the California subject matter projects—the state’s infrastructure for professional development—in the 1998-99 budget.
- *Use Technology to Improve the Quality of Education and to Streamline Access to Postsecondary Education.* The Round Table has focused primarily on those aspects of technology that facilitate access to higher education, especially through activities that affect the electronic transfer of student records across educational sectors. As an example, the Student-Friendly Services, which provide an opportunity for students to apply for admission to the California State University and the University of California at the same time through a “common front door,” has received state support through the Intersegmental Budget process.
- *Bring Additional Community and Professional Resources into the Teaching and Learning Processes.* The Round Table has been especially effective in identifying and integrating new resources into the public schools to improve student performance. Again through the Intersegmental Budget process, the Round Table’s proposal to expand the number of college students tutoring students in kindergarten through sixth grade was funded in 1997 and is now part of the state’s annual budget process. An additional component of this effort has

been the establishment of a clearinghouse and training program for college students who are interested in tutoring in the public schools. Further, the Round Table's initiative—College: Making It Happen—a statewide effort to inform middle-school parents about their role in assisting their children to plan early in order to attend college—has grown so that there are nearly 100 collaborative events across the state attended by more than 50,000 parents and students. Finally, the inclusion in the 1998-1999 state budget of funding for the development of regional partnerships to enhance student achievement supports this particular initiative of bringing additional resources into the teaching-learning process.

- *Assess Student Progress More Uniformly to Determine if Standards Have Been Met.* Clearly, this initiative is closely linked to the focus on standards. Again, the Round Table established two task forces composed of representatives from the public schools and the higher education sectors to review existing assessment instruments and to identify their congruity with the Round Table standards in English and mathematics. These documents will be distributed to schools in order to assist teachers in measuring the progress of their students in meeting standards.

A New Governor: Implications for the Round Table

Newly elected Governor Gray Davis focused his electoral campaign and his administration's initial proposals on improving student achievement, especially in low-performing public schools. Early signals indicate that the prominence, potential, and long standing work of the Round Table and the ICC has influenced the way the governor is thinking about education and the roles and responsibilities of each segment. To that end,

...(T)he Governor calls upon the three higher education segments to shift their focus and view all the schools in California as one system of education for all our citizens and our State. Enormous resources and talent are available in our institutions of higher education; these must be made available to help elementary and secondary students succeed, be ready for college, and equipped to graduate from college four years later. We must view education as a continuum—from kindergarten through baccalaureate, and beyond (*1999-2000 Governor's Budget Summary*).

This emphasis continues in the governor's specific recommendations throughout the budget summary, including a separate section on "Intersegmental Cooperation and Outreach." Both the recommendations and their underlying principles are gratifyingly consonant with those of the Round Table. As such, the Round Table is ideally positioned to join the new administration in providing the leadership to promote and implement a standards-based and research-driven educational reform agenda predicated upon its 1995 initiatives.

Second Generation of Round Table Initiatives

A previous section described the five Round Table initiatives begun in 1995. Those initiatives, the progress to date in implementing them, and the perspective of the new administration provide the basis for proposing a new, slightly modified, set of initiatives with associated specific actions to guide the Round Table over the next several years. These second-generation initiatives are, in some sense, broader and deeper than the original set and reflect the necessity to facilitate actions at the local and regional levels that will contribute to the standards-based statewide reform agenda.

- *Promote the Incorporation of the Newly Adopted State Board of Education Content Standards (K-12) with Higher Education Admission Policies and Academic Expectations.* The proposed new set continues the emphasis on aligning high school graduation standards with expectations of college freshmen. Governor Davis explicitly stated his intention “to develop a single coordinated and integrated educational system...through incorporation of statewide K-12 academic standards, especially the new high school graduation examination, into admissions policies.”
- *Mobilize the Resources of All Educational Sectors to Enrich the Capacity of the Teaching Profession.* The previous Round Table initiative for teachers focused on strengthening programs and resources for them. This initiative continues that focus by emphasizing the imperative for greater articulation across educational sectors in the preparation of teachers, especially by providing discipline-specific and pedagogically effective professional development. Additionally, this initiative seeks to clarify the contributions that each sector can make to ensure that there is a qualified teacher in every classroom from kindergarten through the senior year in high school—one of the top priorities for Governor Davis, who “expects additional commitment to teacher training and preparation from higher education.”
- *Expand the Collaborative Administrative Applications of Technology and Accessibility to Technology.* The success of the previous Round Table initiative in this area in terms of the development of Student Friendly Services and the monitoring of infrastructure developments is the basis for continuation of this initiative, albeit expanded to some extent. The governor is particularly interested in “regional collaboration to share library, computer, and other educational resources.”
- *Intensify the Delivery of Services to Prepare and Inform Incoming Students.* The previous set of initiatives sought to “bring additional community and professional resources into the teaching and learning process.” That initiative has been slightly reformulated to focus on programs and activities specifically designed to expand information dissemination to parents and students about the academic and financial requirements for college attendance and to enhance the capacity

of precollegiate academic preparation programs—both those that focus on individual students or schools—to foster student achievement. Governor Davis emphasized this concept specifically in his budget summary by stating his intention to “expand academic outreach programs to ensure increased participation by students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds through partnership with K-12” and in encouraging “collaboratives not only with the other higher education systems and K-12, but with the community and businesses to help focus all regional efforts on the goal of improving K-12 education.”

- *Strengthen the Transfer Process among and within Sectors.* This initiative was not explicitly included in the 1995 set; however, higher education representatives have been attempting to facilitate student movement across institutional boundaries for over a decade, although significant challenges remain. Transfer from community colleges to baccalaureate-granting institutions is a fundamental principle undergirding the Master Plan for Higher Education and, with burgeoning college enrollments expected during the next decade, there is additional impetus to make progress on this process. Governor Davis, moreover, has clearly articulated his expectations for the transfer process by stating that he “expects the systems to expand transfers and course transferability, not just maintain the current level...and is concerned by reports of students who, after transferring to another institution (often within the same system), are required to repeat classes already taken.” To that end, the governor included in his 1999-2000 budget support for continued emphasis on articulation between community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions based upon a proposal generated through the Intersegmental Budget Process.

Intersegmental Collaboration at Work: Subject Matter Projects

As noted earlier, a significant example of long-standing intersegmental collaboration supported by the Round Table is the state’s professional development system for teachers, known as the California Subject Matter Projects. Despite an uncertain fiscal environment for the state as a whole in the early 1990s, and for educational institutions and agencies in particular, funding for the CSMPs grew from an initial investment of \$7.5 million annually to \$15 million in 1998-99.

Virtually all of the 100-plus CSMP sites are located on university campuses. Collectively, the sites provide intensive, institute and school-based professional development for approximately 45,000 teachers (22 percent of the state total) each year. The average total annual budget for each site is approximately \$209,543, of which \$143,958 (68 percent) is contributed by the state funds. This suggests that the sites are successful at leveraging the state’s investment to acquire additional resources. Older, more mature sites tend to attract more revenue than newer ones and receive significant funding from federal and other agencies.

This level and stability of funding has both created a unique environment for collaboration that has encouraged the setting of far-reaching goals, stimulated prolonged investments of time and energy on the part of university and school personnel, and produced a climate for professional development that is flexible, experimental, and critical. The expectation is that the projects will be around for a long time.

The CSMPs have established an ambitious set of formal goals including:

- To create a statewide infrastructure that is capable of providing a wide range of high quality, discipline-based, professional development experiences that are accessible to all teachers and schools throughout the state;
- To increase the ability of teachers to craft and implement teaching practices that succeed in helping students meet or exceed state standards;
- To make significant contributions to the state's educational capacity by empowering teachers to assume a wide range of leadership roles;
- To help reduce inequities in the state's educational system through careful attention to underlying issues of equity and diversity; and,
- To generate and share knowledge about effective teaching practices within the disciplines, and about the design and implementation of effective discipline-based professional development.

For several reasons, the essential features of the CSMPs suggest a unique, perhaps even unprecedented collaboration.

- *Scale.* There is considerable evidence to suggest that the foundation model for all CSMPs—the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP)—enjoys the confidence and support of educators, especially teachers, throughout the state and nation. The structural elements and organizing principles of the BAWP model and, in particular, its teachers-teaching-teachers strategy suggest the potential to influence large numbers of teachers through the leveraging of teacher expertise and core support dollars.
- *Broad academic focus.* The principal focus of CSMP programs and activities concerns teaching and learning in all disciplines required for high school graduation and admission to UC or CSU. As such, the CSMP partnership targets the heart of the educational enterprise and positions CSMP teacher-leaders to play key roles in reforms within their school, district, and region of the state.
- *Relevance and adaptability.* Even throughout a period of tremendous political upheaval when the direction of every major state reform initiative has been questioned, the CSMPs have continued to be considered a critical part of the infrastructure required to support statewide educational reforms and implement state standards.
- *Funding.* The CSMPs are supported by a shared pool of permanent resources—\$15 million. The CSMPs are administered by a full-time, permanent staff and are governed by a statewide policy board called the Concurrence Committee.

The statewide infrastructure provided by the CSMPs continues to be viewed by the principal stakeholders as holding the potential for widespread improvement in teaching practices and in the underlying belief systems that support them. These stakeholders have remained cooperative and committed even though they have competed and disagreed over other institutional interests.

Those familiar with the history and politics of California education will recognize that each of the principal institutions involved in this work—e.g., UC, CSU, community colleges, and the Department of Education—differ widely in mission, structure, clientele, reward systems, rules and regulations, ambience, and ethos. These institutions are different organizational, cultural, and political entities that have, over the years, fought openly over dollars, been suspicious of each other's agendas, and skeptical of each other's ambitions. Yet, despite the turbulent and at times hostile educational context in California, they have sustained their partnership in the CSMPs for well over a decade.

Summary

Since its inception, and particularly in the last few years, the collective actions of the Round Table have achieved positive educational outcomes in legislative and budgetary terms as well as at the policy and programmatic levels. With the focus of the Davis administration on educational reform efforts, the Round Table seeks to demonstrate further the power of collaboration in enhancing the expectations and achievement of all California students and the capacity of our public schools and higher educational institutions to prepare students for the next millennium. The formation of partnerships at all levels of the educational enterprise to accomplish mutually agreed-upon goals that affect student performance is the strategic centerpiece for the Round Table's myriad actions in the future. Through its sustained and continuous leadership, the Round Table is in a position to advocate for, and promote, a collaborative strategy that is broad enough and deep enough to have lasting positive impact on educational outcomes throughout the educational system, kindergarten through university.