

Governor's Message at the January 16th State Board of Education Meeting

I just wanted to add a few thoughts to this process. I wanted to hear more of the speakers, but maybe it'd better if I offer a few of mine in the beginning. And I do that because what you're considering today is a collaboration and I played some small part in that. Your president was one of the initiators several years ago, and I think it's well just to restate the central principles on which the local control funding formula is based. And the first principle, of course, is that of subsidiarity. Focusing authority where it can be most effectively exercised. That's at the lowest most competent level. As we know, the element starts with the family; that's the primary institution of our society. And then it goes up from there to a parish to a city to a school.

I think we always have to keep in mind when we sit around here is that we're not omnipotent. A little humility is in order. There are six million students in California. There are over three hundred thousand teachers. Anything that's done here will have to be memorialized in some kind of a writing, and that writing has to be sent out to those three hundred thousand teachers, and they have to read it, and then something has to happen based on that and then in the next year or two people will come back to tell you whether that writing was followed.

At the end of the day, the things you do are really important, but what is fundamental is what goes on in each home with each family and what goes on in the classroom. And when the door shuts, the education code is not of much help or even regulations of the school district. When the classroom door is shut, it's the students and the teacher; and if the parents aren't doing the right thing, if the teacher's not doing the right thing, if the principal's not doing the right thing, and if the superintendent at the local school district isn't doing the right thing, and if the elected school board members are insensitive, then it's highly dubious to think that the people around this table are going to be able to make up for it. At the end of the day, we do depend on families, teachers, principals, and people spread out throughout the entire state, who have responsibility for our six million students.



Now that's not to say that it isn't important that we have guidelines and we'll have some goals and some outcomes that all the teachers can strive for. And these regulations certainly go a long way to achieving that, but it isn't a matter of putting this on automatic pilot with minute, prescriptive commands from headquarters. We're in headquarters. Today throughout California there are over six million Californians with three hundred and thirty thousand teachers, who are working as we talk and are not waiting for what comes out. Now luckily the money from proposition 30 is flowing into the school districts and that's really big; and I want to acknowledge by the way all these school leaders who helped and particularly the California Teachers' Association who put the real financial muscle when it was needed. So there are a lot of divisions here and I like to find the truth in the reformers, the unions, the parents, the students, we're all in it together even though we all have different perspectives. And this set of regulations has that flexibility to incorporate different perspectives, but with the overall goal of achievement, of directing more funding where the challenges are greater and setting up a template and a mechanism of accountability. But even accountability can be abused. And we live in a period of discontent and distrust, and the way some people react is to always go higher on the power curve to solve their problem. So if the teacher doesn't make it, somebody will want to come up here to the board; if the board doesn't make it, they want to go back and talk to Arnie Duncan and get him to issue commands from his headquarters. But the further you get from the classroom the less effective your instruction, your conversation, or your command.

So anyway thank God for proposition 30. I thought I'd just say that again because without the money, we wouldn't even be here fighting over regulations. So this is a wonderful thing that people can sit around argue about how we can spend the money, so hallelujah for the money. I just want to say that. Then secondly, this is not the New Testament. It's not the law of the prophets. This is just some mundane regulations that are much better because of the participation of the equity groups and others, so it's getting better. And it will get better and luckily you won't get it done right the first time because if you did you wouldn't have any more work to do. But we don't need to worry

about that. You're here, people are here, and we have a great opportunity in our state to fashion a more effective learning environment.

And my final thing, I don't want to ever forget the students because they have responsibility as well. It isn't like just pouring this noun called education into the heads of students. It's a intransitive verb, "I learn," and the only "I" that can learn is the student. The teacher can facilitate, the teacher lights the fire. The superintendent, the board, the politicians, the state board here, we create environments, some incentives, but we don't want to micromanage. We want to give wide latitude to teach and to explore and to light that fire in every student. And to the extent teaching becomes a menu and a recipe we lose that.

So I would like to close with the two poles that you have to embrace simultaneously. One is imagination and the other is rigor. If you only have imagination, you have chaos and insanity. If you only have rigor you have paralytic death and rigor mortis. But if you combine rigor and imagination, if you combine flexibility with guidelines and some reasonable accountability, we'll get the job done.

So good luck and I'm very excited; I'm bullish on California education.