

# California's Positive Outliers: Promising District Approaches for Achieving Educational Equity



Photo provided with permission by Long Beach Unified School District.

September 10, 2019, 9:30 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Metropolitan Terrace, Citizen Hotel  
926 J Street, Sacramento, CA

*A convening to bring together leading researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to highlight education exemplars and spur dialogue about how California can build upon and expand the promising practices of extraordinary school districts.*

**PRESENTED BY:**



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# AGENDA

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**Coffee & Registration** | 9:00–9:30 a.m.

## Welcome

Patrick Shields | Executive Director, Learning Policy Institute | @shields\_lpi @LPI\_Learning

## Keynote

Tony Thurmond | Superintendent of Public Instruction, California Department of Education | @TonyThurmond @CADeptEd

## Research Presentation: California's Positive Outliers

Dion Burns | Senior Researcher, Learning Policy Institute | @LPI\_Learning

Anne Podolsky | Researcher and Policy Analyst, Learning Policy Institute | @LPI\_Learning

## Break

## Panel Discussion: Developing District Capacity to Support Achievement for All Students

MODERATOR: Kent McGuire | Education Program Director, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation | @ckmcguire @Hewlett\_Found

- Sabrina Alvarez | 12th Grade Student, California Academy of Math and Science, Long Beach Unified School District | @CAMSLBUSD @LBSchools
- Bridget Cruz Brown | 8th Grade Teacher, Bud Carson Middle School STEM Academy, Hawthorne School District | @HSD\_HMorgan
- Francisco Escobedo | Superintendent, Chula Vista Elementary School District | @JoseFra78449306 @cvesdnews
- Corrine Folmer | Assistant Superintendent, Clovis Unified School District | @clovisusd
- Sofia Freire | Chief of Leadership and Learning, San Diego Unified School District | @DrSofiaSDUSD @sdschools
- Chris McIntire | Principal, McKinley Primary School, Gridley Unified School District | @mcintire\_chris @SUPTGUSD
- Wendy Poffenberger | Principal, California Academy of Math and Science, Long Beach Unified School District | @CAMSLBUSD @LBSchools

## Table Discussion & Audience Questions

## Lunch

## Panel Discussion: Developing District Capacity to Support Achievement for All Students

MODERATOR: Vernon Billy | CEO and Executive Director, California Schools Boards Association | @vbilly\_CSBA @CSBA\_Now

- Tom Armelino | Executive Director, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence | @CCEECA
- David Goldberg | Vice President, California Teachers Association | @teachergoldberg @WeAreCTA
- Rigel Spencer Massaro | Senior Legislative Counsel, Public Advocates | @RigelMassaro @publicadvocates
- Matt Navo | Director of Systems Transformation, WestEd Center for Prevention and Early Intervention | @matt\_navo @WestEd
- Mary Vixie Sandy | Executive Director, California Commission on Teacher Credentialing | @MaryVixieSandy @caICTC
- Wesley Smith | Executive Director, Association of California School Administrators | @ACSAwes @ACSA\_info

## Closing Remarks: Learning from Positive Outliers: What the State and Districts can Do

Linda Darling-Hammond | President and CEO, Learning Policy Institute | @LDH\_ed @LPI\_Learning

**Close** | 2:00pm

## SPEAKER BIOS

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**Sabrina Alvarez** is a 12th grade student at the California Academy of Mathematics and Science (CAMS). As a student, she has served as Fundraising Commissioner on the Class of 2020 Board, and on the VEX Robotics Team, which advanced to the 2018 State Championship and 2019 National Championship in Iowa. Additionally, she participates in the Society of Women Engineers, a club that motivates women to pursue STEM, and serves on the CAMS School Site Council. Currently, she takes many STEM classes including AP Physics II, AP Computer Science A, and Engineering Design and Development. [@CAMSLBUSD](#) [@LBSchools](#)

**Tom Armelino** is the Executive Director of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE). He has also previously served as a leader at the national and state levels as the former Executive Director of the National Association of Schools, State President of the Association of California School Administrators, and chair of the state-appointed Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team committee. In addition, Armelino served three 4-year terms as the Shasta County Superintendent of Schools and as superintendent in two school districts, during which time his schools received multiple California Distinguished School and Title 1 High Achieving School awards. [@CCEECA](#)

**Vernon M. Billy** is CEO and Executive Director of the California School Boards Association (CSBA), serving the members of governing boards of more than 1,000 school districts and county offices of education in California. Following his service in the U.S. Air Force, Billy embarked on an impressive 3-decade's long career in business, legislative advocacy and politics. Prior to his service at CSBA, Billy served as an owner and partner of several successful policy and advocacy firms. Billy was also the former vice president of a multi-million dollar education services company; the governmental relations director for the San Francisco Unified School District; and the chief contract lobbyist and governmental affairs director for the Los Angeles Unified School District. Throughout his career, Billy worked closely with superintendents, boards, and district senior staff to advance their education policy goals and develop strategies to support students. [@Vbilly\\_CSBA](#) [@CSBA\\_Now](#)

**Dion Burns** is a Senior Researcher at the Learning Policy Institute, where he conducts research into policies and practices that support educational equity and deeper learning. He co-authored the report, *Closing the Opportunity Gap: How Positive Outlier Districts in California Are Pursuing Equitable Access to Deeper Learning*. Burns was also a research analyst at the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, where he co-authored *Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*. Previously, he has worked in international education diplomacy in Latin America and South Korea, in higher education policy in New Zealand, and as a teacher in Japan. [@LPI\\_Learning](#)

**Bridget Cruz Brown** is an 8th grade teacher at Bud Carson Middle School STEM Academy in the Hawthorne School District, where she has taught for nearly 20 years. Mrs. Brown has taught 1st, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade and has served as a middle school literacy coach and assistant principal. She is most proud of her work on the district's Instructional Leadership Team, where she has focused on helping teachers transition to the Common Core State Standards. [@HSD\\_HMorgan](#)

**Linda Darling-Hammond** is President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute and the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University. She is the former President of the American Educational Research Association and a member of the National Academy of Education and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has authored more than 600 publications and has conducted extensive research on issues of school reform, equity, and accountability. Among her most recent books are *Empowered Educators: How Leading Nations Design Systems for Teaching Quality* and *Preparing Teachers for Deeper Learning*. [@LDH\\_ed](#) [@LPI\\_Learning](#)

**Francisco Escobedo**, Ed.D., is Superintendent of the Chula Vista Elementary School District, which serves more than 29,600 students in southern San Diego County. In prior roles, Dr. Escobedo has also served as Assistant Superintendent for Educational Leadership in the South Bay Union School District, Principal Research Analyst for the American Institutes for Research, President of the Board of Directors for the Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce, and Classroom of the Future Board Member. He is also an adjunct professor of Educational Administration at San Diego State University. [@JoseFra78449306](#) [@cvesdnews](#)

## SPEAKER BIOS

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**Corrine Folmer** is an assistant superintendent in the Clovis Unified School District, which serves 43,000 students. Folmer oversees the Clovis East High School Area, which includes a high school, intermediate school, and eight elementary schools. In total, the Clovis East Area serves 9,600 students and has a 55.4% unduplicated pupil percentage. She has 20 years of experience in education and has previously served as a teacher, learning director, and principal. [@clovisusd](#)

**Sofia Freire, Ed.D.** is the Chief of Leadership and Learning in the San Diego Unified School District. She oversees K-12 instruction and supervises all of the high schools, including alternative/atypical high schools district-wide. She began her teaching career in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), where she served as a teacher, vice principal, and principal. Her last assignment in Los Angeles was as a Senior Director of School Transformation for the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools. Her work included coaching, mentoring, and evaluating secondary principals; planning and facilitating monthly leadership conferences on instructional leadership and organizational management, and summer seminars and retreats on Common Core State Standards; and leading a team of math and English experts in developing curriculum and assessments. Dr. Freire has more than 20 years of experience as an educator and more than 9 years of site-based administrative experience in leading under-performing schools in South Central and Boyle Heights. [@DrSofiaSDUSD](#) [@sdschools](#)

**David Goldberg** is Vice President of the California Teachers Association (CTA). An educator for more than 20 years, he has spent most of his career as a bilingual teacher at Murchison Elementary in the Los Angeles Unified School District. He sees advocacy for a strong public education system as part of a larger struggle for social justice. In addition to serving two terms on the CTA Board, he has also served on the Budget Committee of the CTA State Council of Education, led CTA's Strategic Planning Workgroup, and served as treasurer of the United Teachers of Los Angeles. [@teachergoldberg](#) [@WeAreCTA](#)

**Rigel S. Massaro** is Senior Legislative Counsel for Public Advocates' (PA) Education Equity Team, where she works to advance policy that empowers students of color, low-income students, and English learners. She has written reports on LCFF implementation in districts and charter schools; worked to enforce state laws and regulations on community engagement, transparency, and services for high-need students; and led PA's teacher workforce advocacy to address inequities in students' access to qualified teachers and improve community access to robust teacher data. Before PA, Massaro was a middle school teacher in Phoenix and represented immigrant parents of students with disabilities in NYC. [@RigelMassaro](#) [@publicadvocates](#)

**Kent McGuire** leads the education team at the Hewlett Foundation, overseeing their investments in teaching, learning, and open educational resources. His focus is on making grants to ensure that every learner is empowered and equipped to become an engaged and thriving participant in society. Previously, McGuire was Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education; Dean of the College of Education at Temple University; and President and CEO of the Southern Education Foundation, an organization committed to advancing equitable and excellent public education in the American South. [@ckmcguire](#) [@Hewlett\\_Found](#)

**Chris McIntire** has been a Principal for the past 25 years in the Gridley Unified School District. He is currently Principal at McKinley Primary School, a TK-K-1 school, and has previously served as Principal of both the 2nd-5th grade school and Wilson School. He has 34 years of experience in education, all of which have been with Gridley Unified. He has been a leader in the district, paving the way for early literacy intervention and the implementation of Reading Recovery in 1999 for all struggling first graders. [@mcintire\\_chris](#) [@SUPTGUSD](#)

**Matt Navo** is Director of Systems Transformation at WestEd's Center for Prevention & Early Intervention, where he works with districts and schools to close the achievement gap for all students. Previously, he served as a special education teacher, principal, and director of special education. While he was Superintendent of Sanger Unified School District, the district was highlighted as a California District of Distinction. Navo has also served as the Governor's appointee for the Advisory Commission on Special Education and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. In 2019, Navo was appointed by the Governor to the State Board of Education. [@matt\\_navo](#) [@WestEd](#)

**Anne Podolsky** is a Researcher and Policy Analyst at the Learning Policy Institute. She is the lead author of the report, *California's Positive Outliers: Districts Beating the Odds*. An education lawyer and teacher by training, Podolsky has served in legal, research, and policy roles with a variety of organizations. She has worked with the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, the New York State Education Department, the Children's Advocacy Institute, and Palantir Technologies. Podolsky is a doctoral student at Stanford University, an Illinois State Board of Education certified teacher, and a member of the State Bar of California. [@LPI\\_Learning](#)

**Wendy Poffenberger**, Ed.D., is the principal of the California Academy of Mathematics and Science (CAMS) High School in the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD). Dr. Poffenberger has been a part of LBUSD for 16 years, serving as a middle and high school English teacher, and later as a high school assistant principal. In recent years, CAMS has received many recognitions, including National Blue Ribbon School 2017, Project Lead the Way Distinguished School 2019, and *U.S. News and World Report* 2019 rankings of fifth among California schools and first among California's magnet schools. [@CAMSLBUSD](#) [@LBSchools](#)

**Mary Vixie Sandy** is Executive Director of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, where she oversees public policy related to educator preparation and licensing and directs an agency that awards more than 250,000 credential documents per year and accredits more than 250 colleges, universities, and local education agencies offering educator preparation programs. Previously, Dr. Vixie Sandy served as Executive Director of the UC Davis School of Education CRESS Center, Associate Director of Teacher Education and Public School Programs with the CSU Chancellor's Office, and policy analyst for the California Department of Education and the California Postsecondary Education Commission. [@MaryVixieSandy](#) [@calCTC](#)

**Patrick M. Shields** is the Executive Director of the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), where he most recently co-authored *The Tapestry of American Public Education: How Can We Create a System of Schools Worth Choosing for All?* Prior to joining LPI, Shields was the Executive Director of SRI Education, where he also served as Research Director for Teaching and California's Future. [@shields\\_lpi](#) [@LPI\\_Learning](#)

**Wesley Smith**, Ed.D., is the Executive Director of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), the largest school leadership group in the nation. Previously, Dr. Smith worked as a teacher and served in a variety of school leadership roles, including elementary and middle grades principal, and assistant superintendent and superintendent. As a superintendent and principal, Dr. Smith received multiple awards, including ACSA's Region 8 Superintendent of the Year in 2013. His record of educational service also includes serving on ACSA's local and regional boards, and as a representative to the Equity, Achievement, and Diversity for Student Success Committee. [@ACSAwes](#) [@ACSA\\_info](#)

**Tony Thurmond** was elected the 28th California State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 2018. Prior to this election, he served in the California State Assembly, where his legislative track record showed a commitment to creating better, more equitable education in California, including authoring legislation to move funding from the criminal justice system to school districts and improve access for families to early education and childcare services. Thurmond has devoted his career to public service, in particular in service to youth. Previously, he served on the Richmond City Council, was a Board Member of the West Contra Costa Unified School District, and spent 20 years working directly with families and youth as a social worker. [@tonythurmond](#) [@CADeptEd](#)