



CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

JACK O'CONNELL
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

November 3, 2008

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

CALIFORNIA CLIMATE SURVEYS AND CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Closing the persistent racial achievement gap that exists in our schools is the most critical issue in education today. As you may know, I have made finding ways to close the gap the top priority of my administration. In my State of Education address last February, I presented a series of recommendations that my P-16 Council suggested to help close the gap and improve California schools.

One important recommendation, determined through research and focus groups, was that the California Department of Education (CDE), districts, and schools work to do a better job of understanding the educational environment, or "organizational health," in which our students are expected to learn and teachers are expected to teach. Students are more likely to be engaged in learning if they feel supported and understood by their teachers and peers in school, and teachers are more likely to be effective if they better understand the diverse cultures of the students in their classrooms. It is from that premise that I recommended that all districts and schools conduct a climate survey that will help us improve our educational environments and better help all students meet their full potential.

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and the California School Climate Survey (CSCS) have been revised to ask students and teachers questions about their school cultural climate. These revised surveys will provide better data to help guide district efforts to close the achievement gap and improve the learning environment of all schools. Questions related to closing the achievement gap have been folded into the CSCS. However, on the CHKS, questions have been added to a supplementary Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG) Module that districts must **elect to add** to their student survey. This ten-question module will not add substantially to the survey administration time, yet it will yield very important information that we can all use to improve our schools. Districts that do elect to administer this module will receive special reports of their CHKS and CSCS results broken down by the race/ethnicity of students and staff. The new surveys may be viewed on the Healthy Kids Survey Web page at <http://www.wested.org/chks> (Outside Source).

In February, the CDE will begin posting all district CSCS survey results, similar to the posting of CHKS reports. This will ensure readily accessible results for your school

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improvement planning. If you have not received a copy of your latest CSCS report, it is available from your district CHKS coordinator.

The power and value of these assessment tools in closing the achievement gap cannot be overstated. I strongly encourage every district to use the CHKS and the CSCS to begin the process of collecting and analyzing the data, and using that analysis to map out strategies to address issues the data may reveal. The time to be innovative and seek solutions to the pernicious achievement gap is now.

If you would like more information regarding these survey improvements and the data you will receive, please contact your CHKS/CSCS Regional Technical Assistance Center at 888-841-7536.

Sincerely,



JACK O'CONNELL

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