

State of Education 2006

Prepared Remarks* of State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell on Tuesday, February 7, 2006, Sacramento, California.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/se/yr06stateofed.asp>

This is my third State of Education address in the time I've had the honor of being your State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Traditionally, addresses of this type review accomplishments in the year just past, then outline challenges and propose solutions for the year ahead.

But, today I hope to do something different. I want us to look beyond — far beyond — 2006. Instead of using a calendar as our guide, let's use a map of the world. As we think about—and worry about---California's more than six million students, let's do so in the context of a world with billions of inhabitants.

The world is becoming smaller and more connected by the minute, and the state of education in California today cannot be considered in isolation from that world or the changes occurring in it.

We know that technology has made it possible to do business anytime and anyplace, with almost anyone around the globe. That fact alone changes dramatically the way we work and the way we live.

We know, too, that major demographic shifts are altering the face of California.

With these changes come tremendous opportunities. But these changes also prompt us to sit up, take stock and focus our energies as never before. We can no longer say with utmost confidence that in the coming decades our state will continue to lead the nation — and our nation, the world. It is, frankly, an open question whether or not we will be able to maintain our leadership position as innovators, producers, and income generators.

In raising these issues, I am not suggesting that our future as a state or as a nation is bleak. Rather, I am suggesting that to sustain a high and constantly improving quality of life for all of our citizens — to secure the future of our state and our country — we must confront the challenges we face honestly and with determination. Because within those challenges reside the seeds of an exciting, secure, and successful future.

As a history teacher, I find strength in the decisions of our predecessors. Historically, major sociological or economic changes have spurred our nation to improve the education of its citizens. In the early part of the 20th century, we moved from an agrarian to an industrial economy and jobs moved from fields to factories. Americans adapted by making high school compulsory. As the workplace became more technical and innovations spurred demand for even higher skills, we built university systems.

These major shifts in our economy and society did create enormous upheaval. Not everyone could or did adjust successfully. We needed both sustained leadership and broad collaboration, first to raise educational expectations and then to create an education system to meet those expectations. It wasn't easy then, and it is not easy now. But at every major stage of our economic and social development, we turned to

education to keep pace. As a result, our leadership role was strengthened, in California and the nation.

Californians have never let progress pass us by. In fact, California has been a great driver of American — and international — progress. Our state is not only the birthplace of cultural and political trends, but also of innovations that have transformed lives around the world. We've pioneered vast and promising fields of scientific inquiry that didn't even exist a decade ago. From silicon chips to Internet startups, biotechnology and now, nanotechnology.

Innovations started in Silicon Valley garages have created the dynamic world we live in today, and largely because of these innovations, we now find ourselves at a critical juncture. How we as educators respond to the demands of a rapidly changing global economy will in large measure determine whether our society thrives, or merely survives.

What Margaret Mead said years ago applies more than ever today, "We are now at a point where we must educate our children in what no one knew yesterday, and prepare our schools for what no one knows yet."

The Pace of Technological Change

Sometimes it's hard to notice how quickly — or even how much — things are changing when change is occurring all around you. Look in the mirror every day, and you won't notice yourself getting older, grayer or heavier. But look at a picture of yourself 10 or 20 years ago, and, well, let's just say you'll notice a difference. So for a moment, let's picture California in the late 1970s — just three decades ago, when some in this room were attending public schools.

We see a student population that was predominantly white, largely middle class, and born to English-speaking parents. Only around 30 percent of those went on to get a college degree. For the rest, a high school diploma could be used as an entry ticket to what was thought to be an ever-expanding job market. Our classrooms were mostly modern, clean, and well maintained. Our schools were among the best funded in the nation and were the envy of the world. High-quality teachers were in abundance.

In 1976, America celebrated its bicentennial; the bodybuilding epic, "Pumping Iron" introduced a young Austrian named Arnold Schwarzenegger to the nation and, personal computers first hit the marketplace. If today's sixth graders were to look at a TV show from that year, they'd notice devices and situations they've never before seen: telephones with rotary dials. Record players. Typewriters. Gas station attendants. Today's students would also wonder why so many things are missing from that film: ATMs, DVDs, IPODS, XBoxes. And, oh yes, ring tones! Was there ever really a time when cell phones did not constantly interrupt us?

Yes, the pace and degree of technological change since the 1970s have truly been amazing. But it is nothing compared to what is going on today. If change moved at the speed of sound before, it is moving at the speed of light today. Consider just this one staggering fact: According to Craig Barrett, the dynamic chairman of Intel, 90 percent of Intel's revenues in December of any year come from products which did not exist 12 months earlier. Imagine that. 90 percent!

Expansion of knowledge has led to one technological innovation after another. And technology has, in turn, caused the knowledge explosion to grow exponentially in volume and intensity. New ideas can now be shared with the whole world simultaneously, spurring newer ideas and the sharing of ever more knowledge.

And while these amazing technological advances have taken place, what has been the greatest change in our classrooms to help students prepare? We've moved from blackboards to whiteboards!

I exaggerate — but not much — to make a point. I know there are educators who are using technology in creative ways to help students learn. But in many respects, schools and classrooms today are just as they were in the 1970s. Now of course I recognize our education system will never move at the pace of Silicon Valley — that's not our role. And we must acknowledge the tremendously hard work that has been done over the past decade to improve our education system so we can better prepare our students for the 21st century.

We have raised expectations, developed world-class standards, aligned our classroom materials to those standards, and improved professional development opportunities for our teachers. We have also incorporated an assessment system that is designed to tell us whether our schools are doing the job that needs to be done. As a result, we have seen significant and sustained improvement across almost all subjects and grade levels. And I want to thank California's classroom teachers, administrators, and paraeducators for their dedication to students who come to school with so many challenges. Moving to a standards-based education system has not been easy, but it's been the right thing to do, and we obviously could not have shown the results we have without your hard work.

Of necessity we've focused primarily on academic achievement, but we have been able to do that while also addressing other critical needs. For example, we've worked hard to address the epidemic of childhood obesity and related illnesses that threaten the futures — indeed, the very lives — of too many students. Fostering good nutrition, health, and fitness in California's schools remains an ongoing commitment of mine, and with the recommendations of my advisory committee on Nutrition Implementation Strategies we will continue to find ways to improve our student's health.

In our efforts to make sure every student is prepared to achieve at higher levels, we've also pushed for — and prepared for — preschool for all. This year we have an opportunity to make universal preschool a reality, and I intend to travel the state between now and June telling my fellow Californians why I am convinced that preschool for all will improve students' success in school and in their futures.

The Global Economy

It is difficult to move any large organization or any public entity of consequence, and it is even more difficult to move as quickly as the world demands today. We can be proud of the progress we're making, and it's important that we continue the efforts I've just mentioned. But the fact is, despite all of the positive steps we've taken, we are nowhere near to where we need to be.

I'm pleased that we've stayed the course on reform and have successfully resisted efforts to roll back on high expectations for our students. We've held firm on demanding that a high school diploma actually mean something, that it signify command of essential skills, including the analytical and higher thinking skills involved in algebra.

And my friends, as I've said before, the high school exit exam measures absolutely the LEAST our students must know as they move on to their next step in learning and earning. No student today should view high school graduation as the end of line. Whether the next step is college, trade school, or entry into a career, our students are likely to change jobs and even careers many times over their lifetimes. They will be required to constantly learn new skills. We must prepare every single California

student for a lifetime of adaptability and continual learning. Letting students graduate without even basic skills today leaves them defenseless and unable to survive in the world of tomorrow. And that is not just costly, it is immoral.

In the workforce of today and tomorrow, our students won't compete with just the top students in California or across this nation. They'll compete with many millions of young people entering the global workforce from developing countries in every corner of the world. These countries and their citizens aren't complacent about their place in the world. They are working hard and sacrificing much so that they might enjoy a lifestyle we too often take for granted. We must impress upon our students that their place in the world — and ours — is not guaranteed. It must be earned by each generation of Americans, and in the 21st century it means working harder — and smarter — than we have ever done before!

Our economy has moved from a focus on manufacturing and technical/industrial jobs to a focus on information technology and now, biotechnology. And while the workplace has become more technical, demanding workers with higher and higher levels of skills, jobs are also becoming less secure. Just ask the folks in the auto industry, the airlines, the phone companies, the banks, or in many other fields whether or not I am exaggerating this point. Today, we see Google paying a premium for analytical problem solvers. The company's billboard ads show a complex mathematical equation and ask: "If you can solve this, please call us." Meanwhile, thousands of laid-off workers from GM and Ford struggle to find even minimum wage jobs after losing what they thought would be lifetime career security. Competition for low-skilled jobs is fierce. Even some jobs you thought would never go away are disappearing. Imagine — as Tom Friedman highlighted in his important new book, *The World Is Flat*, — at some McDonald's today, when you place your order through a speakerphone, that order is processed by someone sitting at a computer hundreds of miles away. That person e-mails it back to the worker making your fries, faster than someone standing right next to them at the window could. With today's instantaneous communications, there's no reason those McDonald's orders can't be processed on another continent, rather than just in another state.

Not all that long ago, students who weren't on a track to go to college could get what we called a basic education, and a person with a high school diploma had a good chance of achieving at least a measure of the middle class American dream. Low-skilled jobs that paid a decent family wage provided security for those who showed up every day, worked hard, and performed tasks as assigned.

Today it's a far different story. According to the International Center for Leadership in Education, the reading levels required for entry-level jobs in traditional blue-collar fields like construction and manufacturing are now actually *higher* than those required for many white-collar careers requiring a college degree! Why? Because today's entry-level workers in the trades must know how to read and comprehend complex technical manuals. Not all that long ago, when I was in high school, auto shop was strictly mechanical — open up the hood, take things apart, replace broken parts with new parts, and put the engine back together. To understand how today's cars work, you need technical computer skills. And the transportation of tomorrow will be even more complex.

Like it or not, the world is now demanding that we educate all students to higher levels. That doesn't mean all students will go to college, and we have to recognize that. But it does mean we need to invest in our career technical education programs as well as our college preparatory programs to make sure both truly prepare students for the workforce they will face.

California's Changing Population

But keep in mind that while technology and the economy have been changing so

rapidly, so has the population of students served by California schools. California has the most diverse student population in the world, with more than 100 languages spoken in the homes of those students. Today, our student population is "majority-minority." Forty-one percent of our students speak a language other than English at home, and a quarter of all California public school students are struggling to learn the English language in school.

Sadly, too many people view such diversity as a big problem. I don't. Instead, I say: Imagine! Imagine the potential of that diversity in today's — and tomorrow's — global economy. If we educate these students, well, our state would not only be able to compete more effectively, but it would be able to lead our nation and the world economically.

In any one of California's thousands of classrooms, we could have future workers with the ability to understand a dozen different cultures, and the wherewithal to connect and communicate with people all over the globe on terms they understand. At a time when most of our nation's customers are from other lands, isn't this a tremendous advantage? It certainly should be, but we have not yet tapped the tremendous potential we have.

The Achievement Gap

California public schools have always produced some of the nation's highest performing students. And, regardless of our challenges, we still do. Consider, for example, the fact that more than three-quarters of UCLA's student body and more than 70 percent of the students at UC Berkeley attended California public schools. Participation in Advanced Placement exams continues to increase steadily, and our students in those AP classes and other measures compare favorably with their peers in other states and throughout the world.

The students at the top of the educational heap — kids who are disproportionately white and higher income — are doing very well, but that is not the case with others.

Take a look at our fifth graders: In English-language arts, just 27 percent of Hispanic students and 30 percent of African Americans are scoring proficiently — compared to 66 percent of white students. That is wrong, and it is unacceptable.

In math, the gaps are narrower but still unacceptable. In science, where our students must excel in far greater numbers to stay on the cutting edge, less than half of our white students scored proficient on fifth grade science tests. The results for Hispanic students in this most critical area of study are a dismal 14 percent. And, as bad as those figures are, things get worse as students grow older; the gaps actually widen in high school, where just 16 percent of Latino students and 19 percent of African American students are prepared to enroll in our state university systems. That is not merely unacceptable, it is tragically wrong!

Quite simply, in the demanding global economy, the achievement gap not only threatens the future of our students, but also the future economic health and security of our state and nation. The simple yet terrible fact is that the population of students that is growing the fastest in this state is the population that is lagging the farthest behind.

My friends, we cannot afford to continue down this road. According to the California Budget Project, the gap between California's highest- and lowest-wage earners has widened steadily since 1979 and is substantially wider than that for the nation as a whole. This is not a leadership category we care to embrace.

According to a study by Eric Hanushek of the Hoover Institute, the cost in lost U.S.

economic output due to the nation's achievement gap was a staggering \$2.5 trillion between 1990 and 2002 — enough to pay the entire cost of K-12 education in the nation over that time. Researchers tell us that closing that gap over a 12-year period would add \$980 billion to the annual gross domestic product. Closing the gap is no longer just a moral imperative. It's an economic imperative.

I've heard the argument, as you have, that the gap can't be closed, that students who come to school with disadvantages will always lag behind. I don't buy it. Nor should anyone who cares about our country. I've seen students — as many of you have — overcome tremendous obstacles to achieve, with the right mix of attention, engagement, excellent instruction, and support. So we must find ways to deliver these ingredients to all children.

The Costs of an Aging Population

Let's face it: Closing the achievement gap won't happen unless we first close the teacher quality gap. We must face the fact — like it or not — that the students who need our very best teachers the most are the students least likely to have teachers who are well prepared, fully credentialed and experienced. It is also true that we must address this quality gap at the very same time we are facing a quantity gap. Over the next 10 years, some 97,000 teachers — nearly a third of California's teacher workforce — are expected to retire.

Over the next decade, we will also see a 40-percent turnover in school administrators. And that brings me to yet another serious challenge that will soon be affecting our school — the so-called "graying of America." California and the nation are getting older. The costs of health care, pensions, and other services to support the aging of the baby boom generation are beginning to send shock waves throughout our nation and our state, and the impacts of those waves will only grow more severe in the next decade. One inescapable result of that will be felt by school districts as they compete for both funding and public support as they've never had to do before.

Just like business and governments all over this nation, our school districts are going to have to look at the cost of pensions. They're going to have to find a way to protect retirement security, while at the same time not making it impossible to pay the next generation of teachers and to educate the next generation of students.

And at the same time we are called upon to invest more in our schools, we must realize that we can no longer afford to protect the old ways of doing things simply for the sake of protecting them. The California public clearly supports our public schools. But as fewer Californians have school-aged children, as costs of health care and other services to an aging population soar — we can't count on unconditional support of our schools. We will have to prove we are doing a good job of preparing our children to contribute to an increasingly expensive society. We owe it to our students and our state to meet these challenges, and to succeed.

Meeting the Challenge

Now, many view these challenges as enormous problems. Again, I say, Imagine! The urgent need to staff our classrooms with qualified teachers gives us an unprecedented opportunity to create new pathways into the classroom for talented young college students and career-changing older adults.

The need to prepare students for a changing workforce opens new opportunities for our public schools to strengthen partnerships with businesses and higher education.

Let's imagine where these opportunities can lead.

I propose we seize these opportunities by undertaking comprehensive initiatives that will put California's schools in the forefront when it comes to preparing students to succeed in the 21st century. So today I'd like to outline some specific short-term goals, and also some ambitious long-term goals.

Two years ago I stood on this stage and called for a renewed focus on high schools, and today it continues to be my priority. High schools in California, and quite frankly across the nation, are simply not keeping pace with the needs of our students. Our dropout rate, no matter how you calculate it, is unacceptably high in terms of lost potential and productivity. Not surprisingly, our focus on reform has shown that many students are succeeding to higher levels in smaller learning communities, where academics are blended with a focus on careers. To address this issue, my P-16 Council recommended expanding the number of California Partnership academies in our high schools from 289 to 900. So immediately I will seek to increase the number, as well as to expand these academies from three years to all four years of high school, and to better fund them in order to support stronger liaisons between industries and their school partners.

When it comes to preparing our high school students with the skills they'll need for tomorrow's workplace, rather than career technical education or college preparation, it is time to think in terms of *career academics*. Let's stop thinking about the workforce and higher education as two separate worlds, and work to create a system that prepares every student at every level of education with real-world skills.

Too often when I talk to educators in the field, what I hear from them is that they don't have the ability to provide examples to students of how academic skills will apply in the real world.

A solution to this problem has been found in San Bernardino County's Alliance for Education. This is a partnership of more than 1200 stakeholders. Business, labor, local government, community, and faith-based organizations are joining educators in a partnership committed to creating successful students and a skilled and educated workforce. Businesses are showing classroom teachers the real-world applications of academic standards. Community members are strengthening relationships with students through mentoring, tutoring, and internships. And importantly, this alliance recognizes that children won't meet their academic potential unless their needs for health, safety, and family security are also met. I propose, also based on a recommendation from my P-16 Council, a statewide expansion of this type of program, so that every school district can work with business and community partners to eliminate the achievement gap and prepare every student to succeed.

Beyond just high school, I'm keenly aware that schools are struggling every day to implement the No Child Left Behind Act. And I will continue my push for a system that recognizes improvements in all schools while better identifying those most in need of assistance. In doing so, I will work this year to align our state and federal accountability models. We simply can't continue along the confusing and ultimately debilitating path of two separate, often contradictory, models. Working with Education Secretary Bersin, the State Board of Education, and the education community, aligning both our accountability models and intervention programs, and then better communicating the results, must be a priority moving forward.

In this day and age of technology and innovation, we also have an obligation to better use data to not only drive our decision-making, but to more clearly and transparently articulate the successes and struggles of all our schools. Too often we talk in what I call, "educationese." A shorthand dialect of acronyms and jargon that is simply unintelligible to the average person. My friends, in order to succeed, we in the education community must stop speaking only to ourselves. It's time to put the public

back in public schools. Along these lines I will begin this year by working to redesign our school accountability report cards in order to make them much more user friendly. These reports cards that were intended to let parents and communities know how individual schools were doing, have become so unreadable that a UCLA study found them harder to comprehend than several IRS forms and Microsoft Windows XP Driver Installation Instructions! I know we can do better than that.

Next, it is time to tear down the walls that exist between our segments of education. Every student that graduates from high school should be prepared for the next step in learning and earning. And every segment of our education system should prepare our students with our rigorous academic content standards through curriculum that relates to the real world our students will face.

This will mean strengthening preparation programs for teachers and administrators, and improving ongoing professional development and support for our teachers and principals. It will mean working more closely with our universities to make sure our teachers are getting the preparation they need in our high standards. And it will mean making it a top priority, starting in high school and continuing in our universities, to prepare for the new economy by attracting more science and math majors into the teaching field.

Because when all is said and done, the single most important factor in a student's success will always be the teacher. So to immediately begin solving the problem of our diminishing teacher corps, I call on the Governor and the Legislature to reestablish and fully fund regional teacher recruitment centers and incentives for talented teachers to serve in our classrooms, particularly in our lowest performing schools. To begin addressing the immediate need to strengthen instruction in our rigorous standards, I propose expanding the state's intensive professional development program for teachers to include the subject areas of science and history/social science. And, I will introduce legislation to supply \$53 million in funding to provide outstanding teacher coaches in all subject areas in our most challenging schools.

Beyond this year, we also must provide better support and professional development both for school administrators and for teachers who want to become school leaders. Not long ago, a job opening for a high school principal's job would get 50 or more applicants. Today, only a handful of applicants will appear, and that number is likely to shrink as the demand for principals grows. So I will work with the Commission on Teacher Credentialing both to expand pathways for becoming a classroom teacher and to find new ways for talented administrators from the private sector to begin careers in our schools. To improve leadership at our schools, we need to provide the same support for our beginning principals as we do to our beginning teachers. Our principals also need ongoing professional development that helps them become better instructional leaders and financial managers.

If our schools are to fully engage all students and meet the academic needs of every child, all of us in education must show a new level of flexibility and agility. Let's start by being flexible and creative in the way we build our schools. In this Conceptual Age, we should question whether it still makes sense to build classrooms that were designed more than 100 years ago for the Industrial Age. I applaud Governor Schwarzenegger's call for a great investment in our public works, including \$7 billion to build and modernize our schools. I'm also pleased that Assembly Speaker Nunez and Senate President pro Tempore Perata are supporting a bond proposal. With this type of infrastructure investment comes tremendous opportunity to impact not only student achievement and experience, but in fact the very communities in which we all live. I want to include incentives in the education bond to seek creativity in the construction of our school facilities. Let's build spaces that invite our students to work collaboratively on projects, and also to work independently with computers. Let's replace the long corridors of cell-and-bell designs with flexible spaces that recognize the different learning styles of our children. Let's not just build adequate facilities, but

energy efficient, high-performance learning environments that work in a world of continuous computing.

Of course, meeting all of these challenges will require significant, long-term investments. And, again, the challenge of investing for our future prods us to imagine — to be more creative about how we fund and operate our schools. It is time to stop looking at school funding only through the prism of yearly budget negotiations. So, with the help of several foundations, I'm pleased to say we have begun serious, significant research into the question of adequate and efficient funding for our schools.

We need to know what it would cost to provide high-quality teachers in every classroom, to provide extra support to our most challenging students, to do whatever it takes to bring every student to proficiency in our high standards. And then we need to figure out how to pay that price.

But let's recognize that money is not the whole solution, nor is money unlimited. Over the next decade it is incumbent upon all of us to find ways to be more efficient with the education dollars we spend.

Here in Sacramento, the state must clarify its role in 21st century education. California has done the right thing by adopting world-class standards of what every child should know and be able to do. It has done the right thing by creating a system of assessments and accountability to ensure schools are educating all children and highlighting where more work needs to be done. This is the appropriate role for the state and we must retain those high expectations. But we also must recognize that all the solutions to education's challenges won't come from Sacramento. The state by all means should be a partner in the work, but we need to set standards, hold schools accountable and then let local school districts determine how to best help their students meet them.

At the Department of Education, we too must evolve. I want to help our school districts and schools close the achievement gap by serving a new function. I want us at the department to become brokers of expertise. There are schools and programs within schools throughout our state and country that are islands of excellence, beating the odds with students whose demographic peers are performing poorly. Research shows us that certain practices work, but often those engaged in effective programs are too busy to effectively share their experiences. Meanwhile, our hard-working principals and superintendents have neither the time nor the resources to cull through and evaluate copious research or to distill it in a meaningful way to meet students' needs.

So in partnership with the Hewlett Foundation, I will spend the next several months meeting with practitioners up and down our state. In addition, we will conduct surveys with hundreds of educators in an effort to better understand how to share best practices in a usable and meaningful way. Outstanding educators in every region of this state are using research and innovative practices to help students succeed. I want to help share this success and bring increased value to all of our teachers.

This year and over the next several years, let's work to create a dynamic new workforce of teachers and school administrators. Let's create new partnerships with businesses and higher education focused on preparing every student for success in the global economy. Let's build school facilities that work for the different ways students learn. And let's put the public back in public schools.

I've raised a lot of important questions today, and I wish I could spell out all the answers and introduce the one-, two- or three-point plan that would lead to success for every single California student. But while I've outlined some ambitious goals here today, I must tell you there IS no single solution. There IS no easy fix we can impose

on our schools from Sacramento. Nor is there a simple blueprint that would allow us to say: If we spend this much money, and every school does exactly these things, all students will be well prepared for this changing world. Adapting our education system to the world of today and tomorrow will require all of us to work in partnership, putting together all of our best research with all of our skills and creativity. For too long we have looked for those one-size-fits all solutions, and too many of our students have been lost because that one size didn't fit them. Or we have lacked the discipline and focus to adhere to our rigorous standards, and jumped from strategy to strategy without basing our choices on research.

Today our students must have that discipline and focus, and the rigor that our standards provide. But by using research to guide our decisions, we can also be flexible in the way we educate our children. We can use technology and the wealth of data it can provide to tailor our educational system to more directly meet the needs of each child. Yes, we must adhere to our standards. But learning standards doesn't have to be done in a *standardized* way. For instance, the arts can be used to engage students in reading and math. Some students may thrive with a specific career focus, others with technology or project-based learning. Let's keep working and innovating until we find approaches that address the individual educational needs of all our students.

Our charter schools were created to foster this sort of innovation, and in many outstanding cases they've helped students thrive. But innovation is happening everywhere and must not simply be left to charter schools. Every school should seek ways for every one of its students to succeed.

Conclusion

My friends, 25 years from now, children who are in our public schools today will have jobs that we can't even imagine, just as 25 years ago we couldn't have conceived of nanotechnology. The careers for which we are preparing our students haven't been invented yet. So how do we prepare them?

Our students will have access to all the information in the world, right in their hand-held devices. They will have to learn how to be discerning customers of all that information, to analyze, interpret, and build upon everything they learn in a way that can be applied to the next new thing. And as the next new thing comes faster and faster, our students will have to learn how to adapt to that next new thing. They'll need to communicate precisely, with sensitivity to cultural differences, and to reinvent and market their skills several times over their changing careers. So we must give them a rigorous foundation in reading, writing, math, science, and history/social science. And with that foundation, we must prepare them to become the agile lifetime learners every one of them will need to be. To do that for every student is going to require agility on our part.

I think a good model for us all is Shelbi Wilson, one of our California teachers of the year. The students Shelbi teaches at Abraham Lincoln Continuation High School include teen mothers, young men on probation and youngsters whose families are troubled by drugs and violence. These are the kids others frankly have given up on; there are low — or no — expectations for these students to succeed.

But Shelbi Wilson doesn't give up on any of her students. She expects them to learn to our state standards, because as she says, "the standards are extremely important. They level the playing field for everyone." But she also doesn't expect her students will all learn in the same way. Instead, she continues, "we have to be able to look past what's not there, meet them where they are, and start building a foundation from that point."

It's time to go back to our garages like those early Silicon Valley innovators of technology. It's time to work together in our communities to find ways of meeting all children where they are.

Let's imagine the amazing possibilities and tremendous opportunities before us. A richly diverse society. A world where we can communicate and create with anyone, anywhere, any time. The challenge and enrichment of lifetime learning. My friends, together let's find ways to prepare all children to adapt, to learn and to fulfill their potential in this time of remarkable opportunity. Together let's find ways to truly tap California's most precious natural resource, our people.

Thank you.

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*Superintendent may depart from prepared remarks.

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