



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# NEWS RELEASE

**JACK O'CONNELL**  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

REL#10-16  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 4, 2010

CONTACT: Tina Jung  
PHONE: 916-319-0818  
E-MAIL: [tjung@cde.ca.gov](mailto:tjung@cde.ca.gov)

## State Schools Chief Jack O'Connell Announces New Tool to Help Close the Achievement Gap by Improving School Culture and Climate

SACRAMENTO — State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell today announced the availability of a new resource to help close the achievement gap by improving the culture and climate of the teaching and learning environment at schools.

The Workbook for Improving School Climate & Closing the Achievement Gap is designed to give teachers and school leaders step-by-step guidance on how to interpret and respond to the results of their state-sponsored school climate surveys, in order to make changes that can help close the achievement gap between higher- and lower-performing groups of students.

"There are many factors that go into effective teaching and learning," said O'Connell. "If students feel disconnected from their teachers or unwelcome at school, these factors can interfere with learning and contribute to the achievement gap.

"To give schools more insight into conditions and issues related to race and the achievement gap, we expanded and improved the state's school climate surveys for students and staff. And, I am pleased to announce today that we have created a guide to help schools interpret these results and make beneficial changes. Our school climate Workbook can help foster crucial conversations at schools and districts that can lead to changes that will help all students feel safe and supported in their schools and better engaged in learning."

O'Connell called for an intensive effort in 2007 to close the state's pernicious achievement gap that exists between higher-performing subgroups of white or Asian students and their lower-performing African American or Latino peers. He charged his California P-16 Council with providing recommendations on what the state can do differently to assist local educational agencies in closing the gap.

The P-16 Council identified several areas of concern, including one that focuses on school culture and climate. This is based on an understanding that a student's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to educate occurs within the context of the values, beliefs, and rituals of the school, community, and larger society.

The P-16 Council made 14 recommendations in its 2008 report on Closing the Achievement Gap. One recommendation was to conduct a climate survey that would assess the educational environment and overall school well-being. This recommendation was implemented by expanding the existing California Healthy Kids Survey for students and the California School Climate Survey for staff. These surveys are currently administered in 7,648 schools in 833 districts in the state, with the results publicly available on the survey. They constitute the largest effort in the nation to provide schools with their own data to guide efforts to create positive learning and teaching environments that promote achievement and well-being. Both surveys were augmented to provide schools with better data on issues relating to students' and staff's race, culture, school conditions, and supports that

impact the achievement gap, as well as the needs of migrant education and special education programs.

This led to the Workbook that is a collaboration between the national nonprofit research and service agency, WestEd, and the California Department of Education. The goal is to produce a valuable and user-friendly document that recognizes the importance of creating a positive school environment to support students and teachers.

Schools may use the Workbook to gain a deeper understanding of the data collected in their Surveys to assess what is working and build on those strengths in the classroom, school, and district. The Surveys may also help identify aspects of the school climate that need improvement. Then the Workbook offers strategies to address those needs, helping them link data to practice and policy.

There are three sections of the Workbook focusing on various aspects of the achievement gap: (1.) closing the racial achievement gap, (2.) closing the achievement gap between special education students and others, and (3.) the gap that often leaves students in migrant education programs behind. The Workbook is available online at <http://www.wested.org/chks/pdf/CTAGWorkbook-complete.pdf> , or at <http://www.wested.org/cs/chks/print/docs/chks/ctag> , keyword "Workbook." Survey reports are available at [www.wested.org/chks](http://www.wested.org/chks) and [www.wested.org/cscs](http://www.wested.org/cscs).

---

For more information on O'Connell's Closing the Achievement Gap initiative, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/se/yr07stateofed.asp> . For the P-16 Council, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/pc/> . For WestEd, please visit <http://www.wested.org/>.

The California Department of Education (CDE) is a state agency led by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. The core purpose of CDE is to lead and support the continuous improvement of student achievement, with a specific focus on closing achievement gaps. For more information, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov> or by mobile device at <http://m.cde.ca.gov/> . You may also follow Superintendent O'Connell (@SSPIJack) on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/sspijack> .

Tina Jung, Information Officer II  
California Department of Education, Communications Division  
1430 N Street, Suite 5602, Sacramento, CA 95814  
Main: 916-319-0818; Direct: 916-319-0579; Fax: 916-319-0100  
E-Mail: [tjung@cde.ca.gov](mailto:tjung@cde.ca.gov) ; URL: [www.cde.ca.gov/nr/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/)

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This communication and any attachments may contain confidential and/or legally privileged information. It is solely for the use of the intended recipient(s). Unauthorized interception, review, use or disclosure is prohibited and may violate applicable laws. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender and destroy all copies of the communication.