

California Business Executives Rank Importance of Education High, But Find Quality is Low; Executives Need Students Better Prepared for World of Work

*Executives Would Support Increased School Funding,
But Only if Tied to Accountability and Specific Reforms*

California business leaders place education at the top of public policy concerns, alongside health care, according to a survey released today by the California Foundation for Commerce and Education. At the same time, business executives gave K-12 schools a “D” grade for their quality of work.

In the first statewide survey of its kind, a representative sample of business executives believe that schools need more funding, but believe even more strongly that reforms should be adopted to meaningfully overhaul how schools are run and pupils educated.

“Business leaders insist schools must provide well-qualified workers but believe that is not currently happening, especially in high schools,” said Loren Kaye, CFCE President. “Specifically, executives tell us schools should teach job readiness skills in addition to the basics, and rate communications, work ethic, and personal responsibility on par with reading and even above writing and math. This is a major finding since these skills are not in today’s policy debate in a significant way and represents a sharp distinction from voters and elected officials who are more focused on academic and vocational issues.”

Executives agreed that the main purpose of a high school education should be providing skills to students so they can be productive workers in California’s economy. Focusing on the basics ranked next in priority, followed by college preparation and citizenship.

Business leaders identified the most important education reforms as providing essential basic skills for students, more technical and vocational education, incorporating best business practices into schools, and clearly tracking and evaluating teacher performance in improving student performance.

Regarding top priorities for reforms affecting teachers, executives called for making it easier to fire underperforming or incompetent teachers, increasing salaries for teachers who improve student performance, more teacher training and mentoring, and higher standards for achieving tenure.

Business leaders are open to increased funding, even tax increases, as long as those increases are tied to adopting proven reforms, tougher accountability and increased financial oversight.

“California business leaders believe that increased funding is a necessary ingredient for public school improvement, but only if accompanied by strong reforms and close accountability tied to student improvement,” Kaye added.

Methodology

This statewide internet survey was conducted from January 29 to February 14, 2007 by the national research firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. The 1,342 responding business executives were representative of business size and sector in California as a whole. The margin of error is 2.6% at the 95% confidence level.

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California Foundation for Commerce and Education

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- Accurate, impartial and objective research and analysis of public policy issues of interest to the California business and public policy communities; and
- Education and outreach efforts in support of the research and public policy findings and recommendations.

The Foundation is nonpartisan and does not advocate on legislation or ballot measures.

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